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Income Bracket	Rate
0-3 lakh rupees	Nil
3-7 lakh rupees	5 per cent
7-12 lakh rupees	10 per cent
12-15 lakh rupees	15 per cent
15-25 lakh rupees	20 per cent
Above 25 lakh rupees	30 per cent

Income tax saving of up to ₹ 12,000/- for salaried employee in new tax regime

Income Tax Relief for around Four Crore Salaried Individuals and Pensioners

- Standard deduction for salaried employees to be increased from ₹ 50,000/- to ₹ 75,000/-
- Deduction on family pension for pensioners to be increased from ₹ 15,000/- to ₹ 25,000/-

BUDGET 2024 BOOST TO JOBS, INFRA

NDA allies herald state-specific allocations



Modi 3.0
government's first budget

With rural distress and unemployment being blamed for BJP losing its majority in Lok Sabha, forcing it to rely on partners to form government, Sitharaman in her seventh straight budget provided Rs 2.66 lakh crore for rural development and maintained spending on long-term infrastructure projects at Rs 11.11 lakh crore to boost economic growth.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday announced a marginal income tax relief for the middle class, a Rs 2 lakh crore outlay for job creation schemes over the next five years and a spending splurge for states run by parties that are needed to keep BJP in power as she unveiled Modi 3.0 government's first budget after the general elections.

With rural distress and unemployment being blamed for BJP losing its majority in Lok Sabha, forcing it to rely on partners to form government, Sitharaman in her seventh straight budget provided Rs 2.66 lakh crore for rural development and



maintained spending on long-term infrastructure projects at Rs 11.11 lakh crore to boost economic growth. She scrapped the 'angel tax' that was

imposed on investors pumping money into startups, cut import duty on mobile phones and key parts to benefit firms like Apple, slashed cus-

tom duty on gold and silver to curb smuggling, and made significant changes in capital gains tax.

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"Will act as a catalyst in making India the third-largest economy in the world (from fifth largest today) and will lay a solid foundation for a developed India".
- Narendra Modi



'Kursi bachao' Budget. Appease Allies: Hollow promises to them at the cost of other states. Appease Cronies: Benefits to AA with no relief for the common Indian.
- Rahul Gandhi



"Whatever form the funds come in, they will be very useful for the state. These funds are crucial for the financially strained AP."
- Chandrababu Naidu



"The budget is a quid-pro-quo of the BJP for its allies. The Centre will give funds only to states ruled by parties which support it like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh."
- Revanth Reddy



Extremely grateful to PM Shri @narendramodiji, FinMin Madam @nsitharaman ji, and the central govt for the pivotal financial support.
- Pawan Kalyan

Big relief for salaried

50 pc hike in standard deduction to Rs 75,000

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In sops for the middle class, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday hiked standard deduction by 50 per cent to Rs 75,000 and tweaked tax slabs under the new income tax regime to provide more money in the hands of salaried class with a view to boost consumption.

She said salaried employees in the new tax regime could save up to Rs 17,500 in income tax annually following the changes announced in the Budget.

The standard deduction for salaried employees is proposed to be increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000 annually. Similarly, deduction on family pension for

pensioners is proposed to be enhanced from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000. "This will provide relief to about four crore salaried individuals and pensioners," Sitharaman said in her Budget speech.

In the last fiscal, more than two-thirds individual taxpayers have availed the new personal income tax regime. Over 8.61 crore I-T returns were filed in 2023-24 fiscal. The new tax slabs under the new income tax regime will be effective from April 1, 2024. (Assessment Year 2025-26). Sitharaman said income of up to Rs 3 lakh will continue to be exempted from income tax under the new regime.

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Bonanza for Bihar

Over Rs 60k cr outlay for airports, e-ways and other projects

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget for FY25 on Tuesday unveiled big-ticket measures for Bihar, proposing a total outlay of over Rs 60,000 crore for various projects, including funding for three expressways, a power plant, heritage corridors and new airports and sports infrastructure.

In the annual Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced Centre's support for development of three road connectivity projects -- Patna-Purnea Expressway, Buxar-Bhagalpur Expressway, and Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Vaishali and Darbhanga spurs, and an additional two-lane bridge over river Ganga at Buxar.

These four projects will have a total cost of Rs 26,000 crore," Sitharaman said. Other bonanza for Bihar, current-

ly ruled by the NDA government led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, include setting up of a 2,400 MW power plant at Pirpainti, in Bhagalpur district, which "will be taken up at a cost of Rs 21,400 crore". "New airports, medical colleges and sports infrastructure in Bihar will be constructed," said Sitharaman. In addition, the Centre would also help Bihar, which has frequently suffered from floods in many of rivers originating from Nepal.

"Our government, through the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme and other sources, will provide financial support for projects with estimated cost of Rs 11,500 crore such as the Kosi-Mechi intra-state link and 20 other ongoing and new schemes including barrages, river pollution abatement and irrigation projects," she said.

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Rs 15,000 cr for Amaravati project as AP reaps rich in Union Budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The major allocations to Andhra Pradesh in the Union Budget 2024-25, announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, are a boon for the comprehensive development of the State, focusing on industrial development, infrastructure, and social welfare.

The major allocations in the budget include Rs 15,000 crore for Amaravati Capital City, Rs 10,000 crore for the Polavaram project, Rs 5,000 crore for the Vizag-Chennai Industrial Corridor, and more.

A special financial support allocation of Rs 15,000 crore has been earmarked for the development of Andhra Pradesh's capital city, Amaravati, in line with the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act. This allocation will aid in the establishment of modern infrastructure and amenities, ensuring balanced urban devel-



opment. An allocation of Rs 10,000 crore has been made to expedite the completion of the Polavaram Irrigation Project, crucial for the State's agriculture and water management. This project will ensure adequate water supply for irrigation, benefiting farmers and boosting agricultural productivity.

- Rs 10,000 crore for Polavaram Irrigation Project.
- Rs 12,000 crore for rural and urban housing under PM Awas Yojana.
- Rs 6,000 crore for road infrastructure improvement.
- Rs 5,000 crore for Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor.
- Rs 4,000 crore for the development of backward regions.
- Rs 2,500 crore for new medical colleges and educational institutions.
- Rs 3,500 crore for renewable energy projects.

Continued on Page 2

Import duty on mobile phones, chargers slashed



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday proposed slashing import duty on mobile phones, chargers and some components that are used for manufacturing of handsets in the Union Budget for fiscal year 2024-25.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said with a three-fold increase in domestic production and almost 100-fold jump in exports of mobile phones over the last six years, the Indian mobile phone industry has matured.

"In the interest of consumers, I now propose to reduce the BCD (basic customs duty) on mobile phone, mobile PCBA and mobile charger to 15 per cent," Sitharaman said. Mobile phone industry body ICEA said that the move will enhance export competitiveness of India in the segment.

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- Allocation to NHAI retained at Rs1.68 lakh crore for FY25
- Khelo India gets lion's share of Budget allocation for sports
- Govt proposes Rs26,000 crore for various road projects in Bihar
- Defence budget pegged at Rs6.21 lakh crore for 2024-25
- Govt slashes import duty on mobile phones, chargers, some components
- FM says will evolve solution on New Pension Scheme to address relevant issues
- FM cuts customs duty on lithium, cobalt for energy transition
- Union Budget pledges Rs15,000 crore for AP capital Amaravati
- Customs duties on gold, silver slashed to 6 per cent in Budget 2024-25
- Jobs for youth, tax rejigs for salaried class
- Govt to abolish angel tax on investments in startups
- Customs duty on gold, silver cut to 6%
- Rs5,000 monthly internship allowance announced for 1 crore youth
- FM allocates Rs1.52 lakh cr for agri, allied sectors
- Budget provides Rs1.48 lakh cr for education, employment, skill
- New Tax Regime standard deduction increased to Rs75,000
- Rs3 crore additional houses under PMAY have been announced

Subsidy bill cut by 7.8% to Rs 3.81 lakh crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a move that signals fiscal prudence, the government reduced its subsidy outlay for food, fertiliser, and fuel by 7.8 per cent in the full Budget for 2024-25, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The total subsidy allocation stands at Rs 3,81,175 crore for the current fiscal, down from the previous year's figure of Rs 4,13,466 crore. This reduction aligns with the estimates projected in February's interim budget.

Breaking down the allocations, the food subsidy has been set at Rs 2,05,250 crore, a decrease from the revised estimates of Rs 2,12,332 crore for the fis-



cal ending March 31, 2024. This subsidy covers the difference between the economic cost of foodgrains procured by the government and their sales realisation under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other welfare schemes, benefiting approximately 80 crore individuals.

Continued on Page 2

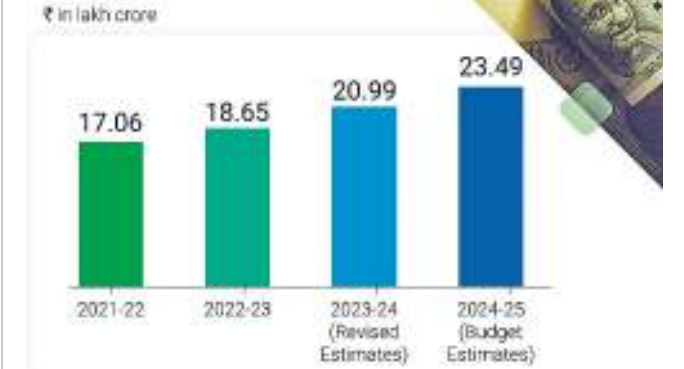
SC rules out cancellation of NEET-UG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major setback to unsuccessful aspirants of NEET-UG 2024, the Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed the pleas seeking cancellation and re-test of the controversy-ridden exam, holding that there was no evidence on record to conclude that it was "vitiated" on account of "systemic breach" of its sanctity.

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Resources Transferred to States and UTs



Confidence-boosting and progressive budget: Naidu

Thanks PM, FM for 'recognising AP's needs'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following the allocation of funds to various sectors across Andhra Pradesh in the Union Budget 2024-25 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu expressed his gratitude to the Central government for addressing the State's needs.

Naidu highlighted the focus on Amaravati, the Polavaram project, the industrial corridor, and the development of backward areas as crucial. In her budget presentation, Finance Minister Sitharaman committed Rs 15,000 crore for capital city development, affirmed

"full commitment" to the Polavaram project, and allocated funds for infrastructure and backward areas. Naidu appreciated this support, stating it would significantly aid in the rebuilding of Andhra Pradesh. "On behalf of the people of Andhra Pradesh, I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for recognising our state's needs and concentrating on Amaravati, Polavaram, industrial nodes, and development of backward areas in the FY 24-25 Union Budget," Naidu posted on X. He also praised Sitharaman for delivering a "progressive and confidence-boosting budget."



In 2017, the Rail Budget was merged with the Union Budget.

The lock-in that follows the 'halwa ceremony' is observed to maintain secrecy around the budget. For, the Union Budget was leaked in the year 1950.

Gidugu seeks to know if Rs 15,000 cr allocated to AP is grant or loan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gidugu Rudra Raju, a Special Invitee to the Congress Party Working Committee (CWC) and former president of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) has questioned whether the Rs 15,000 crore allocated for Amaravati in the Union Budget is a grant or a loan.



Chandrababu Naidu for his inability to leverage the support of his 16 MPs to secure justice for Andhra Pradesh, including the pursuit of Special Category Status. He highlighted that the Budget speech failed to address the Special Category Status issue, despite Naidu's exit from the NDA in 2018 over this very matter.

Lokesh thanks Centre for priority to AP in Budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, has announced a comprehensive inquiry into the 'Nadu-Nedu' activities undertaken by the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government. Lokesh addressed the MLAs on Tuesday's second day of the AP Legislative Assembly session, emphasising the need to strengthen government schools.



under the previous YSRCP administration. He reiterated the government's commitment to transforming government schools to be on par with private institutions. As part of this initiative, teacher positions will be filled through the Mega DSC recruitment drive, increasing the number of teachers in government schools.

Lokesh criticised the YSRCP government for its adverse impact on teachers and the overall education system, citing poor decisions that led to significant damage. He assured that the current government would take methodical and revamped actions to revamp the education system from KG to PG starting from the first year.

Additionally, Minister Nara Lokesh expressed gratitude to the Union Government on X (formerly Twitter) for prioritising Andhra Pradesh in the Union Budget. "Thank you to the central government for its commitment to completing the Amaravati capital and the Polavaram project. On behalf of the people of the state, we are grateful to the NDA government for allocating Rs 15,000 crores towards the reconstruction of Andhra Pradesh," said Lokesh.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that Rs 15,000 crores would be allocated for the construction of Amaravati. She assured full cooperation from the centre for the Polavaram project and support for the backward areas of Uttaraandhra, Rayalaseema, and Prakasam districts through a special package.

BJP leaders hail budget for focus on all-round, inclusive development

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leaders, including Union ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and J P Nadda, heaped praise on the budget on Tuesday, lauding its vision and focus on all-round and inclusive development.

Home Minister Shah said the Union Budget 2024-25 will fuel India's pace to emerge as a developed country by ushering in a new era of employment and opportunities.

Defence Minister Singh said the budget is unique in many ways and by clearly outlining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's nine key priorities for all-round and inclusive development, it has successfully elevated India's growth trajectory.

lauded the budget as a testament to the government's commitment to inclusive growth, sustainable development and economic resilience.

This visionary budget addresses the country's immediate needs while also establishing a robust framework for long-term prosperity by prioritising infrastructure development, technological innovation and social welfare, he said.

Shah said the budget reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "unwavering commitment" to driving economic growth by bolstering India's entrepreneurial power and ease of doing business.

Unemployment biggest challenge, govt's response 'too little': Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the Union Budget, the Congress on Tuesday said unemployment is the "biggest challenge facing the country" and the government's response is "too little" and will have little impact on the "grave situation".

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has "virtually adopted" the ideas underlying his party's proposals on Employment-linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, apprenticeship scheme with an allowance to the apprentice, and on the abolition of Angel Tax.

Naidu govt failed to secure adequate funds for State: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has sharply criticised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and the TDP-led coalition government for failing to secure adequate funds for Andhra Pradesh, despite their role as a key partner in the NDA.

In a media statement, former State finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy highlighted that the Union Finance Minister had announced in the Budget speech that the Union Government would facilitate special financial support through multilateral development agencies, with an allocation of Rs 15,000 crore for the current financial year and additional amounts in future years.

However, the details remain vague, particularly regarding the loan and grant components. The allocation for Additional Central Assistance for Externally Aided Projects under demand head 42 is only Rs 8,000 crore for the entire country, suggesting that a significant portion of the Rs 15,000 crore might be in the form of a loan rather than a grant. If it is a loan within the State's FRBM limit, it may not offer substantial relief, as the State can raise loans under the Net Borrowing Ceiling (NBC) sanctioned by the Central government.

The former minister also criticised the Chief Minister for accepting a special financial



package instead of pushing for special category status, which was promised by the then Prime Minister but later diluted. He pointed out that Andhra Pradesh received no additional benefits under the special package compared to other states. He recalled that during an all-party meeting with the central government before the budget, the TDP did not raise the issue of special status for the state.

On the Polavaram Project, the minister noted that according to the bifurcation act, the central government was responsible for its construction, but the then TDP government took it on themselves. The previous government had agreed to complete the project at 2013-14 rates, leading to increased costs due to non-compliance with protocols. The YSRCP government spent three years securing a revised project cost estimate of Rs. 55,656 crore from the Central Water Commission (CWC). The previous government had secured essential funds for the project, and now it is the TDP's responsibility to expedite its completion.

He also mentioned that the bifurcation act promised Rs. 50 crore annually for each back-

ward district, and the YSRCP had secured most of these funds during their tenure. However, the TDP failed to do so previously. During the TDP's previous tenure, the NITI Aayog recommended Rs. 2,100 crore, but only Rs. 1,050 crore was provided by the central government for the first three years from 2014-15. Additionally, Naidu had promised a Bundelkhand-style package for the state, which did not materialize. With the TDP now part of the NDA, there is public expectation for them to secure such a package for the backward districts as previously promised.

Regarding the union budget, former Minister Buggana Rajendranath expressed satis-

faction with the 11% year-on-year growth in union tax revenues for FY 24, reflecting economic buoyancy. He commended the Centre for its commitment to fiscal consolidation, with the fiscal deficit to GDP ratio decreasing from 6.4% in 2022-23 to 5.6% in 2023-24, and the Central Government's aim to reduce it to 4.9% in 2024-25.

However, he noted that while the interim budget had assumed dividend receipts of Rs 1,02,000 crore, the actual dividends received by May 2024 were Rs 2,10,874 crore. Despite this increase, the budgeted capital outlay remains unchanged at Rs. 11.11 lakh crore, which he believes should have been higher given the current low investment-to-GDP ratio.

Big relief...

Continued from Page 1

As per the proposal, a 5 per cent tax will be levied on income between Rs 3-7 lakh, 10 per cent between Rs 7-10 lakh, 15 per cent for Rs 10-12 lakh.

However, 20 per cent tax will continue to be levied on income between Rs 12-15 lakh and 30 per cent for income above Rs 15 lakh.

Under the existing new I-T regime, a 5 per cent tax is levied on income between Rs 3-6 lakh, 10 per cent for income between Rs 6-9 lakh.

Income between Rs 9-12 lakh and Rs 12-15 lakh is subject to 15 per cent and 20 per cent tax, respectively. A 30 per cent I-T would be applicable on income above Rs 15 lakh.

Boost to jobs, infra...

Continued from Page 1

She, however, raised the securities transaction tax (STT) on futures and options of securities, which disappointed the markets. "India's economic growth continues to be the shining exception (in a world that is gripped by policy uncertainties) and will remain so in the years ahead," she said. "In this budget, we particularly focus on employment, skilling, MSMEs, and the middle class."

The centre-piece of the over Rs 48 lakh crore budget are employment, internship and skilling schemes, aimed at creating job avenues for the largest youth population in the world. Besides Rs 2 lakh crore provided over a five year period for schemes and initiatives to facilitate employment, skilling and other opportunities for 4.1 crore youth, "I have made a provision of Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education, employment and skilling," she said.

For Bihar, where assembly elections are due next year, the finance minister announced spending of Rs 60,000 crore on infrastructure projects like expressways, power plant, heritage corridors and new airports.

The support to Bihar, whose ruling party and BJP's partner JD-U has been demanding an economic package and special category status for the state, is in the form of capital projects but not subsidy or cash dole. Similarly, for Andhra Pradesh, whose ruling TDP recently joined BJP-led NDA, she allocated Rs 15,000 crore in financial aid through multilateral agencies. A similar request for support to Bihar will be expedited, she said. For the middle class, she raised standard deduction -- a flat deduction from total salary earned by an employee in a year before calculating applicable income tax rate -- by 50 per cent to Rs 75,000 and tweaked tax slabs for taxpayers opting for the new income tax regime. This will lead to taxpayers under the new tax regime -- which offers lower rates of taxes but permits limited deductions and exemptions -- saving up to Rs 17,500 in tax annually, she said.

Commenting on the budget, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said it "will act as a catalyst in making India the third-largest economy in the world (from fifth largest

today) and will lay a solid foundation for a developed India".

Modi lauded the budget's sharp focus on the youth, backward sections, women and middle class as also on manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, and asserted that the proposed employment-linked incentive schemes will create crores of new jobs. "This visionary budget will uplift and empower every stratum of our society, paving the way for a brighter future for all". The employment-linked incentives and internship programmes were first mooted by the opposition Congress party in its election manifesto.

In its comments on the budget, the party called two-tax system for individual tax payers as well as the changes in the long-term capital gains tax have created confusion.

Moody's Ratings said the budget for fiscal 2024-25 maintains the fiscal consolidation path announced in the interim budget.

To spur employment, the budget provided for incentives for companies, including paying for one-month salary for first-time employees, incentive at specified sale to both employee and employer with respect to their retirement fund contributions in the first four years of employment, and reimbursing employers up to Rs 3,000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution of each additional employee. Also, a programme to improve skills as well as internship for students and subsidised loans for higher education will be provided, she said.

India's official unemployment rate in urban areas is pegged at 6.7 per cent but private agencies put it at much higher levels.

The increase in benefit for employer's contribution towards NPS under new tax regime from 10 per cent to 14 per cent for non-government employees provides an avenue for tax saving for salaried employees. Buoyed by robust tax collections and a higher-than-expected dividend receipt from the Reserve Bank, Sitharaman said the government's fiscal deficit -- the difference between the total revenue earned and total expenditure -- will be trimmed to 4.9 per cent of the GDP in 2024-25, below the 5.1 per cent figure estimated in the interim budget she presented in February.

Rs 15,000 cr for Amaravati project...

Continued from Page 1

An allocation of Rs 6,000 crore has been made for the improvement of road infrastructure, including the construction of new highways and expressways to enhance connectivity. Better road networks will facilitate smoother transportation, reduce travel time, and support economic activities.

Rs 5,000 crore has been allocated for the development of the Koppurthy node within the Visakhapatnam-Chennai

Industrial Corridor, enhancing industrial infrastructure and creating economic opportunities. This corridor aims to attract investments, foster industrial growth, and generate employment in the region.

Development grants of Rs 4,000 crore have been allocated for the backward regions of Rayalaseema, Prakasam, and North Coastal Andhra to enhance socio-economic conditions. These funds will be utilized for infrastructure development, education, healthcare,

and other essential services.

An allocation of Rs 2,500 crore has been made for the establishment of new medical colleges and educational institutions to improve healthcare and education infrastructure. This investment aims to provide quality education and healthcare services to the residents of Andhra Pradesh.

An allocation of Rs 3,500 crore has been made to promote renewable energy projects to meet the state's energy needs sustainably and reduce depen-

dence on fossil fuels. Investments in solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources will support environmental sustainability and energy security.

Finally, an allocation of Rs 2,000 crore has been made to ensure access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities in rural areas under the Jal Jeevan Mission. This project will improve public health and hygiene, contributing to the overall well-being of rural communities.

Subsidy... Bonanza for...

Continued from Page 1

The fertiliser subsidy has seen a more significant cut, with Rs 1,64,000 crore earmarked for 2024-25 against the revised estimates of Rs 1,88,894 crore for the previous fiscal.

This subsidy supports manufacturers and helps maintain affordable prices for farmers, covering both urea and non-urea fertilisers like DAP and MOP.

Petroleum subsidies, primarily for cooking gas (LPG), have been marginally reduced to Rs 11,925 crore, down from Rs 12,240 crore in the 2023-24 revised estimates.

The government's decision to maintain the subsidy estimates from the interim budget suggests a calculated approach to balancing fiscal consolidation with welfare measures.

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Besides, survey and investigation of Kosi related flood mitigation and irrigation projects will be undertaken, Sitharaman added.

The budget also provided for an additional allocation to support capital investments in Bihar.

"The requests of Bihar government for external assistance from multilateral development banks will be expedited," said Sitharaman. The finance minister also proposed the development of Vishnupad temple at Gaya and Mahabodhi temple at Bodhi Gaya by creating a corridor modelled on the Varanasi-based Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor.

"Comprehensive development of Vishnupad Temple Corridor and Mahabodhi Temple Corridor will be supported, modelled on the successful Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor, to transform them into world class pilgrim and tourist destinations," she said. Besides, the budget also proposed a comprehensive development initiative for Rajgir, which holds religious significance for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains.

"Our government will support Nalanda as a tourist destination centre besides providing Nalanda university its glorious stature," she added. While under the Poorvodaya scheme, in which the government is formulating for an all-round development of the eastern region states covering Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh.

"On the Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial corridor, we will support development of an industrial node at Gaya," she said, adding, "this corridor will catalyse the industrial development of the eastern region."

SC rules out...

Continued from Page 1

The interim verdict, to be followed by a detailed and reasoned order, came as a shot in the arm for the embattled NDA government and the National Testing Agency (NTA), which were facing strong criticism and protests, on streets and in Parliament, over alleged large-scale malpractices like question paper leak, fraud and impersonation in the prestigious test held on May 5. Over 23 lakh students took up the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) in 2024 for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices JB Paridwala and Manoj Misra concluded the four day-long proceedings where they heard submissions from a battery of lawyers, including Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the NTA, and senior advocates Narender Hooda, Sanjay Hegde and Mathews Nedumapra.

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CM: AP Budget to be presented in 2 months

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced that the delay in the State Budget's announcement was due to financial constraints, but assured that it will be formulated within the next two months. During the Assembly session on Tuesday, Naidu said that the State's development was advanced by Vision 2020 and celebrated the coalition party's victory, which he attributed to increased public support.

Naidu expressed gratitude to Governor Abdul Nazeer for his address in the Assembly and criticised the YSR Congress Party's proposal for three capital cities. He placed the blame on former chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's administration for the prolonged absence of a clear capital.

In his address, Naidu paid tribute to TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao for his transformative impact on the Telugu community and Andhra Pradesh.



vijayawada 03

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Allocation for Minority Affairs increased by Rs 574 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Minority Affairs has increased by Rs 574.31 crore to Rs 3,183.24 crore for 2024-25 as against the revised estimate of Rs 2,608.93 crore in 2023-24.

The budget allocation for the ministry was Rs 3,097.60 in 2023-24. However, the revised estimate was Rs 2,608.93, according to official documents. The budget estimate for the Ministry of Minority Affairs this year is Rs 3,183.24. Of the proposed allocation for the ministry, Rs 1,575.72 crore is for education empowerment.

The allocation for Pre-Matric Scholarship for Minorities is Rs 326.16 crore and for Post-Matric Scholarship for Minorities is Rs 1,145.38 crore.

A total provision of Rs 2,120.72 crore has been made for the major schemes/projects of the ministry.

An allocation of Rs 910.90 crore has been made this time for 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram', one of the major programmes of the ministry.

Push for farm sector; focus on research, tech

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday announced a Rs 1.52 lakh crore allocation for agriculture and allied sectors in 2024-25, outlining a comprehensive plan to boost research, promote sustainable farming, enhance oilseed and pulse production and integrate technology in the agricultural landscape.

In her Budget speech, Sitharaman emphasised the need for a thorough review of the agriculture research setup to enhance productivity and develop climate-resilient crop varieties.

"Our government will undertake a comprehensive review of the agriculture research set up to bring the focus on raising productivity and developing climate resilient varieties," the

Finance Minister said.

The research funding will be challenge-based and open to private sector participation, with domain experts overseeing the conduct of research.

Sitharaman announced that farmers will soon have access to 109 new high-yielding, climate-resilient varieties across 32 field and horticulture crops.

To boost self-sufficiency in crucial crops, the Minister revealed plans for focused missions on pulses and oilseeds, aimed at strengthening their production, storage, and marketing infrastructure.

"As announced in the interim budget, a strategy is being put in place to achieve 'atmanirbharta' for oil seeds, such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, soybean, and sunflower," Sitharaman



said.

The government's emphasis on research and crop diversification comes alongside a push for sustainable

farming practices.

Sitharaman announced an initiative to bring one crore farmers into natural farming over the next two years, supported by certification and branding efforts.

In a move to modernise the sector, she outlined plans to implement Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture, covering farmers and their lands in three years. This initiative includes digital crop surveys and the creation of farmer and land registries.

"In the current fiscal, the government will conduct a digital crop survey for the Kharif season using the DPI in 400 districts. The details of 6 crore farmers and their lands will be brought into the farmer and land registries," Sitharaman said.

Union Budget evokes mixed response

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Union Budget for 2024-25, announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, has elicited mixed reactions from the public. Many citizens feel that the reduction in gold and silver prices does not benefit them directly, as their primary concerns are inflation and the high cost of essential commodities like edible oil, dals, and tomatoes.

On the other hand, while the budget's focus on creating employment through skill training initiatives is seen as beneficial for the corporate sector, there is a notable absence of provisions for government jobs for the unemployed. The Andhra Pradesh state government has expressed satisfaction with the allocation of Rs 15,000 crore for

While the budget's focus on creating employment through skill training initiatives is seen as beneficial for the corporate sector, there is a notable absence of provisions for government jobs for the unemployed

the development of Amaravati. This funding, sourced from a World Bank loan, aligns with the Finance Minister's commitment to support the capital's construction, in line with the State Reorganisation Act, according to CPM leader Ch. Babu Rao.

Babu Rao also pointed out the budget's lack of mention regarding Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh, which he believes is crucial for boosting investments and economic growth. He noted the omission of key projects such as the Vizag Metro Rail, Kadapa Steel Factory, Vizag Railway Zone, and the capital investment for the Vizag steel plant, as well as the absence of any measures to halt the privatization of VSP.

Regarding tax benefits, Finance Minister Sitharaman announced that annual incomes between Rs 3 lakh and Rs 7 lakh will now be taxed at a rate of 5 per cent, an increase from the previous upper limit of Rs 6 lakh. The revised tax structure, introduced in 2020, maintains a tax rate of 5 per cent to 20 per cent for incomes up to Rs 15 lakh,

with a 30 per cent rate for incomes exceeding Rs 15 lakh, with no additional benefits for higher earnings.

With the wedding season approaching, the reduction in gold and silver prices is seen as favourable news for jewellery shop owners and buyers.

The industrial sector has welcomed the budget, with members of the AP Chambers and CII praising the allocation of special financial packages for developing backward areas in Rayalaseema, north Andhra Pradesh, and Prakasam districts. They also appreciated the incentives for establishing industries in Andhra Pradesh as outlined in the AP Reorganisation Act 2024, as well as the funding for the Visakhapatnam-Chennai and Hyderabad-Bengaluru industrial corridors.



Health Ministry allocated Rs 90,958.63 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union health ministry has been allocated Rs 90,958.63 crore in the 2024-2025 budget, an increase of 12.96 per cent over the Rs 80,517.62 crore 2023-24 revised estimates.

The government has also announced customs duty exemptions on three cancer treatment drugs -- Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab.

"To provide relief to cancer patients, I propose to fully exempt three more medicines from Customs duties. I also propose changes in the BCD (Basic Customs Duty) on X-Ray tubes and flat panel detectors for use in medical X-Ray

machines under the Phased Manufacturing Program," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Tuesday while presenting the budget in Parliament.

The budget allocation for the AYUSH Ministry has been increased from Rs 3,000 crore to Rs 3,712.49 crore.

Out of the Rs 90,958.63 crore, Rs 87,656.90 crore has been allocated to the Department of Health and Family Welfare and Rs 3,301.73 crore to the Department of Health Research. The budget allocation for schemes under the Department of Health and Family Welfare has been increased from Rs 77,624.79 crore to Rs 87,656.90 crore.

AP Chambers compliments Nirmala for presenting 7th budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry Federation (AP Chambers) President Potluri Bhaskara Rao congratulated Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for presenting the Union Budget for a record seventh time. He stated, "The Indian economy has been on a growth trajectory for the past few years, with income tax and GST collections increasing steadily. The Union government has focused on crucial areas such as agriculture and allied sectors, employment generation, skilling, infrastructure, education, and health."

He noted that the fiscal deficit target was set at 4.9 per cent of GDP for 2024-25, slightly high-

er than the expected 4.5 per cent. For the first time since the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, the state was mentioned in the Union Budget. An allocation of Rs. 15,000 crores was made for the development of the Capital City and the Polavaram project. The Finance Minister also announced financial support for the development of three backward districts in North Andhra, along with Prakasam and Rayalaseema districts. Additionally, support was announced for the development of the Koppurthi industrial park under the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor and the Orvakal industrial park under the Hyderabad-Bangalore Industrial Corridor, though spe-

cific financial details were not mentioned.

"The Budget has provided much-needed support for the MSME sector, which is in dire straits," Bhaskara Rao added. "Several schemes for MSMEs were reintroduced, including EPF benefits to employers, increased Mudra loans from Rs. 10 lakhs to Rs. 20 lakhs, and a credit guarantee scheme increased up to Rs. 100 crore."

He also highlighted support for the food processing sector, including shrimp processing and irradiation centres. The FM announced that 100 industrial parks would be developed nationwide, urging Andhra Pradesh to strive to get some of these parks sanctioned for the state.

Sharmila slams Centre over no mention of SCS in Budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila on Tuesday said the Union Budget for fiscal 2024-25 made no mention of the special category status for the state and alleged that the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre has cheated it again.

The opposition YSRCP slammed the Centre and said it gave a 'zero' to Andhra Pradesh in the Budget.

Sharmila highlighted that the NDA government promised to honour the commitments made in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 but noted that it left the most important of its special category sta-

tus (SCS).

"They (Centre) said they will honour bifurcation promises but there was no mention of SCS. Wasn't SCS the foremost of all. In Tirupati, (Narendra) Modi promised to give special status for 10 years," she said, addressing a press conference at the Congress office in Vijayawada.

Ridiculing the Rs 15,000 crore funds promised for Andhra Pradesh capital city as pittance, Sharmila said Bihar, ruled by NDA partner JD(U), with just 12 MPs managed to procure higher financial allocations of Rs 26,000 crore.

Urging Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who is leading the TDP-led government in the state to respond to these

developments, she advised him to realise that the saffron party is allegedly deceiving Andhra Pradesh again. Further, she wanted to know about the Visakhapatnam railway zone not getting a mention and demanded that the port city and Vijayawada needed Metro Rail projects.

According to Sharmila, Andhra Pradesh has been repeatedly cheated over the past 10 years and called on Naidu to withdraw support to the BJP at the Centre. Delving on the lack of timelines and financial specifics on some budget commitments to infrastructure, backward areas and others, the Congress leader said that this was not a budget but a manifesto.

Pawan hails budgetary allocations to Andhra



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jana Sena Chief and Panchayat Raj Minister, K. Pawan Kalyan, welcomed the budgetary allocations to Andhra Pradesh announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday.

Pawan Kalyan expressed his gratitude to the Central government for the pivotal financial support outlined in Budget 2024 for the state of Andhra Pradesh.

On social media platform 'X', he stated, "The commitment to fulfilling the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, including the completion of the long-awaited Polavaram project, is essential for the development of our state. This

monumental support provides a ray of hope and a significant leap towards the all-round progress of Andhra Pradesh."

"Your unwavering support in recognizing our need for a capital, boosting industrial growth, and aiding backward regions is truly commendable. The allocation of Rs. 15,000 crore for this financial year, with future provisions, underscores a deep understanding of our challenges and a visionary approach to our future. These proactive steps inspire confidence and optimism among the people of Andhra Pradesh," he added, thanking her from the bottom of his heart for her dedication and efforts to uplift the state.



Abolition of angel tax to benefit startups: T-Hub CEO

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Reacting to the Union Budget by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, T-Hub CEO Mahankali Srinivas Rao highlighted the abolition of the angel tax for all classes of investors, seeing it as a crucial boost for startups and a step towards making India a global innovation hub. He stated that the budget marks a significant step for the Indian startup ecosystem, with initiatives that will undeniably create innovation and growth.

IKEA India CFO Murali Iyer appreciated the budget's support for MSMEs and women, citing enhanced access to finance and infrastructure. He also noted the government's forward-thinking approach with schemes for youth internships and Digital Public Infrastructure, along with investments in infrastructure and tax relief for salaried employees is a good move.

CEO of Marut Drones, Prem Kumar Vislawath, emphasised the Rs 1.52 lakh

crore allocation for agriculture, focusing on climate-resistant and high-yield crops is a good move.

Prem Kumar Vislawath welcomed the exemption of lithium imports from customs, supporting domestic drone manufacturing.

Freyr Energy Co-founder Saurabh Marda said the budget's ambitious renewable energy goals, including 500 GW of renewable power by 2030 and Rs 70,000 crore in solar subsidies for homes is a very good move.

Rs 309.74 cr for training of govt employees

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday allocated Rs 309.74 crore to the Union Personnel Ministry for the ongoing fiscal for the training of government employees, both in India and abroad.

These provisions are under the Rs 2,328.56 crore earmarked for the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions for the current financial year.

Of the total of Rs 309.74 crore, Rs 103.05 is for "Training Division, Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA)", Rs 120.56 for "Training Schemes" and Rs 86.13 crore for "National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building" or Mission Karmayogi, according to the Union Budget 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday. The Training Division under the Personnel Ministry, ISTM in Delhi and Mussoorie-based LBSNAA arrange several programmes including "foundation courses, refresher courses, mid-career training, etc. so as to equip all levels/grades of secretarial functionaries."

Primary edn cold-shouldered: Experts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The budget didn't prioritise school education, especially primary schools, according to experts.

M Ravindar, Addle.G.S., TPTF said, "In the budget of Rs 48.25 lakh crore, only Rs 1.25 lakh crore was allocated for the education sector. This is 2.59 per cent of the total budget. It is obvious that these funds do not support any educational development. To provide infrastructure to the educational institutions, how can Vikasit Bharat be possible with meagre funds. With this we understand that the Central government is gradually moving away from its responsibility of giving education to the poor classes."

Murali Radha, Member of Parents Association, Hyderabad said, "Despite

the Central government making significant allocations to higher education, not even a single rupee is focused on primary education or uplift of government schools and infrastructure."

Associate Professor Dr Krishna Reddy Chittedi, University of Hyderabad, said, "One can say that youth is the major target of the budget. However, when it comes to skill centres, unfortunately one can witness that the majority of skill centres are not active currently across urban and semi-urban areas."

Professor Bhagwan Chowdhry,

Indian School of Business (ISB), said, "The Union Budget did not offer big surprises, but a positive way of looking at it is that a few good initiatives that we expected came through."

Prof Alok Kumar Mishra, School of Economics, University of Hyderabad said, "The budget has brought some positive development in the education sector. The Centre proposed Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education, employment, and skilling for over 1,000 ITIs across the country. It emphasises on upskilling industry ori-

ented skills among youth in order to excel in their fields. The government will provide financial support for loans up to Rs 10 lakh for higher education. However one should see how it bridges the gap between school education and higher education and other aspects such as free education programmes, digital education and infrastructure development."

Prof Soumyo Mukherji, Senior Professor, Department of Electrical Engineering & Director, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus, said, "One of the main focus areas laid out by the Finance Minister for Viksit Bharat is innovation, research & development. To bolster R&D and strengthen India's standing globally, the allocation of Rs1,000 crore towards venture capital in space technology is a welcome move."





Budget: eCourts project gets Rs 1500 cr; digitisation records part of initiative

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The law ministry's eCourts project's third phase, which seeks to upgrade the digital infrastructure of the lower judiciary, has been allocated Rs 1,500 crore in the Union Budget 2024-25.

In September last year, the Union Cabinet had approved the third phase of the eCourts project as a central sector scheme with a financial outlay of Rs 7,210 crore.

To be implemented over four years, the third phase will see digitisation of all court records, both legacy and pending cases, at an estimated cost of Rs 2,038.40 crore. A total of 3,108 crore documents will be digitised, official sources had earlier said.

As part of the third phase, the system will be migrated to cloud technology and the cost estimated for providing 25 petabytes of storage (according to existing requirement) is Rs 1,205.20 crore.

The project also seeks to establish and expand the scope of virtual courts for hearing cases by creating a robust digital infrastructure.

The sources had said Rs 413.08 crore is the cost estimate for the establishment of 1,150 virtual courts.

As part of the National eGovernance Plan, the eCourts project is under implementation since 2007 for making the Indian judiciary information and communications technology enabled. The second phase of the project concluded last year.

The main objective of the project's third phase is to create a unified technology platform for the judiciary which will provide a seamless and paperless interface between courts, litigants and other stakeholders.



Reflects continuity of efforts of laying foundation for economic growth: Vaishnav

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Tuesday said the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reflected the continuity of the efforts of laying a strong foundation for economic growth over the past 10 years.

Speaking to PTI, Vaishnav said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has steered the economy in a very thoughtful way in the last 10 years.

"In the past 10 years, we have laid a very strong foundation for our economy. Today, our banking sector is strong, entire middle income families have seen new employment opportunities coming up, and the low income families are seeing a total transformation in their lives," the minister said.

"Technology has come up in a way where it has become a foundation of economic growth. So, the work done in 10 years, the continuity of that effort is reflected in today's budget," Vaishnav said.

Big boost to defence

Rs 6.22 lakh cr allocated for defence spending

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has set aside Rs 6,21,940 crore for defence spending in 2024-25, virtually keeping the same amount allocated in the interim budget amid the continuing border row with China in eastern Ladakh as well as concerns over the evolving security situation in the strategic waterways.

The total allocation for defence is 4.79 per cent higher than the outlay made in the financial year 2023-24.

A total of Rs 1.72 lakh crore was set aside to the military for capital expenditure that largely includes purchasing new weapons, aircraft, warships and other military hardware.

For 2023-24, the budgetary allocation for capital outlay was Rs 1.63 lakh crore while the revised estimates put the amount at Rs 1.57 lakh crore.

The revenue expenditure for day-to-day operating costs and salaries has been pegged at Rs 2.82 lakh crore while Rs



1,41,205 crore has been set aside for defence pensions, which is 2.17 per cent higher than the allocation made in 2023-24.

The total allocation made for defence in the interim budget in February was Rs 6,21,540 crore. On the capital outlay, the defence ministry said the allocation is aimed at filling the critical capability gaps through big ticket acquisitions in current and subsequent years.

"The enhanced budgetary allocation will fulfill the require-

ment of annual cash outgo on planned capital acquisitions aimed at equipping the armed forces with state-of-the-art niche technology, lethal weapons, fighter aircraft, ships, submarines, platforms, unmanned aerial vehicles, drones and specialist vehicles," it said.

The Ministry of Defence has earmarked 75 per cent of modernisation budget amounting to Rs 1,05,518.43 crore for procurement through domestic industries, it said.

'A boon' for agriculture: Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday lauded the Union Budget 2024-25 as a "boon" for the agriculture and rural sectors, asserting that it paves the way for a strong and self-reliant India.

Chouhan said the Budget presents a roadmap for India to achieve developed nation status by 2047. He emphasised that the financial plan would bolster efforts to increase farmers' income.

"This Budget is a boon for agriculture and rural development," Chouhan told PTI, adding that it would bring about "revolutionary changes" in the lives of farmers, women, youth, and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

The minister said the Budget fulfils the government's vision of a developed India, and pointed out that it focuses on key demographics and sectors crucial for national growth.



PMAY-U 2.0: Rs 4,000 cr for Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday brought back interest subsidy under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0 and set aside Rs 4,000 crore for Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS).

In the 2024-25 Union Budget, PMAY-U has been allocated Rs 30,170 crore, an increase of 20.19 per cent from the 2023-2024 budgetary allocation.

According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, the interest subsidy scheme can soon be availed by the economically weaker section (EWS), lower income group (LIG) and middle income group.

Nearly two years ago, the government did not extend the time period of CLSS under PMAY, which provided subsidised home loans based on income.

At present, the scheme is being implemented through three verticals -- Beneficiary Led Construction/Enhancement, Affordable Housing in Partnership and In-situ Slum Redevelopment. Presenting the Budget 2024-25



in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that three crore additional houses under the PM Awas Yojana in rural and urban areas will be constructed, for which the necessary allocations are being made.

According to budgetary document, Rs 3,000 crore has been allocated for EWS and LIG groups to construct houses under CLSS in urban areas while the middle income group will be provided Rs 1,000 crore. Sitharaman announced central assistance of Rs 2.2 lakh crore over the next five

years to meet housing requirement of one crore urban poor and middle class families under the PMAY-U and proposed interest subsidy to provide loans at affordable rates.

She said, "Under the PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0, housing needs of one crore urban poor and middle-class families will be addressed with an investment of Rs 10 lakh crore." "This will include the central assistance of Rs 2.2 lakh crore in the next five years," she added.

The government also plans to provide interest subsidy to facilitate loans at affordable rates, the minister said.

Allocation of more than Rs 3 L cr for schemes benefiting women, girls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For promoting women-led development, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the budget carries an allocation of more than Rs 3 lakh crore for schemes benefiting women and girls.

Presenting the Union Budget for 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said this signals the government's commitment in enhancing women's role in economic development.

"For promoting women-led development, the budget carries an allocation of more than Rs 3 lakh crore for schemes

benefitting women and girls," she said.

Sitharaman said the government will set up working women hostels to promote their participation in the workforce.

One of the key highlights of the budget include establishment of working women hostels in partnership with industries and creches to support working mothers.

These initiatives are aimed at enhancing work-home balance for women, thus encouraging their greater participation in the workforce.

Additionally, the budget outlines the launch of women-spe-

cific skilling programmes designed to boost female workforce participation, which has increased to 24 per cent in Q2FY24.

The budget showed that the recent payroll data shows a notable rise in female workforce participation.

As of May 2024, around 0.24 million new female members were added, marking a 12.1 per cent increase from the previous year.

The net addition of female members also rose by 17.2 per cent compared to the previous year, indicating a positive shift towards a more inclusive workforce.

UNION BUDGET 2024-25			
Central Govt Expenditure			
Budget Estimates for 2024-25 (in ₹ crore)			
Total: 48,20,512			
Interest	11,62,940	Health	
Transport	5,44,128	Finance	
Defence	454,773	Urban Development	
Major Subsidies	3,81,175	Energy	
Transfer to States	3,22,787	Urban Territories	
Rural Development	2,65,808	Social Welfare	
Pension	2,43,296	Commerce and Industry	
Tax Administration	2,03,530	Scientific Department	
Agriculture and Allied Activities	1,51,851	External Affairs	
Home Affairs	1,50,983	Planning and Statistics	
Education	1,25,638	Development of North East	
IT and Telecom	1,16,342	Other	

Outlay for Bhutan highest; allocation to Maldives sees cuts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In line with India's 'neighbourhood first' policy, Bhutan was on Tuesday allocated the largest share of Rs 2,068 crore as development aid in the Union Budget for 2024-25 while the outlay for the Maldives saw a sharp decline to Rs 400 crore from last year's Rs 770 crore.

The cut in allocation to the Maldives came amid strain in ties between the two countries since Mohamed Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, became president of the island nation in November last year.

In the budget, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was allocated a total of Rs 22,154 crore for the fiscal 2024-25 as against last year's revised outlay of 29,121 crore. The same allocation was

made to the MEA in the interim budget that was presented to the Parliament in February.

In the interim budget, the development assistance to the Maldives was pegged at Rs 600 crore.

According to the budget papers, the allocation now stands at Rs 400 crore.

The outlay for Bhutan has been pegged at Rs 2,068 crore for 2024-25 as against Rs 2,398 crore in the revised estimate of 2023-24.

After Bhutan, Nepal was allocated the second largest outlay of Rs 700 crore. An amount of Rs 245 crore has been set aside for Sri Lanka in 2024-25 as against last year's Rs 60 crore.

The allocation for Chabahar Port has also been maintained at Rs 100 crore, underlining India's focus on connectivity projects with Iran.

Rs 1,248.91 cr for salaries of Union ministers, ex-governors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The 2024-25 Union Budget has allocated Rs 1,248.91 crore for expenses incurred by the Council of Ministers, the Cabinet Secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office, and for hospitality and entertainment of State guests.

The allocated amount is substantially lower than the Rs 1,803.01 crore earmarked in 2023-24.

The budget was presented in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday.

A total of Rs 828.36 crore has been given for the expenses of council of ministers. It was Rs 1,289.28 crore in 2023-24.

This allocation is for expenditure on salaries, sumptuary and other allowances and travel by cabinet ministers, ministers of state and former prime ministers. This also includes a provision for special extra session flight operations for VVIPs.

The National Security Council Secretariat has been given Rs 202.10 crore. It was Rs



299.30 crore in 2023-24.

This amount is for meeting the administrative expenses and space programme of the National Security Council Secretariat.

A total of Rs 72.11 crore has been given to the Office of Principal Scientific Advisor (Rs 76.20 crore in 2023-24). The provision is for meeting the administrative expenses of the principal scientific advisor's office and the National Research Foundation.

The Cabinet Secretariat has been allocated Rs 75.24 crore, against Rs 70.28 crore in 2023-24, for meeting the administrative expenses of those of the Chemical Weapons

Convention (CWC).

The Prime Minister's Office has been allocated Rs 65.30 crore (Rs 62.65 crore in 2023-24) for meeting administrative expenses.

The budget has given Rs 4 crore for hospitality and entertainment expenses, the same as that allocated in 2023-24.

This provision is for expenditure on government hospitality and entertainment of foreign State guests, official entertainment arranged at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on behalf of the vice president and the prime minister, reception on national days, investiture and ceremonies for presentation of credentials among others.

Budget: ASI allocated Rs 1,274 crore for heritage preservation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has been allocated Rs 1,273.91 crore in the Union Budget 2024-25 as compared to the Rs 1,131.08 crore in the previous budget.

The more than 160-year-old ASI works for protection, preservation, and conservation of centrally protected monuments and sites.

Currently, there are 3,697 ancient monuments and archaeological sites under its ambit.

The central agency and the Ministry of Culture are the nodal agencies for hosting the 46th session of the World Heritage Committee currently underway in Delhi. It is being held at the Bharat Mandapam from July 21-31.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech on Tuesday underlined the government's emphasis on both 'vikas' (development) and 'virasat' (heritage) in the country's growth trajectory.

The Budget outlay for the culture sector stands at Rs 3,260.93 crore for 2024-25, compared to Rs 3,399.65 crore allocated to it in the last budget. However, the figures for the outlay in the revised estimate for year 2023-24 stood at Rs 3,460 crore.

The ASI has been allocated Rs 1,273.91 crore in the Union Budget 2024-25 as compared to Rs 1,131.08 crore in the previous budget (revised).

The allocation for the ASI in the last budget (estimate) was Rs 1,102.83 crore.

The government has allocated Rs 188.21 crore for libraries and archives in the Budget, while Rs 123.72 crore has been allocated for museums. Finance Minister Sitharaman also announced that comprehensive development of Vishnu Pad Temple corridor at Gaya and the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhi Gaya in Bihar will be supported by the government to transform them into "world-class pilgrim and tourist destinations".



Allocation for rural development up by 12%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The rural development ministry has been allocated Rs 1,77,566.19 crore in the 2024-25 Union Budget, an around 12 per cent increase from the Rs 1,57,545 crore outlay for the last financial year.

The budget was presented in Parliament on Tuesday by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

However, compared to the revised estimates, a mid-year review of the expenditure done by the ministry which stood at 1,71,069.46 crore, the increase is around 3.7 per cent.

Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan hailed



the budget, saying it will help in further development of the rural sector.

The allocation for the flagship 100-day guaranteed wage rural employment programme, Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Development Scheme (MGNREGS), is Rs 86,000 crore, an around 43 per cent increase in allocation from the Rs 60,000 crore made in the last budget.

However, the revised esti-

mates show the total expenditure on the scheme in the last financial year was Rs 86,000 crore, the same as the allocation made for this financial year.

In 2022-23, the government had allocated Rs 73,000 crore for the MGNREGS in the budget, while the actual expenditure, according to the budget document, was Rs 90,805 crore. The scheme provides guaranteed employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult member volunteers to do unskilled manual work. It also earmarks at least one-third of jobs for women.

The allocation for the

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), under which the government aims to build two crore more rural houses, is Rs. 54,500.14.

For 2023-24, Rs 54,487 crore was provided for the PMAY-G. The revised estimates stand at Rs 32,000 crore, around 41 per cent of the allocated amount.

"It has been decided in the budget to build more houses for the poor, and two crore houses will be built for the poor in rural areas," Chouhan said.

Sitharaman announced the launch of the fourth phase of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) to provide all-weather connectivity to 25,000 rural habitations.



Labour Reforms

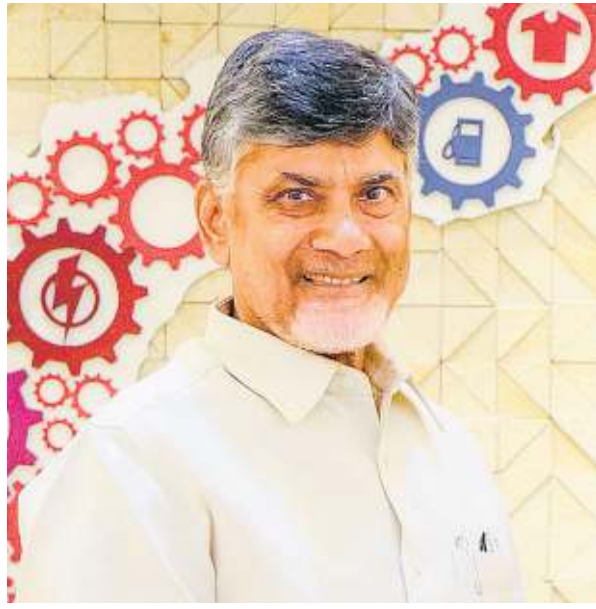
- E-shram portal to be integrated with other portals to provide one-stop labour services solution; will include mechanism to connect job-seekers with potential employers and skill providers
- Shram Suvidha and Samadhan portals to be revamped to enhance ease of compliance for industry and trade

AP Budget to be presented in 2 months, declares CM Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announced that the delay in the State Budget's announcement was due to financial constraints, but assured that it will be formulated within the next two months. During the Assembly session on Tuesday, Naidu said that the State's development was advanced by Vision 2020 and celebrated the coalition party's victory, which he attributed to increased public support. The coalition secured 57 per cent of the vote share with a 93 per cent strike rate, a record he described as unprecedented in his political career.

Naidu expressed gratitude to Governor Abdul Nazeer for his address in the Assembly and criticised the YSR Congress Party's proposal for three capital cities. He placed the blame on former chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy's administration for the prolonged absence of a clear capital.



In his address, Naidu paid tribute to TDP founder NT Rama Rao for his transformative impact on the Telugu community and Andhra Pradesh. He also acknowledged the con-

tributions of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, particularly in Information Technology and economic reforms, and praised the public-private partnership model for fostering development.

Reflecting on recent political dynamics, Naidu recalled that Pawan Kalyan intended to prevent vote splitting at a crucial time. He noted that while Pawan initially suggested cooperation between TDP and JanaSena, the involvement of BJP and national parties led to surprising election results. Naidu stated that the election results represent the public's verdict on the state's future, and vowed to work collectively towards development. He criticized Jagan Mohan Reddy's previous administration for failing to maintain balance and derailing the state's development trajectory.

Naidu also addressed the ongoing investigation into the murder of former minister YS

Vivekananda Reddy, noting that the case has experienced numerous twists. He claimed that the investigation was compromised when the Chief Inspector was promoted rather than reporting the matter to the CBI, and accused the current government of misusing power. Naidu asserted that the CBI team tasked with arresting suspects in the case had to return without making any arrests. He promised that the question of "Who Killed Baba" would soon be answered.

Furthermore, Naidu criticised the previous government for alleged mismanagement and corruption, claiming that significant revenues from sand and liquor were misappropriated, leading to economic decline.

He noted that the State's growth rate has fallen since 2019 and announced plans to introduce three additional white papers in the Assembly starting Thursday.

3 boys electrocuted as they come in contact with snapped HT wire

PNS ■ ONGOLE

In a tragic incident, three teenage boys were electrocuted after coming in contact with a high-tension (HT) wire while riding a motorcycle at SC Colony, Ponugodu village, on Tuesday.

According to police, the victims—Nazeer, Gowtham, and Balaji—were all 16 years old and first-year Intermediate students at Vijetha Junior College. They had left home for college that morning but did not attend classes. Instead, they travelled to Ponugodu village near Kanigiri town to visit the Ponugodu tank. On their way back home, their motorcycle accidentally contacted a high-tension wire that had snapped and fallen across the road. The boys were electrocuted instantly, and their bodies were partially burned due to the ensuing fire. The motorcycle was also destroyed in the blaze.

Police arrived at the scene, registered a case, and transported the bodies to the



Government General Hospital (GGH) for a postmortem examination. Villagers reported that the high-tension wire had snapped earlier in the morning, and they had notified the electricity officials. However, no action was taken to either remove the wire or disconnect the power supply.

The villagers criticised the electricity officials' lack of response, suggesting that prompt action might have prevented the tragedy.

The deceased boys came from economically disadvantaged families. Gowtham's parents were construction workers, Balaji's father worked as a lorry cleaner, and Nazeer's parents

were agricultural labourers. Despite their financial struggles, the boys were enrolled in a private college, highlighting the families' commitment to their education. Their untimely deaths have cast a pall of grief over their communities.

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar expressed deep sorrow over the incident. He announced an inquiry into the matter and directed electricity officials to take measures to prevent similar occurrences in the future. The Minister also pledged financial assistance to the bereaved families and promised a special drive to enhance safety and prevent electrocution deaths.

FAPCCI president hails Union Budget as growth roadmap

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

President of the Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) Mallikharjuna Rao Kankatala has lauded the Union budget 2024 as a comprehensive blueprint for the State's progress. The budget's emphasis on agriculture, employment, skilling, social welfare, manufacturing, infrastructure, and R&D has been particularly praised by Rao.

He expressed satisfaction with the substantial allocation of Rs. 15,000 crore for Amaravati's development and additional funds for the Polavaram Project. The special financial packages for North Andhra, Prakasam district, and Rayalaseema, along with the significant investments in water, power, and transportation infrastructure in Koppurthy, have been welcomed as crucial steps towards balanced development.

Rao highlighted the budget's potential to position Andhra Pradesh as a global manufacturing and logistics hub. The focus on infrastructure, skilling, and the establishment of e-commerce export hubs for MSMEs is expected to drive innovation and economic growth. The measures to improve the financial health of



MSMEs, including broader market access for receivables discounting and interest-free credit for equipment purchase, have been applauded as significant steps to enhance their competitiveness.

While acknowledging the overall positive impact of the budget, Rao expressed disappointment over the lack of substantial reforms for the hospitality and tourism sector. He suggested GST rationalisation, infrastructure status, and policy reforms to boost the sector's growth. The budget's focus on infrastructure development, industrial parks, employment generation, skill development, and religious tourism, coupled with tax relief for the middle class, has been seen as a balanced approach to addressing various development challenges.

'Rs 9 K cr panchayat funds diverted by YSRCP govt'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, K. Pawan Kalyan, disclosed to the Legislative Council that Rs 9,000 crore from the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions, which were intended for infrastructure development in Gram Panchayats, were diverted by the previous YSRCP government. These funds were originally allocated by the Union Government of India, he stated.

K. Pawan Kalyan further emphasized that approximately Rs. 7,518 crore of the Rs. 9,000 crore intended for

Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) was diverted due to the negligence of the State Finance Commission. He noted that these diversions occurred without the knowledge of the Gram Panchayat Sarpanches.

His remarks were in response to questions raised by members of the Legislative Council on the first day of the 45th session, chaired by Council Chairman Koyye Moshen Raju on Tuesday. He underscored the significant issue of fund misallocation and the lack of transparency in utilizing funds meant for grassroots development.

During the question hour, TDP members

Duvvarapu Rama Rao, BT Naidu, and Panchumarthi Anuradha raised concerns about the 14th and 15th Finance Commission Grants released by the Central government.

They criticized the YSRCP for not releasing these funds to Gram

Panchayats and instead diverting them, resulting in many Panchayats lacking proper infrastructure facilities.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan explained that the central government released funds eight times, and Rs. 7,518 crore of this was diverted without the consent of Gram Sarpanches.

Additionally, another Rs. 998 crore was not released to Panchayat Raj Institutions by the previous government, despite the Central government releasing the Finance Commission Grant, he said.

'Proposals for road repairs sent to govt'

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya said that proposals were sent to the government to carry out repairs to the damaged roads.

Collector Thameem Ansariya, flanked by the R&B engineers and officials, inspected the damaged roads between Thatichetlapalem and Budawada villages in Chimakurthy mandal located on Ongole-Kurnool highway on Tuesday.



She inquired the R&B officials about the estimation details to carry out repairs to the damaged roads. SE Devanandm explained to the Collector that proposals have been sent to the government for road repair works at an estimated cost of Rs 1.70 crore. Since the road is at a low level, it has to be leveled to about two feet and the needed repairs should be carried out.

The Collector directed the engineering officials to expedite the process and the works. R&B EE Gop Naik, DE Aruna

Kumari and other officials were among those who accompanied the Collector.

Later, Collector Thameem Ansariya inspected the area where the airport would be established at Donakonda. The Collector inquired from the revenue officials how many acres of land required for the construction of the airport. RDO John Irwin explained to the Collector about the lands. The Collector ordered the RDO to submit her a detailed report on the lands.

'Rs 138.62 cr for healthcare, edu in 15 capital villages'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, Ponguru Narayana, announced that the government is investing in state-of-the-art healthcare and quality education for 15 villages within the Amaravati capital region. The City Investments and Sustain (CITIIS) Project will see the construction of schools, health centres, Anganwadis, and modern cemeteries.

On Tuesday, Minister

Narayana, along with Tadikonda MLA Tenali Shivan Kumar and CRDA Commissioner Katmaneni Bhaskar, reviewed the progress of the development works in Amaravati. The total expenditure for the CITIIS Project is Rs 138.62 crore, with funding sourced from the French Development Agency (Rs 40 crore), the central government (Rs 40 crore), and the CRDA (Rs 58.62 crore).

Minister Narayana criticized the previous administration for allegedly neglecting



Amaravati's development and commended the current government for revitalizing the city's construction. He emphasized that the CITIIS Project is being managed under the

establishment of 16 health centres, with Rs 27.69 crore dedicated to building primary health centres. Additionally, Rs 12.18 crore is being invested in constructing 14 school buildings, with Rs 28.5 crore allocated for other facilities. The government will also spend Rs 11.32 crore on various supplementary facilities.

Minister Narayana reaffirmed the government's commitment to advancing Amaravati and completing its capital project as quickly as possible.

The CITIIS Project encompasses the development of 17 model Anganwadi centers with Rs 23.73 crore allocated for their construction and an additional Rs 8.63 crore for infrastructure and facilities. The project also includes the estab-

YSRCP moves AP HC for Oppn status

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has petitioned the Andhra Pradesh High Court, seeking directives for Assembly Speaker Ayyanna Patrudu to officially recognize his party as the principal opposition.

The petition, filed by the party's legal counsel, argues that despite a letter requesting recognition of Jagan Mohan Reddy as the Leader of the Opposition in June, the Speaker has yet to respond. The YSR Congress Party, which is the only opposition party, secured 40 per cent of the vote in the recent elections. The petition also contends that the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, as outlined under Article 208 of the Constitution of India, do not specify a mandatory percentage of seats required for a party leader to be recognized as the Leader of Opposition.

Kalpana Kumari assumes charge as VC & MD of GCC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Kalpana Kumari has officially taken charge as the new Vice Chairman and Managing Director of the Giriijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC), marking a significant shift in leadership at its Visakhapatnam headquarters. Her appointment has been warmly welcomed by GCC officials and staff, who have extended their congratulations and expressed strong support for her leadership.

Kalpana Kumari immediately set a proactive tone for her tenure by initiating a comprehensive review of the GCC's ongoing programs and schemes. This initial meeting focused on key issues, including the marketing strategies for the renowned Araku Valley coffee. She emphasized the need for unwavering



dedication and urged all GCC staff, both at headquarters and in the field, to pursue the organization's goals with renewed enthusiasm. Central to her vision is the enhancement of livelihoods for tribal communities across Andhra Pradesh, a core mission of the GCC.

Demonstrating her commitment to operational excellence, Kalpana Kumari conducted inspections across various departments, including vigilance, finance, marketing, retail marketing, coffee production,

administration, accounts, and transport. Her tour also included the Hut Arabica coffee shop and retail outlet sales at TRIFED, where she stressed the importance of maintaining high standards in every sector.

In a move reflecting her strategic thinking and hands-on leadership style, Kalpana Kumari reviewed the vacant land in Lawsons Bay Colony. She provided insightful suggestions for potential future activities on the site, showcasing her proactive approach and dedication to thorough oversight. The GCC staff have expressed optimism and confidence in Kalpana Kumari's leadership. Under her guidance, the GCC is poised to enter a new era of growth and development, further reinforcing its commitment to the welfare of tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh.

New GVMC Commissioner vows to transform Visakhapatnam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

P Sampath Kumar officially assumed charge as the Commissioner of Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) on Tuesday. The former Mission Director of Swachh Andhra Corporation, Kumar expressed his enthusiasm for taking up the role and serving the city's 2.5 million residents.

In his first address to the media, Kumar extended his gratitude to Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu for entrusting him with the responsibility of leading the State's largest municipal corporation. He lauded Visakhapatnam's natural beauty and the warm welcome he received from its citizens. Recognising the city's waste management challenges, Kumar pledged to prioritise this issue and improve Visakhapatnam's ranking in

the Swachh survey. He outlined a comprehensive approach involving a detailed assessment of the city's problems, close collaboration with public representatives, and efficient execution of solutions. The new commissioner unveiled an ambitious 100-day plan aimed at transforming Visakhapatnam into a model city. Key focus areas include enhancing civic services, enforcing discipline among employees, conducting regular grievance redressal sessions, and maintaining open communication with the media. Kumar's appointment is seen as a significant step towards accelerating Visakhapatnam's development and improving the quality of life for its residents. His commitment to transparency, efficiency, and public welfare has generated positive expectations among the city's populace.

AP I&PR Minister hails Union Budget

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, Kolu Sardha Saradhi, has welcomed the Union Budget's allocation of Rs. 15,000 crore for state development. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced this funding for the capital, Amaravati. Saradhi also highlighted the central government's commitment to providing additional funds to complete Andhra Pradesh's crucial Polavaram Project.

Following the Union Budget presentation in Parliament, Minister Saradhi spoke to the media at the Media Point on the Legislative Assembly premises in Velagapudi on Tuesday. He noted that while the Polavaram Project was approximately 72% complete by 2019, it had been neglected by the previous YSRCP government.

Saradhi expressed gratitude for the BJP-led NDA government's assurance of support for the project's completion. He also praised the allocation



of special funds for development in the Rayalaseema, Prakasam, and North Coastal districts.

Additionally, the Minister highlighted that the budget prioritizes the Visakhapatnam-Chennai and Chennai-Bangalore Industrial Corridors. Significant funding has also been allocated for the development of the Orvakallu and Koppurthy Industrial Centres. He further noted the central government's provision of special funds for drinking water, energy, railway, and road projects.

Missing MPDO found dead

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The search for Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) Venkata Ramana Rao, who had been missing, has ended in tragedy. After eight days of intensive search efforts, rescue personnel recovered his body from the Eluru Canal at Madhuranagar in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

The search began on July 15, when Rao was reported to have jumped from the Madhuranagar railway bridge into the canal. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and local Penamalur

police launched immediate search operations.

Despite extensive efforts, hope dwindled as days passed without any sign of Rao. NDRF divers eventually discovered his body lodged against a pillar of the Madhuranagar overpass, less than a kilometre from the location where he had entered the canal.

The body was transported to a government hospital for a postmortem examination. The news of Rao's death has deeply affected his family. His sons and relatives were overwhelmed with grief upon identifying the body.

AP Cabinet meet tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu will preside over a Cabinet meeting on July 25 at the Secretariat in Velagapudi. The announcement was made in a circular issued by Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad. The meeting comes as the AP Assembly Session continues through July 26, and it is expected to address several key issues.

Chief Secretary Prasad has requested that all Special Secretaries, Principal Secretaries, and Secretaries of Government departments submit their proposals in the prescribed format. Each proposal should be accompanied by 40 copies and sent to the General Administration (Cabinet.I) Department by 5:00 PM on July 24, 2024, under the guidelines outlined in the Cabinet Handbook and previous instructions.

Nidhi Meena takes charge as NTR District JC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Nidhi Meena took charge as the Joint Collector of NTR district at the camp office in Vijayawada on Tuesday. District Revenue Officer (DRO) V Srinivasa Rao, Sub Collector Bh Bhavani Sankar, Civil Supplies District

Manager G Venkateswari, DSO G Mohan Babu, Collectorate AO Ch Naga Lakshmi and others welcomed her. Later, she declared her dedication to striving for the development of the district under the guidance of District Collector Dr. G Srijana. She considered her appointment

as Joint Collector of NTR district as significant compared to other districts, emphasising its pivotal role. She highlighted her commitment to collaborating closely with district officials to enhance the implementation of development and welfare schemes effectively.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Optimistic outlook

The Economic Survey for 2023-24 emphasises the urgency of addressing inequality and unemployment

The Economic Survey for 2023-24 released on the eve of the Union Budget is optimistic about the Indian story of growth and development; however, it also indicates the areas of concern on which it suggests the Central Government to act on priority. It is customary to have the Economic Survey just before the budget as it sets the tone of the budget and puts things in perspective. This year round it is buoyant on growth and pegs India's GDP growth at 6.5-7.0% in this fiscal year. The Economic Survey, a comprehensive report that reviews the developments in the Indian economy over the past year, forecasts robust growth in various sectors. This optimism is grounded in several factors, including strong domestic consumption, increased investments, and favourable government policies. Interestingly this is despite the fact that most economies around the world are struggling to attain much lower levels of GDP. The survey underscores the Government's focus on infrastructure as a critical driver of growth. Ongoing projects in road, rail, and port development are expected to boost connectivity and efficiency, facilitating smoother trade and commerce. Besides, the rapid expansion of the digital economy is another significant area of growth. Though open to criticism, the Survey maintains that the 'Make in India' initiative continues to show promising results.



The survey notes that boosting exports, particularly in high-growth industries such as pharmaceutical, electronics, and textiles, could significantly enhance India's global economic standing. The Survey also talks about the problem area of the Indian economy. Agriculture, the backbone of the Indian economy, remains a priority.

The survey recommends further reforms to increase productivity and ensure sustainable growth in this sector. Innovations in technology and better access to markets are crucial to achieving these goals. The Economic Survey rightly numerates various factors which could pull down the economy and be an impediment in the national growth. The biggest stumbling block is of course inflation. The survey suggests a balanced approach to monetary policy to manage inflation without stifling growth. Unemployment yet another constraint needs to be addressed on priority. The survey calls for policies that support skill development and entrepreneurship to harness the potential of the burgeoning young population. PM Modi reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to growth. Indeed, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget for 2024-25 incorporates several suggestions made by the Economic Survey. Setting a roadmap for the third term of Modi Government, Union Finance Minister has defined nine priorities. These are agriculture, employment, human development, energy security, manufacturing, innovation, infrastructure and next generation reforms. These would indeed go a long way in reducing unemployment, curbing inflation and giving economy a push that would be inclusive and sustainable.

PICTALK



Hindu devotees offer prayers during the holy month of Shrawan at the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu

To mitigate heatwave effects we must prioritise innovations in RE

This climatic extremity underscores the urgent need for innovative solutions in the renewable energy sector

India is no stranger to scorching summers. Recently, the country has endured its longest and most intense heatwave in recorded history, with temperatures in some areas soaring to a blistering 50 degrees Celsius. Heatwaves in India typically occur between March and June, with May being the peak month. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) defines a heatwave as a period where temperatures exceed 40°C in plains, 37°C in coastal areas, and 30°C in hills, with significant deviations from average temperatures. When this deviation reaches 6.5°C or more, it is classified as a "severe heatwave." The public health implications of such extreme temperatures are severe. Heatstroke, dehydration, and heat exhaustion become common, exacerbating pre-existing conditions like heart disease and respiratory issues. Vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and outdoor workers, are particularly at risk. The heatwaves also impact wildlife, causing water scarcity, disrupted food chains, and habitat loss. Livestock suffers from



heat stress, affecting milk production and overall health. Global warming has raised average temperatures, creating conditions ripe for extreme weather events. Heatwaves, in turn, drive up electricity demand, straining power grids to their limits. A 2022 report from the World Meteorological Organization underscored the vicious cycle: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel-based electricity production contribute to heatwaves, which increase power demand, further straining fossil fuel resources and exacerbating the climate crisis. This highlights the urgent need for large-scale renewable energy adoption. India has ambitious renewable energy goals, aiming for 500 GW of capacity by 2030. However, the very heatwaves that renewable energy seeks

to combat pose challenges, particularly for the solar energy sector. Solar panels, primarily using photovoltaic technology, are designed for optimal efficiency between 15 and 35 degrees Celsius. As temperatures rise, their efficiency drops, with prolonged exposure to high temperatures potentially reducing efficiency by 10-25%. This is because increased thermal agitation disrupts electron flow within the circuits, decreasing voltage output. To address this challenge, several solutions are being explored. Monocrystalline panels, known for their superior performance under stress, could be a viable alternative for heatwave-prone areas, despite their higher cost. Advances in technology like TOPCon (Tunnel Oxide Passivated Contact) are also promising, enhancing the efficiency and performance of solar components in harsh environments. Additionally, incorporating advanced cooling systems, such as ventilation within panels, can manage excess heat. Using heat-resistant materials in solar panel construction could also help

withstand high temperatures with minimal efficiency loss. The intense heatwaves in India underscore the urgency of climate action. The renewable energy sector must innovate continuously to develop efficient and affordable solar panels capable of withstanding India's diverse weather patterns, from extreme heatwaves to heavy monsoons. Local geographical factors must be considered in design and deployment strategies. The country's renewable energy sector must rise to the challenge by fostering resilient technologies that can withstand extreme weather events like heatwaves. This journey demands a multi-pronged approach to accelerate the development of heat-resistant solar technologies. Promoting public-private partnerships can facilitate the large-scale deployment of these advancements, making them more accessible and affordable. Only then can India ensure a cleaner, greener legacy for future generations. (The writer is the Chairman of Hindustan Power Group; views are personal)



RATUL PURII

India backs Philippines in South China Sea standoff



ASHOK K MEHTA

As China continues its aggressive tactics, the Philippines, bolstered by international alliances, stands resilient against Beijing's coercion

My enemy's enemy is my friend is a fitting adage for India's support to the Philippines which is fighting a battle royale in the South China Sea with China. Chinese Coast Guards have been regularly intruding into the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (PEEZ) which they regard as part of the South China Sea under its default claim of 10 dash line that was rejected by an arbitration court at Hague under UNCLOS in 2016. Bash on regardless is PLA's dictum in coercing the Filipinos as they to us along LAC. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Manila in May and expressed full support for the Philippines in its claims in PEEZ.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson after the 17 June clash said "We oppose destabilizing unilateral action to change status quo by force or coercion". Earlier in 2022 India made its first international sale of the Brahmos anti-ship missile system to the Philippines. I was in Manila last month, days after the 17 June incident comparable to our own Galwan clash on 15 June 2020. It was evident that the Chinese were bullying Filipinos in their waters. The 17 June incident has been flogged with Chinese but mainly Filipino accounts. In brief, Chinese Coast Guards are trying to force out Filipino Coast Guards from their outpost on Thomas Shoal 2 which they preemptively occupied in 1999 denying a free run to China in seizing unoccupied islands in PEEZ.

Like pirates, the Chinese Coast Guard are even poaching in EEZ of Asian countries. Chinese have unilaterally promulgated la in the South China Sea laws that allow them to seize for 60 days without trial, foreign vessels and even fire at them -which they have not done - if necessary. Chinese Coast Guard is employing lethal weapons short of firearms like picks, axes, spears and rods to inflict casualties with medieval warfare equipment that the PLA used to surprise Indian troops in Galwan. Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and Indonesia have quietly accepted Chinese bullying while the Philippines



backed by the US is pushing back. All these countries are hugely reliant on China for trade and BRI benefits. The Philippines like Taiwan is resisting Chinese coercion while balancing its economic relations with Beijing. Between 2000 and 2020 China committed a total of USD9.1 bn in financial support to the Philippines.

In Manila, after the violent incident near Thomas Shoal Chinese Coast Guard intercepted the Philippines Coast Guard that was trying to resupply its small island garrison. Seven Filipino sailors were wounded in the clash and one lost a thumb. Seven rifles were also impounded and have not been returned. President Bong Bong Ferdinand Marcos Jr who had recently warned China at Shangri-la Dialogue of 'consequences' and vowed not to yield 'even an inch or a millimeter' has been blowing hot and cold as have his ministers also.

The Philippines has a Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951 with the US whose conditions are more specific and binding than the US-Taiwan Act. Still, no one wants to invoke the Treaty over the 'territorial integrity of a Shoal'. American Ambassador to the Philippines Mary Carlsson said in Manila on 24 June that China should settle disputes by international law and "not bully our partners in their backyard". The US is wary of opening another



IN MANILA, AFTER THE VIOLENT INCIDENT NEAR THOMAS SHOAL CHINESE COAST GUARD INTERCEPTED THE PHILIPPINES COAST GUARD THAT WAS TRYING TO RESUPPLY ITS SMALL ISLAND GARRISON

front after Ukraine, Gaza and the Red Sea, even as the risk of accidental escalation or misunderstanding is high in the Taiwan Straits. The US plans to revive and modernize Subic Bay and adjoining Clarks Airbase and is deploying the deadly Typhon missile system at some of their ten bases in the Philippines.

The Indian Brahmos missiles are located in Luzon facing the South China Sea and can reach out to Chinese-occupied Mischief Reef, Thomas Shoal 2 and Scarborough Shoal. It is believed that some 3 to 400,000 Americans reside in the Philippines and US-Philippines relations under Marcos Jr are back to its heyday. The Philippines is actively collaborating with QUAD-US, India and Australia. Japan and the Philippines signed a defence agreement this month that will allow the deployment of troops on each other's territory with Tokyo pledging to provide additional defence aid. Similarly, Manila and Seoul are coordinating maritime coordination and joint exercises.

South Korean shipyards are likely to receive orders to build Coast Guard vessels for the Philippines. Canada and even the European Union are coordinating maritime activities in PEEZ. None of the Philippines' brave calls for standing its ground in the South China Sea and pledges of support from its friends and allies has deterred China in its show of force.

It fielded its aircraft carrier Shandong and the world's largest Coast Guard vessel 5901 in PEEZ while at the same time, it held talks with Filipino officials on de-escalation measures this month. The code of conduct in the South China Sea under preparation for over two decades is expected to be finalized in 2026.

However, the most recent agreement is about establishing hotlines at various levels for stopping maritime incidents. From the US and Indian perspective, the Chinese claimed preeminence in the South China Sea has to be contested by QUAD, AUKUS, the new trilateral between Japan, the Philippines and South Korea. Further resistance to the reunification of Taiwan must continue and Taiwan Straits remain free for navigation and overflights.

As China's economy declines, and Asian economies grow through new supply chains and the realization of India's East Asia policy, Western collective deterrence will dampen Chinese bravado in the South China Sea. The Philippines will be the immediate natural southern pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THAT GOOD MORNING THUD

Madam — Day after day, month after month and year after year, I have waited, and have been rewarded with, the familiar thud of a bundle of newspapers at my doorstep. Two newspapers rolled into a cylindrical bundle, a Hindi one for my significant other, and an English one for myself, have made their presence felt at a fixed time, and at a designated landing spot — a coir doormat placed just outside of our front door. Kudos to our "paperwallah bhaiya" whose throw never misses the mat. And what's more, the bundle always aligns itself in the North-South direction, even after a seemingly careless throw. The soft thud is much like the firing of a starter pistol before a sprint, albeit much less noisy. The familiar thud signals that yet another day has begun, and we have no time to fritter away. What remains now is to pour the hot coffee into our waiting tumblers, put on our specs and try to take the world in our stride.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

MAMATA'S GOODWILL GESTURE

Madam — This is in response to the news report titled "Opposition curses NDA Sarkar" (July 22). A state government might not have any locus standi to offer shelter to foreign citizens within its border, but West Bengal Chief minister Mamata Banerjee must be appreciated for displaying such warmth for the innocent Bangladeshis running away from internal unrest. After all humanity must reign supreme over petty artificial international borders. So instead of maligning Banerjee with all sorts of ridiculous accusations possible, BJP leaders must ask it's own government in New Delhi to act as gallant-hearted as Indira Gandhi (during the 1971 turmoil prior to formation of Bangladesh) and allow refuge to the escaping Bangladeshis in the neighboring Indian states including West Bengal. Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Joe Bide backs Kamala Harris



US President Joe Biden has endorsed Vice-President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, marking the end of his re-election bid. Kamala Harris pledged to do everything in her power to unite the nation. If nominated, Kamala Harris would be the second woman, following Hillary Clinton, to run for the U.S. presidency. If successful, she would make history as the first female president of the United States. Despite being the world's oldest modern

democracy, America has not yet elected a woman as president in its 236 years of electoral history. In contrast, India, a much younger democracy, elected Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister in 1966. Women face numerous hurdles in politics, including time poverty, lack of campaign funding, and fewer opportunities for political training and mentorship. Social media also facilitates personal attacks that disproportionately target women, potentially driving them out of politics, according to Silveria E. Jacobs, former Prime Minister of Sint Maarten.

If Kamala Harris breaks the American glass ceiling, it could inspire women worldwide to pursue politics and promote female leadership. Her achievement would symbolize progress and motivate more women to seek political office, enhancing gender diversity and representation in global political leadership.

Srinivas Madhav | Hyderabad

BANGLADESH BLUES

Madam — Apropos, "Trouble in Bangladesh," Jul 22. The tragic death of about 100 people in violence triggered by the students' protest demanding a roll-back of 30 percent job reservation for relatives of veterans who fought in the 1971 war in Bangladesh, has shown the Sheikh Hasina government in poor light. The quota provision has been under fire as it apparently benefits the supporters of PM Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement.

She had defended it on the grounds that veterans deserved the highest respect for their contribution to the liberation, regardless of their political affiliation. However, the PM cannot afford to ignore the present realities. A merit-based system for jobs will help Bangladesh sustain its impressive economic march. Hopefully, the government will implement the apex court's order in letter and spirit. And there is also a lesson here for India, where unemployment is a major issue and sev-

eral states have witnessed an uproar over quotas. Prioritising political considerations over ensuring a level playing field for recruitments is fraught with grave consequences.

The tragic deaths resulting from the students' protest against job reservations have cast a shadow over the Sheikh Hasina government. While the PM defends the quota for veterans, a merit-based system is essential for Bangladesh's economic progress.

The government must heed the apex court's order to ensure fairness. This situation also serves as a cautionary tale for India, where prioritising political considerations in job quotas could have serious repercussions. Now the apex court of Bangladesh has toned down the quotas it is likely that Bangladesh will once again have peace and chart on its path to progress. It will also be good for India-Bangladesh relations.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING THE POWER OF OPTIMISM

In the high-pressure maze of the corporate world, optimism emerges as a powerful antidote to stress



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

The corporate world is a maze of challenges, deadlines, and pressures that often leave an employee drained and disheartened. However, amidst this complex and mostly daunting environment, there lies a strong antidote: optimism. That very saying, "The whole world runs on hope," has within itself a very deep message that can turn around professional life and make it work wonders. Optimism, not pessimism, is not some feel-good philosophy but a very practical way to build resilience, increase productivity, and foster a more positive workplace culture. Long-term optimism is the positivity of thinking towards the occurrence of good things and ultimately positive results from our efforts. This mindset should be at the core of every working principle in a corporate setting. Projects may fail, market conditions may go for a toss, or other obstacles might impede; it is then that the optimist who views these obstacles not as insurmountable barriers but as opportunities for growth and learning.

Consider its effect on workplace morale. The optimistic frame of mind can make a lot of difference in the general feel of an office. If leaders or team members have bright, twinkling eyes and a positive outlook, this no doubt will breed others to emulate and follow in their footsteps, creating an upward spiral of sentiments. This sort of collective optimism yields openness to collaboration, increasing innovation, and a willingness to take calculated risks. A team that believes in the possibility of success is going to realize it far more than one that is bogged down in doubt and negativity. Optimism allows for an increase in resiliency. When faced with setbacks, an optimistic person is more likely to try again and views these failures as being transitory, or conquerable.

This elasticity can prove particularly useful in business circles where preservations are often what distinguish between giving up and breaking through to success. In its instance, the optimistic approach will make individuals keep themselves motivated and move consistently toward their goals, even when the odds are not favourable. Even so, optimism needs to strike a correct and delicate balance with realism. Blind optimism that is not based on the real situation brings over-optimistic expect-



tations with a sense of subsequent disappointment. The key here is to adopt realistic optimism: know the challenges, and uncertainties, but emphasise solving the problems and cultivating the outcomes. This balanced approach will keep one hopeful without losing sight of practical considerations.

One of the ignored facts about optimism is its relationship with the capability of stress management. The corporate world itself is a very stressful environment with great stakes and constant demands. Optimism hence acts as a defence mechanism against this stress and thus helps them cope better under pressure. Optimistic employees must, therefore, be more likely to resort to proactive coping strategies like problem-solving and seeking support than become prey to anxiety and despair.

This kind of camaraderie enhances job satisfaction, reducing turnover rates and generally creating a stable and harmonious work environment. Inculcating optimism in professional life does not mean one gets oblivious to challenges and uncertainties in a business environment. Instead, it is a manner of relating to them with hope and activity. Without attachment to the outcomes, giving it our best creates the opportunity for a whole lot of possibilities to start unwrapping. Life itself, much like work, is unpredictable. Embracing that uncertainty optimistically makes us able to move through the corporate landscape resiliently, creatively, and in high spirits. Optimists by choice can build a workplace that is productive, enriching, and supportive. This means that optimism is not merely a personal virtue; rather, it is a business asset with its key to professional success and better careers.

(The writer is a motivator; views are personal)

Income tax amendment promises relief for MSMEs



UTTAM GUPTA

The biggest problem faced by small enterprises is delayed payment of their dues by large enterprises as it results in a shortage of working capital severely impacting their production



An amendment to the Income Tax Act, introduced through Finance Act 2023, and effective from April 1, 2024 stops businesses from claiming tax deductions for payments beyond 45 days to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) for supply of goods and services has caused much consternation. The MSMEs are ancillary units engaged in the production, manufacturing and processing of goods and commodities (mostly intermediate goods) which are supplied to large enterprises or master units. These units operate on a small scale and are further categorized into micro, small and medium enterprises depending on the 'investment' and 'turnover' threshold as defined under the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006.

A micro-enterprise is one where investment in the plant and machinery or equipment doesn't exceed Rs 10 million and turnover doesn't exceed Rs 50 million. A small enterprise is an entity where investment in the plant and machinery is less than 100 million and turnover doesn't exceed Rs 500 million. For a medium enterprise, the thresholds are set at Rs 200 million for investment in the plant and machinery or equipment and Rs 1000 million for turnover. According to the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, the share of MSME Gross Value Added (GVA) in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is around 30 per cent. The share of MSME manufacturing output in all India Manufacturing output is even higher at around 36 per cent.

The share of export of MSME-specified products in all India exports has oscillated between 44 - 50 per cent during the last couple of years, according to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIIS). As for employment, according to a report released by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), MSMEs in India contribute 62 per cent to the total. Looking at the omnibus 'informal' sector - apart from MSMEs, it also includes proprietary household and partnership establishments - its contribution to employment is even higher at more than 75 per cent whereas in GDP its share is almost 50 per cent. The MSMEs thus play a predominant-

ing role in shaping the prospects of the economy more so in promoting 'inclusive' development with particular emphasis on increasing employment and income and reducing income inequalities.

Yet, they have borne the brunt of far-reaching economic decisions implemented by the Modi - Government during its first two terms such as demonetization (2016) and introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), 2017 also the devastating impact of the Corona - pandemic (2020). The government has taken several mitigation steps including a Rs 500,000 crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for businesses/MSMEs; equity infusion of Rs 50,000 crore through MSME Self-Reliant India Fund; no global tenders for procurement up to Rs. 200 crores (it bolsters their chances of securing government contract); relaxing threshold for classification of MSMEs; extension of non-tax benefits for 3 years in case of an upward change in status of MSMEs; inclusion of retail and wholesale trades as MSMEs; launch of Udyam Assist Platform (UAP) to bring the Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) under the formal ambit for availing the benefit under Priority Sector Lending (PSL); launch of an online Portal "Champions" to cover various aspects of e-governance including grievance redress and handholding of MSMEs and so on.

Even as all these initiatives seek to address issues of credit availability, technology infusion, market support etc, a problem haunting small enterprises has to do with delayed payment of their dues by large enterprises. When they don't receive payment for the goods supplied by them, it results in a shortage of working capital severely impacting their ability to continue with production. To address this problem, Section 15 of the MSMEs Development Act 2006, had mandated payments to micro

and small enterprises within 45 days in case of written agreement (in case, there was no written agreement, the time limit was set at 15 days). In 2019, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs came up with the Specified Companies (Furnishing of information about payment to micro and small enterprise suppliers) Order that required large firms to file returns every six months even if there is no outstanding to MSME beyond 45 days.

Yet, the problem persisted forcing numerous firms to down shutters. This prompted the Union Government to look for a solution under the IT Act (1961). The Finance Act 2023, inserted Section 43B(h) in the IT Act (1961), which prescribes that if a larger company doesn't make payments to micro and small enterprises within 45 days in case of written agreements, it cannot deduct that expense while calculating the taxable income of the relevant financial year. How does it impact the large enterprises? To arrive at the profits during a financial year (FY) and hence the income on which tax is levied (known in IT parlance as 'taxable income'), a company deducts all expenses incurred on running the business from the total revenue it earns. The payments made by it for the purchase of goods from the MSMEs are an important item of expense; therefore it is deductible from the revenue.

If, it doesn't pay the small firm say Rs 5 lakh within the prescribed 45 days, Section 43B(h) will kick in and the large firm won't be allowed to deduct this amount in that FY thereby increasing its taxable income to that extent. So, it will end up paying more tax during that FY. Taking an effective corporate tax of 34.9 per cent (basic corporate tax of 30 per cent plus 12 per cent surcharge plus 4 per cent Health & Education Cess), the extra tax works out to Rs 174,500/-. This will

be a deterrent strong enough to dissuade large enterprises from holding back payments to MSMEs. It is not as if this extra tax ends up impacting the company's balance sheet forever. This additional tax paid (albeit due to delays in making payments to MSMEs) can be adjusted the following year when the company pays the supplier. The Section thus strikes a good balance between the interests of all stakeholders. Even while creating a strong incentive for large enterprises to prioritize payments to the MSMEs thereby bolstering the latter's financial health and growth, it doesn't unduly penalize the former. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has also relaxed the reporting requirements under its 2019 Order. A notification issued on July 15, 2024, requires that "only those specified companies which are having payments pending to any micro or small enterprises for more than 45 days from the date of acceptance or the date of deemed acceptance of the goods or services under section 9 of the MSMEs Development Act, 2006 shall furnish the information". Earlier, they were required to furnish even if there was no outstanding to MSME beyond 45 days. Yet, industries and businesses have asked Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to defer the implementation of the clause in the IT Act by a year to April 2025.

At the same time, we see reports of large enterprises arm-twisting small firms by deciding not to buy from MSMEs; instead deal with those MSMEs that are not registered with the Udyam portal (It's an online system for registering MSMEs, launched by the Union MSME ministry) or from non-MSMEs. This must be avoided. Section 43B(h) of the IT Act should be given a fair chance to succeed.

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



A MICRO-ENTERPRISE IS ONE WHERE INVESTMENT IN THE PLANT AND MACHINERY OR EQUIPMENT DOESN'T EXCEED RS 10 MILLION AND TURNOVER DOESN'T EXCEED RS 50 MILLION

India introduces three new criminal laws: A shift from colonial past

While some legal bodies have criticised the new laws, other see these laws as a transformative step towards a modern justice system

At the onset, with the introduction of three new criminal laws, launched on July 1st, some of the legal bodies and other civil organisations opposed the move stating it to have been introduced without 'much discussion' in the Parliament. Whereas, some of legal experts consider it to be a 'New Avatar' that will enable the country to have a paradigm shift from favoured colonial laws to a contemporary India. The laws; of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) have replaced the almost 150 years ago laws of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPc) and the Indian



MANOJ VARGHESE

Evidence Act (IEA), formulated during the British regime. The new laws will bring in a modern justice system, incorporating provisions such as Zero FIR, online registration of police complaints, summonses through electronic modes such as SMS and mandatory videography of crime scenes for all heinous crimes. With around 20 new offences added, 40 offences amended, 83 new fines imposed and six community services introduced, the

new laws are all set to deliver speedy justice in the public interest.

The new laws are framed on the lines of 'citizen first, honour first and justice first'. The general impression is that the police will now need to work with 'data' instead of 'danda' (baton). Universally, introducing and executing a change in any system is a challenging task. Above all, a change in the legal system is a complex mechanism for adaptation. "Change is inevitable, and progressive laws are good for any nation", says Prof Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, of Indraprastha University.

The police need to understand that they cannot refuse to register an FIR based on lack of jurisdiction or disputed

jurisdiction. It is tough for them to bring it into practice as the number of cases filed in their jurisdiction will bring in a bad repute for their respective Police station.

They are now legally bound to register (Zero FIR) and transfer such a case to the respective police station. Section 37 of the BNSS requires a police officer in every police station, not below the rank of Assistant Sub-inspector, to be responsible for maintaining and prominently displaying information about the arrested persons. Justice M L Mehta, Former Judge of Delhi High Court says, "Law is a set of norms emulated by state for the welfare of the people. Law is the efficacious remedy for legal system. Delays are unavoidable mechanism in the legal system.



With only 20% cases reaching the court, over five crore cases are pending. It is a herculean task and will take over 300 years to dispose of these pending cases."

As per the BNSS, the new laws prioritise the investigations of crimes against women and children, ensuring timely completion within two months of recording information

(Section 193). Summons can now be served electronically (Sections 64, 70, 71). Courts grant a maximum of two adjournments to avoid unnecessary delays in case hearings (Section 346).

The new laws mandate all state governments to implement the Witness Protection Scheme (Section 398). A new chapter has been added to the BNS specifically to address offences against women and children (Chapter V) and the introduction of community service for minor offences (Sections 4, 202, 209, 226, 303, 355, 356). For its effective implementation, and creating awareness among all stakeholders including police, prisons, prosecutors, judicial, forensic personnel as well as the general public, the

Government has organised several rounds of orientation and training programs. The awareness is happening at different levels to understand the legal system better concerning the newly introduced three criminal laws. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has made 23 functional modifications to the existing CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems) application to facilitate technology compatibility with new criminal laws, including the filing of an FIR. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed 13 training modules for capacity building of police, prisons, prosecutors, judicial officers, forensic experts and central police organisations.

The Bar Council of India has made it mandatory to include the three new criminal laws in the curriculum of universities and legal education centres from the academic year 2024-25. Justice Talwant Singh, Former Judge of Delhi High Court is all praise for the role of academicians in drafting the new laws. He suggests that in the days to come the country will require an ample number of forensic experts. In contrast, the more new laws are unfolded; the more is the possibility of its lacunae being exposed. Is growing incidents of crime good for police and lawyers, is a million-dollar question!

(The writer is former editor with Free Press Journal and Media Advisor to Delhi Govt. Presently Media Advisor to GGSIU; views are personal)



Gold prices crash by Rs 3,350 after govt cuts custom duty on bullion



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices tumbled by Rs 3,350 to Rs 72,300 per 10 grams in the local market here on Tuesday amid subdued demand by jewellers after the government announced the customs duty cut on the yellow metal and silver to 6 per cent.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, silver prices also nosedived by Rs 3,500 or 4 per cent to Rs 87,500 per kg. In the previous session, it had closed at Rs 91,000 per kg.

The precious metal rates dropped by Rs 3,350 or 4.6 per cent to Rs 72,300 per 10 grams. On Monday, the precious metal rates had closed at Rs 75,650 per 10 grams.

In addition, gold of 99.5 per cent purity plummeted by Rs 3,350 to Rs 71,950 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 75,300 per 10 grams in the previous session.



Money 08

VIJAYAWADA | WEDNESDAY | JULY 24, 2024

Govt to rope in private sector to boost nuclear power: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday proposed roping in the private sector to boost the share of nuclear power in India's energy basket, as it aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2070.

Presenting the Union Budget, Sitharaman announced that the government will partner with the private sector to set up Bharat Small Reactors and in the research and development of small modular reactors.

Sitharaman said the government will also partner with the private sector for research and development of newer technologies for nuclear energy.

She said the Rs 1 trillion research and development funding, announced in the interim budget in



February, will be made available for the nuclear sector.

"Nuclear energy is expected to form a very significant part of the energy mix for a Viksit Bharat," the finance minister said.

In the interim budget presented on February 1, Sitharaman had announced a Rs 1 trillion corpus, with the provision of a 50-year inter-

est-free loan, to help finance research in technology.

"The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates. This will encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains," Sitharaman had said in February.

Budget proposes steps to reduce litigation, 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme 2.0 in offing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To reduce litigation, the Budget on Tuesday proposed to come out with 'Vivad Se Vishwas' scheme 2.0, cut down the time limit for initiation of re-assessment proceedings and hiked the threshold for filing of appeals by taxmen before legal fora.

As per the Budget announcement, the I-T assessment can be reopened beyond three years from the end of the assessment year only if the escaped income is Rs 50 lakh or more, up to a maximum period of five years from the end of the assessment year.

Even in search cases, a time limit of six years before the year of search, as against the existing time limit of 10 years, is proposed in the Budget.

"This will reduce tax uncertainty and disputes," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget 2024-25 speech.



Nangia Andersen LLP Executive Director Yogesh Kale said the reassessment regime under the Income Tax Act, 1961 was overhauled in 2021 by bringing in radical changes compared to the erstwhile reassessment regime.

"This opened the floodgates of litigation at various levels up to the Supreme Court. One of the changes made was the ability of the tax officer to initiate reassessment up to 10 years if income suspected to have escaped is more than Rs 50 lakh," Kale said.

The FY25 has proposed to amend the relevant provisions to provide that a tax officer cannot initiate reassessment beyond 5 years in any case. This amendment will help in substantially curbing the period of uncertainty for the taxpayers, he said.

'Govt has ears close to ground': Economists praise focus on jobs, inflation in Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The focus of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget on employment generation, inflation management, and fiscal prudence augur well for the economy, eminent economists said on Tuesday.

Commenting on the the Budget 2024-25, former NITI Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar said it was good to see that the government has given the first priority to employment and skill development.

"Shows the government has its ears close to ground and is not being led by spurious claims on massive job generation as done by some economists," Kumar said. He also welcomed the

finance minister's proposal to reduce customs duty on gold imports to 6 per cent, saying this will reduce smuggling and lower prices.

Commenting on the finance



minister's proposal to raise the long-term capital gains tax to 12.5 per cent from 10 per cent, Kumar said it is not clear if this rate will apply uniformly for both financial and non-financial assets.

"This will perhaps dampen the flow of household saving to financial instruments," he said.

Commenting on the Budget, NIPFP distinguished professor Pinaki Chakraborty told PTI that a stable path of fiscal prudence needs to continue to reduce the Union government's debt and deficit to a level consistent with the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

"A comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act 1961 has been announced in the Budget. "Since modern-day tax system is driven by simplicity and an easy to administer tax system, this review of the Income Tax Act is a significant announcement," Chakraborty said.

DISINVESTMENT, ASSET MONETISATION

Govt estimates Rs 50,000 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has estimated to collect Rs 50,000 crore from disinvestment and asset monetisation in the current fiscal, DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said on Tuesday.

Besides, the government estimates a total of Rs 56,260 crore dividend from CPSEs (central public sector enterprises), more than Rs 48,000 crore estimated in the interim budget.

The budget also estimates that dividend from RBI, banks and



financial institutions would be Rs 2,32,874 crore in FY25, more than double of interim budget estimate of Rs 1.02 lakh crore.

Govt withdraws equalisation levy of 2%: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday announced withdrawal of the 2% equalisation levy or digital tax on overseas e-commerce supplies. It is proposed that Equalisation Levy at the rate of 2% of consideration received for e-commerce supply of goods or services, shall no longer be applicable on or after August 1, 2024. This has been done keeping in mind ongoing negotiations on Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 global tax framework, FM said.

Under the proposed two-pillar solution for taxation of MNCs -- Pillar One is about the reallocation of additional share of profit to the market jurisdictions and Pillar Two consists of minimum tax and subject to tax rule.

Govt to set up integrated tech platform to boost insolvency ecosystem, strengthen tribunals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

To improve the outcomes of the insolvency proceedings, the government will set up an integrated technology platform for the stakeholders as well as increase the number of benches at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

Presenting the 2024-25 Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said appropriate changes



will be brought in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

The Code, which came into force in 2016 and so far has been amended six times, provides for a market-linked and time-bound resolution of stressed assets.

"An Integrated Technology Platform will be set up for improving the outcomes under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) for achieving consistency, transparency, timely processing and better oversight for all stakeholders," Sitharaman said.

She said IBC has resolved more than 1,000 companies resulting into a direct recovery of Rs 3.3 lakh crore to the creditors. "In addition, 28,000 cases involving over Rs 10 lakh crore have been disposed of even prior to admission," the minister said.

'Budget to address skill gap, boost job creation for youth'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

HR and Ed-tech industry experts on Tuesday said budget proposals on skilling, internship and job creation will help address the need for a skilled workforce and boost employment generation for youth.

Experts termed the Budget for 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as forward-thinking which aligns with the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat'. Direct Benefit Transfer

(DBT) of up to Rs 15,000 is set to boost formal employment by making it more attractive for industries to hire new talent, they added. Sitharaman in the budget announced an outlay of Rs 2 lakh crore for several schemes targeting 4.1 crore youth. The minister announced a provision of Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education, employment and skilling programmes.

TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship Chief Strategy Officer Sumit Kumar said with targeted outreach to 4.1 crore

youth over five years, the initiative is poised to make a significant impact by seamlessly integrating education, skill development and employment.

"Up to Rs 15,000 in direct benefits will facilitate the transition of new entrants into the formal workforce, while additional incentives for job creation in the manufacturing sector and support for employers across various industries aim to promote widespread job creation and bolster economic activity.

Disappointed hospitality players say nothing specific for sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hospitality players on Tuesday expressed disappointment with the Budget for 2024-25 citing lack of policy announcements to facilitate the development of the sector.

They lamented that some

key demands to revitalise the tourism and hospitality sector such as granting of infrastructure status and bringing ease of doing business and policy reforms have not been considered in the Budget.

The Hotel Association of

India (HAI) President KB Kachru said the tourism and hospitality sector plays a crucial role in the growth of the Indian economy.

The continued focus on government spending on infrastructure development augurs well for the sector.

Will boost rural consumption, augment consumer purchasing power: FMCG

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget will help drive consumption, especially from rural areas, with its special focus on agricultural schemes and rural development, FMCG industry leaders said.

Terming the measures announced in the budget "positive", HUL CEO and MD Rohit Jawa said investment in infrastructure will have multi-year effect and help drive consumption.

"The new announcements today, increasing the investment rural

development, investment activities supporting urban poor, the schemes for youth, employment, especially skilling, are quite positive, especially for business like ours that serves consumers," said Jawa during an earning calls on Tuesday.

Abolition of angel tax significant milestone; will boost startup ecosystem: IT Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget announcement of the abolition of the



angel tax is a significant milestone that will boost the startup ecosystem in India, IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Tuesday.

It is a "very good decision" and has been the biggest demand of deep tech startups, Vaishnaw said, adding that the move will spur investment in startups.

"Angel tax has been a long-standing issue...deep tech startups had a major issue on how

do you do valuation... that point has been addressed with its abolition," he said at a post-budget conference. He minis-

ter said India has taken big strides in domestic manufacturing of mobiles, laptops and servers, and the focus now is to encourage component manufacturing.

The process of framing rules under the Data Protection Act (DPDP Act) is in the 'advanced stage', he said, adding that "we will place rules for public and stakeholder consultation soon".

Budget size almost unchanged from interim, shows govt's commitment to fiscal prudence: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The overall size of the budget has remained almost unchanged from the interim one presented in February, indicating the government's strong commitment to move along the fiscal prudence path, said experts on Tuesday.

According to the Union Budget 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the total expenditure in Budget Estimates (BE) 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 48,20,512 crore of which total capital expenditure is Rs 11,11,111 crore.

The total expenditure in the Interim Budget presented in February was estimated at Rs 47,65,768 crore of which total capital expenditure was Rs 11.11



lakh crore. Debadatta Chand, Managing Director & CEO, Bank of Baroda, said the Union Budget complements the main takeaways from the Economic Survey and focusses clearly on medium term development of the economy.

"The overall size of the budget has remained almost unchanged

from the interim one. The budget has shown strong intent on moving along the fiscal prudence path and targeted the fiscal deficit at 4.9 per cent for the year," he said.

The said action will keep the growth steady as well as robust not only for economy but also banking.

Govt to release financial sector vision, strategy document



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday said it will bring out a financial sector vision and strategy document for five years, with the objective to meet the financial needs of the country.

"For meeting financing needs of the economy, our government will bring out a financial sector vision and strategy document to prepare the sector in terms of size, capacity and skills," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said while unveiling Budget 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha.

This will set the agenda for the next 5 years and guide the work of the government, regulators, financial institutions and market participants, she added.

She also announced that the government will develop a taxonomy for climate finance to enhance the availability of capital for climate adaptation and mitigation.

GHUDCHADI TO STREAM FROM AUGUST 9

The makers of the eagerly awaited film *Ghudchadi* released a captivating poster on Tuesday, teasing two beautiful love stories set to unfold on August 9th on JioCinema Premium. With its warm brown tones, the poster exudes a rustic charm, inviting viewers into a world of romance and intrigue.

Starring Sanjay Dutt, Raveena Tandon, Khushali Kumar, Parth Samthaan and Aruna Irani, the film, directed by Binnoy K. Gandhi, promises an exhilarating blend of fun, romance and drama, making it a must-watch family entertainer! *GHUDCHADI* is produced by Nidhi Dutta and Binnoy K Gandhi.



GULSHAN DEVAIAH SAYS ULAJH IS JANHVI'S FILM!

Since its announcement, *Uljah*, which stars Janhvi Kapoor, Gulshan Devaiah and Roshan Mathew in the key parts, has generated a lot of attention. The recently released teaser gives moviegoers and fans an idea of what to expect. Demonstrating Kapoor's fearless and audacious persona, her co-star Devaiah concurs that the action genre is no longer exclusively dominated by men.

"It's Janhvi Kapoor's film and she is the 'front and center of the movie,' characterising her as the 'whole orchestra,' Gulshan Devaiah said in an interview, glancing at the film's poster. He said that *Uljah* disproves the idea that spy films are solely ruled by men because Kapoor plays the lead. Agreed, Devaiah noted that female celebrities are capable of showcasing the 'action genre is no longer male-dominated' and drawing crowds to theaters with their impressive acting. *Uljah* is an intriguing persona and presents a fantastic story, according to Gulshan. He compared seeing the movie like going to a beloved restaurant and getting the same food, but with a unique twist under well-known parameters. He said he was frequently taken aback by the way the movie progressed and that he had never looked better, crediting Sudhanshu's advice to grow a beard for his enhanced looks.



Unlock laughs and secrets with *Khel Khel Mein*

The highly anticipated film *Khel Khel Mein* has just unveiled its motion poster, teasing an exhilarating rollercoaster ride with a perfect blend of humour, intriguing conversations and more. This comedy-drama, releasing nationwide on August 15, 2024, features an ensemble cast including Akshay Kumar, Taapsee Pannu, Vaani Kapoor, Ammy Virk, Aditya Seal, Pragma Jaiswal and Fardeen Khan, promising a delightful mix of laugh-out-loud moments and heartwarming scenes that resonate deeply. Gulshan Kumar, T-Series and Wakaao Films present *Khel Khel Mein*. *Khel Khel Mein*, is directed by Mudassar Aziz and produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, Vipul D. Shah, Ashwin Varde, Rajesh Bahl, Shashikant Sinha and Ajay Rai.

Meanwhile, in a recent interview, Akshay reflected on his career, emphasising his passion for work and his resilience in the face of adversity. He describes how the story of *Sarjira* initially captivated him with its revolutionary vision and the relentless spirit of Captain Gopinath. He shared that overcoming limitations has been a significant challenge in his career. Coming from a modest background, he initially viewed Bollywood as a distant dream. Yet, his determination, hard work, and a bit of luck enabled him to break into the industry. His persistence and focus have been vital to his journey. The Khiladi actor acknowledges the pain of a film's failure but stresses the importance of learning from setbacks. He believes that each failure underscores the value of success and fuels his drive to do better. Instead of letting failure define him, Akshay uses it as a motivator, channelling his energy into his next project with renewed strength.



Camila Mendes, Madelyn Cline in talks for *I Know What You Did Last Summer* reboot

side the *Scream* franchise. The story follows a group of four friends bound by an accidental death during their holiday gone wrong. They reunite later and realise they are being stalked by a hook-wielding maniac who may or may not know their secret. The film became an instant hit on its release and a sequel was made the following year, titled *I Still Know What You Did Last Summer*. A TV series was also made on the story in 2021.

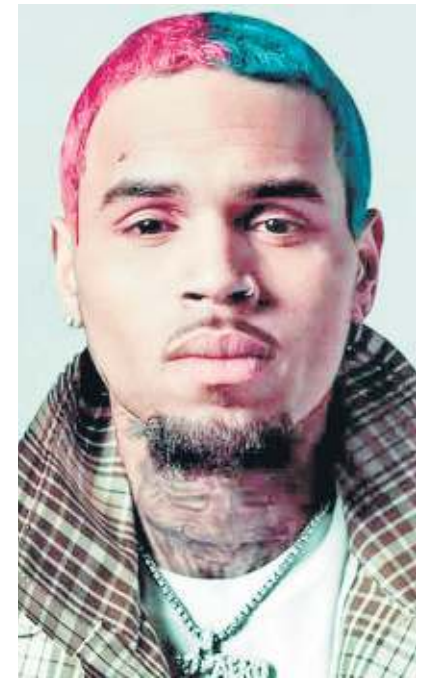
The upcoming remake is slated to release in theatres on July 18, 2025. Prinze Jr. and Hewitt, who starred in the original film, are also in talks to star in the movie.



Chris Brown sued for \$50 million over alleged backstage assault

Singer-songwriter Chris Brown has been slapped with legal action for his alleged misdemeanor. He has been sued for \$50 million in connection with an incident that took place backstage at one of his concerts, as per reports. Larry Parker, Joseph Lewis, Charles Bush and Da Marcus Powell filed the suit in Harris County, Texas, on Tuesday against Brown, as well as his tour promoters Live Nation, Sinko Ceej, Hood Boss and Yella Beazy.

In addition to the payment, the four plaintiffs are asking for a temporary restraining order against all defendants. According to the complaint, which was first reported by TMZ, Brown and his crew severely beat the plaintiffs following the singer's performance as part of his 11:11 Tour at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth, Texas. As per reports, the four men were invited backstage to meet Brown, who showed up 30 minutes later than anticipated. Before leaving, Bush approached Brown to congratulate him on the show, prompting a member of the



singer's entourage to remind Brown that the two previously had issues. Brown allegedly said, "Oh yeah, we were. What's up, n****? I don't forget sh*t."

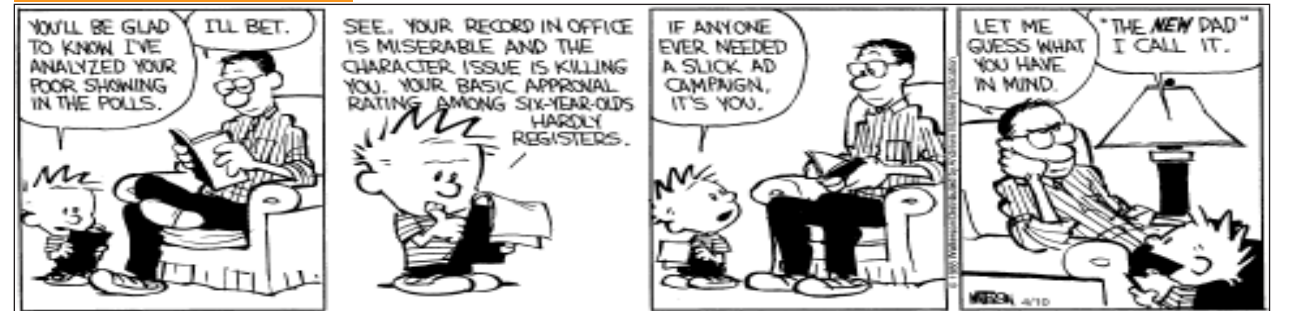
The suit states that Brown and seven to 10 members of his entourage proceeded to assault Bush and punch him in the chest and claims that Hood Boss picked up a chair and threw it at Bush's head.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



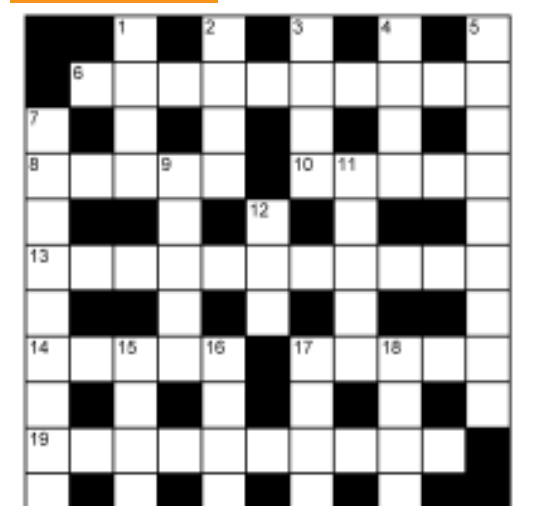
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



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Yesterday's solution

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

- Rules
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Not finished
- Chewed up and swallowed
- Tongans live in this country
- Someone who works with wires, lights, switches
- A name for a doll
- Have a quarrel
- These are published daily

DOWN

- To do something very well
- Happen
- Important rules
- The barks of a small dog
- Mountains
- A young woman



'I want to push myself, but not in an obvious way'

SHIKHA DUGGAL

Actress Nikita Dutta, who recently completed a Marathi film, is reaping several gains as she ventures into different cinema genres and acquires new knowledge. She told us in an exclusive interview that there are many more opportunities to advance in this field and that her efforts will ultimately have a lasting impact on her career.

"In *Gharat Ganpati*, my role has more to do with the movie and less to do with Kriti. To be honest, this movie belongs to my favourite genre. I have been dying to be a part of this variety! When I want to treat myself, I would like to see a movie of this type if I had the option," the lead actress sums up her delightful experience in her Marathi debut in this way.

Fans are thrilled for the actress' latest endeavour after seeing the highly anticipated movie's trailer. "I instantly said a 'yes' when reading the script," she exclaimed, expressing her excitement too. "For me, my role was introducing a relatable concept. Having to play a Maharashtrian girl fascinated me in so many ways at once. I knew very little about the strict Maharashtrian customs. Because Mumbai is such a global metropolis, I never really got to experience the heart of this state during my 23 years there. I'm sure a lot of readers will concur with me." Subsequently, the actress continues with the same phrase, stating, "This movie gave me a new perspective on Marathi, including its cuisine and culture. And let's not overlook the music and clothes! This new regional identity won my heart. I became accustomed to their eating habits, their speech patterns and my own habits whilst filming *Gharat Ganpati*."

Nikita, who is well-known for her impactful roles in Hindi movies such as *Gold*, *Kabir Singh* and *The Big Bull*, embarks on a new endeavour by joining the Marathi film industry. Isn't that interesting? She does, however, also remark, "I had never been involved in a regional movie. I had doubts! However, I didn't see much change in that regard. With my fourteen fellow actors, we made a stunning ensemble that didn't have any conflicts on the *Gharat Ganpati* sets. Due to the fact that the crew was Maharashtrian, there were moments when they would all start speaking Marathi and I would be left sitting there in complete confusion. Hehe!" However, following that, Nikita said to us, "I also began to notice the language. They began to include me in all of their attempts at conversation once they realised I was there. You perceive that as the beauty of a fresh set? To be completely honest, I just don't have chemistry with my leading man and when you

SINCE STARRING IN GHARAT GANPATI, NIKITA DUTTA HAS MADE HER SCREEN DEBUT IN MARATHI CINEMA. IN AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH THE PIONEER, SHE TALKS ABOUT LEARNING ABOUT THE RICH TRADITIONS OF MAHARASHTRIAN CULTURE

watch *Gharat Ganpati*, it's evident with all the other cast members as well."

Kabir Singh fame further says, "My film is extremely rich in showing the culture," while reminiscing about some of his happy moments spent on the *Gharat Ganpati* set. "For example, one thing Mumbai is well-known for is Ganesh Chavithi! It has been at this time that I have participated in several darshans. However, what's the deal? I learned from this movie that, up until it came out, my knowledge of this festival had been incredibly limited. I immersed myself in the 'mumbaiya' way of life. When it came to carrying out the rites, the director followed the text! I had the impression that I was celebrating all month long because we spent more than a month filming this movie. Because of *Gharat Ganpati*, I can now truly appreciate the significance of Ganesh Chaturthi."

Nikita recalls, adjusting to the part, "I was finding it difficult to respond to the sentences that were being uttered in Marathi. One of my main concerns while on the sets of *Gharat Ganpati* was seeing my fellow performers, who are adept at swiftly improvising on the scene. Sometimes they are known to stray from the plan. However, they used to give me hints, hehe. I had never worn a 'nauvari' saree, either. How difficult is it to wear that? Oh my goodness! It was exciting for me to know that I would be wearing it on screen, but I have to admit that shooting it was challenging." But her fondest memory was of, "My first marathi saree, which I wore, was an ancestral saree. Ages old and incredibly costly! To ensure I didn't dirty it, I constantly had a huge team standing on my head. Could you believe that the heritage saree was guarded? And not the main actress! Not to mention that the process of draping used to take over three hours. I used to have three people come help me drape the saree. I have been nagging my team to let me recreate that look again since I am so in love with it when I am doing my promotions."

Her character in *Gharat Ganpati* is Kriti Ahuja, a girl from North India who enjoys the colourful world of Maharashtrian traditions and sets out on a cultural odyssey. Nikita appears to be settling into the part with ease in the trailer, wearing a classic appearance that goes well with the touching story of the movie. As the interview was drawing to an end, the well-known actor from *Dybbuk* also said, "I haven't worked with any production houses, directors, or actors that I wouldn't want people to see any of my films with. I've prevailed there, then! Without coming across as corny, I want to push myself, but not in an obvious way. I signed up for a Marathi debut; why? There are two reasons: one, it's not my native tongue and second, I was meant to operate in an entirely different environment. Thus, why not? I don't always have to play out and audacious parts! It was difficult for me personally, but I'm glad I did it."



FURRY THERAPISTS

Surprising mental health benefits of pet ownership

Pets have consistently proven to be humans' best companions. A study by the University of Liverpool reveals, strong human-pet bonds, especially with dogs, provide emotional support that aids people suffering from mental health problems, including depression.

Post 2020 the pet industry is witnessing a growth at 22% per annum and aims to touch over 50% in 2026 in the post-pandemic era. In India, dogs and cats are cherished companions, rendering numerous invaluable benefits.

Reduction in stress and anxiety

Considering that 74% of Indians suffer from stress and 88% from anxiety, therapy pets are fast gaining traction. This is because physical interaction in the form of petting and playing raises levels of oxytocin, increasing feelings of relaxation. This has proven through various researches that a person owning a pet would have reduced levels of cortisol, a hormone causing stress and increased oxytocin, which promotes relaxation and reduces anxiety.

Having pets increases routine and responsibility, two aspects that are important in treating anxiety disorders. Pets provide companionship reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. Walking a dog or playing around with it ensures physical activity and stimulation of endorphins enhancing an individual's mental wellbeing.

Enhanced mood and happiness

Pets give out unconditional love and happiness to the owners. It has been proven that pet interaction stimulates the release of dopamine and the serotonin between the carriers of happiness and a good mood.

One research study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that pet owners tend to have greater self-esteem, are more physically fit and are less lonely than non-pet owners. Due to the playful demeanour of pets, it boosts self-esteem in households, bringing more joy and laughter.

Boost in self-esteem

Pet owners are comforted by pets' emotional petting and companionship amidst high demanding work schedules and economic pressures. They offer one valuable support: emotional petting and companionship. Unconditional love and acceptance can raise

one's self-esteem and self-worth enhancement.

It has been observed that most pet owners express that their pets make them feel needed and valued by them which can positively enhance the self-esteem of owners. Many pet owners reportedly convey that taking care of a pet makes them feel useful and satisfied, especially when some parts of life do not go well.

Enhanced emotional stability

Coming into the house with a friendly pet will do very much for emotional stability. Pets offer unrelenting comfort and support that can be used for the resilience of coping in chronic stress and adversity.

The Human-Animal Bond Research Initiative (HABRI) is research-backed, whereby it is validated that pet ownership is allied to decreased rates of conditions like depression and anxiety, precisely because the pets can be grounding and affectionate. This emotional stability is thus what forms the cushion between the rough environmental conditions and mental well-being; it makes it hard to push an individual off-center or make a total derailment of a given mental state.

Combat isolation

In the rapidly urbanising Indian scenario, loneliness has become a modern concern, exacerbated by the experience of the recent pandemic. Pet ownership has emerged as a strong tool for social connection and to weaken loneliness among people.

The Pets and People (PaPs) Program at Monash University seeks to explore more of the benefits through animal-assisted activities within aged care settings and community programs. It promotes interactions of a like-minded group of individuals with shared responsibilities for pets, bringing forth the issue of loneliness within the promoted social well-being of a heterogeneous society.

As we delve deeper into this age-old symbiotic relationship between humans and animals, it becomes more prevalent that pets improve the quality and well-being of our lives. The companionship that we receive from them is meaningful and gives us a real sense of purpose in our lives. The unconditional love and acceptance that animals give us provide a form of support that is available all too rarely amongst humans.

But what we must understand well is that we as pet owners have an equally important role to play of providing. Providing their pets with love, time & timely healthcare. Creatures of love also must maintain the best of mental health and we as pet owners are responsible for that. Engaging them in mind stimulating games, good nutrition based on vet-recommended food plans, vet-recommended grooming products, wellness activities, regular playtime and more are some of the elements we must keep in mind for our pets & let them have access to it.

We are everything they have, we must provide for all that can keep them happy, loved, healthy & free from anxieties.

The most beautiful bond must be celebrated each day & be therapeutic for us and them.

(The author, Dr. Vinod Sharma, is the Head Veterinarian at DCC Animal Hospital.)



AARTI SREENATH

In the picturesque town of Suri, West Bengal, where tradition and culture merge seamlessly, Chaitali Maji first discovered her artistic talent. Now a prominent artist based in Hyderabad, she has transformed her early inspirations into a celebrated career, showcasing her work in galleries across India and abroad. Growing up in a Bengali family, she was immersed in a vibrant cultural milieu. "I was exposed to dance, music, art and other cultural activities from a young age. Suri's proximity to Shantiniketan, known for its art and culture, was influential in shaping my artistic path," she recalls. Her prodigious talent was evident early on; at just four years old, her drawing assignment astonished her teacher. "I remember vividly that, at four, my class teacher gave me a drawing assignment. My drawing was exceptional for my age and she asked me to recreate it in front of her. When I did it flawlessly, she encouraged my parents to nurture my budding talent." Transitioning from her educational years at Suri and Burdwan University to family life in Hyderabad, she faced the challenge of balancing her artistic passion with new responsibilities. "When I became a mother, it brought me a lot of happiness but also some personal unhappiness. I found myself searching for something that was missing, despite my material happiness. It was my passion for painting that filled that void," she explains.

Chaitali's path to becoming a professional artist was not straightforward. Initially working as an art teacher, she was urged by her family and friends to showcase her art in prominent galleries. "I started as an art teacher and with encouragement from my well-wishers, family members and friends, I began to exhibit my art in renowned galleries. This support was crucial in my transition to becoming a professional artist," she says. Her work has been showcased in prestigious venues, including the IHC, AIFACS, Artizen Art Gallery in New Delhi, the State Art Gallery, the HAS and Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad, the ICCR and Academy of Fine Arts in Kolkata and Dom Artysty Plastyka in Poland. "My painting has traversed through innumerable shows in these prestigious galleries. I believe that painting is the most powerful visual communication tool, making a profound impact on the human mind," she asserts.

She prefers working with acrylic on canvas but also enjoys exploring various mediums. "I prefer to work with acrylic on canvas due to its versatility. I also love working with watercolors, pencil sketches, graphite and soft oil pastels. My work often focuses on nature, animals, birds, mythology, cultural heritage, social awareness, and womanhood," she shares. Her artistic repertoire spans both realistic and contemporary styles. "I started with realistic art, which I believe is essential for developing skills. My current project, *Inner Voice*, is focused on realistic art. I feel that

ART VIA DIVINE AURA



mastering realism is important before exploring contemporary forms. Realistic art helps in developing the necessary skills." One of her significant projects is the *Divine Aura* series, which presents deities in a modern light. "I liked mythology from my childhood. My parents used to tell me stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other epics. I wanted to present God and Goddess in a contemporary way, which is reflected in my *Divine Aura* series. It represents the superpower in my own way, making it easier to embrace and comprehend," she explains. Her *Inner Voice* series delves into societal biases and the complex experiences of women. "Through *Inner Voice*, I represent various societal biases and how they impact women's lives. Some works highlight the captivity or subjugation women experience, while others showcase their passion and determination. My art often depicts women as powerful and profound, like Mata Durga, showcasing their resilience and depth," she elaborates.

Her creative process is deeply intertwined with her personal experiences and emotions. "What we see, feel and think in our surroundings first comes to our mind, then I convert it into a painting on a canvas. My artworks are experiences through my life," she reveals. Despite the challenges of her artistic journey, Chaitali remains deeply motivated. "Painting is my passion and love. I never feel bored with it. Whatever challenges come my way, I take them positively and enjoy my work."

Reflecting on her long-term goals, she is committed to using her art to drive societal change. "I am sure that someday my artwork will bring awareness to society and this is my long-term goal. I hope that my artwork will bring awareness to societal issues and drive positive change," she says. For aspiring artists, the renowned artist offers this advice: "Enjoy your work with full dedication and hard work. Remain committed to your passion and keep pushing forward." Balancing her personal and professional lives is crucial for her. "Daily, I allocate seven hours to my family and seven hours to my career. This balance is crucial for maintaining both aspects of my life," she explains. Chaitali Maji's art vividly illustrates the profound impact of creativity on both personal and societal levels. Her extraordinary journey from the small town of Suri to the international art scene highlights her resilience and dedication, demonstrating the powerful influence art can have in shaping and inspiring the world.

ASALANKA TO LEAD SRI LANKA IN T20I SERIES

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Charith Asalanka was on Tuesday named captain of the Sri Lankan T20 team for the three-match series against India, starting here on July 27, replacing spin all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga, who stepped down after the team's early exit from last month's T20 World Cup. The 27-year-old comes with considerable captaincy experience. In the absence of Hasaranga, who was facing suspension due to ICC code of conduct violations, Asalanka had captained Sri Lanka in two T20Is on the tour of Bangladesh earlier this year. A former Sri Lankan U-19 captain, he also led Jaffna Kings to the Lanka Premier League title last week. Sri Lanka Cricket Selection Committee opted for several changes following the team's dismal show at the T20 World Cup, where the island nation managed to win only one game and made an early exit. Overall, the 16-member squad is a good mix of experience and youth.



The seasoned pair of all-rounders Angelo Mathews and Dhananjaya de Silva, wicketkeeper Sadeera Samarawickrama and left-arm pacer Dilshan Madushanka have been left out of the squad. Returning to the squad are 34-year-old Dinesh Chandimal, who last played a T20I in February 2022, and Kusal Janith Perera. Uncapped all-rounder Chamindu Wickramasinghe has earned a maiden call up. Right-arm seamer, who had been training at the MRF Pace Academy in India, has been rewarded for his breakout IPL season.

Pacers Binura Fernando and Avishka Fernando also find themselves back in the national fold. Sri Lanka will play the first of the three T20Is on July 27 here, followed by games on July 28 and 30. The Indian team, which will be led by a new captain in

Suryakumar Yadav as well, landed here on Monday night for the series, which also features three ODIs scheduled next month.

SRI LANKA SQUAD:

Charith Asalanka (capt), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Janith Perera (wk), Avishka

Fernando, Kusal Mendis (wk), Dinesh Chandimal, Kamindu Mendis, Dasun Shanaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dunith Wellalage, Maheesh Theekshana, Chamindu Wickramasinghe, Matheesha Pathirana, Nuwan Thushara, Dushmantha Chameera, Binura Fernando.



Rahul Dravid screamed and cried, recalls Ashwin on India's T20 World Cup celebrations

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Virat Kohli handing over the T20 World Cup trophy to former coach Rahul Dravid after India's title triumph in Barbados and the much revered coach 'screaming and crying' in joy is something that will remain etched in his memory, Ravichandran Ashwin has expressed. After India pipped South Africa in a tense final last month to win their second T20 World Cup, former coach Dravid was seen letting out his emotions in a rare show while holding the trophy aloft. Ashwin admitted it was indeed a special moment for the 51-year-old Dravid, who could not win an ICC title as a player but finally redeemed it as a coach.

"My moment was when Virat Kohli called Rahul Dravid and gave the cup... I saw him hug the cup and cry," he said in a video on his YouTube channel. "Rahul Dravid screamed and cried. I saw him enjoy it. I felt that a lot." Ashwin also reckoned that Dravid was scared being at the helm of another campaign in the Caribbean, for the team under his captaincy had made a group-stage exit in the 2007 ODI World Cup. "I want to talk about a sacred person. (In) 2007, (the) 50-over World Cup. India gets knocked out. Rahul Dravid (was) the captain then. He does not captain the one-day side after that," he said. "He has been with the Indian team. If something does not go well, if the Indian team goes out, or if they lose a match,

immediately they ask what Dravid is doing." Ashwin also acknowledged the hard work done by Dravid during his stint as India coach, saying he brought balance to the team and changed in approach. "I know what he has been doing with this team for the past two to three years. I know how balanced he has been. I know how hard he has worked to change this approach," Ashwin said. "I know what he has given each of his players. Even when he is just sitting at home, he has been planning how to do this and that," he added. Under Dravid, India reached the finals of the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup but lost to Australia on both occasions.



Bernard dubbed Olympics' godfather; here's how he built LVMH's fortune

AP ■ PARIS

For decades, France's LVMH has been the face of luxury for the wealthy who tote Louis Vuitton bags, don Christian Dior clothing, spritz Bulgari perfume and sip Veuve Clicquot Champagne. This week, the world's dominant luxury group - home to 75 high-end brands across fashion, jewelry, watches and alcohol - will be the face of a global event for the masses: the Paris Olympics, with its billions of viewers around the planet. With a major sponsorship role aimed at burnishing the image of the Games and the French capital, it's a new chapter in LVMH's speciality of selling exclusivity at a grand scale under its chair and CEO, Bernard Arnault. Assembling and growing dozens of exclusive labels under one powerhouse roof has put Arnault, 75, at the very top of Forbes' list of the world's richest people. As recently as June 3, Forbes

estimated his wealth at USD 207 billion, narrowly ahead of Tesla's Elon Musk and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. With ever-shifting stock-market prices, the three men often trade places (according to Forbes' real-time billionaires list on Tuesday, Arnault and his family are currently No. 3). LVMH's cosmetics brand Sephora sponsored the Olympic torch relay. Berluti designed France's opening ceremony uniforms. Jeweler Chaumet crafted the Olympic medals. Those will rest in cases designed by Louis Vuitton, whose headquarters at 2 Rue Pont Neuf will be hard to miss as the opening ceremony parade floats by on the Seine River. "We tried to find a way to do it, to do something else than just signing a check and getting billboards on the side of the streets," Antoine Arnault - LVMH's head of environment and image and Arnault's eldest son - told The Associated Press on Monday.

Purnima's sacrifices for elusive archery medal

PTI ■ PARIS

Purnima Mahato didn't even know when her son Siddharth and daughter Archisa turned 17 and 10 as she would often feel guilty of being a perennially absentee mother. But in her three-decade career as an archery coach, the myriad desire to see one of her wards stand on the Olympic podium allowed her to make sacrifices and also demand a bit of it from her children. "We have everything but an Olympic medal. Archery has become life for me. My children grew up on their own and I didn't even realise," the Dronacharya Awardee coach told PTI in an exclusive interaction. "I hardly got to spend any time back home all these years with my kids. I left my son (Siddharth) at home when he was not even a year old. He is now all grown up and 17 years old, preparing for his 12th standard board exams. My daughter (Archisa) is 10 years old. It seems they have sacrificed way more than me for this Olympic medal," she gets a touch emotional. She has not even stayed at home for a week in 2024. "I went home for four days this year busy with the trials and camp, this has been the story so far. We have got all the medals but the Olympic medal is still a work in progress," she rued. BETTER EQUIPPED TO KEEP EMOTIONS UNDER



CHECK: The heartbreak of missing the 'Inner 10' when it matters is way too familiar a feeling for Purnima, who is again in charge of the women's team at the Paris Games where she wants veteran Deepika Kumari and her compatriots to focus on process rather than thinking about the end result. "Medal layenge, medal layenge yeh baat tum dimaag se nikal do (a medal will never come if you chase after a medal, just focus on the processes)," she has told the trio of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Bhajan Kaur. "They are now better placed to control their emotions and overcome the nervousness in big matches. It's (an Olympic medal) just a matter of time now." A CWG medallist, Mahato took up coaching at Tata Academy after leaving the sport in late 90s. She first coached the national team in an Olympics during the Beijing

edition where Dola Banerjee and V Praneetha were part of the squad. It was a 10-team draw and India got a bye to quarters as they needed to win two matches for their maiden Olympic medal. They were pitted against China, where they lost by big five-point margin and their story of heartbreaks continued since then. Every time the Olympic approaches, the expectation reaches its peak for the archers. And this time, it is no different. The women's team, who finished the Olympic cycle as World No. 8, topped the rankings among the non-qualified nations to earn the team quota. The men also made it on rankings by finishing the Olympic cycle as world No. 2. Paris, as a venue, has also been lucky for the Indian team. The women's team had won a silver and bronze medal in the World Cup Stage 3 in 2022 and

2023 in Paris, while senior archer Deepika Kumari has an individual gold here from World Cup Stage 3 in 2021. "The Koreans and the Chinese also have hearts that beat faster but they know how to control it by being mentally strong," Mahato said. "It's about following the process, stay engaged and relaxed without looking at scoring a perfect 10." "I don't want them to focus on the opponent's team, it's about keeping the atmosphere relaxed, by humming a song or focusing on the breath when your turn comes," she said. STRATEGY AND CODE WORDS: In the team event, Ankita will shoot first followed by Bhajan while Deepika with all her experience has the responsibility to play the role of the finisher. "Whenever one archer goes to the shooting line, the other has the job to keep the mood light by using their respective code words," Mahato said. This time the women's coach has the added responsibility after being awarded the Padma Shri three months back. "It's not a burden but an added responsibility, whenever you get a recognition you have an extra responsibility. I've been coaching for the last 28 years now and our players also do well but never got a medal. "But everyone in this team comes into the Olympics after doing well in the World Cups held during the current Games cycle. We have medals across all categories," she signed off.



Vidhatri eyes back-to-back wins on Hero Women's Pro Tour

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Talented golfer Vidhatri Urs, who captured her first title as a professional on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour last week, will look to make it two in a row as she tees up at the 10th Leg of the tournament at the par-72 Prestige Golfshire here on Wednesday. The field is once again very strong in the presence of the current Hero OOM leader Hitaashee Bakshi and last year OOM winner Sneha Singh, who have won twice each this year. The field also has Anvitha Narendar, winner of the eighth leg, the experienced Amandeep Drall, winner of the fifth Leg, and Neha Tripathi. While Amandeep seeks greater consistency, Neha is trying to make a comeback from a back injury.

Vidhatri, who is related to one of India's top pros Pranavi Urs, has been in excellent form. She was third in her first two appearances and then grabbed a win last week. Some of the other young pros waiting to make a mark include Durga Nittr, Jasmine Shekar, Gourabi Bhowmick and Karishma Govind. The amateurs have also shown a lot of promise with the prominent ones being Saanvi Somu and Mannat Brar, who have also played for India in international teams chosen by the Indian Golf Union. Apart from the in-form Saanvi Somu and Mannat Brar, the other amateurs are Aaradhya Shetty, Anuradha Chaudhuri, Keerthana Rajeev and Kaya Daluwatte of Sri Lanka. The event carries a purse of Rs 13 lakhs and will have a total 38 players including six amateurs.

Woods watches 15-year-old son Charlie shoot a 12-over 82

AP ■ BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP (MICHIGAN)

Charlie Woods, the 15-year-old son of Tiger Woods, covered his face with his cap after shaking hands with his playing partners on the 18th green at the Oakland Hills North Course. Woods shot a 12-over 82 on Monday in the U.S. Junior Amateur, a tournament he played his way into. "He still qualified," Tiger Woods said to his son's caddie after the rough round. "That's what I keep telling him," caddie Luke Wise said. Woods earned a spot in the field of top juniors from around the world when he shot a 1-under 71 to win his qualifier last month in Coral Springs, Florida. He will have to have quite a turnaround Tuesday on the Oakland Hills South Course, which Ben Hogan called "The Monster," to be among the low 64 scorers from a field of 264 players from 40 states and 35 countries. Charlie Woods is the only

one in the world who knows what it's like to be the son of Tiger Woods, and now he's fully aware of what it's like to compete with all eyes on him. At an event that usually draws a few hundred people for the championship match, about 100 were waiting on the first tee to see Charlie play while his dad watched, and at least that many spectators followed them for hours. Oakland Hills had six members assigned to assist with crowd control. That wasn't enough, and 10 more men were dispatched to hold ropes to give the players - and Tiger - some space. After Charlie hit his tee shot on the seventh hole and left behind his tee, adorned with a palm tree, a fan took it out of the ground to keep as a memento. "I feel like he's feeling pressure," said 35-year-old John Pinch of Warren, Michigan. "If his dad could talk to him, he would probably try to get him to

US JUNIOR AMATEUR AT OAKLAND HILLS



settle down. "You can tell he's really down on himself." Charlie was frustrated and let it show, slamming and swinging clubs into the ground after errant shots and shaking his head from side to side. His father was relatively helpless because rules prevent parents from coaching their children during the tournament. After a brief exchange prior to the round on the practice green, Tiger didn't say a word to his son and didn't appear to even make eye contact as he watched from afar while surrounded by police officers - at least one of whom snapped photos - and security personnel. Without a doubt, Tiger wished his son could hear him on the 181-yard, par-3 fourth. A rules official gave Charlie relief because his ball landed on a metal cap on the right side of the green. "He gets a club length," Tiger said, standing out of earshot

of his son. Tiger wanted his son to place his ball to the left, but Charlie elected to take relief to the right. "No, no, no," Tiger muttered to himself. "Go the other way." Charlie ended up with his first of five double bogeys at No. 4 to go with four bogeys and two birdies - on both of the par 5s. He was wild off the tee - often missing to the right - came up short on a series of flop shots out of thick rough and sailed some approaches over greens. Tiger was 14 when he qualified for his first U.S. Junior and reached the semifinals. He won his first U.S. Junior a year later and went on to become the only player to win the tournament three times in a row. Tiger traveled to suburban Detroit from Scotland after matching his highest 36-hole score as a professional at the British Open, missing the cut for the third straight time in a major.

'I WASN'T VERY CONFIDENT ABOUT PULLING OFF THE ROLE IN BUDDY'

Prisha Singh is slated to make her Tollywood debut as one of the leading ladies in the upcoming Telugu film *Buddy*, which stars Allu Sirish. The actress will play an air hostess in the film, directed by Sam Anton.

Prisha reflects on how she got the part, saying that the producers discovered her through her portfolio images. Prisha was initially shocked by the offer and says, "I wasn't very confident about pulling off the role because it required a different personality and a pattern of exploits and doings. I had to prepare carefully, examining several flight hostesses, their body language, how they walk and communicate and so on. The filmmaker also gave some allusions, which helped me better grasp the role."

Prisha sees her experience in Tollywood as enlightening and she hopes to take on impactful roles that will allow her to exhibit her acting skills. She is an avid nature photographer in addition to her acting career. She just shared a series of Instagram photographs from a nature adventure. Prisha, a wildlife fanatic, enjoys travelling on safaris and documenting moments in nature. She has taken part in various wildlife trips.

"I adore photographing flora and fauna and safaris are one of my passions. For me, photography is more than just catching animals and wildlife; it's about capturing moments and feelings in their purest form," explains Prisha. "Looking at such images makes me nostalgic, gives me a sense of fulfillment and meaningful experience."

Her wilderness travels have given her a greater respect for nature's beauties. "Every capture has an interesting story to tell," she says, adding that wildlife photography has improved her acting abilities. "It has helped me embrace the camera more."

Tara Sutaria to make her South debut with *Toxic!*

KGF actor Yash's highly anticipated project *Toxic: A Fairy Tale for Grown-ups* has added another Bollywood actress to its cast. Reports revealed that Tara Sutaria has been engaged in a crucial role in the action thriller helmed by Geethu Mohandas.

"Tara is overjoyed to have landed a prominent role in such a massive project. She plays one of the two romantic interests of the Kannada superstar, the other being Kiara Advani," an industry source informed us. The multi-lingual, big-budget film rides on a strong force of women characters and also features

Jawan actress Nayanthara and Huma Qureshi in lead roles. Nayanthara will play Yash's sister, while Huma is expected to take on a negative character.

Toxic, billed as an action-packed spectacle, is set in the 1950s and 1970s, during the rule of the drug mafia. Yash, who became a national star following the historic box-office success of *KGF Chapter 2*, will purportedly play a slick gangster in this high-stakes action picture. The project will take over 200 days of filming to achieve an unprecedented scale, giving fans an unrivaled visual film experience.

Toxic began shooting in June and is slated to continue throughout the year, with a theatrical release scheduled for April 10, 2025. Yash is presently filming Nitesh Tiwari's magnum epic, *Ramayana* and will continue production on *Toxic* in September. Despite the fact that filming is still underway, the producers have kept the cast a mystery. This film is produced jointly by Yash and Venkat K Narayana under their respective banners, Monster Mind Creations and KVN Productions.

Fire Song: Suriya dances his heart out with gigantic energy

Attention everyone! The makers of *Kanguva* released a brand new song from the film on Tuesday and it is trending heavily. Suriya, the film's main actor, dances his heart out in the new tune, *Fire Song*, while dressed in an elaborate costume. The song depicts a bleak society immersed in darkness, with Suriya standing out brightly as the power capable of changing it. Suriya appears in a never-seen-before appearance, complete with dreadlocks and severe makeup. The track was released in Tamil, Telugu and Hindi.

The Hindi version was sung by B Praak and Pavithra Chari, with lyrics by Raqueeb Alam. The Tamil rendition was sung by VM Mahalingam, Senthil Ganesh, Shenbagaraj and Deepthi Suresh, with lyrics by Viveka. The Telugu version was sung by Anurag Kulkarni and Deepthi Suresh, with lyrics by Sreemani.

Suriya will also appear in a production titled *Love Laughter War*. The makers unveiled the project in an Instagram photo with the remark, "An unveiling maverick, ready to conquer." Join the excitement for *Love Laughter War* and more! Happy Birthday to the one. #HappyBirthdaySuriya #HBDTheOneSuriya Best wishes from Team #Suriya44." Siva directed *Kanguva*, which also stars Disha Patani. The film was produced by K E Gnanavel Raja, V Vamsi Krishna Reddy and Pramod Uppalapati under the labels Studio Green and UV Creations. The film is scheduled for release on October 10. The film will compete with *Vettaiyan*, starring superstar Rajinikanth.



KARTHI'S CAMEO IN KANGUVA

Kanguva is one of the most anticipated films from South India for 2024. The producers are going above and beyond with their promotions.

According to the latest chatter in Kollywood film circles, Suriya's brother Karthi would make a spectacular appearance at the end of *Kanguva*. It is speculated that Karthi's appearance in the climax will act as the lead for the second installment. Tamil audiences are hopeful *Kanguva* will be Kollywood's first 1,000-crore grosser. Disha Patani is Suriya's love interest in this big-budget film that combines period drama with modern themes. Bobby Deol is the antagonist. *Kanguva* is produced by Studio Green and UV Creations. Dev Sri Prasad is composing the music. The film will be released in cinemas on October 10, 2024.

Aho! Vikramarka releasing in theatres on August 30

Dev Gill, known for his diverse roles and charismatic performances in several South Indian films, including the blockbuster *Magadheera*, is all set to debut as a hero. Dev Gill Productions presents *Aho! Vikramarka*, directed by Peta Trikoti.

The movie is set to release on August 30 in Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Kannada languages. The makers have officially announced this with a release poster. In the poster, Dev, portraying a powerful police officer, is depicted delivering a powerful punch to the villain.

Hero Dev remarked, "With *Aho! Vikramarka*, we aim to showcase the courage and dedication of the police force. The film has shaped up wonderfully and we are thrilled about its pan-India release on August 30.

Audiences, who have seen one side of my acting so far, will witness a different aspect on the silver screen."

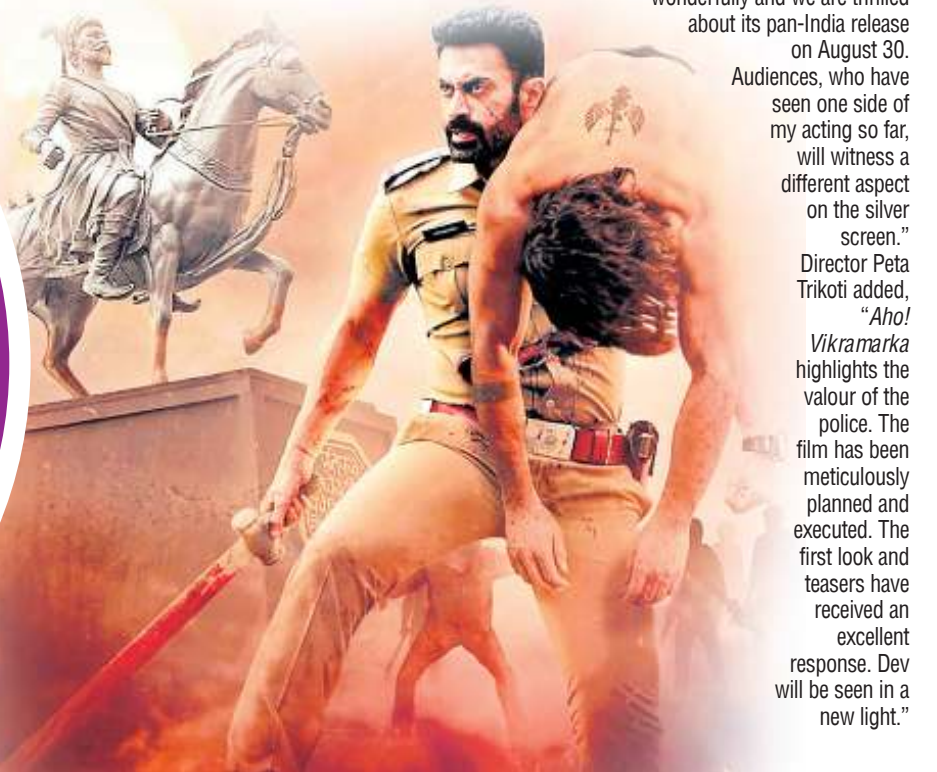
Director Peta Trikoti added, "Aho! Vikramarka highlights the valour of the police. The film has been meticulously planned and executed. The first look and teasers have received an excellent response. Dev will be seen in a new light."

BSS12 marks 'special significance' in Bellamkonda's career

Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas has been choosing a variety of unique scripts lately, with each recent project differing from the last. His 12th film was announced today, directed by Ludhir Baireddy in his debut and produced by Mahesh Chandu under Moonshine Pictures, with Shiven Ramakrishna presenting.

Marking a decade in his acting career, this film holds special significance for Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas. The official announcement coincided with the 75th birth anniversary of Kоди Ramakrishna.

The announcement poster features a spiritual theme, depicting Bellamkonda Sai Sreenivas in front of a 400-year-old temple, hinting at the film's plot centered around this temple. *BSS12* is described as an innovative occult thriller, promising a fresh experience for the audience. The intriguing poster has already sparked considerable interest. Music and cinematography will be managed by Shivendra and Leon James, respectively.



Shivam Bhaje's thrilling trailer teases its release

Following the success of *Hidimba*, Ashwin Babu's latest film, Shivam Bhaje, promises to enchant audiences once more. The film's buzz has already begun, owing to an intriguing trailer and the release of a captivating first track. *Shivam Bhaje*, directed by Apsar, is scheduled to open in theatres on August 1, 2024.

With the release date quickly approaching, the promotional campaign has gained traction. The trailer of the film was premiered at AAA Cinemas in Hyderabad and it began with a frightening scene involving China's surprise threat to India. As the trailer progresses, we see Ashwin Babu as the character of a chemical engineer at a pharmaceutical business on a mission to discover the identity of a notorious criminal on a killing rampage.

The video reveals the villain's motivations and Ashwin's relationship to the unfolding drama, leaving viewers curious to see how it all plays out on the big screen. While the trailer is entertaining, the evocative score really lifts it.



Meanwhile, director Apsar thanked Anil, Thaman and Vishwak Sen for attending the event. He also shared that he believed the story and the film will resonate with everyone.

Digangana Suryavanshi, the leading lady further added, "The trailer is fantastic and I'm grateful for the opportunity. The *Shivam Bhaje* team feels like family, and Ashwin has been a great support. We're all looking forward to the August 1 release."

Ganga Entertainments presents this highly anticipated debut, which features a captivating storyline, partnerships with top industry talent and excellent production elements. The film's female lead is Digangana Suryavanshi, who is joined by a great cast that includes Hyper Aadi, Murali Sharma, Sai Dheena, Brahmaji, Tulasi, Devi Prasad, Ayyappa Sharma, Shakalaka Shankar, Kashi Vishwanath Inaya Sultana and many others. Vikas Badisa is the musical director.

ARJUN RAMPAL AS PRIMARY ANTAGONIST IN RANA NAIDU 2

Netflix India has announced that filming for *Rana Naidu Season 2* is moving quickly, with exciting action scenes revealed in a teaser. It has been announced that Arjun Rampal will play the primary villain this season, while Rana Daggubati will return with much more ferocity.

The next season, directed by Suparn Verma and Karan Anshuman, will feature both returning *Season 1* characters and new faces. For those unfamiliar, *Rana Naidu* is the Indian adaptation of the critically successful American television series *Ray Donovan*.

