

# sunday pioneer

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**Participative diplomacy can help solving conflicts: EAM**



**'India to be leader in MARITIME sector soon'**




**A mascot and LIFE OF the party**



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
The pioneer

**Mr Revanth Reddy, you have until Sankranti to fulfil your promises. The Congress Government has become a puppet in the hands of urban Naxals. Former Naxals are now part of the Cabinet. They are appointing people who have embraced the Naxalite ideology in the Education Commission. There is a conspiracy to turn Telangana's youth into Naxals.**

— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home



**DON'T MISS...**

**CM's vision for AP explained**

State Revenue, Registration, and Stamps Minister Satya Prasad emphasised Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu's vision to transform Andhra Pradesh into a knowledge hub. As part of this initiative, Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) have been organised to improve the quality of education in government schools and ensure students learn in a cheerful atmosphere. Addressing PTMs at Cherukupalli Zilla Parishad High School and Kavuru Girls' Gurukul School on Saturday, Minister Satya Prasad underscored...

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**'Corporate-type edu at govt schools'**

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj K Pawan Kalyan stressed the importance of developing Government schools on par with corporate schools, assuring that efforts would be made to address the problems faced by students. Pawan Kalyan participated in the Mega Parents-Teachers Day programme held at the Municipal School in Kadapa on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, he emphasised the need to provide corporate-quality education in Government schools, stating that societal progress depends on the...

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**Delhi's air quality slips back to 'poor'**

After a brief respite of three days, Delhi's air quality dropped again to the 'poor' category on Saturday. The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city was recorded at 233 at 4 pm on Saturday, marking a deterioration from Friday's reading of 197, which fell in the 'moderate' category. The primary pollutants on Saturday were PM2.5 and PM10, with PM2.5 levels recorded at 93.2 µg/m³ and PM10 levels at 185.4 µg/m³ at 2 pm. These fine particles pose significant health risks as they can...

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**Farmers seek cheaper credit**

Farmer representatives and agricultural stakeholders urged the government to provide cheaper long-term credit, implement lower taxes, and double the PM-KISAN income support during a comprehensive pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday. The two-hour meeting saw a detailed discussion of proposals, aimed at addressing multiple challenges in the agricultural sector, with key demands focusing on financial relief, market reforms, and strategic investments. Bharat Krishak Samaj Chairman Ajay Vir Jakhar emphasised the need for targeted interventions to boost agricultural productivity and farmer welfare. Primary demands included reducing interest rates on agricultural loans...

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# Parent-Teacher Meet a 'mega' hit

○ NAIDU ASKS STUDENTS TO UPDATE THEMSELVES WITH TECHNOLOGY

○ PTM MOST IMPACTFUL, SAYS EDUCATION MINISTER NARA LOKESH

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/BAPATLA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has said that the future of children depends on the collective efforts of parents and teachers, urging students to continuously update themselves with technology to achieve greater heights in life.

Addressing a landmark Parent-Teacher Meeting at Bapatla Municipal School on Saturday, the CM highlighted the uniqueness of the event, which saw simultaneous gatherings in 45,000 schools across Andhra Pradesh, involving 1.2 crore students and their parents.

"This is the first time such an affectionate meeting has been held on this scale, uniting parents, teachers, and students. These meetings will now be an annual tradition on December 7," Naidu announced.

He stressed that close collaboration among students, parents, teachers, and the state government can yield excellent results. Recalling his teachers, the CM urged students to value their mentors and focus solely on their education to build a bright future and create wealth through knowledge.

Naidu also announced plans to introduce online health cards and progress reports for students, along



- Andhra Pradesh organised a massive Parent-Teacher Meeting across 45,000 schools, involving 1.2 crore students and their families.
- Annual PTMs to be held every December 7.
- Digital libraries, labs, online health cards, and progress reports to be introduced by next academic year.
- Anti-drug drive initiated in schools; vigilance against ganja misuse stressed.
- Minister Nara Lokesh announces the filling of vacant teaching posts within six months and highlighted Holistic Progress Cards for students.
- Says Rs 944 crore allocated for student kits and nutritious meals; political influence removed from schools.

with digital attendance tracking for parents. Highlighting the anti-drug drive, he called for vigilance in schools, noting the harmful effects of ganja cultivation and misuse. The CM pledged to establish dig-

ital libraries and labs in every school by the next academic year and encouraged students to balance academics with active participation in sports. State Education and IT Minister

Nara Lokesh added that Andhra Pradesh's PTM initiative is the largest and most impactful, fostering a "spiritual bond" between schools and parents. Continued on Page 2

## Naidu, Lokesh share meal with students

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu visited Bapatla Municipal High School, where he toured the classrooms and interacted with the students. During his visit, he encouraged them to focus on their studies, assuring them that a bright future awaits those who work diligently.

After the interactions, the Chief Minister shared a meal with the students. Sitting on the floor in traditional style, Naidu, along with his son and Minister for Education

Nara Lokesh, joined the students and their parents for lunch.

While having lunch, Naidu engaged the students in conversation, asking about their studies, family backgrounds, parents' professions, future aspirations, and areas of interest. He stressed the importance of being a lifelong learner and sharing knowledge with family members. The Chief Minister also highlighted the significance of remembering one's early teachers, mentioning that he himself has never forgotten his first educators. Continued on Page 2



## 'URJAVEER' PROGRAMME LAUNCHED



## Naidu calls for energy efficiency, sustainability

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu highlighted the significance of energy conservation, stating that saving energy is just as important as generating it. He stressed that adopting innovative power-saving methods would greatly enhance the quality of life for the people of Andhra Pradesh while inaugurating the Urjaveer programme on Saturday at Poranki.

Addressing the gathering, CM Naidu expressed his appreciation for the collaboration between the State Government and Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of Central Public Sector Undertakings. He underscored the government's commitment to enhancing energy efficiency and sustainability across the state.

The Chief Minister criticised the previous administration for plunging the power sector into a deep crisis over the last five years. He assured that the Energy Department was undergoing extensive reforms, focusing on improving efficiency instead of raising power tariffs. "We aim to provide better service to consumers through

enhanced efficiency," CM Naidu affirmed, reaffirming his government's dedication to resolving the sector's issues.

Additionally, CM Naidu shared plans to promote green energy, particularly solar and wind power, on a large scale. He announced the establishment of an energy university in the state to support these initiatives and further the development of clean energy technologies.

The Chief Minister expressed confidence that Andhra Pradesh would attract investments worth over Rs 10 lakh crore over the next five years, creating a foundation for 7.5 lakh new jobs. "We are also implementing programs aimed at increasing public revenue by 15 per cent by 2047," he added.

To promote the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and meet growing demand, the CM unveiled plans to set up an EV charging station every 30 kilometres across the state. He also commended the citizens' participation in the Urjaveer programme, which aims to build a network of energy-conscious individuals. Continued on Page 2

## Amaravati construction gathers pace

Works to begin by Dec 15 after cancellation of previous tenders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Construction activities in Andhra Pradesh's Amaravati are regaining momentum, with the State government initiating steps to restart and complete long-pending projects. The works are slated to begin by December 15, following the cancellation of previous contracts and the issuance of fresh tenders to accelerate progress. The prestigious Happy Nest hous-

ing project, aimed at middle-class and upper-middle-class families, has been awarded to Nagarjuna Construction Company. Other key tenders include KMV Projects for senior IAS officers' bungalows, NCC for apartments for All India Services and gazetted officers, and

L&T for housing for non-gazetted officers.

BSR Infra has been entrusted with constructing bungalows for judges and ministers. The Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) has pegged the total cost of these projects at Rs 1,872 crore. The government

plans to execute the construction in phases, adhering to strict deadlines.

**DEADLINE FOR PROJECTS**

Construction of MLA, MLC, and IAS officer quarters will begin on December 15, with IAS quarters targeted for completion within six months.

Bungalows for gazetted officers, judges, and ministers are expected to be completed in nine months.

## HOUSING & POWER PROJECTS IN AP

### Union Minister Khattar assures more funds

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister for Energy, Housing, and Urban Affairs, Mohan Lal Khattar, on his one-day official visit to Vijayawada, assured the Andhra Pradesh government of necessary funds for ongoing development projects under his ministry. The Minister reviewed the state's progress in utilising central funds for various infrastructure projects and promised continued support for future funding allocations.

The meeting was attended by key state ministers, including Kolusu Pardhasaradhi (Minister for Housing), P. Narayana (Minister for Municipal Administration), Gottipati Ravi Kumar (Minister for Energy), and senior officials from various departments.

During the meeting, Minister Kolusu Pardhasaradhi appealed to the Union Minister for additional funding for infrastructure works in housing layouts under construction as part of the Pradhan Mantri Awas



Jyana (PMAY-1) scheme. He also requested an increase in the central government's share for the PMAY scheme. In response, Union Minister Khattar assured that efforts would be made to allocate funds for the PMAY scheme in the upcoming 2025-26 Union Budget.

Additionally, the Minister committed to working on increasing the budget allocation for the Energy and

Urban Development departments, which fall under his ministry, to support the state's growth.

Ajey Jain, Special Chief Secretary, made a presentation on the ongoing housing schemes, highlighting both progress and challenges. Vijayanand, Special Chief Secretary for the Energy Department, provided an update on the state's energy sector developments. Continued on Page 2



### Stalker stabs girl 13 times for rejecting his love

PNS ■ KADAPA

In a shocking incident, a stalker stabbed a girl 13 times after she rejected his advances in Vemula village, Pulivendula constituency, on Saturday.

According to the police, the accused, Kullayappa, had been stalking the girl for several months, insisting that she accept his love, but she had repeatedly rejected him. Continued on Page 2

**OBTUSE ANGLE**



## Another low pressure area forms over Bay of Bengal

PNS ■ GUNTUR

### Heavy rains forecast for south coastal AP, R'seema

A fresh low pressure area formed over the Bay of Bengal on Saturday, and it is likely to become more marked in the next 24 hours. Heavy rains have been forecast for the South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema regions.

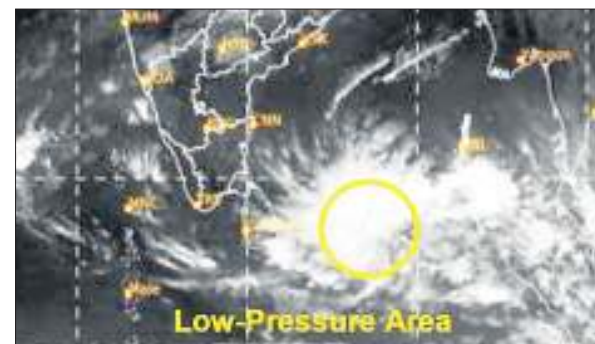
According to the Meteorological Department, the low pressure area formed at 08:30 hours on Saturday, influenced by an upper air cyclonic circulation over the Southeast Bay of Bengal and adjoining East Equatorial Indian

Ocean. The associated cyclonic circulation extends up to middle tropospheric levels and is expected to move west-northwestwards, becoming more defined in the next 24 hours.

The system is likely to continue its west-northwestward movement and reach the southwest Bay of Bengal, off the coasts of Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, around December 11, the Meteorological Centre reported. Heavy rainfall is expected at isolated

places in south coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema on December 11 and 12. Thunderstorms, accompanied by lightning, are also likely in these regions on December 10 and 11.

Light to moderate rain or thunder-showers are expected at one or two places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema over the next seven days. The IMD report said that light rainfall occurred at one or two places in both regions in the last 24 hours.



# Harish Rao's loyalists feel let down in party totem pole

Going by the buzz in Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) circles, former minister Harish Rao's camp followers are of the settled opinion that their 'Anna' is not holding any harshin-chathagina position. A seasoned hand, known trouble shooter within the party as well as among parties, and a towering figure in Telangana's politics, Harish Rao has of late found himself holding only the title of MLA, while key posts like Legislative Party leader and Public Accounts Committee Chairman have eluded him. His followers vouch for the respect that Harish Rao commands, but feel that his contributions don't seem to translate into positions. Even when he was recently booked in a phone tapping case, BRS reacted very slowly. Had KCR, KTR or Kavitha been named in the same case, predictably the response would have been lightning fast. With KCR firmly at the helm as BRS president, and with KT Rama Rao at the steering wheel as working president, Harish's loyalists can't help but feel let down believing their leader is being sidelined. Adding to the intrigue, KTR's role as working president is credited for the party's robust performance in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation area, leaving no room for doubts about his continued hold over the position. Since appointing two working presidents from the same community and that too from the same family could lead to

## Déjà vu for journalists: BRS then and Congress now

Journalists see through celebrations of political achievements, instead of being carried away by drumbeating and public festivities. Journalists in Telangana are presently experiencing a sense of déjà vu as the Congress government's extended celebrations of its first-year achievements closely resemble the Bharat Rashtira Samithi's 2023 Telangana Dashabdi Utsavalu. Both events, intended to showcase in highlighting the state government's accomplishments through brouhaha at public events, instead of being strikingly dissimilar, had common elements that blurred the distinct role of the two dispensations. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy's public relations team has been in highlighting the state government's milestones just like BRS's PROs did during the decennial celebrations. No wonder, unbeknown to the public, the current festivities feature themes and presentations with only minor modifications to those lifted from the previous year's events schedule. Accentuating the irony of unintended repetition, a book compiling the achievements highlighted during Dashabdi Utsavalu, curated by KCR's PRO Ramesh Hazari, was dis-

attitude," a senior journalist later grumbled.

In striking contrast, CM Revanth Reddy, at a recent press meet, wanted media persons to own Praja Palana Vijayotsavalu, while appreciating their contributions. "Media, along with family, should join the celebrations. You are always working, breaking news, scrollings and staying in tension. Take a break—it's important for your health," he remarked. He recounted the role journalists had played during the Telangana statehood movement. "On the one hand, we're dismissed with gottalu talk, and on the other, we're celebrated as integral to history. The difference couldn't be more obvious," remarked another senior journalist.

## Briefing scribes en masse vs extensive interviews

Normally media houses seek out netas and various personalities they want to interview. With the electronic media gaining ascendancy over print media in terms of immediate or even live impact and wider coverage, trends have changed. These days netas pick among channels and offer 'interviews' to put across their views. Such interviews are fine as long as there is no blatant discrimination

against journalists from the print media. On Saturday, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee's media wing invited scribes for one-

to-one short interviews with TPCC chief Mahesh Kumar Goud at CLP office between 9.30 am and 12.30 pm. However, as elsewhere, electronic media personnel got the 'first bite' and interactions with them went on till 1.30 pm. Many print media personnel, despite having come hours before, had to wait for their turn indefinitely. Finally, the TPCC chief chose to brief print media scribes en masse. He talked about the successful completion of the State government's one year Praja Palana and highlighted the achievements of the government; of course, while criticizing opposition parties. The slighted scribes noticed that the TPCC chief had got rid of them in 25 minutes flat. "It is literally a mind blanking interview instead of a mind blowing interview", a scribe commented.

## Pawan seizes the moment with his 'seize the ship' remark

Film titles are prized for their impact on the box office collections as well as the scope they give for marketing tricks, gimmicks, or sale of merchandise. In Andhra Pradesh, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's sharp fiat "Seize the ship", while inspecting a vessel through which smuggled Public Distribution System rice was allegedly being exported from the Kakinada port, ignited social media frenzy. It gained such traction in a short period that the phrase has now been registered as the title of an upcoming Telugu movie by R Film Factory Productions.

(With inputs from Naveena Ghanate and K Venkateswarlu and Pradeep Kumar)

# 617 KL Univ students land TCS jobs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Koneru Lakshmaiah University (KLU) students have made a remarkable impact in campus placements, with 617 students securing positions through Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) during a recent placement drive. This achievement was announced by the University's Vice Chancellor, Dr Parthasaradhi Varma, in a press conference on Saturday. Dr. Varma expressed pride in this record-breaking accomplishment, noting that this year, students have also secured placements in top companies like Cognizant, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, and IBM. To date, KLU students have received over 2,300 job offers, with placement drives still ongoing.

# Centre approves 8 KVs, 18 over-bridges for AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Union Government has sanctioned the establishment of eight new Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and approved the construction of 18 over-bridges on national highways in Andhra Pradesh, benefiting thousands of students and enhancing the state's infrastructure.

Lanka Dinakar, Chairman of the Twenty Points Programme and BJP leader, hailed these approvals as transformative measures for the state. The new KVs, with an investment of Rs 600 crore, are expected to provide quality education to approximately 7,680 students. "This initiative underscores the Centre's commitment to enhancing human resource development, a cornerstone for long-term economic

"These projects signify the Centre's dedication to building a 'Vikasit Bharat' and a 'Swarnandhra,' improving both educational opportunities and transportation infrastructure in the state."

growth," Dinakar said. The approval for 18 over-bridges aims to improve connectivity, streamline traffic, and bolster regional trade and economic activities. Dinakar expressed gratitude to the

Union Government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and highlighted the synergy between the Centre and state under the "double-engine sarkar" model, which aligns with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's vision for development.

"These projects signify the Centre's dedication to building a 'Vikasit Bharat' and a 'Swarnandhra,' improving both educational opportunities and transportation infrastructure in the state," Dinakar stated.

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari played a pivotal role in advancing these initiatives, reaffirming the Centre's focus on accelerating Andhra Pradesh's growth trajectory through strategic investments in education and infrastructure.

## REPORTERS' DIARY

criticism and resentment, Harish's followers are now left wondering whether the seasoned politician's efforts would be matched with a position worthy of his stature at all. It looks like his camp will continue to be in the shadows of BRS's familial power triangle, at least until his services are required again as a trouble-shooter.

## Ponguleti defines 'bombs', rules out jail or manhandling

Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy has been the darling of the media ever since he hinted (quite graphically before Diwali) at "dropping bombs" leaving political and other circles abuzz with speculations. When confronted by the media about what exactly he meant, Ponguleti recently clarified the figurative use of 'bomb', stating: "Bomb doesn't mean sending (someone unnamed) to jail or manhandling (him)." Discounting studied interpretations of the term in media reports, he emphasized that the term signified systematically exposing (alleged) irregularities under the previous Bharat Rashtira Samithi regime. "E-race scams, phone tapping, Ranganayak Sagar, Kaleshwaram irregularities, and corruption in power purchase agreements—each of these will be unveiled one by one," he elaborated, suggesting it would be some kind of political vastrapaharanam. The idea is to highlight lapses and bring them to the public's attention. The clarification has clothed the ongoing political discourse with fresh speculations, while all unblinking eyes remain riveted on Ponguleti's next move to see the next edition of his explosive charge.

## Differing approaches of Revanth and KTR towards media

Netas want media to write only good things about them. But that is bad journalism from the standpoint of the public. This stood out starkly during recent interactions of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Bharat Rashtira Samithi working president KT Rama Rao with the media. KTR, at his presser, got on the nerves of scribes with his choice of words about the trappings of journalists while talking about the slowdown in the real estate sector. Alluding to microphones as 'gottalu', KTR remarked: "Take your gottalu and go meet builders," sparking objections from journalists, some of whom remonstrated, saying, "No, don't say gottalu." But KTR stood his ground, remarking, "Call it gottalu or mic, whatever you want". Amidst continuing objections from journalists, he said: "Okay mics, microphones, and the new small mics, take those go and ask. You may not be as rich as Revanth Reddy, but you must have invested in some plots. Ask yourself. You people don't do fact-checking etc". The exchange left journalists fuming. "It wasn't just the word; it was the

government schools and student welfare while favouring private institutions. He pointed out that the coalition government has accumulated unpaid dues of Rs 3,900 crore in fee reimbursements and scholarships, leaving countless underprivileged students in distress. Nagarjuna questioned Naidu's commitment to education, terming the event a diver-

sionary tactic to cover up the failures of his administration. He contrasted this with the achievements of the previous YSRCP government, highlighting initiatives such as Nadu-Nedu, which modernised over 45,000 schools and hostels with a Rs 12,000-crore investment. He also praised schemes like Amma Vodi, Vidya Deevana, and

Vasathi Deevana for providing financial assistance to students and enabling access to quality education. The former minister further criticised the appointment of politically influenced interim vice-chancellors in universities, stating that such actions have contributed to the decline of higher education in the state.

# YSRCP rubbishes propaganda on Kakinada Special Economic Zone

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has dismissed allegations surrounding the Kakinada SEZ, accusing the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of siding with corporates and exploiting farmers. The party has demanded a comprehensive inquiry into the land deals since the SEZ's inception in 2003.

Addressing the media on Saturday, former Ministers K Kannababu and Dadiseti Raja, former MP Vanga Getha, and members of the Kakinada SEZ Farmers' Protection Committee alleged that former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu prioritised corporate interests over farmers' wel-

fare. They lauded Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for returning lands to farmers as promised.

The leaders claimed that Naidu initially supported agitating farmers but, after assuming power, aligned with industrialists. Lands were allegedly allotted to KV Rao, GMR, and Divis, who misused them. Farmers from six villages reportedly opposed giving up their lands, but TDP leaders allegedly resorted to harassment, including filing false cases, during Naidu's tenure from 2014.

The YSRCP leaders further alleged that TDP leader Yanamala Ramakrishnu received inflated compensation for his lands, while ordinary

farmers were paid meagre amounts. They accused industrialists of mortgaging the allotted lands to secure loans and purchasing land at throw-away prices.

Calling the propaganda against YS Jagan Mohan Reddy "malicious," they highlighted that nearly 800 acres remain with farmers, though technical issues have delayed record rectifications. They urged the current government to resolve these issues to benefit the affected farmers. The YSRCP leaders criticised the "TDP-friendly" media for distorting facts about the SEZ and reiterated the demand for a thorough inquiry to uncover the truth.

# TTD offers VIP break darshan for donors

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) has announced VIP Break (General) darshan for donors of the "Ananda Nilayam Ananta Swarnamayam" scheme, introduced in 2008. The scheme, which was paused due to unforeseen reasons, previously offered Archana Anantara Darshan to donors. However, as the Archana Anantara Darshan was discontinued a few years ago, the TTD Trust Board has now decided to extend VIP Break (General) darshan as a substitute.



What donors are entitled to VIP Break (General) Darshan: Access for three days a year for up to five family members. ● Accommodation: Three

days of stay per year at a tariff of Rs 2,500 per day. ● Prasadam: 20 small laddus provided once a year. ● Special Gifts: A one-time offering of a 5-gram gold dollar and a 50-gram silver dollar during the donor's first visit. ● Clothing: A one-time Uttariyam and blouse piece given annually during darshan. ● Mahaprasadam: Ten packets provided once a year. ● Donation Passbook: Valid for 25 years from the date of issue.

# Mega parents meet a farce: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Merugu Nagarjuna criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's "Mega Parents Meet," calling it a theatrical attempt to mask the government's shortcomings in the education sector. Speaking at the YSRCP Central Office, Nagarjuna accused Naidu of neglecting

government schools and student welfare while favouring private institutions. He pointed out that the coalition government has accumulated unpaid dues of Rs 3,900 crore in fee reimbursements and scholarships, leaving countless underprivileged students in distress. Nagarjuna questioned Naidu's commitment to education, terming the event a diver-

sionary tactic to cover up the failures of his administration. He contrasted this with the achievements of the previous YSRCP government, highlighting initiatives such as Nadu-Nedu, which modernised over 45,000 schools and hostels with a Rs 12,000-crore investment. He also praised schemes like Amma Vodi, Vidya Deevana, and

Vasathi Deevana for providing financial assistance to students and enabling access to quality education. The former minister further criticised the appointment of politically influenced interim vice-chancellors in universities, stating that such actions have contributed to the decline of higher education in the state.

# Lokesh pays tribute to Ratan Tata's legacy

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The annual reunion event of Andhra University, Waves-2024, turned into a momentous occasion of leadership, innovation, and future aspirations. IT & HRD Minister Nara Lokesh, in his address, paid a tribute to the legacy of Ratan Tata, lauding his visionary leadership and contributions to both industry and society. "Ratan Tata's unwavering commitment to excellence continues to inspire us," said Minister Lokesh, reinforcing Tata's role as a beacon of innovation and integrity.

The event, held at Andhra University (AU), brought together alumni and leaders, including L&T Chairman SN Subrahmanyam, AU Alumni Association Founder Chairman Dr GM Rao, and Padma Shri awardee Dr SV Adinarayana Rao. Their presence underscored the university's role in nurturing leadership and excellence.

During the event, Minister Lokesh also engaged with a



vibrant group of international students, commending their contributions to AU's multicultural environment. "AU has emerged as a melting pot of cultures and ideas," he remarked, highlighting the students' role as ambassadors of India on the global stage.

Looking ahead, the Minister outlined an ambitious vision for AU, aiming to position the university among the top three in India and within the global top 100. "Andhra University has a rich history of producing exceptional leaders. It's time to leverage this legacy to elevate AU to

new heights," he declared. In line with this vision, Lokesh launched the Skill Census initiative, a forward-thinking program designed to bridge the skills gap and better prepare students for an evolving global workforce.

Keynote speaker SN Subrahmanyam, Chairman of L&T, emphasised the transformative impact of digital technologies on global industries and India's leadership in the digital revolution. Reflecting on his visit to AU's AI Lab, Subrahmanyam stated, "The digital revolution is reshaping

industries worldwide, and India is at the forefront of this change." He also touched upon the construction sector's challenges, particularly the need for skilled labour.

Dr. G.M. Rao, in his address, spoke about AU's upcoming centenary celebrations in 2025. "With the continued support of our alumni and the government, we will further strengthen AU's position as a centre of excellence," he remarked, stressing the importance of collective efforts in securing the university's future.

Vice Chancellor Prof. G Shashibhusan Rao highlighted AU's achievements, including an impressive 80% placement rate and a rising international student population of 1,250. "Our centenary celebrations will begin in April 2025, and we are committed to making this a historic moment for the entire university community," he announced.

Minister Lokesh urged the alumni to unite in support of AU's mission.

# Naidu, Lokesh share meal with students...

Continued from Page 1

During the interaction, students shared their concerns and suggestions. SK Janvi, a 9th-grade student, expressed her wish for a computer lab in the school, while 10th-

grade student D. Santosh suggested the establishment of sports courts for badminton and volleyball.

Akhil, another 10th-grade student, conveyed through his mother, Jhansi, that he was uncertain about his future after the

10th grade. In a heart-to-heart conversation, the Chief Minister asked Akhil whether he had discussed his ambitions with his parents. When Akhil revealed that he aspires to become a policeman, Naidu encouraged him to pursue his goal.

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# Govt schools to be upgraded on par with pvt ones: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha emphasised that government schools are being upgraded to compete with corporate institutions by improving educational standards and facilities. Speaking at a Mega Parent-Teacher Meeting (PTM) held at Zilla Parishad High School in Nunna, Vijayawada Rural, he highlighted the dedication of skilled teachers in government schools and the commendable performance of students in academics, sports, and technical fields.



Dr Lakshmisha received a warm welcome from the school staff and interacted directly with students, inquiring about their education, mid-day meals, and school infrastructure. He reviewed facilities, including the newly established Marreddy Seetharavamma Science Laboratory, funded by donors. The Collector noted that 939 schools across the district conducted Mega PTMs, creating a festive atmosphere. He appreciated the enthusiastic participation of parents, praising their interest in their children's education, discipline, and talents. Lauding the

achievements of students who excelled in national-level events, technical competitions, and even won prizes from NASA, he urged teachers to continue identifying and nurturing students' hidden potential. Parents were encouraged to support their children's aspirations while focusing on their holistic development. Explaining the concept of Holistic Progress Cards, Dr Lakshmisha said these provide

insights into academics, attendance, and extracurricular activities. He also acknowledged the invaluable contributions of donors and alumni in enhancing government schools. Referring to Nunna High School alumni who have reached prominent positions, he urged current students to draw inspiration and give back to their alma mater once established. The event concluded with a shared meal and cultural performances by students. The Collector also felicitated donor N Satyanarayana Reddy for his contributions. School headmaster Vajrala Bhupal Reddy, Vijayawada Rural Mandal Tahsildar B Suguna, Deputy Sarpanch K Brahmananda Reddy, MPDC member Bonthu Sarojini, Education Committee Chairman G Kumar, Nunna Rural Sub-Inspector N Vimala, and others were present.



# MP calls for welfare of construction workers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) stressed the need to work towards the welfare and development of construction workers in Andhra Pradesh. He expressed his wishes during the swearing-in ceremony of TDP leader Guttumukkala Raghurama Raju as the Chairman of the Building and Construction Advisory Committee.

MP Sivanath noted the hardships faced by construction workers during the previous government's tenure. He praised Guttumukkala Raghurama Raju for his relentless efforts in addressing workers' issues as the State President of TNTUC. He expressed hope that, under Guttumukkala's leadership, AP would establish a Skill Development Center in Amaravati, surpassing the National Academy of Construction in Hyderabad, to empower workers further.

He expressed hope that, under Guttumukkala's leadership, AP would establish a Skill Development Center in Amaravati, surpassing the National Academy of Construction in Hyderabad, to empower workers further. The MP expressed confidence that Raju's leadership as Chairman of the Building and Other Construction Advisory Committee would drive the organization toward significant progress and recognition statewide. He assured full support for initiatives aimed at enhancing the welfare and development of workers.

MP Sivanath recalled Raju's dedication to TNTUC, where he prioritized discipline and elevated the organization's stature statewide. Despite earlier opportunities for other positions, Raju chose to remain as TNTUC state president to serve workers better. Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju, government whip Bonda Umamaheswara Rao, MLA Gadde Rammohan, Swachh Andhra Corporation Chairman Kommireddy Pattabhiram, TDP state spokesperson Syed Rafi, and TNTUC state president Parchuri Prasad along with other leaders, congratulated Raju on his appointment.

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# Collector emphasises hard work, dedication for success of students

At a mega parents and teachers meeting in Gopalapatnam, the Collector stressed the importance of quality education, a supportive home environment, and collaboration between parents, teachers, and students to ensure academic excellence.



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad highlighted the importance of hard work and dedication in helping students achieve success during a mega parents-teachers meeting held at Narava Zilla Parishad High School on Saturday morning. The Collector, the chief guest at the event, announced that similar meetings would be organized across all government schools in the district, following the directives of IT & HRD Minister Nara Lokesh. "The primary objective of these meetings is to gather feedback from parents and enhance the quality of education. Principals must address various aspects such as students' education, behaviour, discipline, learning abilities, and their relationship with parents," said Collector MN Harendhira Prasad.

He also stressed the need for a robust monitoring system to ensure that students not only attend school regularly but also compete with those receiving coaching at private institutions for competitive exams. "Our goal is to empower our students to excel not only academically but also to secure seats in prestigious higher education institutions like engineering, medical, and others," he stated. In his address, the District Collector urged students to prioritize their studies over distractions like sports, especially during exam preparation. "Students must be willing to make certain sacrifices to achieve their goals," he said. He also appealed to parents to create a supportive home environment conducive to studying, emphasizing the need for small sacrifices to ensure their children's success. The Collector recognized

the pivotal role of teachers in providing quality education and achieving a 100 per cent pass rate across all subjects. "Teachers must take ownership of their students' education and strive for excellence in every subject," he stated. He called for a collaborative effort between teachers and parents to develop the school, emphasizing, "This is our school, and these are our children." The District Collector encouraged instilling self-confidence in students, assuring them that with hard work, they can achieve their dreams. "Believe in yourselves and know that dedication and effort are the keys to success," he added. The meeting was well-attended by a large number of parents and teachers, who actively participated in discussions aimed at improving educational standards in the region.

# Education a tool for change: NALSAR V-C

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

"Education is the most powerful weapon to transform the world," stated Prof Srikrishna Deva Rao, Vice-Chancellor of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. He was speaking at the 2nd Online Education Convocation of Vignan University, held on Saturday. Degrees were conferred upon 860 students who completed their MBA and MCA programmes through online and distance learning. In his keynote address, Prof Rao lauded Vignan University's role in shaping skilled and knowledgeable individuals, describing it as a source of pride. Highlighting the transformative power of education, he quoted Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, saying, "Knowledge leads to creativity, creativity to thinking, thinking to knowledge, and knowledge transforms you into a great individual."

860 get degrees during online convocation of Vignan University



Prof P Nagabhushan, in his remarks, noted that the degrees awarded included 670 MBAs and 190 MCAs. He emphasised that education has trans-

formed traditional classrooms, allowing learning to occur "anytime, anywhere, and by anyone." Dr Lavu Rattaiah, Chairman of Vignan Institutions, urged students to view education not merely as a privilege but as a responsibility to contribute to society. He acknowledged the dedication required to pursue an online MBA while managing personal and professional commitments. Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu encouraged students to approach challenges as opportunities and uphold moral values. He underscored that education is not just about knowledge acquisition but also about understanding societal needs, addressing challenges, and providing solutions. Drawing inspiration from Ratan Tata, he stressed that true success lies in integrity and giving back to the community.

# Minister highlights CM's vision for AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Revenue, Registration, and Stamps Minister Satya Prasad emphasised Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu's vision to transform Andhra Pradesh into a knowledge hub. As part of this initiative, Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTMs) have been organised to improve the quality of education in government schools and ensure students learn in a cheerful atmosphere. Addressing PTMs at Cherukupalli Zilla Parishad High School and Kavuru Girls' Gurukul School on Saturday, Minister Satya Prasad underscored the significance of creating a supportive and joyful learning environment. He noted that the initiative of conducting PTMs across 42,303 schools, benefiting 1.2 crore students, is unparalleled both nationally and globally.



The minister interacted with students, shared meals with them, and reviewed their academic progress and the facilities available in schools. He reiterated the importance of holistic

education, encouraging students to excel not only in academics but also in sports, arts, and other fields. The PTMs, he said, aim to help students identify and nurture their interests.

Highlighting the advantages of government schools, the minister praised the superior training of teachers, availability of large playgrounds, and modern facilities, which students should

utilise to advance in life. He criticised the previous YSRCP government for burdening students with an English-medium curriculum and a varied syllabus, leading to a decline in pass percentages in Class 10 examinations. Minister Satya Prasad credited Minister Nara Lokesh for reforms that have revived the education system, including the introduction of PTMs. He assured that the government is committed to equipping schools with top-tier infrastructure, promising "five-star" facilities for schools in his constituency. The minister urged parents to ensure their children's regular attendance and encouraged students to make the most of the government-provided amenities. He called PTMs a crucial step in shaping students into future leaders, securing a brighter tomorrow.

# Vizag takes a giant leap towards a plastic-free future

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Versatile film personality RP Patnaik, who is a music director, singer and actor apart from being the Swachh Visakha ambassador, rallied the people of Visakhapatnam to join forces in making the city plastic-free. Addressing a public gathering at RK Beach on Saturday, Patnaik urged citizens to shun single-use plastics and adopt eco-friendly alternatives as the city prepares for the implementation of a plastic ban on January 1, 2025. "Plastic items may seem attractive, but they pose serious health risks, including cancer. Let us remember the days when life was sustainable without plastic and adopt eco-friendly alternatives," Patnaik emphasized, highlighting the importance of preserving Visakhapatnam's natural beauty. The awareness campaign,



spearheaded by the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC), aimed to educate the public about the detrimental effects of single-use

plastics. GVMC officials, including Additional Commissioners DV Ramanamurthy and R Somanna Rao, and Chief

Medical Officer Dr Naresh Kumar, reiterated that the ban on single-use plastics will be strictly enforced from January 2025.

Patnaik emphasised the significance of the upcoming plastic ban, stating, "With unwavering determination, GVMC is implementing the ban on sin-

gle-use plastics to safeguard our environment and public health. I wholeheartedly support this initiative and will continue to collaborate with GVMC in spreading awareness for this noble cause." The actor-turned-activist encouraged the public to transform Visakhapatnam into an environmentally friendly city for future generations. "Determination leads to success. If we strive hard, we can achieve our goal of a plastic-free city," he motivated the crowd. After his inspiring speech, Patnaik participated in a beach cleanup drive alongside GVMC officials, staff, and residents, underscoring the importance of maintaining a clean city. The event witnessed a significant turnout, with active participation from Zonal Commissioners, Assistant Medical Officers, sanitary inspectors, and GVMC staff and employees.

# Amarnath slams Naidu as CBI clears YSRCP over drug charges

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former minister Gudivada Amarnath has criticised TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu for making unfounded allegations regarding a supposed drug seizure at Visakhapatnam Port. His remarks follow the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) report, which confirmed that no drugs were found in the container, effectively ending the controversy. Addressing the media on Saturday, Amarnath accused Naidu of using the issue as a political ploy ahead of the 2024 elections. "Chandrababu Naidu habitually blames the YSRCP government for every issue. He falsely claimed that a container carrying 25,000 kg of drugs had arrived in Vizag, solely to tarnish

the image of the YSRCP government and our beloved city," he said. Amarnath also criticised the CBI for taking eight months to clarify the matter. "From the beginning, we have maintained that the YSRCP government had no involvement in this incident. While the delay in the CBI's response is concerning, the truth has now come out, vindicating our stance," he stated. The former minister accused Naidu of running a smear campaign to undermine Visakhapatnam's growth as a major urban hub. "This false propaganda was part of Naidu's strategy to derail the progress of Vizag, a city with immense potential. His actions were aimed at harming the city's reputation for personal and political gains," Amarnath alleged.



# Dy CM promises corporate-type education at government schools

PNS ■ KADAPA

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj K Pawan Kalyan stressed the importance of developing Government schools on par with corporate schools, assuring that efforts would be made to address the problems faced by students.

Pawan Kalyan participated in the Mega Parents-Teachers Day programme held at the Municipal School in Kadapa on Saturday. Speaking on the occasion, he emphasised the need to provide corporate-quality education in Government schools, stating that societal progress depends on the quality of education provided in public institutions.

"Although the Government is facing financial challenges, we are exploring ways to overcome these issues. The aim of organising Parents-Teachers Day across 44,000 schools is to understand the problems and take steps to address them. Over one crore students, their parents, and teachers participated in this programme," he said.

Pawan Kalyan pledged financial support from his trust for modernising the kitchen at the municipal school. He also expressed concern over the growing drug culture in the state, warning that it could undermine the



quality and future of students.

The Minister raised concerns about the negative impact of social media on students and stressed the need for awareness to reduce excessive use of mobile phones.

On the issue of student safety, he referred to the suspicious death of a schoolgirl, Sugali Prithi, in Kurnool district, lamenting that the culprits had yet to be punished. "We have expedited the investigation into the Sugali Prithi case," he assured.

Pawan Kalyan suggested installing CCTV cameras in schools to enhance security and emphasised that the best teachers are essential to create the best students.

The Deputy Chief Minister also addressed the drinking water crisis in Kadapa city, stating that despite the region

producing two Chief Ministers, it still faces severe water shortages. "This issue can be resolved with funds from the Amrit Scheme," he stated, recalling that the water crisis in Uddanam was solved with an expenditure of Rs 61 crore between 2014 and 2019.

He added that Rs 45 crore had been allocated for drinking water projects in Pulivendula. Later, Pawan Kalyan interacted with the students and shared a meal with them.

MLAs Reddipati Madhavi Reddy, Putta Chaitanya Reddy, Vardarajula Reddy, MLC MV Ramachandra Reddy, Panchayat Raj Director Krishna Teja, Collector Sridhar Cherukuri, and SP V Vidyasagar were among those present at the programme.

## Do not spend too much time on mobile phones: DC to students



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chhadalavada Nagarani advised students to avoid excessive use of mobile phones and encouraged them to focus on their studies to achieve their goals.

On Saturday, a mega parent-teacher meeting was held at the SNS Municipal High School campus in Narasapuram, where the Collector interacted with the students. She also spoke with the headmaster to inquire about the student strength in each classroom and appreciated those students who excelled in sports. Additionally, she observed the digital board installed in one of the classrooms.

Addressing the gathering, the Collector urged students to avoid spending long hours on mobile phones and instead

focus on their education. She motivated them to excel academically and reach greater heights in life. Nagarani also appealed to the parents to actively participate in school activities to monitor and support their children's academic progress.

Superintendent of Police Adnan Nayeem Asmi advised parents to observe their children's habits and behaviour closely. He cautioned students to stay away from bad habits and warned that addiction to substances like ganja and drugs can ruin their lives.

SMC Chairperson A. Karuna Kumar, DEO E. Narayana, Headmistress C.H. Geetabala, and Municipal Commissioner M. Anjaiah attended the event.

On the occasion, tug-of-war and rangoli competitions were organized for the parents.

## Embrace modern tech, farmers told



PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar urged farmers to embrace innovative techniques and advanced equipment to enhance agricultural productivity. He assured them of the government's unwavering support despite financial constraints.

During his visit to paddy fields in Peda Bondapalli village, Parvatipuram mandal, on Saturday, the Minister inspected the operations at the Rythu Seva Kendram and interacted with farmers to understand their challenges. He encouraged them to adopt modern farming methods to achieve higher yields and recalled the provision of subsidised tarpaulins to protect paddy from rain.

"The government is committed to supporting farmers. Despite budgetary limitations, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is keen on addressing

irrigation challenges in North Andhra Pradesh. Plans have been drawn up to interlink rivers and ensure adequate water for crops," the Minister stated.

He also highlighted that payments for paddy purchases are being processed within 24 hours, a significant improvement over the delays faced under the previous government. Farmers expressed their gratitude and appealed for the swift completion of the Janjivathi project.

The Minister was accompanied by MLA Bojela Vijayachandra, Joint Collector SS Sobhika, ITDA Project Officer Ashutosh Srivastava, and Agriculture Officer K Robert Paul.

### Government's Education Initiatives Lauded

Earlier, Minister Nadendla Manohar participated in the Mega Parents' Day meeting at

Narsipuram village. Addressing parents, he revealed that the government is investing Rs 14,000 crore in the education sector. He encouraged students to take full advantage of the benefits provided and called on teachers to dedicate themselves to shaping students into responsible citizens.

Criticising the previous YSRCP government, the Minister noted that despite receiving Rs 4,000 crore from the Centre, basic amenities in government schools were neglected. He emphasised that the Chandrababu Naidu-led government has laid out the Vision@2047 document to drive significant progress.

District Collector A Shyam Prasad informed that there are 1,590 government schools in the district, serving over 95,000 students. MLA Bojela Vijayachandra also addressed the gathering.

## Rs 5 cr works underway in Somandepalli: Savitha

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Minister for BC and EWS Welfare, S. Savitha, announced that various development works, including the construction of roads and drains, are being carried out with Rs 5 crore in Somandepalli.

On Saturday, the Minister performed the bhoomi pooja for the construction of a function hall, with Rs 80 lakh being allocated from MPLAD funds. She emphasised that substantial funds are being invested in the development of Somandepalli.

Savitha explained that CC roads and drainage systems are being built in Somandepalli mandal with over Rs 5 crore. She further stated that the drainage works, costing Rs 1.40 crore, would be completed promptly. The Minister also assured that steps would be taken to resolve the drinking water issue by installing four borewells in the area. Highlighting agricultural advancements, she mentioned that pipelines had been laid through the HNSS canal to irrigate 300 acres of land, with farmers currently using the water for crop cultivation.



"A junior college and an ITI will be set up in Somandepalli soon, with ITI classes starting next year," Savitha said. She also thanked the people of Somandepalli for their support in her election victory, along with the Bhagaritha brothers, who had been a pillar of support to

her, much like her father. The Minister announced a personal contribution of Rs 5 lakh towards the construction of the Bharitha Kalyana Mandapam and expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for empowering her with the ministerial position.

PNS ■ PADERU

District Superintendent of Police (SP) Amit Bardhar emphasized the state government's dedication to educational reform and issued a stern warning against the dangers of drug abuse, particularly ganja, during a mega parents-teachers meeting at the Government Tribal Welfare Boys' Ashram School-1.

"The state government is taking decisive action to enhance the quality of education," Bardhar stated. "Just as we were confined to our homes during the Covid pandemic, those involved in ganja activities are now restricted to their homes." He issued a strong warning, highlighting the police's active efforts to arrest individuals involved in ganja cultivation and

## Police urge public to combat drug abuse



consumption. Bardhar urged parents, particularly mothers, to take a more proactive role in their children's lives. "Mothers should emulate the divine figure of Saraswati Devi, constantly over-

seeing their children's well-being and academic progress," he advised. He also called for a shift towards agricultural development, specifically coffee cultivation, as a viable alternative to marijuana.

ITDA Project Officer V Abhishek echoed the SP's concerns, stressing the paramount importance of education and the devastating consequences of drug abuse. He highlighted the Margadarshini program, which

provides career guidance to students, and urged parents to closely monitor their children's academic performance and personal habits.

"Addiction to intoxicants can irrevocably destroy one's future," Abhishek warned. "Every student should aspire to attain at least a degree-level education." Both officials urged the community to unite in eradicating marijuana cultivation and promoting educational pursuits. The event, attended by key officials, teachers, parents, and students, underscored the collective responsibility to safeguard the future generation and create a drug-free society.

## Revanth govt a captive of urban naxals: Sanjay



Union Minister Bandi Sanjay addressing party's public meeting at Saroor Nagar on Saturday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Revanth Reddy Government is a captive in the hands of Urban Naxals, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar said.

He criticised the attacks on Hindu temples in Bhayanagar (Hyderabad), like in Bangladesh and warned that if the situation continues Bhayanagar would become another Bangladesh.

He urged the people of Bhayanagar to decide whether they want to follow the path of Swami Vivekananda, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, Komaram Bheem and Sewal Maharaj or become Naxalites.

"Dear Revanth Reddy, you have until Sankranti. Without fulfilling the promises you made, no Congress leader should be allowed to visit villages. The responsibility to fulfil the promises made to farmers and others lies with you. You ask what funds Modi has given to Telangana. Does Modi come carrying sacks of money and distribute them? Isn't the Centre providing funds for every development project in Telangana? Doesn't the Modi government fund all development works in pan-

chayat? Isn't the Centre funding municipal development works? Even for ration rice and paddy procurement, isn't the Modi Government providing money? Despite all this, Revanth is deceiving people by not showing the Prime Minister's photo and instead is using names like Indiramma and Sonia. He promised houses for all the poor within a year. Has even a single house been constructed? The Modi Government sanctioned lakhs of houses, but during BRS rule, those funds were diverted. Now, the Congress is deceiving people without constructing houses. Go door-to-door and tell the truth that the houses being built in the state are funded by the Modi Government. The Revanth Government has become a puppet in the hands of Urban Naxals. Former Naxals are now in the cabinet. They are appointing people following the Naxalite ideology in the education commission. In coming days, there is a conspiracy to turn Telangana's youth into Naxals. The people of Telangana should decide whether they want to follow the path of Swami Vivekananda, Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Komaram Bheem or want to become Naxals," he said.



## TTD chief releases 'Venkateswara Strottram' audio album

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Chairman B.R. Naidu released the audio album of Sri Venkateswara Strottram at his office in Tirumala on Friday evening.

The song is sung by child singer Niara Naga Sunkarineni,

with accompaniment by child instrumentalist Nitaru Naga Sunkarineni. Dr. K. Swaroopa composed the music for the album.

On the occasion, the TTD Chairman congratulated the children for their melodious rendition of the song and

praised the beautiful music. He expressed hope that they would continue their singing careers with more versatile songs. Bollineni Rabindranath, along with the parents of the singers, Dr Nishma Sunkarineni and Dr Nikhil Sunkarineni, participated in the event.

## Vizag CP launches 'No Drugs Bro' campaign

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a bid to curb the growing threat of drug abuse, City Police Commissioner Dr. Shankhabrata Bagchi, has launched the "No Drugs Bro" campaign. This initiative, aligned with the Andhra Pradesh State Government's directives, aims to educate and sensitize the youth about the devastating effects of drug addiction.

As part of the campaign, mega teacher-parent meetings were organized across schools in the city, focusing on issues such as cybercrime, women's safety, traffic regulations, and drug abuse. Dr Bagchi attended a session at Sri Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Social & Welfare Residency Junior College & School, where he unveiled the "No Drugs Bro" poster and urged students to join the fight against drugs.

"The youth are the future of our country," Dr. Bagchi emphasized. "Drugs destroy their health, financial stability, and character. We need to

work together as a society to protect our children from this menace." He stressed the importance of family, school, and community involvement in addressing the issue. "Parents, teachers, and society at large must play an active role in guiding our children. By raising them with love, understanding, and vigilance, we can ensure they stay away from drugs."

Dr. Bagchi also encouraged citizens to report any suspicious drug-related activities to the police. "If you notice any drug use or sale in your neighbourhood, school, or anywhere else, please inform us immediately," he said. People can report such incidents by calling or messaging him personally at 7995095799, dialling 112, or contacting the nearest police station. The "No Drugs Bro" campaign has been widely appreciated for its proactive approach and focus on involving all stakeholders. By creating awareness and promoting community engagement, the initiative aims to create a drug-free society.



## 800 litres of jaggery wash destroyed



PNS ■ NANDYALA

The police on Saturday raided Kollabavapuram village in Nandikotkur mandal and destroyed 800 litres of jaggery wash, which was intended for brewing illicit liquor.

Circle Inspector (CI) Ramanjaneyulu informed the media that, following instructions from Kurnool district Excise Deputy Commissioner Sridevi, a police team led by him carried out the raid in the forest area and seized the jaggery wash, which had been stockpiled for distilling illegal alcohol.



## 118 kg ganja seized, two peddlers arrested

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Police seized 118 kg of ganja and arrested two drug peddlers at Sompeta railway station on Saturday. Palasa GRP Circle Inspector Ravikumar informed the media that the accused were transporting the contraband from Odisha to Bengaluru. Acting on a tip-off, the police apprehended the suspects while they were waiting for a train at the station.

However, four other individuals involved in the operation managed to flee upon noticing the police. Efforts are underway to trace and apprehend the absconding suspects, the CI added.

Further investigation is going on.

ACROSS THE STATES



Assam CM expands cabinet, 4 new ministers take oath

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday expanded his cabinet with four ministers taking oath. Assam Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to the four new ministers - Prasanta Phookan, Kaushik Rai, Krishnendu Paul, and Rupesh Goala. All of them are BJP legislators. The chief minister and members of his cabinet were present on the occasion. Phukan is a four-time MLA from Dibrugarh, Paul a two-time MLA from Patharkandi while Rai and Goala are first-time MLAs from Lakhimpur and Doom Dooma respectively. Phukan and Goala represent the Upper Assam tea districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia respectively while Paul and Rai are from the two Barak Valley districts of Sribhumi (formerly Karimganj) and Cachar.



Youth must engage in politics to drive change: Atishi

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Saturday urged students to actively participate in politics, cautioning against leaving critical decisions to the 'worst kind of people'. Speaking at the Founder's Day celebration of St. Stephen's College here, Atishi recounted her time as a student there and how politics was once dismissed as a 'dirty business' and an unlikely career choice. "It was more than two decades ago that I was a student here, at that time, the idea of effecting change was limited to charity work or social causes. Politics seemed inaccessible," she said, according to a statement. She explained that disengaging in politics leaves crucial decisions about education, healthcare, and safety in the hands of others, the statement said.



9 Kendriya Vidyalayas to be set up in Rajasthan

The Union government has approved the opening of nine new Kendriya Vidyalayas in Rajasthan that will increase the opportunities for quality education in the state, Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma said on Saturday. The Union Cabinet approved on Friday the opening of 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas and 28 new Navodaya Vidyalayas. The opening of these new Kendriya Vidyalayas will provide an opportunity for over 82,000 students to receive affordable and high-quality education across the country. According to a statement issued here, the approved Kendriya Vidyalayas include AFS Phalodi in Jodhpur district, BSF Satrana and BSF Srikananpur in Ganganagar district, Hindaun City in Karauli, Merta City in Nagaur, Rajsamand, Bhim, and Mahua in Dausa district.



Participative diplomacy can help solving conflicts: EAM

PNS ■ DOHA (QATAR)

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday called for "more innovative and participative diplomacy" and said the needle is moving towards the reality of negotiations rather than the continuation of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Jaishankar highlighted the increasing cost of oil, fertilisers and shipping etc. for several countries, including India, due to conflicts in the Gulf and the Mediterranean region.

He is visiting Doha to participate in the Doha Forum at the invitation of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of State of Qatar Mohammed bin Abdulrahman. He was addressing a panel along with

the Qatari prime minister and Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide.

Jaishankar said that diplo-

**Jaishankar said that diplomats have to tell themselves, it's a messy world. "It's terrible. There are conflicts, but therefore there's all the more reason for diplomats of the world to step forward," he said**



mats have to tell themselves, it's a messy world. "It's terrible. There are conflicts, but therefore there's all the more reason for diplomats of the world to

step forward," he said. He also said the era of the 60s and the 70s when the UN Security Council or a few

diplo- macy, for more innovative participative diplomacy, and, and I think more countries need to have the boldness to bypass the West," the former diplomat turned minister said.

When the anchor asked about India's role in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Jaishankar said, "The needle is moving towards the reality of negotiation than the continuation of the war."

Describing how India is walking the talk, by going to Moscow, talking to President Vladimir Putin, going to Kyiv, engaging,

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, transparently carrying messages to each other, Jaishankar said India is trying to find "common threads" which can be picked up at some time.

'Will provide school edn to all sections'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible with the Cabinet approving the opening of 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas. He asserted that while the step will benefit a large number of students, many new employment opportunities will also be created. "Our government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible. Under this, 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas will be opened across the country.

While this step will benefit a large number of students, many new employment opportunities will also be created," Modi said in a post in Hindi on X.

The prime minister said the government is committed to providing school education to every section of the society in accordance with the National Education Policy.

"As part of that, our government has approved 28 new Navodaya Vidyalayas across the country. This will expand residential and quality school education to a larger extent," Modi said in another post in Hindi.



No joy among people after Mahayuti's massive victory: Pawar

PNS ■ KOLHAPUR

NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday claimed that no enthusiasm or overt joy was visible among the people of Maharashtra after the BJP-led Mahayuti coalition's landslide victory in the November 20 assembly elections.

Speaking at a press conference at Kolhapur in western Maharashtra, Pawar said the Opposition need not worry, but it should go back to the people after the setback.

The Opposition's Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance will work to ensure that the government kept all its pre-poll promises including

increasing the financial assistance for women under the Ladki Bahin scheme to Rs 2,100 from Rs 1,500, he said.

"No enthusiasm is visible in the people after the Mahayuti's massive mandate," said the veteran politician whose party could win only 10 seats in the 288-member assembly.



US denies BJP's allegations of backing anti-India agenda

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The US on Saturday rejected the BJP's allegations that organisations funded by the US State Department and elements in the American "deep state" were behind attempts to destabilise India through targeted attacks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and business tycoon Gautam Adani.

A spokesperson at the US embassy described the allegations as "disappointing" and asserted that the US government had been a champion of

media freedom around the world.

The BJP alleged on Saturday that the US deep state colluded with the media portal OCCRP (Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project) and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to "damage" India's image.

The BJP had cited Gandhi's use of reports by OCCRP to attack the Adani Group and to accuse it of having closeness with the government.

"It's disappointing that the ruling party in India would make these kinds of accusa-

tions," the US embassy spokesperson said.

"The US government works with independent organisations on programming that supports professional development and capacity building training for journalists. This programming does not influence the editorial decisions or direction of these organisations," the official said.

The OCCRP, headquartered in Amsterdam, is a media platform that largely focuses on stories relating to crime and corruption.

Govt hiking tax rates for common man, says Rahul

Accuses it of giving concessions to billionaires

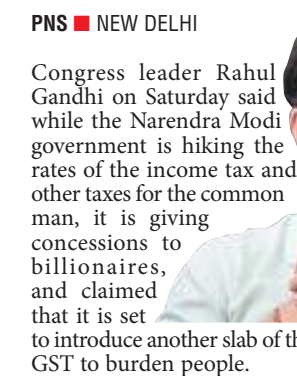
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said while the Narendra Modi government is hiking the rates of the income tax and other taxes for the common man, it is giving concessions to billionaires, and claimed that it is set to introduce another slab of GST to burden people.

Gandhi said the Congress will continue to oppose this "injustice" of imposing higher tax rates on things of daily use and giving concessions to big billionaires. "See another example of concessions to capitalists and looting common people."

On one hand, the income tax is increasing constantly in comparison to the corporate tax. On the other hand, the Modi government is preparing to collect more money through Gabbar Singh Tax," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

"It is heard that amidst the ever-increasing collection from the GST, the government is going to introduce a new tax slab -- there is a plan to increase the GST on things of daily need.



'Kerala govt has nothing to hide' Minister Saji on Hema panel report

PNS ■ KOZHIKODE

Emphasizing that there is nothing to hide over the Justice Hema Committee report, which exposed the shocking harassment and sexual exploitation faced by women in the Malayalam film industry, Kerala Culture Minister Saji Cheriaan on Saturday said the government is implementing its recommendations.

Addressing the media, he stated that the government had adhered strictly to court directives, omitting only the

portions the State Information Commission recommended not to release.

"The matter is currently before the High Court, and there are no objections if the court or the information commission instructs that these portions be made public," Cheriaan clarified.

He underscored the government's commitment to addressing issues faced by women in cinema, highlighting that this is the first time such a committee has been constituted in India.

Modi govt in no mood for talks: Pandher Farmers to march towards Delhi today

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said on Saturday that they have not received any message from the Centre for talks to address their issues and said a group of 101 farmers will again begin their march to Delhi on December 8.

On Friday, protesting farmers suspended their foot march to the national capital for the day after some of them suffered injuries due to tear gas shells



fired by security personnel, who stopped them at the Punjab-Haryana border. The

farmers have been pressing for various demands, including a legal guarantee for Minimum

Support Price (MSP). Addressing the media at Shambhu on the Punjab-Haryana border on Saturday, Pandher said 16 farmers suffered injuries and one of them lost hearing ability because of the tear gas shelling by Haryana security personnel.

Except four injured farmers, the rest of them have been discharged from hospital, he said, adding, "We have not received any message from the Centre for holding talks.

Delhi's air quality slips back to 'poor'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a brief respite of three days, Delhi's air quality dropped again to the 'poor' category on Saturday. The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) of the city was recorded at 233 at 4 pm on Saturday, marking a deterioration from Friday's reading of 197, which fell in the 'moderate' category. The primary pollutants on Saturday were PM2.5 and PM10, with PM2.5 levels recorded at 93.2 µg/m³ and PM10 levels at 185.4 µg/m³ at 2 pm. These fine particles pose significant health risks as they can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream.



Of the 38 air quality monitoring stations in the city, two reported air quality in the 'very poor' category on Saturday, 30 were in the 'poor' category, and the rest recorded 'moderate' air quality, according to the Sameer app. According to the Air Quality Early Warning System for

Delhi, air quality in the city will likely remain in the 'poor' category on Sunday and Monday, while it is expected to deteriorate to 'very poor' on Tuesday. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) classifies AQI between 0 and 50 as 'good', between 51 and 100 as 'satisfactory', between 101 and 200 as 'moderate', between 201 and 300 as 'poor', between 301 and 400 as 'very poor', and

above 400 as 'severe'. Meanwhile, the Decision Support System (DSS), the primary tool used to assess and estimate the sources of pollution in Delhi, has not been updated since November 29. A Commission for Air Quality Management official stated that the DSS is still in the development phase and has not been fully commissioned yet. "An evaluation committee

reviewed the system and found that its data and accuracy were not in line with the terms of reference set for the model. It was also observed that some of the data or the emissions inventory being used was outdated," the official said on the condition of anonymity. The DSS will resume sharing data once the necessary changes are implemented, the official added.

Tribunal upholds extension of five-year ban on LTTE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi High Court tribunal has upheld the government's decision to extend a five-year ban imposed on the LTTE, saying the group continues to be a threat to India's sovereignty and territorial integrity and it is still indulging in activities prejudicial to integrity and security of the country.

The tribunal comprising Delhi High Court Judge Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora observed that the objective of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for a separate homeland (Tamil Eelam) for all Tamils threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India.

It amounts to the cession and secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union and thus falls within the ambit of unlawful activities, the tribunal observed.

No political witch hunting on Covid 'scam': Shivakumar

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Saturday said there won't be any political "witch hunting", while taking action on the recommendations of the Justice Michael D' Cunha Commission, which investigated alleged irregularities in the purchase of equipment and medicines during the Covid-19, when the BJP was in power. Officials have been asked to take action "based on facts". A separate committee will be formed at the official level, also involving some retired officials, to look into the report, "for guiding and for follow up action", he said.

The cabinet subcommittee headed by Shivakumar constituted to take further action based on the report, met here today to review it. "Today, we held a second

cabinet sub-committee meeting...we have only reviewed. We have asked the officials to take action, as per law, based



on the recommendations and findings of the Justice Michael D' Cunha Commission report," Shivakumar told reporters after the meeting. Departmental inquiries on officials will be done as per procedures. "Justice Cunha has also recommended crim-

inal inquiry on some, that will also happen separately...legally whatever has to be done like -- booking FIR or disciplinary action or anything else, will be done in accordance with law," he said.

The sub-committee will once again meet in Belagavi and will review the progress. "The cabinet sub-committee will not be directly involved. Whatever the procedure is, the officials will do it themselves...we (govt) will not indulge in witch hunting, but we can't hush up or close what is there in the report...we have told officials to take action based on facts," Shivakumar said. "We are looking into the recommendations of the committee. Officials are empowered and they will do their duty," he added.

The preliminary report was submitted by Justice Michael D' Cunha on August 31.

Nestled gracefully in the foothills of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand, Mukteshwar is a serene and unspoiled retreat that has yet to gain the limelight it truly deserves. Perched at an elevation of 2,171 meters, this picturesque hill station is located approximately 51 kilometers from the bustling town of Nainital. Mukteshwar offers you an idyllic escape for those seeking solace amidst nature's bounty and a peaceful respite from the chaos of urban life.

**The Journey to Mukteshwar**

The journey to Mukteshwar is as scenic as the destination itself. Once you cross the town of Nainital and continue your ascent, the winding roads begin to carve through the hills, offering a thrilling experience of hairpin bends and steep curves. The air grows crisper, and the lush greenery surrounding you seems to come alive, offering a visual treat to your senses. The long stretches of forested hills and cascading valleys make the drive a captivating experience, setting the stage for the calm that awaits you.

**A Gateway to Himalayan Grandeur**

Formerly known as Muktesar, Mukteshwar serves as a gateway to the majestic Himalayas, providing breathtaking views of snow-clad peaks. The Himalayan panorama here includes the towering Nanda Devi, the second-highest peak in India, standing tall as a symbol of nature's grandeur. The pristine mountain air and serene ambiance work like a balm, calming your soul and rejuvenating your spirit. Mukteshwar's unspoiled beauty makes it an ideal destination for mindful activities such as meditation, yoga, or simply soaking in the peace of the surroundings.

**Mukteshwar Dham:  
A Spiritual Treat**

The town derives its name from the revered Mukteshwar Dham, an ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Believed to be over



5,350 years old, this temple is not only a place of worship but also a testament to the spiritual and historical richness of the region. Located 21 kilometres from the town centre, the temple is perched atop a hill, offering mesmerizing views of the valley below. To reach the temple, visitors must embark on a short yet rewarding trek of about 15 minutes. There are two paths leading to the temple: one with well-paved stairs and another with a steep incline, allowing visitors to choose based on their preference and stamina.

**Zero Point:  
A Viewpoint like No Other**

Just a short walk from the Mukteshwar Dham lies Zero Point, a spot that offers unparalleled views of the Himalayan range. The 10 to 15-minute walk to this viewpoint is well worth the effort, as the vistas that greet you are nothing short of magical. A small entry fee of Rs. 60 is required, but the sight of the towering peaks bathed in golden sunlight or shrouded in misty clouds is a reward far greater than the cost. Zero Point allows visitors to fully immerse themselves in the raw beauty of the mountains, leaving an indelible mark on their hearts.

**Why Mukteshwar?**

Mukteshwar is more than just a destination, it is an experience that soothes the mind, body, and soul. Whether you are looking to relax in silence, embrace the beauty of nature, or embark on a spiritual journey, this quaint hill station has something for everyone. With its charming landscapes, rich history, and spiritual essence, Mukteshwar stands as a testament to the timeless beauty of Uttarakhand's Kumaon Hills. The place is a must visit if you want to detox yourself.

**WAY TO MUKTESHWAR**

Mukteshwar promises not just a tranquil retreat but also a journey filled with stunning views. Whether you prefer flying, riding a train, or driving through scenic routes, the travel itself becomes part of the adventure. From picturesque landscapes to steep turns on the mountain roads, each mode of transport offers a unique charm. Comfortable travel options ensure that reaching this beautiful destination is as delightful as staying there.

**Mukteshwar by Road**

Mukteshwar is well-connected by road, lying 353 km from Delhi, 51 km from Nainital, and 42 km from Haldwani. State-run buses link Mukteshwar with nearby Uttarakhand cities, including Kathgodam. Luxury buses are also available on the Delhi-Kathgodam route, with buses departing from Delhi's ISBT. The journey from Delhi to Kathgodam takes about 8 hours. For those driving from Delhi, follow NH 24 to Rampur, then NH 87 to Ranibagh. From Ranibagh, take the state highway to Bhowali, and finally another state highway via Ramgarh to Mukteshwar.

**Mukteshwar by Train**

Kathgodam Railway Station is the closest railroad to Mukteshwar, offering connections to major cities like Delhi, Lucknow, and Kolkata. From Kathgodam, travelers can hire taxis or take buses to reach Mukteshwar conveniently.

**Mukteshwar by Air**

The nearest airport to Mukteshwar is Pantnagar Airport, located 111 km away. Another option is the Jolly Grant Airport in Dehradun. From both airports, travelers can hire taxis to reach Mukteshwar comfortably.

**THE SCENIC AND  
SIMPLE MUKTESHWAR**



Mukteshwar is a quite destination that will help you discover your calmer self, writes **ABHI SINGHAL**



As someone who lives for the thrill of discovering untouched destinations, my recent journey to Jihar Village was a revelation. Nestled in the Almora district of Uttarakhand, this unspoiled hamlet, perched at 5,400 feet, offers a serene escape from the chaos of modern life. It lies about 45 km beyond the ever-popular Jim Corbett National Park, yet few venture this far—a detail that adds to its charm. What awaited me was a perfect blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and heartwarming simplicity. The drive to Jihar was nothing short of mesmerising. The winding road was flanked by pine forests and occasional streams that glistened under the sunlight. Accompanied by lovely music in the car, I was lost in the serenity of the place. Two jackals darted across the path at one point, a reminder of the region's rich wildlife. As I drew closer, the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas greeted me, reaffirming that I had made the right choice to explore this lesser-known gem. For accommodation, I opted for Nivriti Summit View, a boutique property near Basot village. Travelling with my family, I needed a place that catered to both comfort and scenic beauty, and this property delivered on all fronts. The first thing that struck me upon arrival was the sheer grandeur of the views. On one side, the majestic Himalayan ranges seemed close enough to touch, while on the other, the



endless valley stretched into a picturesque horizon. The sight of the Ramganga River winding its way below added to the allure. The property, with its six thoughtfully designed rooms, was a sanctuary in itself. Each room had large windows that framed the surrounding beauty like a painting. What made the stay even more special was the personal touch of the owner, Randhir Brar, whose love for travel and nature was evident in every corner. From curated books to artistic décor, every detail told a story. My mornings began with the golden glow of Nanda Devi, and my evenings ended with a cup of tea as Trisul's snowy peaks reflected the last light of the day. The highlight for my children was the sprawling garden—a perfect space to play and unwind. For me, it was the property's glasshouse rooms, which allowed me to gaze at the stars from the comfort of my bed. The culinary experience was equally memorable. While I enjoyed

**Escape to Peaceful Jihar**

From stunning Himalayan vistas and hidden waterfalls to the charm of Nivriti Summit View, my journey to Jihar was a perfect blend of adventure, tranquillity, and warm hospitality, writes **DIVYA BHATIA**



their continental offerings, the Kumaoni dishes—prepared with fresh, local ingredients—stole the show. Don't miss the chance to savour dishes like Bhatt ki Churdhani and Aloo ke

Gutke, prepared with expertise. After a full day of relaxation, we set out the following morning to explore Jihar. Our first stop was the Bona Devi Temple, a revered shrine nestled deep within the forests. Located about 14 km from Kalason Basot, the temple is more than 250 years old and steeped in local legend. It houses a Shivaling, a pillar of Kaal Bhairavnath,



and the sacred hearth of Harju Devta. The moment we stepped into the temple premises, a serene calmness enveloped us, as though the place radiated an abundance of positive energy. However, it wasn't just the spiritual aura that captivated us. The temple offers stunning panoramic views of the Himalayan range and the five regions of Salt—Talla, Malla, Vichalla, Palla, and Valla. Its potential for spiritual tourism is undeniable, but its tranquillity must be preserved. Next on the itinerary was a hidden waterfall, about 25 km from the property, towards Almora. Accessible only on foot, the path to the falls remained elusive until a local guide helped us navigate the terrain. From the road, it appears like a modest stream cascading down the mountainside, but once you hike up, the scene transforms. The effort was worth it. At the top, I was greeted by a crystal-clear pool fed by cascading waters. Taking a dip in the cool, pristine water felt like nature's own therapy. A jungle walk leading to a secluded spot by the Ramganga River was another unforgettable highlight. Nivriti Summit View

arranged a picnic lunch for us there, and it was nothing short of magical. Surrounded by the sounds of rustling leaves and flowing water, the experience felt like stepping into another world. The locals mentioned occasional sightings of leopards, though they assured us these majestic creatures had never harmed anyone—a testament to the harmonious coexistence of humans and wildlife here. Evenings back at the property were spent stargazing. The clear skies above Jihar unveiled the Milky Way in all its glory, a humbling reminder of the universe's vastness. It's rare to find a place where time slows down, where each moment invites introspection and wonder. Jihar, with its unpretentious beauty, offers precisely that. In today's fast-paced world, places like Jihar remind us of the beauty of simplicity. It's not just a destination; it's an experience—a chance to slow down, breathe, and reconnect with what truly matters. Whether you're a nature lover, an adventure seeker, or simply someone looking to escape the crowds, Jihar promises memories you'll treasure for a lifetime.

**HOW TO GET TO JIHAR**

Reaching Jihar is part of the adventure. The nearest airport is Pantnagar, about 140 km away, while Kathgodam railway station is 100 km from the village. From these points, the scenic drive to Jihar is best enjoyed in a private cab or local bus.

# The Art of Authentic Kashmiri Dining

Kashmirana serves authentic Kashmiri food with a cosy setting, bringing the flavours of Kashmir to Gurugram

FOODFREAK



Pawan Soni  
Food critic and founder of the Big F Awards

My friends have been dedicated patrons of Kashmirana, a Kashmiri restaurant nestled in Rodeo Drive that's gained a steady following in its five years. They've shared their experiences numerous times, so I was eager to see what the buzz was about on my first visit. Kashmirana has a cosy vibe with a mix of comfortable table seating and a few low tables for those looking to linger. My wife aptly described the interiors as reminiscent of a houseboat's warmth and charm. We found ourselves indulging in a variety of dishes, given her vegetarian preference. In the non-vegetarian starters, the Tabakmaaz and mutton seekh kebabs were both outstanding. The Tabakmaaz had that perfect crispiness, yielding to the fatty richness inside, while the mutton seekh had a delicate, hollow centre that retained a satisfying bite - some of the juiciest I've had in Gurugram. My wife, on the other hand, enjoyed the lotus root fritters (nadrū chips), cut into long, crispy strips and coated with a flavourful, addictive spice blend. In the mains, the rista and goshtaba were delightful, with the same signature spongy meatballs but distinct gravies that made each dish memorable. I prefer bigger balls but these tasted as good. On the vegetarian side, the haaq, rajma, and nadru yakhani shone brightly, leaving us no choice but to pack up the leftovers - vegetarian for us and non-vegetarian for my friends. And if I say we loved the non-veg, it's only fair to note the vegetarian options were no less satisfying. Traditional brassware enhanced the authenticity of the experience, and the kehwa added an extra layer of warmth, perfect for the season. Though the phirni was good, I've had more refined versions. However, the dry fruit-laden shufta, cooked in desi ghee, was a decadent finale. Kashmirana's portions are ample, the pricing fair, and the food impressive, especially as the restaurant filled with fellow Kashmiris as we dined, a clear testament to its authenticity and popularity among those who truly know this cuisine.

RATINGS (Out of 5):  
FOOD: 4.0 | AMBIENCE: 3.75 | SERVICE: 4.0 | OVERALL: 4.0



ADDRESS: KASHMIRANA, 1ST FLOOR, RODEO DRIVE, SECTOR 49, GURUGRAM | PHONE: 85953 99049



# The Heart of Odisha's Cuisine

Chor Bizarre's Odia pop-up brings an authentic, unique taste of Odisha, writes TEAM AGENDA



Left to right - Culinary Collaborator Mona Lisa Bal, Chef Srinivasulu. A and Actor & Filmmaker Nandita Das

When one thinks of India's diverse culinary landscape, it's easy to be drawn to the well-known dishes of the north or the spicy delights of the south. But what about the understated flavours of Odisha? Often overshadowed by its more famous counterparts, Odisha's cuisine is a hidden gem, rich in taste and steeped in tradition. The recent *Odia pop-up* at Chor Bizarre, the iconic Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi restaurant, offered a rare opportunity to experience the unique vegetarian dishes of Odisha, expertly curated by actor-filmmaker Nandita Das and her culinary collaborator Mona Lisa Bal. The event was an exciting foray into the lesser-known corners of Indian cuisine, offering an authentic glimpse into the simple yet bold flavours of Odisha. With the restaurant's long-standing reputation for bringing regional Indian cuisines to the forefront, this pop-up felt like a welcome celebration of the state's rich culinary heritage, especially for those in New Delhi who may not have had the chance to explore it. The carefully crafted vegetarian menu showcased the simplicity and brilliance of Odia cuisine. The meal began with "Ghole Dahi" (Odia Chhas), a traditional yogurt-based drink that was both refreshing and tangy, setting the tone for the meal ahead. It was the perfect introduction to a menu that relied on fresh, local ingredients and a delicate balance of spices. The starters were a real treat, with dishes like "Biri Boda with Dhaniya Chutney" (Lentil Fritters with Coriander) and "Besara Chhatu Potra Poda" (Mushrooms with Mustard in Banana Leaf) capturing the essence of Odisha's cooking style. The lentil fritters were crispy on the outside, soft on the inside, and paired beautifully with a fresh coriander chutney that added a burst of flavour. The mushrooms, cooked with mustard and wrapped in banana leaves, offered a smoky, earthy flavour that exemplified the depth of Odia culinary techniques. When it came to the main courses, the dishes truly shone. "Dahi Baingan" (Shallow Fried Eggplant with Tempered Yogurt) was a standout, with its crisp, golden eggplant and creamy, tangy yogurt creating a delicious contrast in texture and taste. "Dalma," a hearty lentil and vegetable stew with coconut, was a comforting dish, light yet full of flavour. The



addition of "Kusala Saaga" (Amaranth Leaves with Garlic) and "Santula" (Sautéed Vegetables with Five Spices) further exemplified the region's love for vegetables, bringing out the freshness and natural taste of the ingredients in every bite. The accompaniments were the perfect complements to the main dishes. "Chakuli Pita," a soft, chewy flatbread made with lentils and rice, was ideal for scooping up curries, while the steamed "Bhaata" (rice) acted as a neutral base to balance the complex spices. No meal would be complete without dessert, and Chor Bizarre didn't disappoint. "Kheer Sagar" (Chhena Balls in Thickened Milk) offered a rich and creamy end to the meal, while "Chhena Podo," a baked chhena dessert, had a beautiful caramelised flavour that left a lasting impression. The vegetarian menu was, without a doubt, the star of the pop-up. However, it's worth noting that the non-vegetarian thali also garnered rave reviews, with guests praising its perfect blend of spices and execution. Chor Bizarre's ability to balance both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings with such precision only further cements its reputation as a destination for authentic regional cuisine. The *Odia pop-up* at Chor Bizarre was an enlightening and flavoursome journey into the heart of Odisha's culinary culture. For those who have yet to explore the delights of Odia cuisine, this pop-up provided a rare and memorable experience, showcasing the region's unique approach to vegetarian dishes that are as healthy as they are flavourful. With its emphasis on fresh ingredients, simple yet creative preparations, and a deep respect for tradition, this pop-up was a celebration of the incredible variety India's regional cuisines have to offer.



When it comes to coffee culture, *First Coffee* has always been a name synonymous with quality, creativity and bold flavours. Co-founded by the dynamic trio of Sohrab Sitaram, Shiv Dhawan and Chandini D Purnesh, this café has been a favourite haunt for caffeine enthusiasts and foodies alike. Their latest revamped menu is here to take your coffee and snack experience to the next level. Packed with innovative offerings, trendy beverages and classic delights, the menu is designed to cater to every palate. Whether you're a matcha enthusiast, a fan of indulgent pastries or someone who loves a good sandwich or wrap, *First Coffee* has you covered.



Co Founders - Sohrab Sitaram and Shiv Dhawan

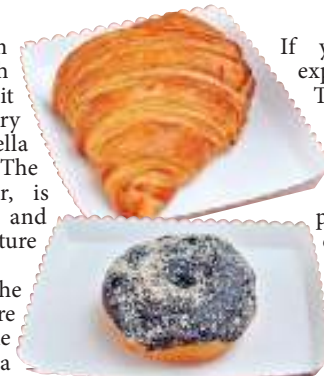
flavour, matcha has become a favourite among those looking for a trendy yet healthy alternative. While it might take some getting used to for first-timers, it's a sip worth acquiring. *First Coffee's* version offers a creamy, balanced taste that pairs beautifully with savoury bites like the paneer tikka sandwich or the chickpea Veggie wrap. **NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE:** As much as *First Coffee* excels in innovation, they also understand the value of keeping things classic. Their Classic Iced Coffee remains a cornerstone of the menu, offering a refreshing pick-me-up that's as dependable as it is delicious. Perfectly brewed and served chilled, it's a reminder of why *First Coffee* became a beloved name in the first place. **SWEET DREAMS IN EVERY BITE:** Sweet tooth? You're in for a treat. The new menu introduces the incredible range of pastries. First up is the freshly baked Choco-Berry Dream Doughnut, a decadent creation that combines the richness of chocolate and custard with a fresh twist of blueberry jam and shaved chocolate on top. If you're a fan of chocolate, the Choco Truffle Eclairs are not to be missed. They combine deep, indulgent chocolate flavours with just the right amount

# MORE THAN JUST A COFFEE!

First Coffee's revamped menu combines innovative flavours, trendy beverages and classic favourites, creating the perfect coffee and snack experience, writes TEAM AGENDA



of berry sweetness, making them the perfect treat for anyone with a sweet tooth. For something a bit more adventurous, the Blueberry Passion Eclairs and the Nutella Cinnamon Roll are a must-try. The cinnamon roll, in particular, is topped with marshmallows and toasted seeds, adding extra texture and sweetness to every bite. **SAVOURY DELIGHTS:** The savoury offerings on the menu are just as impressive. The Truffle Mushroom Sandwich is a symphony of flavours, combining truffled mushrooms, caramelised onions and gooey cheese. It's rich, satisfying, and indulgent. For a spicier kick, the Chipotle Veggie Sandwich features Mexican-inspired vegetables and melted cheese layered on hearty Italian bread. Wrap lovers will adore the Chickpea Veggie Wrap, a flavour-packed burrito-style wrap filled with spicy chickpeas, and tangy pickled onions. Pair it with a side of their crispy Classic Fries for a meal that's as comforting as it is filling. **SWEET AND SAVOURY PAIRINGS:** The new menu is designed with pairings in mind, offering a curated experience that complements every dish. Enjoy their signature Crunchy Hazelnut Smash for a heavenly mix of chocolate sweetness and nutty richness. Or, pair the bold Flaky Chicken Seekh Wrap with a soothing Ginger Tea and Masala tea for a balance of spice and warmth.



If you're in the mood to experiment, the Cascara Thunder, a refreshing mix of cascara syrup over ice and lemonade, offers a zesty complement to the bold flavours of wraps. Each pairing has been thoughtfully created to elevate your dining experience. **DESSERTS AND SIDES THAT DELIGHT:** *First Coffee* has also introduced indulgent sides and desserts that are worth savouring. The Korean BBQ Potato and Chicken Poppers are perfect companions to their wraps and sandwiches, while the Brookie, a fusion of brownie and cookie, is a dessert dream come true. **WHY YOU'LL LOVE IT:** *First Coffee's* new menu blends trendy offerings like the Matcha Latte with timeless classics like the Iced Coffee, creating a menu that caters to every taste and preference. Add in the cosy, welcoming ambience and you have a café that's more than just a place to grab a coffee, it's a destination.

**FACT SHEET**  
LOCATIONS:  
Cyberhub, Gurugram  
Pacific Mall, Jasola  
Pacific Mall, NSP

IN BRIEF



TVS Motor rolls out 2025 TVS Ronin

Two and three-wheeler major TVS Motor Company has unveiled the 2025 edition of its popular 225 cc motorcycle TVS Ronin, during the ongoing TVS MotoSoul 4.0 event in Goa, the company said. The company, in a statement on Saturday, said the TVS Ronin mid-variant would be equipped with a Dual-Channel ABS towards enhancing the safety and stability of its riders. "This upgrade creates a more consistent differentiation across all three variants of the TVS Ronin, providing clear distinctions not only in colour and graphics but also in functionality," the company said. Two new colours, 'Glacier Silver' and 'Charcoal Ember', have been introduced, replacing the existing 'Delta Blue and Stargaze Black' in the Ronin models. The city-headquartered TVS Motor Company on the occasion also announced its collaboration with GIVI, a global leader in motorcycle luggage systems.



MSME stakeholders seek tech upgrade

Stakeholders from the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sought a reduction in GST, technology upgrade, and production-linked incentive scheme benefits for various segments in a pre-Budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday. The meeting aimed to seek inputs and suggestions for the Budget for 2025-26, expected to be presented on February 1. Members from the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka (AWAKE); Karnataka SC and ST Entrepreneurs' Association; Plant-Based Food Industry Association (PBFIA); Ambala Scientific Instruments Manufacturers' Association (ASIMA); Rajasthan Footwear Manufacturers' Association were among the participants at the meeting. The All-India Plastics Manufacturers' Association; All India Manufacturers' Association; Gujarat Chamber of Small Industries Association; Federation of Associations of Cottage and Small Industries (based in West Bengal); Federation of Andhra Pradesh Small and Medium Association; and Laghu Udyog Bharati were also present during the interaction.



Rs 2k cr being invested in Narmadapuram: MP CM

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Saturday said Rs 2000 crore is being invested in the state's Narmadapuram region for developing it into a hub of renewable energy. The industrial area of Mohasa-Babai will become the centre of development for the entire Narmadapuram region, Yadav said while addressing the Regional Industrial Conclave (RIC) here. "Land for the Mohasa-Babai Solar Energy Park has expanded from 227 acres to 884 acres. Land allotment letters have been distributed for the establishment of 20 industrial units in the RIC. Youth from Sohagpur, Itarsi, Seoni Malwa, Pipariya and Pachmarhi will benefit due to employment opportunities. Migration for jobs from these areas will stop," he asserted. Narmadapuram, with its rich forest resources, land and good road and rail connectivity, is highly suitable for industrial growth, he said.

'India to be leader in maritime sector soon'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will soon emerge as the world leader in the maritime sector as it is multiplying its cargo-handling capacity in ports and building a robust shipping building and repairs ecosystem, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said on Saturday.



Speaking at the silver jubilee celebrations of the Kamarajar Port trust in Chennai, Sonowal said by 2047 India will be among the top-ten maritime nations in the world.

He said the port marked a significant step in decongesting Chennai Port by fostering efficient coal handling with possibilities of future expansion.

The minister said construction of IOCL Jetty of 3 MTPA will further enhance its capacity.

He said the setting up of 1 MLD seawater desalination plant at the port at a cost of Rs 32 crore will serve to meet not only the port's need but also those of the coastal community for drinking and other domestic purposes.

Timely implementation of infrastructure projects taken up by the shipping ministry

has led to faster completion of flagship programmes, Sonowal said, adding that quality has also been a focus area when development projects are rolled out.

The minister laid the foundation stone for establishing capital dredging, integrated command and control centre at the Kamarajar port at Rs 545 crore.

UPI enabled expansion of credit among underserved borrowers: Study



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has brought in a significant expansion of consumer credit among the underserved borrowers who had no credit history, a study said.

Since its launch in 2016, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has transformed financial access in India, enabling 300 million individuals and 50 million merchants to perform seamless digital transactions.

By October 2023, 75 per cent of all retail digital payments in India were through UPI, according to a study titled Open Banking and Digital Payments: Implications for Credit Access.

UPI is a payment system built as an interoperable protocol that allows third-party vendors to build apps to provide payments as a service to all customers of participating banks.

It has enabled underserved groups to access formal credit for the first time as transaction data was available before the lenders which enabled them to make credit decisions, it said.

UPI is the earliest implementation of an open-banking-based payment infrastructure that is free for customers and enables them to create

verifiable digital financial footprints in real time. Importantly, customers own their data and can share their UPI transaction history across financial intermediaries, it said.

Taking advantage, it said, fintech lenders scaled rapidly, increasing their loan volumes 77 times, far outpacing traditional banks in catering to smaller, underserved borrowers.

The study noted that the affordability of digital technology played a critical role, enabling widespread UPI adoption in rural and urban areas alike.

A 10 per cent increase in UPI transactions led to a 7 per cent rise in credit availability, reflecting how digital financial histories enabled lenders to assess borrowers better, the report said.

Despite the credit surge, default rates did not rise, showing that UPI-enabled digital transaction data helped lenders expand responsibly, it said.

India's success with UPI offers a replicable model for other nations, showcasing how combining public digital infrastructure with open banking policies can reduce financial exclusion, foster innovation, and promote equitable economic growth, it suggested.

M&M to strongly contest for 'BE 6e' trademark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra & Mahindra on Saturday said it has decided to rename its new electric vehicle brand as 'BE 6' but noted that it will continue to contest strongly in court with InterGlobe Aviation for the trademark 'BE 6e'. InterGlobe Aviation, which owns IndiGo airlines, has taken the automaker to court over the usage of 6E in its new EV brand. "Our priority and focus is on ensuring an excellent experience for our customers as we take our product to the market. We would not like to get distracted from our vision of popularising electric transport in India," M&M said in a statement. It further said, "We also find it unseemly that two large, Indian multinationals should engage in a distracting and unnecessary conflict when in fact we should be championing each other's growth and expansion."

India, Norway to discuss ways to increase bilateral trade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Norway will on Monday discuss ways to enhance trade and investments ties between the two countries, an official statement said on Saturday.

The talks will be held between Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Norwegian industry delegation led by May-Elin Stener, Ambassador of Norway to India.

The India-Norway Business Roundtable will be held in Mumbai.

Minister Goyal is expected to hold discussions on key opportunities and trends for further Norwegian investments in India, and potential areas of collaboration," the commerce and industry ministry said.

A significant focus of the discussion will be on the recent Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the EFTA countries, which holds



immense potential for both nations, it said.

"India is particularly keen on attracting USD 100 billion in investments from the EFTA countries, as outlined in the agreement," it added.

It said the two sides will assess the opportunities in investment partnerships in logistics, supply chain, connectivity, maritime, energy, circular economy, food and agri, infrastructure, technology, and more.

INSOLVENCY PROCESS

RBI pitches for enforceable code of conduct for CoC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reserve Bank Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao on Saturday pitched for an enforceable code of conduct for the Committee of Creditors (CoC) under the insolvency resolution process.

While emphasising that the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), which was introduced in 2016, has gained significant traction as a recovery and resolution mechanism, Rao also said significant improvements are needed with respect to the area of CoC. CoC has a key role in implementing the corporate insolvency resolution process under the IBC.

At a conference in the national capital, Rao said there have been instances where the CoC's performance has been found lacking in several aspects.

"This includes disproportionate prioritisation of individual creditors' interests over the collective interests of the group, disagreements among the CoC members on approving the resolution plan due to concerns about undervaluation and perceived lack of viability, disagreement over the distribution of the proceeds," he said.

Even when the resolution plan is agreed upon, Rao said there have been instances of non-participation in the CoC meetings



and a lack of effective engagement, coordination or information exchange among the members.

According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Deputy Governor, nominees of financial creditors in CoC are entrusted with responsibilities that far exceed their actual authority.

"It is in the larger interest of the creditors that issues related to the conduct are addressed by the members themselves without waiting for the regulatory prescription..." he said.

When incentives are not perfectly aligned, deviations from best practices become the norm, he said, adding that "we need an enforceable code of conduct for the CoC".

"Ideally, IBBI (Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India) should have the powers to

enforce norms for the conduct of all the stakeholders under the IBC process," he said.

Rao also touched upon the role of insolvency resolution professionals who have a lot of operational responsibilities, and in many instances, he said, the resolution professionals do not enjoy the cooperation of other stakeholders to discharge their duties.

Mentioning incentivising resolution professionals, Rao said compensation should be determined by the market based on commercial considerations.

The RBI Deputy Governor also made various suggestions to further improve the insolvency resolution process, including addressing delaying tactics used by corporate debtors and having a better understanding of the reasons behind defaults.

UltraTech receives CCI notice over India Cements acquisition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement maker UltraTech Cement has received a notice from the fair trade regulator CCI over its proposed acquisition of the South-based India Cements Ltd.

UltraTech Cement, in a regulatory filing, said it has received notice from the Competition Commission of India (CCI), and the Aditya Birla group flagship firm is confident in the merits of its case.

"The Company has received a communication from the Competition Commission of India under Section 29 (1) of

the Competition Act, 2002, regarding the proposed acquisition of The India Cements Ltd. The Company will be responding to the same," said UltraTech.

The southern market for grey cement, where India Cements primarily operates, is highly competitive and fragmented, with the presence of over 35 grey cement manufacturers. "We are confident of the merits of our case," the Aditya Birla Group firm said.

Under the CCI Act, where the fair trade regulator is of the opinion that a combination is "likely to cause, or has caused an appreciable adverse effect on



competition within the relevant market in India", it shall issue a notice to show cause to the parties to combination calling upon them to respond within 15 days.

After the receipt of the response of the parties to the combination, CCI may also call for a report from its probe unit -- Director General of Investigations.

Earlier in July this year, UltraTech Cement had announced the acquisition of a 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from promoters and their associates in a Rs 3,954 deal in a move to expand its footprint in the highly competitive and fast-growing southern cement market, particularly Tamil Nadu.

Besides, it had also announced a Rs 3,142.35 crore open offer to acquire 26 per cent share of ICL from its shareholders. UltraTech leads the Indian cement market with a consolidated capacity of 156.66 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement.

Finmin asks banks to use MuleHunterAI to check digital fraud



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Ministry asked banks and financial institutions to use artificial intelligence tools including MuleHunterAI developed by the Reserve Bank to rein in growing financial frauds.

In a meeting with Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju, banks were asked to adopt best practices, leverage cutting edge tools, and foster inter-bank collaboration to address mule accounts effectively.

He emphasised that proactive measures are required to be taken to protect citizens' hard-earned money.

"Protecting citizens' wealth is our shared responsibility," the Department of Financial Services (DFS) said in a series of posts on X.

Banks are directed to adopt advanced technologies including artificial intelligence and machine learning solutions for real-time detection of mule accounts, it said.

"Banks were also encour-

aged to explore and implement http://MuleHunter.AI, an AI/ML-driven model developed by RBI, to strengthen the detection and monitoring of mule accounts," he told representatives of I4C, RBI, NABARD and banks.

Earlier in the day, the RBI asked banks to collaborate with its initiative MuleHunter.AI to weed out mule accounts which are used to commit financial fraud.

A mule account is a bank account used by criminals to launder illicit funds, often set up by unsuspecting individuals lured by promises of easy money or coerced into participation. The transfer of funds through these highly interconnected accounts makes it difficult to trace and recover the funds.

"Use of money mule accounts is a common method adopted by fraudsters to channel proceeds of frauds," Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said.

PRE-BUDGET MEET WITH FM

Farmers seek cheaper credit, lower taxes

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Farmer representatives and agricultural stakeholders urged the government to provide cheaper long-term credit, implement lower taxes, and double the PM-KISAN income support during a comprehensive pre-budget consultation with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday.

Bharat Krishak Samaj Chairman Ajay Vir Jakhar emphasised the need for targeted interventions to boost agricultural productivity and farmer welfare.

Primary demands included reducing interest rates on agricultural loans to as low as 1 per cent and increasing the annual PM-KISAN instalment from Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000. Farmers' bodies also strongly advocated for zero-premium crop insurance for small farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

Taxation reforms were a critical component of the proposals, with stakeholders calling for



GST exemptions on agricultural machinery, fertilisers, seeds, and medicines. PHD Chambers of Commerce and

Industry requested a reduction of pesticide GST from 18 per cent to 5 per cent. Jakhar proposed a targeted

investment strategy of Rs 1,000 crore annually for eight years, focusing on specific crops like chickpeas, soybean, and mustard to enhance national agricultural productivity.

This approach aims to strategically enhance crop yields, reduce import dependence, and improve national nutritional security, he told PTI after the meeting.

Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) Speaker Dharmendra Malik demanded a comprehensive review of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism, seeking calculations that include land rent, farm wages, and post-harvest expenses.



FOOD REVIEW

# NIGHT OF COCKTAILS & DISCOVERY



Morning Breakfast (Roku Gin, matcha, champagne acid and yogurt wash) gave us a boozy breakfast vibe without the judgment.

Kin Ru took us on a flavour-packed adventure with a menu that had us Googling ingredients mid-sip. The To The BeeT combined bourbon with blood turnip (yes, turnip) and mint cordial for a drink that tasted way better than it sounds. The Yuzumiru was a citrusy delight featuring yuzu and sage, while the aptly named Mezcal Mayhem brought smoky drama with coffee and agave. But the real showstopper? The Kin-Furi, a sesame oil-infused mezcal-tequila cocktail with genmaicha syrup and vegan foam—truly a drink for the bold and adventurous.

This bar crawl was exemplary of Hyderabad's growing clout in the cocktail universe. The creativity, craftsmanship and sheer chutzpah of the bartenders left us floored (in more ways than one). Whether you're a seasoned mixology connoisseur or just someone who loves a good drink, the initiative is raising the bar—pun intended—for what's possible in Indian nightlife.

Now, excuse us while we nurse our hangovers with a very unglamorous coconut water. Cheers to the next round!



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Hyderabad's nightlife just got a lot more spirited, quite literally, as the 30 Best Bars India bar crawl rolled into town, bringing with it a cocktail-fuelled journey that's equal parts glamorous, tipsy and downright delicious. This initiative aimed to shake (and stir) the Hyderabad bar scene, spotlighting the city's best bars and bartenders. The cherry (or citrus peel?) on top? The rankings are based on a poll of over 250 bar enthusiasts, beverage influencers and industry experts.

The crawl was a tasting tour de force, with pit stops at some of Hyderabad's hottest watering holes, each offering unique concoctions guaranteed to tickle your taste buds and, occasionally, test your spice tolerance. From innovative cocktails to inventive bar bites, the night was one long, boozy love letter to the city's mixology maestros. Here's a tipsy tale of our escapades:

Hodds was a masterclass in balancing bold Indian flavours with classic cocktail finesse. Their Nizami Spiced Nectar mixed dark rum with curry leaf, tamarind and Guntur chili—a drink that said, "Hyderabad, but make it a party." Vitamin C, a tequila-based concoction with kiwi and coriander, brought just the right amount of citrus zing—it's basically a multivitamin, right?

At Noho, the drinks were as elegant as they were edgy. The Noho Picante, a spicy twist on the classic picante, combined reposado tequila with mango blossom cordial and a punch of jalapeño. It was basically a summer holiday in a glass, complete with a hibiscus-lime salt rim that had us licking our lips for more. Meanwhile, the Ca Chua Gimlet took things up a notch with clarified tomato water and peach vinegar—yes, you read that right. Even their zero-proof Orange Blossom Delight was a masterpiece, mixing hibiscus tea and kaffir lime leaves for a guilt-free sip of sunshine.

After the rounds of cocktails, Aidu stepped in to save us from going bottoms up on an empty stomach. Their bar bites were the MVPs of the night—from crispy Lotus Stem Chips to hummus served with marinated olives, everything screamed "elevated snacking." The drinks, though, refused to be outshined. The Gongura brought tangy drama to tequila with its pickled gongura juice, while the Monday



## How menstruation 'timed' muhurats

Shubh muhurat, a guide for auspicious beginnings, likely originated from tracking a woman's menstrual cycle to align marriages with fertility, maximising chance of conception.

The custom of following the shubh muhurat—an auspicious time to commence any event or activity—is widely observed by people adhering to Hinduism, primarily in India. It is believed that if an event or activity is started at a specific time, it will yield fruitful results. People consult pandits and astrologers to determine auspicious times for a variety of activities, ranging from marriages and pujas to housewarmings, shop openings and even stock trading. These pandits and astrologers, in turn, refer to almanacs and provide what might seem to be arbitrary times for such events. We will explore this in detail, but you'll have to bear with a somewhat lengthy discussion.

If we follow the logic of evolutionary theory, the idea of shubh muhurat may be developed alongside the idea of marriage—a supposedly lifelong union between a man and a woman. But before delving into this, we need to understand the origins of marriage itself. Sex, being one of the basic natural instincts of all sexually reproducing things, allows any male to mate with one or more females of the same species, and vice versa. Humans were no different. As their numbers grew and they realised they were physically weaker compared to other species and predators, they began living in groups. Thus, humans became social animals.

Thousands of years ago, these groups would constantly move from place to place, as agriculture had not yet begun and they had to hunt and forage for food. Men could mate with multiple women and, naturally, have children with them. However, the growing population within these groups led to food shortages. When food was scarce, people fought among themselves, with children and women—the weakest members—being the first to be killed. Men, being physically stronger, survived. But without women, men could not continue to perpetuate the species. Someone recognised this and decided that each man should mate with only one woman. There are various iterations of this rule, depending on how much the man could provide for the woman and their children, but that is a topic for another day. The essence is that this rule was created to control the growing population within groups.

One of the key points of evolution-

ary biology is natural selection, which involves survival and reproduction. Organisms with traits better suited to their environment are more likely to survive and reproduce. The natural instinct of sex aids individuals to pass on their genes to the next generation through reproduction, and the more copies of your genes, the better (Dawkins, 2016). However, with the rule of only one mating partner, certain restrictions arose on multiplying your genes. If men wanted more copies of their genes but had only one mating partner, they had to develop strategies to maximise the number of their offspring. Thus, the primary strategy was to mate with a woman as soon as she is biologically fertile to give birth, which occurs at the onset of menstruation.

Such restrictions created two major problems for men: a) how to identify and convince a fertile woman to mate with you and b) how to tell other men that this woman was now going to be their biological mate. Thus, the concept of marriage emerged. Marriage is defined as "the state of being united as

spouses in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Essentially, marriage is a socially, culturally, and generally legally accepted union of (traditionally) a man and a woman.

So, where does muhurat come into all this? When two people marry, there is a custom of honeymoon in all cultures, under various names, but the underlying idea is the same—socially accepted intercourse between the newly married couple. When a woman is ovulating, her body releases a mature egg from one of her ovaries into the fallopian tube. If a sperm successfully reaches and penetrates the egg, fertilisation occurs. The fertilised egg, now called a zygote, starts developing, reaches the uterus, and implants into the thickened uterine lining (endometrium), where it continues to grow and develop into an embryo. Successful implantation leads to pregnancy, with the embryo developing into a fetus over the subsequent months. This ovulation period typically occurs around the middle of her menstrual cycle, roughly 14 days before the start of her next menstrual cycle. However, if intercourse occurs during menstruation, sperm cannot reach and fertilise the egg, as the endometrium sheds along with the unfertilised egg, thereby reducing the chances of conception.

Therefore, logically, if a woman is ovulating around the day of her wedding and/or honeymoon, this presents the earliest opportunity for a man to engage in socially accepted intercourse with the hope of progeny. Thus, the concept of muhurat came into being, which essentially tracks a woman's menstrual cycle to ensure her honeymoon preferably coincides with her most fertile days or at least avoids her menstrual cycle. This increased the probability of her conceiving a child at the earliest opportunity, thereby maximising a man's chances of having offspring and passing on his genes to the next generation.

The human mind is capable of forming associations between different phenomena. Sometimes, these associations may not make much sense. Cultures, traditions and associations are passed down from one generation to the next through cultural transmission, known as a meme (Dawkins, 2016). Thus, over time, like other superstitions, cultures, and traditions, the custom of performing activities at an 'auspicious time' or a muhurat became associated with everything, from starting a new business or trading to moving into a new house, conducting a pooja, and many other events and activities.

(The author, Madhura Gondhalekar is a Teaching Assistant, at SPIJMR.)



## BURGUNDY - THE COLOUR OF THE SEASON

As we move into the fall/winter 2024 season, one bold trend that is making a significant impact is Burgundy. It is making a statement this season with its rich, deep hue and we have several pieces from different brands that align perfectly with this colour trend.



### SAAKSHA & KINNI

A structured, contemporary bustier in a deep burgundy hue, perfect for layering or wearing solo for a statement look. The intricate design and rich color add elegance to any winter ensemble.



### WESTSIDE

A statement piece combining rich burgundy faux leather with embossed text detailing, adding a modern edge to winter outfits.

### STATEMENT BURGUNDY ACCENTS

Luna Blu burgundy cut out detailed slingback shoes: These elegant slingback shoes feature intricate cut-out detailing in a burgundy hue, adding sophistication to any outfit.



### SUMMER SOMEWHERE

A flirty mini dress in burgundy with a fitted silhouette and subtle detailing, perfect for casual outings or cozy dinner dates.



A versatile burgundy shoulder bag with seam detailing, offering both style and functionality for daily use.

# the pioneer agenda

"It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression"  
— Alfred North Whitehead



It is a paradox of sorts: while people's reading habits are at an all-time low, there is a flood of writers producing content on virtually every subject. From fiction and non-fiction to cookbooks and travelogues, the book market is booming like never before. The Indian publishing industry was valued at approximately INR 500 billion in 2019, with projections indicating growth to INR 800 billion by 2024. This sector significantly contributes to India's economic development, fostering learning, education, and employment for over 1.2 million people.

Recent reports suggest that the industry is expanding at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 19.4%, with some estimates as high as 25%. This growth is particularly notable in the printbook market, which is anticipated to see substantial increases in value. Educational books dominate the sector, while the increasing adoption of eBooks and digital content is transforming the industry. Despite a decline in print publishing revenues due to shifting consumer preferences towards online books, magazines, and newspapers, the combined revenue from print and digital publishing continues to grow, illustrating that publishing as a whole is not in decline.

India has approximately 19,000 publishers. The publishing industry in India is vibrant but scattered, with no single association having more than 1,000 members. Evaluating publishers can be challenging, as it involves considering factors such as market size, reputation, genres covered, and influence on the literary landscape. Among the prominent names in Indian publishing, Penguin Random House India stands out as a major player, recognised for its diverse portfolio, literary excellence, and global reach. It publishes celebrated authors such as Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie, establishing itself as a giant in the industry.

HarperCollins India, established in 1992, is another notable publisher with a strong presence across genres, including fiction, self-help, and business books. It is home to renowned authors like Amitav Ghosh, Chetan Bhagat, and Paulo Coelho. Rupa Publications, one of India's oldest and most respected publishers, specialises in Indian fiction, biographies, and academic works, with imprints such as Rupa, Oak, and Fingerprint.

Bloomsbury India launched in 2002, has also made a mark in the industry with its high-quality literary fiction, non-fiction, children's books, and academic texts. Together, these publishers play a vital role in shaping India's literary landscape and catering to the evolving preferences of readers. But when it comes to writers it is another story. Given the size of the country, even a small percentage of people trying their hand in writing becomes large in absolute terms. However, not all are equally talented or taught. Of course, creativity cannot be taught in school, but style and form can be. With very few institutions that hone the craft of writing suffers and only a handful of writers stand out in the ocean of mediocrity.

Of course, books cannot be strictly categorised as good or bad; they are simply those you cherish and those you don't. Some books resonate deeply, while others leave you wondering who they were written for. Even so, labelling a book as 'bad' feels unfair; what one dislikes might be perfect for someone with different tastes or standards. But having said that it is also true some books leave a bad taste in the mouth for almost all.

Though the number of writers is swelling, which is indeed a good thing that cannot be said about the quality of books written by them. There is a

Where are the bold, thoughtful voices that once defined Indian literature? As commercial pressures dominate, the true art of writing seems increasingly overshadowed, writes  
**GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

## The write thing!

As they say, it is easy to write a book but difficult to make a person read it. To make it readable it needs to be worth the time and effort of the reader – give him or her some insights, information or perspective he didn't have or make him laugh or cry if that is intended. Translating thoughts into words is an art that deserves to be approached with seriousness. To do so, one must often seclude themselves, almost in a spiritual sense, and dedicate their focus to the act of writing. Writing retreats are an excellent opportunity to refine your skills, learn the ropes, and gain insight into the publishing industry. Mentors, often editors from the industry, along with established writers, offer valuable tips and guidance.

In a world increasingly characterised by distractions, writing retreats have emerged as sanctuaries where budding writers can focus, grow, and thrive. These retreats offer a unique blend of solitude, community, and professional guidance, making them appealing to anyone passionate about honing their craft.

Writing retreats often take place in idyllic settings, mountains, beaches, countryside estates, away from the hustle of daily life. This change of scenery not only inspires creativity but also provides the peace needed to concentrate on storytelling. Many retreats combine workshops, one-on-one mentoring, and group discussions, creating a collaborative yet personal environment. Fortunately, we have many literary retreats to choose from, some good, others very good! TheWriteScene's Landour Writers' Retreat recently unfolded as a vibrant tapestry of inspiration and creativity. Founded by award-winning author Deeba Salim Irfan, this retreat was not just a gathering of minds but a sanctuary for writers from across India, offering them the opportunity to refine their craft in the tranquil surroundings that once inspired the renowned author Ruskin Bond. "I founded the Landour Writing Retreat to provide aspiring writers with the support they need to thrive. Drawing from my own experience as a published and award-winning author, I understand the challenges and rewards of the writing journey. The serene setting of Landour inspires creativity and focus. Beyond Landour, I organise retreats in picturesque locations like Kangra Valley, India, Slovenia and Lapland (Northern Lights) fostering a global community of writers. I also

## The Allure of Writing Retreats

Writing retreats emerge as havens for writing enthusiasts, offering serene surroundings to inspire creativity and refine their craft



curate the English and Filipino sessions of the Tabbib Literary Festival in Dubai, a platform for diverse voices and literary exchange," Deeba says with a smile and a sense of satisfaction. The sense of community is another powerful draw. Writing can be a solitary endeavour, and retreats allow participants to connect with like-minded individuals. "Writing is a solitary profession. You sit alone with memory and imagination, both equal parts dangerous and exciting. Writing retreats are a warm hand extended in time, nudging you on, picking

you up and sometimes, putting you back on track" says author and lawyer Sonia Chauhan. The Landour Writing Retreat is one such retreat. From the hosts to the sessions to the participants, it was a motivating journey. Sharing ideas, receiving feedback, and networking with peers and mentors can be incredibly motivating and lead to lifelong creative partnerships. What participants feel is indeed writ large on their faces, "the Landour Writing Retreat was more than a getaway, it was a turning point in my writing journey. I discovered the art of truly listening to my inner voice. The retreat's emphasis on discipline balanced with creativity taught me to treat writing as both a craft and a calling. Sessions by seasoned experts from the publishing industry added technical depth, knowledge, and insights into demystifying the process of writing and publishing in India," says Bijetri Roy, an upcoming writer in her own right. Additionally, retreats often invite established authors, editors, and publishers to guide participants. This access to industry professionals offers budding writers' invaluable insights into the craft of writing and the business of getting published.

growing trend among new Indian authors to just write and have a book under their name. This is perhaps more true of writers writing in English than in other Indian languages. Many recent books feel amateurish and hastily written. It's frustrating to see many careless writings being passed off as literature, leaving readers feeling duped.

Many books are being churned out with similar themes as if other streams have dried up — ala Bollywood which tends to produce similar films after a blockbuster, hoping to cash in on the success. Others who experiment often end up with juvenile themes and shallow characters. It seems the trend began with the overwhelming success of Chetan Bhagat. While Bhagat's book was light and entertaining, its success led many aspiring writers to believe they could replicate his formula without effort—by simply injecting Bollywood-like clichés into their stories. Many times writers succumb to commercial temptations, trying to publish which would get them a filmmaker like Slumdog Millionaire after the film adaptation's Oscar triumph. Thus, we have a trend: literature crafted to satisfy a superficial public demand, rather than to challenge or inspire.

No doubt publishing is a business like any other and must make a profit. It also has to compete with the reader's attention span of human goldfish- the GenZ. But that often comes with a big price tag. Where are the bold, thoughtful voices of Indian literature? Where are the Salman Rushdies, Amitav Ghoshes, R.K. Narayan, and Anita Desais of today? Literature thrives on diversity, but the current scene of Indian writing in English seems weighed down by opportunists chasing fame over craft. And make no mistake this trend is here to stay. It is all over -- visible in the literature festivals even in the reputed ones.

For many budding talents, the challenge isn't just about writing—it's about finding the time and discipline to do so consistently. Writing retreats provide structured schedules that balance writing time with relaxation, fostering a productive rhythm. They also encourage writers to step out of their comfort zones, experiment with new styles, and confront creative blocks.

"The Landour Retreat was a perfect combination of creativity-sparking processes, sufficient unstructured time to allow writing whenever one entered a flow, and quality discussion time with a bunch of like-minded people who write because they love to, and who felt like long-known friends even though we had all just met. The insights shared by publishing industry professionals at the Retreat were invaluable eye-openers for me, says gratified Nilanjana, an avid reader and a writer.

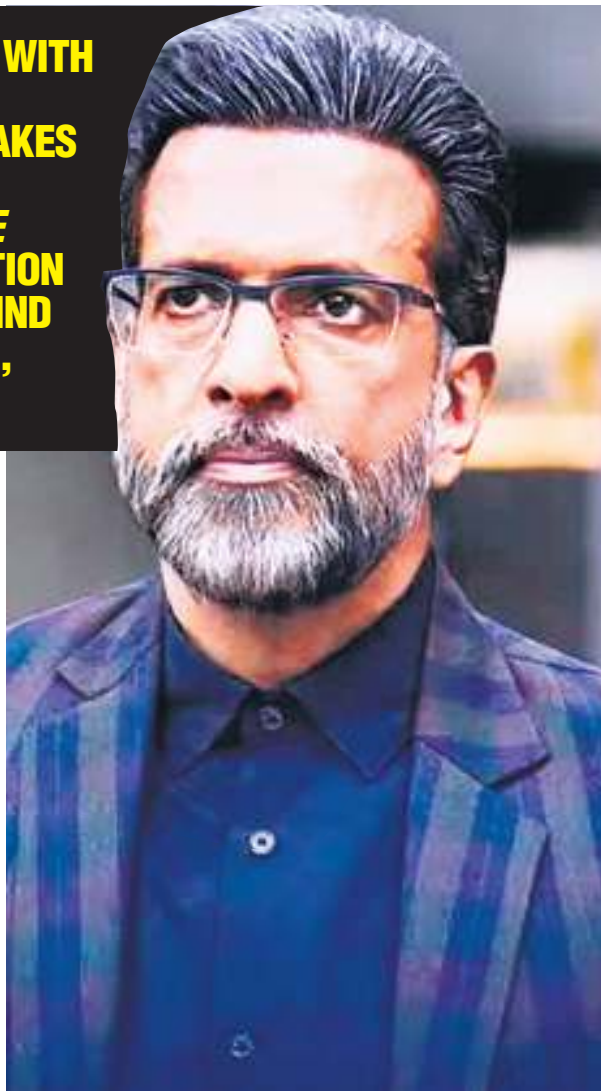
In recent years, writing retreats have gained immense popularity, driven partly by the rise of remote work and digital nomadism. People now seek fulfilling, creative experiences that go beyond their day-to-day routines. As more people explore writing as a career or serious hobby, the demand for such retreats has surged. This trend reflects a cultural shift towards valuing personal storytelling and self-expression. Networking at retreats is also a valuable opportunity to build connections that could open doors to literary agents, publishers, and collaborative opportunities. "India's literary scene is a dynamic blend of tradition and modernity, marked by its linguistic diversity and exploration of contemporary themes like gender, mental health, and identity. Regional narratives and translations are gaining prominence, while digital platforms and self-publishing empower emerging voices. Young writers experiment with genres like fantasy and speculative fiction, and women authors tackle issues of patriarchy and empowerment. International accolades, such as Geetanjali Shree's Booker Prize win, highlight India's global literary impact," says Rajul, who is a well-known mentor and editor.

Writing retreats are more than just creative getaways; they are transformative experiences that equip writers with the tools, confidence, and connections needed to succeed. Whether you're an aspiring novelist, a poet, or a memoirist, a writing retreat could be the spark that ignites your literary journey.

CHAT-O-CINO

# Javed Jaffrey speaks on the 'rewarding challenge' of exploring contrasting emotions

**IN AN EXCLUSIVE CONVERSATION WITH THE PIONEER, VERSATILE ENTERTAINER, JAVED JAFFREY TAKES US THROUGH HIS ILLUSTRIOUS CAREER, HIS LATEST ROLE IN THE MAGIC OF SHIRI AND HIS EVOLUTION FROM THE COMEDIC GENIUS BEHIND TAKESHI'S CASTLE TO AN ACTOR, DANCER AND VOICE ARTISTE**



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Javed Jaffrey is more than just the comedic genius behind Takeshi's Castle—he's a versatile entertainer whose talents stretch far beyond game shows. From hilariously narrating contestants' epic failures to turning every move into a punchline, he's the man who made "falling face-first into mud" a comedic art form. A man of many talents, Jaffrey is also a renowned actor, dancer and voice artist. His dance moves in Bollywood films, especially in the iconic song *Aja Meri Gaadi Mein* from *Taal*, showcased his unmatched flair and rhythm. Whether playing quirky roles in films like *Masti* and *Boom*, or lending his voice to animated characters, he has consistently amazed audiences with his charm and energy. With a knack for effortlessly blending humour with drama, Javed is not just a television icon, but a true all-round performer who has kept the audience hooked with his every move.

Set in the transformative era of 1996, *The Magic of Shiri* delves into a time of cultural and economic change in India, with Salim, a seasoned magician, as one of its central characters. Reflecting on his portrayal of Salim, the actor shared, "It's the first time I'm stepping into the shoes of a magician. The preparation was an exciting challenge, learning sleight-of-hand tricks and understanding the mechanics behind illusions required a lot of focus. Collaborating with a professional magician really opened up a new world for me."

What added to the novelty was the opportunity to play a character much older than himself. "Salim is about 60, which actually matches my real age. But I've never played someone this age before, so it was fascinating to navigate the nuances of his persona. His journey is layered—he's a once-successful magician, now grappling with setbacks in life. Without giving too much away, his past and his connection with the other protagonist create a poignant narrative of mutual healing and empowerment." The story also explores a dynamic and unusual bond, one that borders on a father-daughter relationship. "Salim and the protagonist uplift each other in remarkable ways. It's not just about him teaching her tricks; it's about emotional and personal growth for both characters."

What makes his latest project even more compelling is its focus on a middle-class homemaker who dares to dream big. "Her journey is extraordinary—she's a wife and mother leading a typical domestic life until circumstances force her to rediscover herself. Pursuing magic in a male-dominated field is no small feat and that's what makes this story so unique. We rarely see female magicians, even in real life. This narrative breaks that mold beautifully."

With its rich themes and a strong, relatable protagonist, *The Magic of Shiri* offers more than a tale of magic—it's a story of resilience and rediscovery. "It's a refreshing take, something we haven't seen before."

When asked about balancing comedy with the dramatic depth required to portray Salim, the actor humbly acknowledged his range. "Well, yes, comedy is something I'm known for and I've often been recognised for my timing in that regard. But portraying Salim is dif-

ferent. There's a lot of emotional depth to him, with themes of resilience and hardship woven into his story."

He also teased an additional layer to Salim's character that would be revealed later on. "There's a self-discovery aspect to Salim's journey, which plays a crucial role in the narrative. It's about understanding who he is and what shaped him, uncovering the backstory that explains why he is the way he is today."

Reflecting on his career trajectory, the actor acknowledged the shift in his recognition over the past decade. "Yes, for a long time, I've been associated with comedy. But there's more to me and I've worked on different projects that have allowed me to explore darker, more complex roles. A while ago, I did a film with Ram Kapoor, which didn't quite land as we had hoped. It's always about what resonates with the audience," he noted.

He also spoke of his recent venture with Bhuvan Bam in the second season of *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma*, where he played a much darker, morally ambiguous character. "It was refreshing to step back into a gray area after a long time, playing a character who wasn't quite good or bad but somewhere in between. The response has been encouraging, and people have appreciated seeing this different side of me."

The actor reflected on his recent transition from playing darker, more intense characters to stepping into a role filled with emotional depth and vulnerability. "It's a fascinating experience to go from portraying a dark, almost monstrous figure to suddenly playing a sympathetic, older man. The audience has witnessed me in a completely different light and then, out of nowhere, I'm this emotionally complex character. For an actor, it's a rewarding challenge

to explore such contrasts within a short time frame. People will look at you and say, 'We just saw him in a completely different role, and now he's playing something entirely different.' That's the beauty of being an actor — being able to navigate these varied roles and showcase different facets of your craft," he explained with enthusiasm.

Turning to his collaboration with Divyanka Tripathi, the actor shared insights into their creative process on set. "In our work, both of us bring our own unique approaches to the roles. I never try to interfere with how she prepares for her character, just as I focus on my own process. When we meet on set, it's about letting the characters take center stage. The chemistry between us evolves naturally as we delve deeper into our roles. It's not just about our individual performances but about how the characters interact and grow together." The actor particularly remembered an emotionally charged scene, one that highlighted the profound connection between their characters. "That scene was intense. We both broke down emotionally, and it felt like a pivotal moment, not just for our characters but for our own connection on set. Moments like that define the relationship on screen." Regarding Divyanka's professionalism, the actor spoke highly of her dedication. "Despite her immense popularity in television, Divyanka approached this project with a deep sense of respect and professionalism. She understood the nuances of the character and as a senior, I appreciated how much respect she showed for the process. I wasn't very familiar with her work before, but when we started working together, I was truly impressed. She has this natural dedication to her craft, and that's something I really admire. When you have someone so committed to the role, it makes everything flow seamlessly, and it was a joy to collaborate with her."

On the topic of responsibility as an actor, he shared a more introspective perspective: "As an actor, I don't see my roles as making a social statement or carrying a heavy responsibility in the sense that people often perceive it. I'm part of a larger picture, a narrative that is meant to entertain and move people. However, I do understand that cinema, especially in a country like India, holds significant power. It influences people's perceptions and in a way, it's a mirror of society. We, as actors, need to be conscious of that power and the impact our roles might have on the audience. Cinema has a massive responsibility, particularly when it comes to giving voice to issues and telling stories that resonate with people who might not have other avenues for expression. For many, films become their teachers, their source of inspiration, and in that way, cinema becomes more than just entertainment — it becomes an integral part of their lives."

He continued, "It's crucial to understand that in a country like India, where many people face challenges accessing education or resources, cinema becomes their gateway to the world. It shapes how they see themselves, society, and the world at large. As an actor, you have to be aware of this responsibility, not in a burdensome way, but with a sense of reverence for the role you play in someone's life. It's an immense privilege to be able to contribute in any small way to shaping narratives that matter."

The actor then reflected on a profound lesson passed down to him from his father. "My father had the privilege of working with some of the greatest talents in the industry, like Vinod Warisan and Madok Khan's father. These figures, who became father figures to him after he lost his own father at a young age, played an integral role in shaping his understanding of cinema. He absorbed their wisdom and passed it down to us, teaching us about the true essence of cinema. One sentence my father often said that stuck with me was, 'Cinema is life.' It's simple yet so powerful, capturing the very essence of what we do as actors — we bring life to stories, and in turn, the stories become a reflection of life itself."

He paused for a moment, recalling the depth of those words. "I always believed in that philosophy. Cinema isn't just about entertainment; it's about connecting with people's emotions, telling their stories and giving them something to hold on to. It's a powerful medium that transcends time and age."

On a thoughtful note, he added, "I feel like the responsibility I carry, both as an actor and as someone who has been influenced by these great mentors, is to continue that legacy. Cinema is a reflection of hope, a belief that passion and dedication can drive us forward, regardless of age or circumstances. It spreads hope, makes us dream and tells us that no matter what stage of life we're in, we can keep our passions alive."

TRENDING

PERSON

TAYLOR SWIFT



Spotify, unveiled *Wrapped*, its yearly retrospective that provides a customised look at users' musical journeys, on Wednesday. For the second consecutive year, Taylor Swift is the most streamed artist worldwide, dominating the Spotify list once again.

STAMPEDE AT PUSHPA 2: THE RULE



VIDEO

At the release of Allu Arjun's eagerly anticipated movie *Pushpa 2: The Rule* on Wednesday night, a 39-year-old woman was killed and a small boy was seriously hurt in a stampede outside the Sandhya Theatre at RTC Crossroads.

MOVIE

PUSHPA 2: THE RULE



Superstar Allu Arjun's eagerly awaited action film *Pushpa 2: The Rule* broke all previous records on its first day of release, setting new standards in Indian cinema.

SONG

PEELINGS



The dance in the movie's song *Peelings* drew a lot of criticism. Videos of fans dancing to the song in theaters, however, are becoming very popular on social media.

NAGA CHAITANYA TIED KNOT WITH HIS LADY LOVE, SHOBITA DHULIPALA



PICTURE

In a lavish yet private ceremony in Hyderabad tonight, Naga Chaitanya and his lady love, Shobita Dhulipala, were married, formally becoming Mr. and Mrs.

# Agni is perfect 'fiery ode' to firefighters

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Seven years after directing Shah Rukh Khan in *Raees*, Rahul Dholakia is back with a never-before-told story about firefighters in Hindi cinema—*Agni*, a cinematic salute to the fearless spirit, honour and sacrifices of firefighters. The film is currently streaming on Prime Video and has been produced by Excel Entertainment

PLOT

*Agni* centers on Vitthal Rao (played by Pratik Gandhi), the leader of the Parel Fire Station. Without delay, Rahul plunges into an incident, a dangerous blaze within a well-known restaurant, detailing how Vitthal and his crew spring into action to quench the fierce flames.

But this time, they detected something different. Unlike the yellow and orange flames, this time the fire has a blue tint to it. As Avni Purohit (played by Saiyami Kher) leads the investigation, another big fire breaks out at a textile factory. Vitthal and Avni suspect arson since the flame here is also suspiciously blue. While Vitthal is a well-respected firefighter who inspires many in his profession, he is tired of having to prove himself to his kid, who is enamored with Samit (played by Divyendu), his maternal uncle, the 'super cop'. Unlike the righteous Vitthal, Samit is unafraid to break the rules if it benefits him.

Vitthal's wife, Rukmini (played by Sai Tamhankar) lives life on the edge. She is frequently anxious about her husband's whereabouts and practices rituals to remove nazar (evil eye), even as she attempts to prevent Vitthal from clashing with her corrupt, borderline evil brother, Samit. In a heartbreaking scenario, we see Ganpath, a police officer, die from burns. Devi, who used to be unable to sleep without her father, can no longer look at him due to his scorched skin. Firefighters not only do a thankless job, but they frequently work in dangerous environments with minimal protection in the form of government medical insurance.

Who will emerge as the true hero between Vitthal

and Samit? Will they get along? Will Vitthal be able to earn his son's respect? How do firefighters handle their thankless job?

THE HIGHLIGHTS

*Agni* is a gripping and emotionally charged film that pays tribute to the bravery and selflessness of firefighters. Inspired by real-life events, the movie boasts a gripping storyline that explores themes of courage, sacrifice and the human spirit. The cast delivers strong and nuanced performances, bringing depth and complexity to their characters. The film's action sequences are impressively realistic, with heart-stopping firefighting scenes that showcase the skill and bravery of these everyday heroes. With its intense and emotional moments, the film is a thrilling ride that will keep you on the edge of your seat, while also providing a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of what it means to be a hero.

THE DRAWBACKS

The remark on the inadequate city infrastructure and lack of government assistance may seem too 'on-the-nose', but when it comes to serious issues like civic safety and a lack of support for firemen, nothing can be too obvious. In fact, there may be a need to shout it from the rooftops. *Agni* could be one of the most important pictures



released this year. At one point, the narrator states, "Jo jwala mein jalte hain, woh amar ho jaate hain." It may lack the raw depth and sadness of *Parzania*, but Rahul comes back strong with this one. *Agni* also gives us a glimpse into the lives of firefighters, who are sadly not regarded as the cream of societal saviors.

PERFORMANCES

The performances in *Agni* are a major strength of the film. Pratik Gandhi delivers a standout performance as the lead, bringing a sense of quiet intensity and nuance to his character. He effectively conveys the emotional depth and complexity of his role, making his character relatable and rootable. Divyendu, on the other hand, is excellent as the main antagonist, exuding menace and unpredictability without overplaying his hand. He brings a sense of depth and dimension to his character, making him a compelling and formidable opponent. One notable weakness in the film's character development is the portrayal of Avni. Her storyline feels somewhat undercooked, particularly in her response to her boyfriend's death in a fire. The film doesn't provide sufficient context or backstory to explain her seemingly indifferent and detached reaction to the tragedy. As a result, her character comes across as somewhat one-dimensional and lacking in emotional depth.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The film's technical aspects are noteworthy, particularly the cinematography, which skillfully captures the gritty, unglamorised side of Mumbai's middle-class neighborhoods. The camerawork, combined with the actors' performances and Vijay Maurya's dialogues, lends an air of authenticity to the narrative. The special effects team also deserves praise for their realistic depiction of raging fires. Director Rahul Dholakia successfully crafts a believable world, piece by piece, culminating in a suspenseful climax that keeps viewers on the edge of their seats. The film's casting is another notable strength. By opting for non-mainstream actors, the makers allow the story to take center stage, unencumbered by the baggage of big-name stars. This bold choice pays off, as the cast delivers nuanced, vanity-free performances that bring depth and realism to the narrative.

VERDICT

*Agni* is a film that merits attention for its straightforward and uncomplicated storytelling approach. By eschewing high-concept narratives and instead focusing on a simple, relatable story, the film proves that sometimes, less is more. While it may not possess the same level of emotional depth and tragic intensity as *Parzania*, *Agni* marks a successful return to form for director Rahul Dholakia. The film also deserves credit for shedding light on the often-overlooked lives of firefighters, who put their lives on the line every day to save others. However, it's Pratik Gandhi's outstanding performance that truly elevates the film, showcasing his remarkable talent and cementing his status as a leading actor in solemn, middle-class dramas.

**DIRECTED BY:** Rahul Dholakia  
**PRODUCED BY:** Excel Entertainment  
**CAST:** Pratik Gandhi, Divyendu, Saiyami Kher, Sai Tamhankar, Jitendra Joshi, Udit Arora and Kabir Shah  
**STREAMING ON:** Prime Video  
**RATING:** 3.5/5



# A mascot and life of the party



## CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

My father worked as a deputy tahsildar in West Godavari district. Because of his job transfers my schooling took place at various places. I studied mostly in Godavari areas like Kovvur, Polavaram, Tanuku, but from 5th standard I studied in Eluru, St Xaviers School. I was a good student, scoring good marks and always calm. I am the youngest in our family; I have one elder brother and four sisters. My brother lives in Addanki Vari Lanka and sisters are settled in Godavari district.

## DIEHARD FAN OF KRISHNA

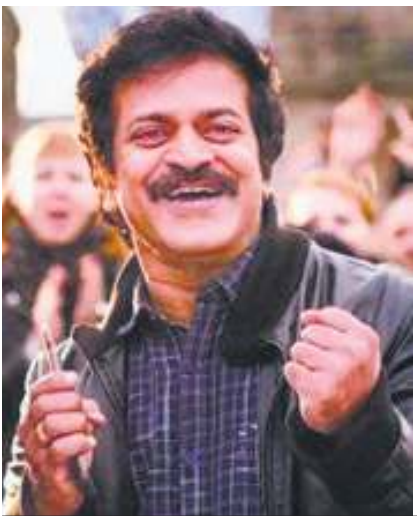
When I was studying in college, I was a big fan of Superstar Krishna. I used to watch all his movies and I was the president of the Eluru Krishna Fans Association.

In the 1980s, many of the stars had associations and they actively participated in activities like printing pamphlets about their stars. I read in a magazine about Krishna's 12-point record about his films. I took that and printed a pamphlet and mentioned my name, Brahmaji, president, Krishna Fans Association, Eluru. Usually they print the names of the secretary, vice-president, members also, but I wanted to show my individuality; so, I printed only my name.

In 1980, Krishna came to Mandapeta village for his film shooting and I met him for the first time there. He is a very handsome actor. At that time his *Chuttalunnaru Jagratha* film shooting happened and they were shooting a song from the film *Apana tana mana*. The song turned out to be a super hit. As my father was a tahsildar, he could meet Krishna garu at that shooting. I gave Krishna garu the pamphlet I had printed. He read all those points patiently and appreciated me. Nearly 10 minutes he spoke to me alone.

## SOBHAN BABU'S FANS GOT ANGRY

Actor Sobhan Babu's fans were also active at that time and a big competition ensued in printing these pamphlets. Fan wars were also big at that time. I don't remember the film name, but Sobhan Babu and actress Sujatha film was released, but before that she acted with Super Star Krishna. So, I printed a pamphlet saying, "Best wishes to Sujatha who acted in our film as heroine and now she is acting in this film as heroine." I put that printed pamphlet in all the seats of the theater before the morning show screened. Sobhan Babu fans got angry and they wanted to beat me and searched for me for two days. But by then I had escaped. I watched all of Krishna's films on the first day first show, whether they were good or bad. I watched *Srimalle Navvindi* nearly five times.



## PLAYED TENNIS

St Xavier's School, where I studied, was popular for sports too. There was a big tennis court at the Collector's office and my father joined me there to play tennis. I played tennis at that time which was a big thing. I was a calm-going person in college too. My best friends were Venu and then Rambabu, Gupta and another Brahmaji, Raja from Vizag. We talk even now over phone regularly.

## INTEREST IN CINEMA

When I was in college, K Viswanath's *Sankarabharanam* was released and it was a big hit. JV Somayajulu played the lead actor and he was a deputy collector in real life. The Revenue Department felicitated him in Eluru after that film and because my father was a tahsildar, I got to see Somayajulu at close quarters. Many people greeted him and some of them touched his feet. The first thought that came to my mind after seeing that incident was that actors are very popular and I wanted to become an actor at that time. I was in 9th or 10th class at that time. After completing my Intermediate, I went to Chennai to do AMI for a two-year course. I had gone to Chennai mainly to get into films. At that time the Telugu film industry was in Chennai. I was an MPC student in Intermediate.



Brahmaji started his career as a character artiste essaying small roles and then turned a villain with Krishna Vamsi's *Gulabi* that gave him a good break as an actor with scope to display his versatility. Then he played as lead actor in Krishna Vamsi's *Sindhooram*, but settled mostly as a character artiste - role into which he was typecast. An industry veteran for more than three decades, he has always stayed clear of controversies, thanks to his good rapport with almost every top actor. The best part is that he is deemed a mascot by many people in the industry and is known for being the life of the party always. In a conversation with **The Pioneer's Suresh Kavirayani**, he shares the odds he had to battle while struggling to gain a foothold in the film industry as a youth.

## FRIENDS, FILM INSTITUTES AT CHENNAI

I took a room at the famous Malakpudi Mansion in Chennai. There were nearly hundred rooms in that Mansion and most of them were students - some trying to go to the USA, others trying their luck in cinemas, engineering, upcoming technicians, film artistes, mostly strugglers used to stay there in that Mansion. I used to be friends with those upcoming technicians to get cinema news and also to get a chance to see the directors. Pandy Bazar is very near to that Mansion and I used to go there since people there talk mostly about film news. Then I decided to become an actor and went back to Tadepalligudem, where my parents had settled. I told them about my idea. My father told me that without any film background or known persons in the film industry it would be very difficult to make it big. So, I decided to join the famous Madhu Film Institute, Hyderabad in an acting course. From Chennai, I came to Hyderabad and attended the test. At that time, there were only two batches a year and limited seats. I failed the first time and went back home. Second time, I decided to get a few days of training from a local theater artiste and prepared. Second time I was successful and joined there. Devadas Kankala garu, his wife Lakshmi garu, were teaching at the Madhu Film Institute. When I was in Chennai, I casually tried in the famous Adayar Film Institute, but didn't get there. After completing my course in Madhu Film Institute, I went back to Chennai. I used to meet the directors and give my photos hoping for a chance. Director Krishna Vamsi became my friend as he used to stay in the same Mansion. I got money from my father every month for room rent and food. I used to travel in buses which I felt were difficult; so, my father bought a bike.



## FIRST BIG BREAK

My friend Krishna Vamsi worked as assistant director for *Shiva* and later he turned as director with *Gulabi*. He offered me a big role in *Gulabi* where I played a villain. My role was that of a friend of the protagonist and later I backstabbed him. At that time, *Gulabi* was a huge hit and it was my first good break. This film is always special for me as it showcased my performance as an actor. Later Krishna Vamsi offered another good role in his film *Ninne Pelladatha* that starred Nagarjuna and Tabu. This film was a huge blockbuster at that time. Then Krishna Vamsi made me a lead actor with *Sindhooram*. Ravi Teja played as another lead actor in it. This film actually brought me huge respect in the industry.



## GRATEFULNESS AND KRISHNA VAMSI

Krishna Vamsi gave me a lot of opportunities in his films. Actually I told you I know Krishna Vamsi from Chennai days. When we were in Chennai, I got money from my father and I paid for room rent and also for mess charges. I took coupons for my lunch and dinner at a mess near Pandy Bazaar. At that time Krishna Vamsi didn't get any opportunity and he wanted to go back to his home place. Before leaving, we met casually and at around 8.30 it was dinner time and I asked Vamsi to come with me for dinner. We both went to the mess and had dinner. I did not know that Krishna Vamsi had not had a meal for two days. So, when I offered a meal to him, he felt it was a great thing. So, at that time he decided that if he ever became a director, he would make a film with me as the lead actor. Just for a single meal, he remembered it and showed his gratitude towards me and offered me these roles. *Sindhooram* was not a commercial success, but he offered me another full-length role in his *Chandralekha*. Nagarjuna was the lead actor and I played his friend. Ramya Krishna was also there in the film.

## HOW HE MET RGV

Director Kodi Ramakrishna gave me a chance for the first time in his film *Mannemo Monagadu*. He has given chance to many newcomers. There were only two scenes in my debut film and he then gave two more chances in his two other films. Krishna Vamsi, also came to Tadepalligudem, but I met him only in Chennai. He became friendly and told me that Annapurna Studios was making a film with newcomers and asked me to come. Siva Nageswara Rao was co-director for that new film and he had asked Krishna Vamsi to join him as assistant director. So, with Krishna Vamsi, I too came to Hyderabad. We went to Annapurna office and there were two people, Siva Nageswara Rao and another one with spectacles and a lean person walking towards us. Then they told me he is Ram Gopal Varma, the director. That's how I met RGV for the first time. I gave my photos to him and he said: "What do I do with these photos? You better show your acting skills". At that time, some film shooting was going on in that studio, and I got a loose shirt from a customer. I wore it and came to RGV and told him that I could pronounce his name in delectably differing voice modulations and showcased my talent, saying "Ramu" in varying styles. He was impressed and promised me a role in his film *Shiva*. From then onwards RGV has been close to me.

## LOVE MARRIAGE

When I just got busy with films, I met Shashwathi, who used to stay opposite my house. She was an interior designer in Chennai and she had divorced her husband. She had two kids and after I met her, I decided to marry her. It was a registered marriage, because I did not know whether my parents would accept it. Many of my industry friends attended; actually they took the entire responsibility and stood behind us. The marriage happened when I was doing *Chandralekha* film. Director and my good friend Krishna Vamsi, Ramya Krishna attended along with Gunnam Gangaraju, Urmila acted as parents from my side, producer Ram Prasad and his wife as Shashwathi's parents. Uttej, Ravi Teja, Praveen, Giri, Nandini Reddy (she worked as assistant director to Krishna Vamsi) and many others attended our marriage. I shifted from Chennai to Hyderabad completely later. Subsequently, I took her to my parents place and they were very happy.

## PARTIES AT HOME

In Tollywood, I started the party culture at home. Many of the Tollywood stars hang out at my place, definitely at weekends. My wife is very good at cooking. Many know that and I invite them to my house. When I worked for a film, the lead pair and the other actors became close to me, they too came to my house for dinner. Festivals like Diwali, Holi and for birthday parties, many of my friends come to my house.



## WITH CHIRANJEEVI, THE BIG THING HAPPENED

When we were in Chennai, we met all the directors and production houses. Before Chiranjeevi, most of the filmmakers didn't give respect as they looked at us very cheaply and even did not offer a seat or coffee. But once Chiranjeevi entered and was booming with this kind of style and films, we got respect from filmmakers. Chiranjeevi was not flamboyant, not handsome like Sobhan Babu, but he was on top with his own talent and hard work. From then onwards, filmmakers' attitude changed towards newcomers. One day anyone can become a top hero or heroine, so they started giving respect. Through my brother's contact I met producer Allu Aravind, brother-in-law of Chiranjeevi and his Geetha Arts production house was big. I used to go and meet him during my struggling days and he didn't show any interest in me. One day he took me and introduced me to Chiranjeevi. It was the first time. I met Chiranjeevi he asked about me and that's it. Later, after my *Gulabi* was released, I met him at Dr Venkateswara Rao's (Chiranjeevi's co-brother) daughter's marriage. Chiranjeevi saw me and he told me, "Brahmaji, you have done it. Very nice, keep it up". That's the best compliment for me. Later he watched my *Sindhooram* at a special screening and after the film he hugged me and spoke very well. That was another best compliment from Chiranjeevi which I still felt was a big one.

## SPEND LOT OF MONEY ON HOLIDAYS

Generally many actors put their money on lands, villas or business. But I want to spend my money on holidays. After my marriage, I decided that part of my remuneration, I want to spend on holiday and for the last 30 years I have been doing this. Whenever I get a break, I go on a holiday, abroad or in India. I like hill places and beaches. When summer comes I go to Coonoor, where I have a house. I want to explore the world more. I have not gone to Russia and Japan. Will make it next time, these two countries are in my bucket list.



## RAVI TEJA BEST FRIEND

Ravi Teja also entered the industry; he did small roles at that time. We met in Chennai, but our bond became thick when he shifted to Hyderabad. After doing a few small roles, he vexed and decided to become an assistant director to Krishna Vamsi for the *Ninne Pelladatha* film. He was a great mimic and also imitated many Hindi actors. He grew up in north India, so he was fluent in Hindi. While shooting this film, he walks like Anil Kapoor and also talks like him. Lead actress of that film Tabu enjoys a lot of Ravi Teja's imitations. Director Krishna Vamsi saw his potential and offered him a good role in *Sindhooram* along with me. His character was lively and he did it well. Later he got many good offers and director Puri Jagan gave him lead actor and he never looked back. From then onwards, we became good friends and I am very happy for Ravi Teja.



## PUSHPA 2 IS DEFINITELY A GOOD ONE

I appeared briefly in the first part of *Pushpa*, but in the second part I was there throughout along with Fahadh Faasil, who played the cop role. The scenes between me and Fahadh provide some fun moments and the audience is definitely entertained. It's not a comedy one, I played Koppuraju, assistant to Fahadh and he used to ask me everything about the situation in this film. This is one of my favourite films that I have done till now.

