

The 10 MLAs who defected from the BRS will be disqualified soon. Whenever by-elections are held, the BJP is sure to win seven seats. There is a lot of fighting in the government and MLAs from Revanth Reddy's party are holding secret meetings. The days of trouble for the Revanth Reddy government are near

— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home

P2

'Punjab's deportees share largest'

STPIs TO HELP KEEP PACE WITH CHANGING TECH: MIN

I Never Saw Myself as an Unsuccessful ACTOR

DON'T MISS...

Storm water drainage plan soon

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Commissioner K Ilambarthi highlighted to come up with Storm water Drainage Master Plan. He has directed officials to conduct a comprehensive survey of the Yakutpura drainage system. On Wednesday morning, Commissioner Ilambarthi, accompanied by Yakutpura MLA Jaffer Hussain and corporators, inspected several storm water drains in Yakutpura. As part of the visit, the Commissioner toured Rangeeli Khidiki, Hussaini Kothi, Maulana Chilla, Ganga Nagar and Rein Bazaar. During the ...

-PAGE: 3

India exceeding climate targets

India is already meeting and exceeding key climate targets and has a real opportunity to grow even faster using clean energy and industry, UN climate chief Simon Stiell has said. In an email interview Stiell said India's vast geography and large population mean a significant number of people are vulnerable to climate impacts. Therefore, he said, it is crucial to invest in making people, communities, infrastructure, and businesses more resilient. "India is already meeting and exceeding key targets...."

-PAGE: 5

Layoffs: Infosys denies using force

IT services company Infosys on Wednesday said it did not use force or intimidation tactics when it laid off trainees at Mysuru campus over performance-related issues, and that it was explaining the circumstances to the labour department authorities. In an interview to PTI, Shaji Mathew, Chief Human Resources Officer at Infosys, however, conceded that assessment failure percentages this time around have been 'slightly higher' than in the past but dismissed charges that the tests had been designed....

-PAGE: 8

Gill becomes No 1 ODI batsman

India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the Number one spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series. The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy (CT) in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand. "India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC....

-SPORTS

TG seeks equitable Krishna water share

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Final arguments before the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II (KWDT-II) began on February 19, with Telangana's senior counsel CS Vaidyanathan presenting the state's case. The tribunal, chaired by Justice Brijesh Kumar, with Justices Ram Mohan Reddy and S. Talapatra as members, is hearing Telangana's demand for a fair allocation of Krishna waters.

Telangana argued that historical injustices in water distribution have left large sections of its population struggling for irrigation water, despite the



state being home to several Krishna basin projects.

The counsel explained the basin's history and how projects were planned by the erstwhile Hyderabad state, such as the Tungbhadra Dam,

the Upper Krishna Project, and the Bhima Project, were abandoned post-1956 by the unified Andhra Pradesh government, leading to Telangana's water crisis.

Continued on Page 2

HC stays probe against Harish in phone tapping case



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court has stayed investigation into the phone-tapping case involving former ministers Harish Rao and Radha Kishan Rao. The case, registered at the Punjagutta Police Station, was based on a complaint by realtor Chakradhar.

During the investigation, the police had arrested a computer operator who had earlier worked for Harish. The court had earlier issued an interim order preventing the arrest of Harish Rao and Radha Kishan Rao, while they filed a petition seeking to quash the FIR.

During the hearing, the Public Prosecutor (PP) informed the court that senior lawyer Siddharth Luthra would argue on behalf of the government. However, as Luthra was engaged in another case, the PP sought additional time for arguments. Considering this, the High Court adjourned the next hearing to March 3.

Uttam secures Central assurance



- Uttam meets Union Jal Shakti Minister, Secretary at Udaipur meet
- Centre to okay Sitarama Sagar project soon, NDSA report on Medigadda by Feb-end

PNS ■ UDAIPUR

Irrigation Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy secured a firm assurance from the Union Minister for Jal Shakti, CR Patil, that the Centre would address Telangana's water concerns and speed up approvals for key irrigation projects.

During a meeting held during the second All India State Water Ministers' Conference on Wednesday, Uttam also held discussions with Debashree Mukherjee, the Secretary of the Union Ministry of Jal Sakhti, and requested immediate action on water disputes and funding for

important projects. Uttam raised concerns over Andhra Pradesh allegedly drawing excess water illegally from the backwaters of the Srisaillam Dam and the right canal of the Nagarjuna Sagar Project during the Rabi season. He emphasised the urgent need for Central intervention to protect the Rabi crop in the irrigation areas of Nagarjuna Sagar, particularly in the erstwhile Nalgonda and Khammam districts. Union Minister Patil said the Centre would immediately ensure fair water distribution and prevent unauthorised withdrawals.

Continued on Page 2

Centre allots Rs 231.75 cr NDRF funds to TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Central government has approved an additional assistance National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) assistance of Rs 231.75 crore for Telangana, as part of a broader allocation of Rs 1,554.99 crore to five states.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah sanctioned the funds on Wednesday, ensuring financial support for disaster management and relief measures.

The additional NDRF assistance is being provided over and above the funds previously released to these states last year. Apart from



Telangana, the largest share of Rs 608.08 crore has been allocated to Andhra Pradesh, followed by Tripura with Rs. 288.93 crore, Odisha with Rs. 255.24 crore, and Nagaland with Rs. 170.99 crore. The Union Home Ministry issued formal orders confirming the disbursement of these funds to the respective states.

The additional allocation is expected to bolster disaster preparedness and relief measures in Telangana, ensuring the state is better equipped to handle natural calamities and emergencies.



Fisrt-time MLA Rekha to be new Delhi CM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

First-time MLA Rekha Gupta will be the new chief minister of Delhi, the BJP announced on Wednesday.

Gupta was chosen as the Leader of the House in the Delhi Assembly at the BJP legislature party meeting. The party has returned to power in Delhi after over 26 years, ending the 10-year rule of the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP.

Gupta and her Cabinet ministers will take the oath of office at the Ramlila Ground on Thursday. She will be Delhi's fourth woman chief minister after Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit and Atishi.

She will be the only woman chief minister among the states being ruled by the BJP at present.

The 50-year-old leader won from Shalimar Bagh, defeating AAP candidate Bandana Kumari by over 29,000 votes in the February 5 Assembly polls.

All 48 newly-elected BJP MLAs attended the legislature party meeting in the presence of Central observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and O P Dhanakar.

Continued on Page 2



Naidu trying to enter TG thru NDA

KCR reportedly warns BRS cadre

NAVEENA GHANATE naveena.ghanate@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao has reportedly cautioned BRS activists about Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's alleged attempts to re-enter Telangana using the NDA as a platform.

During a BRS Executive Meeting on Wednesday, sources said KCR said that Chandrababu is trying to come to Telangana through the NDA and it needs to be stopped. He recalled how he had fought

against him in the past, even resigning from his post for the cause of Telangana. He reportedly pointed out that after securing just 16 seats, Naidu is managing to call the shots inside the NDA.

Sources said KCR is disappointed that the BRS was not present in the Lok Sabha, which he felt was affecting Telangana's voice at the national level.

He hardly spoke about Telangana CM Revanth Reddy and didn't take his name. It is learnt that all he said was that nobody got anti-incumbency so quickly.

Continued on Page 2

TG to host Miss World grand finale event in Hyd



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana is set to host the 72nd Miss World festival in 2025, marking a significant milestone for the state under the global spotlight. The event will be held from May 7 to May 31, with various destinations across Telangana playing host to different segments of the festival. The grand finale and closing ceremonies will be held in Hyderabad.

Following the success of the 71st Miss World, which was hosted in New Delhi and Mumbai, the event is now moving to Telangana – a state celebrated for its fusion of tradition and innovation. The pageant, the oldest-running international beauty festival, continues to promote diverse representations of beauty with a purpose, alongside humanitarian causes.

Continued on Page 2

BJP opens 'Saffron Book,' warns 'hostile' officials

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress maintained a 'Red Book' when it was in the opposition and the BRS was in power. The Congress had also announced that it had been recording the names of hostile politicians and officers and would tackle them once it gained power. The Congress finally came to power. But it's a different question whether it would take revenge or not.

The BRS and the BJP are in the opposition now. BRS MLC Kavitha recently announced that the party is maintaining a 'Pink Book' and warned that the party will take 'double revenge' after coming to power

against officials who are harassing BRS leaders and cadres.

Now it is the turn of the BJP. The BJP has now opened a book like the Congress and the BRS. On Wednesday, the BJP's Malkajgiri MP, Eatala Rajender, made an announcement regarding this. Eatala said they are maintaining a 'Saffron Book' containing the names of hostile elements. The BJP will reveal the details of the officials when the time comes, he warned.

Moreover, Eatala said that IAS and IPS officials should function as per the law. He suggested that IAS and IPS officials should work as per rules instead of blindly obeying the directions of their bosses.

Rajalingamurthi who filed case against KCR murdered

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Unidentified persons killed one Nagavelli Rajalingamurthi on Wednesday using swords. Nagavelli had filed cases against KCR, former BRS Ministers and the companies who executed the Kaleshwaram Project.

The murderers killed Nagavelli near the TBGKS office in the Reddy Colony in Bhupalpally district headquarters when Nagavelli was riding his two-wheeler. Nagavelli died on the spot.

The police shifted the body of Nagavelli Rajalingamurthi to the mortuary and launched an investigation.

Ganga water at Sangam unsafe for bathing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ganga water at Triveni Sangam, where lakhs of people are taking a holy dip every day during the ongoing Maha Kumbh, is currently unsafe for bathing as it exceeds the prescribed limit for biological oxygen demand (BOD), a key parameter to determine water quality, according to government data.

BOD refers to the amount of oxygen required by aerobic microorganisms to break down organic material in a water body. A higher BOD level indicates more organic content in the water. River water is considered fit for bathing if the BOD level is less than 3 milligrams per litre.

Government data shows that the river water at Sangam is currently exceeding this limit. The BOD level at Sangam was 5.09 milligrams per litre at 5 am on January 16. It was recorded

Govt data: It exceeds the prescribed limit for biological oxygen demand (BOD) levels

at 4.6 milligrams per litre at 5 pm on January 18 and 5.29 milligrams per litre at 8 am on January 19 (Wednesday).

According to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data, the BOD level at Sangam was 3.94 milligrams per litre on January 13 when the Maha Kumbh started.

It improved to 2.28 milligrams per litre on Makar Sankranti (January 14) and further dropped to 1 milligram per litre on January 15.

However, it rose to 4.08 milligrams per litre on January 24 and was recorded at 3.26 milligrams per litre on Mauni Amavasya (January 29).

In a report submitted to the National Green Tribunal on February 3, the CPCB said the river water quality did not meet bathing standards during



monitoring on January 12-13 at most locations in Prayagraj.

"However, after that, organic pollution (in terms of BOD) started to

decrease due to freshwater intrusion at upstream locations. After January 13, 2025, river water quality (is) conforming (to) the bathing criteria w.r.t.

BOD except (at) Lord Curzon bridge on river Ganga on January 19, 2025," the CPCB report read.

According to Uttar Pradesh government officials, 10,000 to 11,000 cuses of water is being released into the Ganga to ensure it meets bathing standards. The Maha Kumbh, which started on January 13, will conclude on February 26, Maha Shivaratri day. Over 54 crore people have taken a dip in the sacred waters of Triveni Sangam so far.

Mahakumbh Nagar is the world's largest temporary city, accommodating 50 lakh to 1 crore devotees at any given time.

These pilgrims generate at least 16 million litres of faecal waste and 240 million litres of greywater daily from activities like cooking, washing, and bathing.

Rs 60 crore apparel unit in Sircilla nearing completion: Tummala



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The representatives of Texpert Industries Private Limited met the Minister for Textiles, Tummala Nageswara Rao, at the secretariat to provide an update on the Rs 60 crore apparel manufacturing unit at Peddur in Rajanna Sircilla district. The company, which had long-term business ties with global brands like the Kohl's, Robert Graham LLC, Tommy Hilfiter,

Vans, VG Europe BVB, Nautica, Michael Kors, and Primark, informed the minister that the unit is set to begin production soon.

Textiles Principal Secretary Shailaja Ramaier said the new unit will generate employment for around 2,000 people with focus on women and will have the capacity to produce 70 lakh garments annually for men, women and children. The company aims to export apparel worth Rs 270 crore per year from this facility.

Tummala Nageswara Rao urged the company to maintain high-quality standards and ensure that locally produced garments remain competitive in the market. He also encouraged efforts to further expand employment opportunities for local women.

Continued on Page 2

Draft UGC regulations make V-Cs very vulnerable

The draft University Grants Commission (Minimum Qualifications for Appointment and Promotion of Teachers and Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations, 2025, makes Vice-Chancellors vulnerable and dependent on the Minister and the subordinate entity named UGC. Although called the University Grants Commission, it is neither a university nor a commission. Grants for any university depend on the Centre's sweet will.

A significant issue of this 'regulation' is the proposal to revise the selection process for Vice-Chancellors. This draft has given powers to Chancellors or Visitors to constitute a three-member search-cum-selection committee to appoint Vice-Chancellors. The guidelines also warn that non-implementation of it may result in debaring an institution from participating in UGC schemes or from offering degrees. The UGC has given 30 days to stakeholders and the public to comment on the draft.

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The JNU and in many others, it is a distinguished academician appointed by the Visitor of the University (President) as per the recommendation of the University's Executive Council. The only exception is the Vishwa Bharati University, the only Central University with the PM as its Chancellor. Another exception is that the Chief Justice of the state will officiate at the National Law University. Interestingly, the judicial institution does not have any say in the executive of the state. It is a major change in the balance between

the Executive and Judiciary. The judicial machine in the state is under the administrative power of the state's Chief Justice. The Chief Justice of India will be the Chancellor or is the visitor at the National School of India University in Bengaluru. Former Chief Justice Mohammad Hidayatullah, the late Advocate, Ram Jethmalani, and Professor Upendra Baxi petitioned the Legal Education Committee of the Bar Council of India to establish a university that would rival the Harvard Law School.



PROF MADABHUSHI SRIDHAR ACHARYULU
Professor of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad

The Chief Justice of India is the Visitor and de facto Chancellor of the school, with the ability to advise on the school's operations (Section 7 of The National Law School of India Act, 1986). The Vice-Chancellor of the school is the chief executive of the university and manages its day-to-

day operations. The school's administration is overseen by the General Council, Executive Council, Academic Council and the Finance Council. The Councils consist of individuals like the Chief Justice of India, the Chairman of the Bar Council of India, Judges of the Supreme Court of India, the Advocate General of Karnataka, Secretaries and Ministers of the Government of Karnataka, and other eminent legal scholars.

As per all executive orders issued under the name of the UGC, there exists the prospect of litigation at the cost of the exchequer for the state government. For instance, the UGC draft regulation says, "The selection for the Vice-Chancellor post shall be through an All-India newspaper advertisement and public notification. Applications can also be invited through nomination or a talent search process by a search-cum-selection Committee."

Another proposed process is: "A nominee of the Visitor/Chancellor will be the Chairperson of the search-cum-selection Committee. A nominee of the Chairman, UGC, and a nominee of the apex body of the university like the Syndicate/Senate/Executive Council/Board of Management/Equivalent Body of the University will be members of the committee. Usually, state cabinets used to recommend the chancellor's nominee for this committee, but in many states the Governors have changed this norm and start nominating their persons for the committees, leading to conflicts with states."

ADILABAD SCHOOL WITHOUT FACILITIES

CM directs immediate action

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has responded to a report highlighting the lack of basic amenities at Dajinagar Government School in Dubbaguda, Battisavaram Panchayat, Mavala mandal, Adilabad district. Expressing concern over the poor management of classrooms, the Chief

Minister has directed the Education department to immediately relocate the school to a temporary building to avoid inconvenience to students.



arrangements be made for running the school after the election code ends to ensure that students do not suffer due to infrastructural shortcomings. The directive reflects the government's commitment to prioritising education and addressing gaps in school infrastructure to create a better learning environment for students in rural areas.

If by-elections come, BJP sure to win 7 seats: Bandi Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay said that the 10 MLAs who defected from the BRS party will be disqualified soon. He said that whenever the by-elections are held, the BJP is sure to win 7 seats.



Sanjay said that the employees and teachers who fought bravely for Telangana should think about why they are in a miserable situation of begging for their salaries and allowances and solution to their problems. He was furious that the government was harassing them by not giving them the money saved in the GFP along with DAs and pending bills.

secularists and to inform the people about the real history, there is a great need to promote such movies. While the Modi government wants to shape students into warriors like Chhatrapati Shivaji, Ambedkar, Phule, Savarkar, the Congress government is trying to shape the education system to make them hold guns and become Naxals. The responsibility to stop this lies with all of us.

Rs 60 crore ...

Continued from Page 1

Representatives from Boston Consulting Group (BCG) gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Minister, outlining key challenges faced by the state's six major handloom clusters, that is, Gadwal, Narayanpet, Pochampally, Siddipet, Warangal, and Karimnagar. They said that weavers face marketing gaps, lack of access to new designs, low wages, decreasing interest from younger generations, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient training programs.

Uttam secures...

Continued from Page 1

Uttam requested the installation of telemetry systems at both Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar dams and at 35 points on the Krishna River to ensure transparency and prevent disputes. These systems would provide real-time data on water usage, ensuring adherence to allocated quotas. The Union Minister agreed, recognising the importance of accurate monitoring mechanisms.



Amberpet Bathukamma Kunta has survived, says VH

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Senior Congress leader V. Hanumantha Rao said that the Bathukamma Kunta at Amberpet has survived. He said that he is happy that the Bathukamma Kunta, which was being encroached by private individuals, has been restored and that he achieved this after a long fight. He thanked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath.

VH visited the Bathukamma Kunta on Wednesday and examined the restoration works of HYDRAA along with Amberpet constituency in-charge C. Rohin Reddy. Rohin said the CM responded immediately to VH's appeal and resolved the Bathukamma Kunta issue.

Southern Discom's power demand crosses 10,000 MW mark

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For the first time in its history, the Southern Telangana Power Distribution Company has recorded a peak power demand exceeding 10,000 MW in February. On February 7, the highest-ever demand of 10,130 MW was registered, while Wednesday's demand reached 10,049 MW. Additionally, power consumption has surged to 200 million units per day, with February 18 recording a record usage of

202.18 million units. Previously, the highest demand of 9,910 MW and consumption of 198.80 million units were recorded on September 20 and 19 last year, respectively. Notably, such peak demand and consumption figures were previously observed only in September, but this year, they have already been recorded in February, highlighting an unprecedented surge.

Chairman and Managing Director of the Southern Telangana Power Distribution Company, Musharraf Farooqui, stated that the demand is in line with expectations due to the ongoing rabi season and the onset of summer. He noted that power demand is likely to rise further in the coming weeks. To manage the additional load, the company has taken several measures, including setting up new sub-stations, upgrading power transformers, installing additional distribution transformers and restructuring feeders.

BRS to celebrate silver jubilee, with year long events

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bharat Rashtia Samithi (BRS) has decided to celebrate its 25th anniversary with year-long events, while also intensifying its role as the principal opposition in Telangana. Addressing the media after a key party meeting led by party president K. Chandrasekhar Rao at the Telangana Bhavan, BRS working president KT Rama Rao (KTR) said the party remains committed to fighting for the people's issues under the Congress government.

First-time MLA Rekha...

Continued from Page 1

Gupta's name was proposed by senior party leaders Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay. The announcement came 11 days after the results of the Delhi Assembly polls were declared on February 8. The CM-designate will now meet Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena at Raj Niwas to stake a claim in forming a BJP-led government in Delhi.

Soon after the announcement, Gupta thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said she would work with full honesty, integrity and dedication for the welfare, empowerment and overall development of every citizen of Delhi. "I am fully committed to this important opportunity to take Delhi to new heights," Gupta said in a post on X.

Naidu trying to enter TG...

Continued from Page 1

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TG seeks equitable Krishna...

Continued from Page 1

Telangana's submission highlighted the fact that the allocation of assured water for its projects would benefit 25 lakh families, impacting nearly 80 lakh people in the Krishna basin. The state argued that former Andhra Pradesh government's administrative decisions post-1956 were biased, favouring Andhra over Telangana in water, employment and financial allocations.

diverting 323 TMCs of Krishna water to outside basin areas, while Telangana's farmers continue to struggle for water even for a single crop. In its argument, Telangana urged the Tribunal to consider the availability of additional water sources for Andhra Pradesh, such as Polavaram (80 TMC), Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Scheme (100 TMC), and Chintalapudi LIS (27 TMC).

Telangana contended that the efficient and scientific utilization of water would reduce the overall requirement, allowing reallocation to in-basin areas. It also pointed out that an additional 75 TMCs of unaccounted water from Krishna Delta System drains should be formally acknowledged and considered in the redistribution process. The tribunal was informed that Andhra Pradesh has been

TODAY ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Saptami: Feb 19 07:32 AM to Feb 20 09:58 AM
Ashtami: Feb 20 09:58 AM to Feb 21 11:58 AM
Nakshatram: Vishaka: Feb 19 10:39 AM to Feb 20 01:30 PM
Anuradha: Feb 20 01:30 PM to Feb 21 03:53 PM
Rahukalam: 1:56 PM to 3:23 PM
Yamagandam: 6:43 AM to 8:10 AM
Varjyam: 05:54 PM to 07:39 PM
Gulika: 9:36 AM to 11:03 AM
Amritakalam: 04:27 AM to 06:13 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:06 PM to 12:52 PM
HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 33°
Humidity: 51%
Sunrise: 6:40 AM
Sunset: 6:20 PM
Updated: February 19, 2025 5:00 PM

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | THURSDAY | FEBRUARY 20, 2025

03



CITY EVENTS

The Relevance Of Satire In 2025 India
Talk By Dr Medusa
Venue
Lamakaan
February 20, (7:30 pm)

Live Musical Orchestra
By Sruthi Laya Music Organisation
Venue
Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha
February 20, (4:30 pm)

Live Performance
By Harish & Martin (Band)
Venue
Stone Waters - Kitchen & Lounge
February 20, (8 pm)

Sci-Connect 2025
Inter-Collegiate Science Fest
Venue
St Mary's College (Co-Education)
February 20, (9 am)

Thursday Night
With DJ Hak
Venue
Sounds & Spirits
February 20 (8 pm)

Live Performance
By Aalaap (Band)
Venue
36 DOWNTOWN Brew Pub (Vapour)
February 20, (8 pm)

Sanmaan 2025
Display & Sale of Crafts
Venue
T-Works Foundation Corporate Office
February 20, (10:30 am)

Silk Expo
Exhibition Cum Sale
Venue
Sri Satya Sai Nigamagamam
February 15 to 21, (10 am)

GHMC to hold property tax resolution drive

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) will conduct a special initiative, 'Property Tax Resolution' (PTP), to address property tax-related grievances from February 22 to March 29. GHMC Commissioner Ilambarithi announced that the programme will be held every Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at circle offices. This initiative aims to resolve various tax-related issues, including revision petitions, assessment corrections, payment discrepancies through bill collectors or RTGS, pending dues rectification, court case settlements, IGRS concerns, and self-assessment-related queries. Officials emphasised that taxpayers facing such issues can attend the PTP sessions at their respective GHMC Deputy Commissioner's offices.

Advocate dies of heart attack at a bank

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Senior advocate Venkata Ramana, a resident of Tarnaka, suffered a fatal heart attack while waiting at Indian Bank, West Marredpally to pay a challan. Marredpally Police said that the incident occurred suddenly as he collapsed inside the bank premises. Fellow customers and bank staff rushed him to a nearby hospital, but doctors declared him dead on arrival. This comes a day after another advocate, P Venugopal Rao, suffered a heart attack while presenting arguments in Telangana High Court's Court No. 21. He collapsed in the courtroom and died.

Unregistered plots for four years: Govt sets March 31 deadline for LRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For the past four years, thousands of poor families who purchased unregistered plots across the State have been waiting for regularisation. In a significant move, the State government has decided to expedite the implementation of the long-pending Land Regularisation Scheme (LRS), setting a deadline of March 31 for beneficiaries to complete the process. A review meeting on the progress of the LRS scheme was held on Wednesday at the Dr BR Ambedkar Secretariat, chaired by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu, with Ministers Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy and Duddilla Sridhar Babu in attendance. As part of the push to speed up LRS implementation, the government announced a 25 per cent subsidy on LRS charges for eligible applicants, which will be available until March 31.

The decision is expected to benefit plot buyers who have been unable to register their purchases, as well as layouts where a large number of plots remain unsold and unregularised. Under the new policy, if at least 10 per cent of the plots in a layout have been registered, the remaining 90 per cent will now be eligible for regularisation under LRS. The ministers also decided that those who have already purchased plots with a registered sale deed but have not yet completed LRS will also be eligible for the 25 per cent concession if they apply before March 31. The government emphasized that the scheme is particularly aimed at benefiting low-income families who have been waiting for LRS resolution for four years. Ministers urged applicants to take advantage of the government's initiative, assuring that the process would be monitored daily to ensure swift

implementation. While granting several concessions under LRS, the government directed officials to be cautious regarding prohibited lands, instructing them to act strictly in such cases. The ministers stressed that ordinary citizens should not face difficulties in the process, and to prevent unnecessary delays, payments for LRS regularization should be made directly at sub-registrar offices rather than requiring applicants to visit multiple government offices. The meeting was attended by **Chief Secretary Shanthakumari, Principal Secretary (Finance) Sandeep Kumar Sultania, Principal Secretary (Municipal and Urban Development) Dana Kishore, Principal Secretary (Revenue) Naveen Mittal, Principal Secretary (Industries) Jayesh Ranjan and Stamps and Registration Commissioner Buddha Prakash.

Storm water drainage master plan for city soon

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Commissioner K Ilambarithi highlighted to come up with Storm water Drainage Master Plan.

He has directed officials to conduct a comprehensive survey of the Yakutpura drainage system. On Wednesday morning, Commissioner Ilambarithi, accompanied by Yakutpura MLA Jaffer Hussain and corporators, inspected several storm water drains in Yakutpura.

As part of the visit, the Commissioner toured Rangeeli Khidiki, Hussaini Kothi, Maulana Chilla, Ganga Nagar and Rein Bazaar. During the inspection, he observed the overflow of sewage water in Rangeeli Khidiki Street. Officials informed the Commissioner that the drain from Jahangir Nagar to Ganga Nagar was originally constructed and had overflowed during the last monsoon, causing flooding. Later, MLA Jaffer Hussain informed him that the drain construction had been going on for three years but remained incomplete. The Commissioner instructed the



GHMC Commissioner K Ilambarithi, accompanied by Yakutpura MLA Jaffer Hussain and corporators, inspecting storm water drains in Yakutpura

agency responsible to expedite the work, assuring that there was no shortage of funds and that the project must be completed within the stipulated time frame. Local residents complained about accumulated garbage in the drain, leading to water stagnation and seepage into their homes. Taking immediate action, the Commissioner directed the Zonal Commissioner to clear the

garbage without delay. In Rein Bazaar, residents reported that rainwater was stagnating in the existing box drain, causing flooding in nearby homes. MLA Jaffer Hussain mentioned that a proposal worth Rs 1.60 crore had been submitted for the construction of a new box drain. The Commissioner instructed engineering officials to send a detailed report on the project.

Drawing a parallel to road development plans, the Commissioner said that there is a need for a Master Plan for Storm water Drainage Development in Hyderabad. He stated that such a plan would ensure systematic development, maintenance and expansion of the drainage system, helping reduce urban flooding and integrating existing drains with newly developed areas.

BioAsia to provide unique platform to showcase startup innovation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BioAsia 2025, Asia's largest life sciences and healthcare conference, will provide a unique platform to showcase startups and their role in future innovation. The conference will be held on February 25 and 26 at HICC Novotel. Hosted by the Telangana government, BioAsia aims to support healthcare and life sciences entrepreneurs by driving growth. The 'Innovation Zone' will feature the Startup Pavilion and Incubator Pavilion, showcasing around 80 selected startups with healthcare solutions. These startups will receive free exhibition space and exclusive networking opportunities with industry leaders, enhancing their access to mentorship and partnerships. IT Minister D Sridhar Babu expressed enthusiasm for the strong startup participation, reinforcing Telangana's commitment to innovation.

IT Department, Special Chief Secretary Jayesh Ranjan highlighted the state's rapid growth in life sciences, while Shakti Nagappan, CEO of Telangana Life Sciences, emphasised BioAsia's role in driving impact.



Partnering with BIRAC, BioAsia 2025 continues to be a key platform for life sciences innovation.

'Sculpting Voids' expo to be held in city from Feb 22 to March 16

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A solo exhibition 'Sculpting Voids' by renowned sculptor Robin David will be on view from February 22 to March 16, at Phoenix Arena in Hytec City.

Sculpture is often seen through its form and material, but for Robin David, it is also about space and meaning. 'Sculpting Voids' explores the connection between form and emptiness, showing how the empty spaces within a sculpture can be just as powerful as the solid parts. Each piece tells a hidden story, inviting viewers to engage with the unseen.

This exhibition highlights Robin David's mastery as an artist who has reshaped Indian sculpture. As a leading figure in Central India, he has influenced contemporary Indian art not only through his own work but also by mentoring young artists. With nearly five decades of experience, his sculptures balance space, light and form, inspiring others. His works are part of prestigious collections, including Madhya Pradesh Bhawan, the Reserve Bank of India and Raj Bhawan, Bhopal.

Sukamal Banerjee appointed as CEO of Cyient



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad-based Cyient Limited, a global Intelligent Engineering solutions company, has appointed Sukamal Banerjee as Executive Director and CEO of its DET business, effective February 19, 2025. He will also join Cyient's Board of Directors.

With over 30 years of experience, Sukamal is a recognised leader in ER&D and Technology. He previously served as Corporate Vice-President at HCL Technologies and most recently as CEO and Board Member of Xoriant.

Sukamal has led business growth, market partnerships and technology-driven solutions in Digital Industry 4.0, AI/ML, and sectors like Communications, Semiconductor, Energy and Healthcare. His expertise aligns with Cyient's key markets.

Cyient Chairman MM Murugappan expressed confidence in Sukamal's leadership, highlighting his values-based approach. Executive Vice-Chairman Krishna Bodanapu welcomed Sukamal, emphasising his role in Cyient's transformation.

Sukamal stated his commitment to driving innovation and growth, leading Cyient's 16,000+ team members toward new milestones in the evolving ER&D landscape.

E-BAJA to be held from Feb 20 to 23

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

'E-BAJA 2025,' a racing challenge to test engineering students' problem-solving skills, will be held in Hyderabad from February 20 to 23. The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), a globally recognised association of engineers in aerospace, automotive and commercial vehicle industries, in collaboration with the Sri Vishnu Educational Society and SAE BAJA INDIA, is



organising this prestigious inter-collegiate event at B V Raju Institute of Technology (BVRIT), Narsapur, Medak. E-BAJA is an exciting All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) racing challenge that tests the knowledge, technical skills and problem-solving abilities of mechanical and electrical engineering students. This competition attracts teams from top

engineering institutions, including IITs, NITs, and leading universities.



Hyderabad Collector Anudeep Durishetty inspecting the Community Health Centre in Sriram Nagar

Collector Anudeep orders CHC expansion, salary processing for sanitation staff

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Collector Anudeep Durishetty conducted a surprise inspection at the Community Health Centre (CHC) located in Sriram Nagar. He interacted with pregnant women and asked officials to submit proposals for a 50-bed facility due to the increase in patients. During his visit, Anudeep inspected the pharmacy, primary examination room, X-ray and ECG rooms, along with the attendance register to ensure the presence of doctors and staff. The Collector interacted with pregnant women at the hospital to gather feedback on the medical services available. He also instructed that preg-

nancy-related data be recorded online for better monitoring. Responding to grievances from sanitation staff regarding unpaid salaries for several months, he ordered immediate action for salary approvals. Additionally, he directed officials to submit proposals for ambulance repairs and the expansion of the hospital into a 50-bed facility due to the increasing patient influx. The recruitment of an additional gynecologist was also suggested. District Coordinator of Health Services (DCHS) Dr Rajendranath, and Superintendent Dr Navaneeth Rao were instructed to submit these proposals for approval.

Study reveals mixed reaction toward AI for TB diagnosis

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A study by researchers at the Max Institute of Healthcare Management (MIHM) at the Hyderabad Indian School of Business (ISB) explored healthcare provider's attitude toward

using artificial intelligence (AI) for tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis in India. The study, published in JMIR Formative Research, surveyed 406 Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) and

informal healthcare providers (AIPs) across Gujarat and Jharkhand.

The study highlights the need for specific AI adoption strategies, including training and infrastructure improvements.

Afzalgunj Police rescue kidnapped 2-year-old boy; Three arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Afzalgunj Police rescued a two-year-old kidnapped boy and arrested three accused involved in the crime. The gang, led by the prime accused Shaik Amer alias Tara, labourer, had abducted the child with the intention of selling him or using him for begging. Shaik Amer, targeted the child after noticing that his mother was intoxicated and asleep on the footpath near Gowliguda. He, along with three accomplices, including two women hatched a plan to kidnap and sell the boy to a needy couple, said Afzalgunj Police.



Afzalgunj Police with the mother and two-year-old who was rescued from kidnap

Bandela Devi, a 25-year-old labourer from Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh. She reported that she had come to Hyderabad with her 2-year-old son in search of work but had been living on the footpath near CBS, Gowliguda, after losing contact with her cousin. On February 15, at 11am, she fell asleep in an intoxicated state, and when she woke up at 2pm, her child was missing. Afzalgunj Police registered a case under Section 137(2) BNS

and Section 84 of the Juvenile Justice Act) and began viewing CCTV footage which revealed a middle-aged man kidnapping the child and leaving in a passenger auto.

Three special teams were formed to track down the vehicle using 100 CCTV cameras. In 36 hours the police identified the auto and raided the residence of an accused and found the kidnapped child in the possession of the accused.



Aruna urges youth to follow in footsteps of Chhatrapati Shivaji

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Mahabubnagar Lok Sabha member DK Aruna paid tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as a protector of Hinduism and an inspiration to the youth. The programme, organised under the leadership of Chhatrapati Shivaji Youth Member Madhav, marked the birth anniversary of the warrior king.

DK Aruna, who attended as the chief guest, was joined by BJP State executive member Anand Babaiah, Yuva Morcha State Leader Vamsi Krishna, SC Morcha State Leader Yenkanolla Venkatesh, as well as BJP leaders and activists.

Addressing the gathering, DK Aruna highlighted Shivaji Maharaj's resistance against the Mughal emperors, who she claimed destroyed Hindu temples, attacked Hinduism, and oppressed women. She credited Shivaji's mother, Jijiji Bai, for instilling values that led him to protect Hindu



Mahabubnagar Lok Sabha member DK Aruna at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's birth anniversary at Elikatta in Rangareddy district

temples and women, ultimately establishing him as a great nationalist and a guardian of Hindu culture.

She urged the youth to take inspiration from Chhatrapati Shivaji, particularly his deep respect for women, and to follow his ideals. On this occasion, Chhatrapati Shivaji Youth Member Madhav and BJP SC Morcha State Leader Yenkanolla Venkatesh presented a portrait of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to DK Aruna as a token of remembrance.

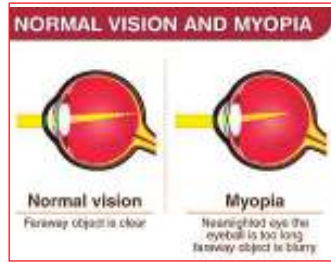
5,660 students suffer from eye defects in Khammam

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

A total of 5,660 students have been identified with vision defects out of the 1,89,784 students from government schools and colleges who were screened for eye ailments.

Last year, between April and October, students from government schools and junior colleges were screened twice for vision problems as part of the Rashtriya Bala Swasthya Karyakram. Expert doctors conducted diagnostic tests to assess students' eye health.

The second round of screening for the 5,660 affected students began on February 17, with daily checks of 200 students. The screening is expected to be completed by March 15. Based on the results, students suffering from severe issues will be referred for surgical treatment at the Sarojini Devi Government Eye Hospital in Hyderabad. Meanwhile, students with less serious conditions will be treated with medication and prescribed glasses.



Over the past three days, the second phase of the screening has been underway in government hospitals in Sathupalli, Nelakondapalli, and Khammam in Khammam district. A total of 1.11 lakh students from 1,332 government schools and colleges have been tested for eye problems, revealing that 3,557 students are experiencing vision issues. These students are unable to read properly and often suffer from headaches. In Bhadrachalam-Kothagudem district, 78,227 students were screened, and 2,103 students have been identified as needing a second round of testing. The screenings are being

conducted daily, with 250 students being examined at hospitals in Bhadrachalam and Kothagudem starting from February 17.

Dr Ramakrishna from Khammam attributed the high incidence of vision problems to poor nutrition, prolonged screen time, and excessive use of smartphones and TVs. He pointed out that many hostel students have developed the habit of using smartphones during their vacation periods. He advised parents to limit their children's screen time and encourage outdoor play to promote better eye health.

Dr Kalavati Bai, the District Medical and Health Officer, visited the special eye camp at the district headquarters hospital on Tuesday. She stated that ophthalmic officers from the Rashtriya Bala Swasthya Karyakram had identified 3,500 students with vision-related issues after two rounds of screenings in government schools.

If needed, these students will be referred to Hyderabad for further surgical treatment.

Aadhaar server glitch: Cotton procurement grinds to a halt

PNS ■ KUMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD

Komuram Bheem Asifabad district cotton farmers are facing severe difficulties with the Aadhaar server malfunctioning. Since February 10, the cotton procurement has come to a grinding halt. The Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) has stopped procuring cotton due to glitch in Aadhaar authentication. As a result, around 350 cotton vehicles are waiting in front of ginning mills.

Authorities have announced that procurement has been stopped due to disruptions in Aadhaar authentication. However, there has been no clarity as to when procurement of cotton would be resumed, leading to concerns among farmers. Procurement is expected to resume only after the Aadhaar server is restored.

To facilitate procurement, a total of 18 CCI centres have been set up in the district. Farmers have been lining up at these centres to sell their cotton, and they rented vehicles to transport their produce.

However, due to the disruption in the Aadhaar server since February 10, the rented vehicles have been waiting for 15 days in front of the mills, increasing the burden of vehicle rental costs.



Lorries loaded with cotton waiting at procurement centres in the undivided Adilabad district

The support price for cotton, if the moisture content is within the acceptable range, should be Rs 7,521 per quintal. However, private traders are paying only Rs 6,500 per quintal or even less, citing quality issues. As a result, farmers have been waiting in long queues at CCI procurement centres for over a week.

Private vehicle rentals have increased by Rs 1,000 or more per day. Yet, procurement is not happening, and some farmers are finding it difficult to pay the higher rental fees. They are selling to private traders at a loss, who are exploiting the situation by offering lower prices, even below the support price.

Farmers are urging for an immediate resolution of this issue and the resumption of CCI cotton procurement without further delay.



Officials conduct inspection of 'unauthorised' clinic in Khammam on Wednesday

'Unauthorised' clinic sealed in Khammam

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

In a surprise inspection conducted on Tuesday, Dr B. Kalavathi Bai, the District Medical and Health Officer, checked the Pain Relief Acupuncture Hospital in the Kaman Bazaar area here. She identified that the hospital was operating without proper registration and directed the authorities to seal it immediately.

During the inspection, Dr Kalavathi Bai found that Dr P Vijayabaskar, who was reportedly acting as the doctor, was not present. She confirmed that he lacked the necessary qualifications to

provide medical services. Dr Kalavathi Bai said that only qualified individuals should provide medical care and recommended that practitioners should register under the Allopathic Act before practising.

She clearly warned that operating without authorisation is illegal and assured that regular inspections would be conducted and strict actions would be taken against hospitals that failed to comply with the regulations.

Deputy DMHO Dr Saidulu, Dr Chandunayak, Demo Sambasivareddy and other officials were also present.

Chaos as farmer attempts self-immolation

PNS ■ JADCHERLA

Tension arose here on Wednesday after the police prevented Udandapur farmers who came in a procession to highlight their 'plight'. They chanted their protest as a "begging expedition" to draw the attention of the government.

The farmers embarked on a

protest in support of their demand for compensation for the lands they had lost for the Udandapur irrigation project, which is part of the Palamuru-Rangareddy irrigation project.

A farmer, named Mallaya, even attempted to set himself on fire after pouring petrol on his body. The police promptly intervened and thwarted the attempt.



A policeman thwarting a farmer from setting himself on fire after dousing himself with petrol in Jadcherla on Wednesday

The farmers have been staging protests and embarked on hunger strike for the past eight, demanding full compensation for their lands and houses they had lost for the project.

On Wednesday, when the farmers moved to Jadcherla town, carrying begging bowls, the police stopped them at the government guest house, saying they

did not have permission. They staged a protest at the guest house.

Finally, the police allowed the farmers to hold a rally, during which they demanded that the state government provide the full compensation they were entitled to while continuing their procession with begging bowls in their hands.

Collector makes surprise visit to Gurukul Girls' School

PNS ■ HANAMKONDA

The District Collector P Pravina visited the Telangana State Gurukul Girls' School in Vangara under Bhimadeva rapalle mandal. During this visit, the Collector inspected the classrooms, dormitories, and kitchen facilities of the school. The Collector also examined the grievance box set up within the school premises.

The Collector inspected the food prepared for the students. She inquired about the progress of various developmental works at the school. Additionally, the Collector asked about the available facilities for the students and if there were any issues.

The Collector also reviewed the library in the hostel and



Hanamkonda Collector P Pravina inspecting Gurukul Girls' School at in Bhimadevapaalle mandal in Hanamkonda district on Tuesday

interacted with the students. During the visit, the Collector mentioned that the school has 550 students.

The Collector also reviewed the progress of the developmental works undertaken at the Gurukula Girls' School with a budget of Rs. 24 lakhs,

under the guidance of the Amma Adarsha School Committee. She directed the officials to ensure that the pending developmental works are completed within the next ten days.

An order was given to install mesh doors in the hostel.

Rally marks Shivaji Maharaj's 395th birth anniversary in Shadnagar

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Shadnagar town in Rangareddy district witnessed a grand celebration of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's 395th birth anniversary, with a massive rally organised by Hindu Vahini, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and Bajrang Dal. The event began with floral tributes to Shivaji Maharaj's statue, honouring his legacy as a warrior and protector of Hinduism.

MLC Naveen Kumar Reddy, Vishwa Hindu Parishad State Secretary Bandari Ramesh, BJP leader Sri Vardhan Reddy, Municipal Chairman Konduti Narendar, Hindu Vahini leader Kedela Venkatesh, BJP leader Murali, and other prominent figures participated in the program.

Addressing the gathering, MLC Naveen Kumar Reddy urged the youth to follow the ideals of Shivaji Maharaj and contribute to the nation's progress. He emphasized that Shivaji's vision and leadership continue to



MLC Naveen Kumar Reddy speaking at a rally organised on the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's 395th birth anniversary in Shadnagar on Wednesday

inspire generations.

Following the rally, activists from various Hindu organisations organised a blood donation camp to support children suffering from thalassemia, adding a humanitarian touch to the celebrations.

PEDDAGATTU JATARA

Durajpally to be developed at a cost of Rs 60 cr

Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy announced that a ghat road and guest houses will be constructed

PNS ■ SURYAPETA

Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has announced a Rs 60 crore development plan for Durajpally, the venue for Pedda Gattu Jatara, the second-largest religious festival in Telangana after Medaram. Construction of a ghat road and guest houses would be taken up, he said.

Addressing devotees at the Jatara, the Minister emphasised the significance of the festival, which attracts nearly 40 lakh people, and assured that the government is committed to improving amenities for the devotees.

Venkat Reddy stated that, after 10 years of BRS rule, a people's government has been formed in Telangana, and he prayed to Lord Lingamantla Swamy and Goddess Chowdamma for strength to provide houses for the poor. Reflecting on the previous administration, he criticised the decade-long family rule in Telangana, which, according to him, led to large-scale exploitation. He said the people



Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy at Peddagattu Jatara in Suryapet district on Wednesday

gave a landslide victory to the Congress in Nalgonda, where party candidates secured 50,000-60,000 vote majorities in each constituency.

The Minister also raised concerns about irrigation projects, stating that the previous government had failed to supply water to Suryapet by neglecting SLBC, Brahmana Vellamla, and Srisamsagar canals. Assuring

farmers of better support, he reiterated that the Congress government would prioritise their welfare.

Turning his attention to the previous BRS government, Venkat Reddy questioned why leaders like Kavitha never offered Bonalu at Durajpally while in power but suddenly remembered the place after losing their positions. He recalled the ser-

vices of Damodar Reddy, which prompted former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy to ensure water supply to Tungaturthi and Suryapet. Highlighting Congress' commitment to agriculture, he stated that even without water from the Kaleshwaram Project, Telangana recorded a historic 1.52 crore metric tonnes of paddy production, solely relying on older projects developed by

Congress. He also reminded farmers that it was Congress that granted a Rs 500 bonus per quintal on 70 per cent of paddy.

Venkat Reddy also accused KCR of selling Telangana's water resources to Andhra Pradesh by hosting Jagan Mohan Reddy at Pragati Bhavan and allowing water diversions for the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation and Muchumarri Lift Irrigation schemes. He alleged that KCR colluded with Jagan to divert 88,000 cusecs of water from Pothireddy padu and dried up Srisaillam and Nagarjuna Sagar reservoirs.

Speaking about development plans for Nalgonda, he revealed that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had sent him to the USA to study tunnel boring technology, which was crucial in transforming Nalgonda into a prosperous region.

Defending Congress as a secular party that united people, he accused the BJP of hypocrisy, stating that a party that removed a Backward Classes leader as its state unit president has no moral right to speak about BC welfare.

Three Rohingyas arrested, fake passport, Aadhaar card seized

PNS ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

Three Rohingyas from Myanmar were identified and arrested by the police at a farmhouse in Narsing Thanda under Rajapur mandal. They were produced before the court and remanded in judicial custody.

Mahabubnagar Deputy Superintendent of Police Venkateswaru at a media conference at the Jadcherla police station revealed the arrest of Rohingyas. Noor Mohammad, a Myanmar national, who was residing at Balapur in Hyderabad, had created a fake passport a visa for Saudi Arabia. After going to Saudi Arabia, he returned to Hyderabad in 2022. In October 2022, he obtained another visa and went to Dubai, returning within a month. He married a Rohingya girl, Rizwana, from Balapur.

With the help of an agent, he crossed into Bangladesh via the Tripura border, where he stayed for a year in Cox's Bazar. During this time, he met a couple, Sumayya Mohammed and Aroob Ahmed, who informed him that he could earn more money in India. He took a large sum of money from them.

In March 2024, the couple illegally entered India through the Tripura border at Charma Nagar at night. The next morning, they reached Agartala, the capital of Tripura, and from there traveled by train to Secunderabad. To avoid the police, they worked at a farmhouse in Narsing Thanda in Jadcherla constituency, owned by a person from Hyderabad named Ayog. They had been staying at the farmhouse for eight months. Ten days ago, the main accused sent his wife to Bangladesh with the help of an agent. Acting on information, sub-inspector Shivananth Goud conducted an investigation after a complaint was filed. The police arrested three illegal immigrants—Noor Mohammad, Muhammad Aru Ahmed, and Sumayya.

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PART - I EXTRAORDINARY PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY
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GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
OFFICE OF THE REVENUE DIVISIONAL OFFICER,
KHAMMAM

PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION
FORM-VI
(See sub rule (1) of rule -19 and Section -11(1) of the Act-30/2013)

Collector File No. G1/1627/2018 Date: 14.02.2025
RD/160 Khammam Re. No. C1/1469/2018, Date: 04.02.2025

Whereas it appears to the Government of Telangana Collector that a total extent of Acs. 60-16 Gts land is required in the Dhamsalapuram village of Khammam (Urban) Mandal of Khammam District for public purpose, namely for the proposed 3rd Railway line with electrification between Kuzipet to Kondapalli Section and the notification is issued under Section 11(1) of the Right Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act-2013 and the Publication is Made as shown in the below schedule.

The District Collector, Khammam has appointed the Revenue Divisional Officer, Khammam as Land Acquisition Officer, vide Prods. Re. No. G1/1027/2018, dated: 27.08.2018 for acquisition of Patta land for the proposed 3rd Railway line with electrification between Kuzipet to Kondapalli Section in the village limits of Dhamsalapuram of Khammam (Urban) Mandal.

Therefore, it is notified that for the above said project in Dhamsalapuram village of Khammam (Urban) Mandal of Khammam District a piece of land measuring an extent of Acs. 60-16 Gts of standard measurement, whose detail description is as following, is under acquisition.

SCHEDULE

Sl. No.	By No.	Save No.	Type of Land	Area under Acquisition (Acs-Gts)	Name of the Pottadar	Boundaries
1	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-02	Bandaru Pushpavathi, W/o Venkateswarlu	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
2	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-03	Hanuman Temple	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
3	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-05	Hikala Meera Sab, S/o Rama Swamy & Others	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
4	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-03	Varakambolu Venkateswaru, S/o Veerash	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
5	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-04	Adhuri Rajavardhan, S/o Anji Reddy	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
6	171/1/2	171/1/2	Patta Dry	00-02	Bornnisiati Ramosh, S/o Ramalak	N/E 41/19/19 N/31/19/19
Total (In Acs-Gts)						00-16

This notification is made under the provision of Section-11 (1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act-2013 (Act -No. 30/2013), to all whom it may concern.

A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the District Collector, Khammam & in the office of the Revenue Divisional Officer, Khammam on any working day during the working hours. The Government of Telangana Collector cum-Appropriate Government is pleased to authorize Officer & Revenue Divisional Officer, Khammam and his staff to the Revenue Divisional Officer, Khammam to enter upon and survey lands, take levels of any land, dig or bore into the sub-soil & do all other acts required for the proper execution of their work as provided and specified in Section -12 of the said Act.

Under Section 11(4) of the Act, no person shall make any transaction or cause any transaction of land i.e., sale/purchase, etc., or create any encumbrances on such land from the date of publication of such notification without prior approval of the Collector.

Objections to the acquisition if any may be filed by the person interested within (60) sixty days from the date of publication of this notification as provided under Section-15 of the Act before District Collector, Khammam.

Sd/- Additional Sd/- District Revenue Divisional Officer Sd/- Collector Sd/- District Collector, Khammam, Khammam, Khammam.

DIPR No. 699/LA/PP-Pub/2024-25

ACROSS THE STATES



Utkhand Vidhan Sabha goes paperless

The Uttarakhand Vidhan Sabha has worn a new look by adopting the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) under which the proceedings and day-to-day workings of the assembly will be digitised. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami inaugurated the e-Vidhan Sabha at the state assembly here at the start of the budget session on Tuesday. Assembly Speaker Ritu Khanduri and cabinet ministers were present during the inauguration. The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs described it as a "momentous leap for Uttarakhand". By embracing the NeVA, Uttarakhand Assembly has become a digital House, it said. The e-Vidhan Sabha system has been adopted to make the work of the Uttarakhand Assembly digital and paperless. Through this, the agenda of business, answers to questions asked in the Assembly and other documents will now be made available online to the MLAs. Under this, tablets have been installed on the tables of the MLAs in the Assembly, and all the documents are being made available to them digitally. Big screens have been put up on three walls of the assembly to display the proceedings of the House live.



Man sells infant son for Rs 1 lakh, booked

A man has been booked for allegedly selling his nine-month-old son for Rs 1 lakh with the help of his brother-in-law, police said on Wednesday. The incident came to light when a police team patrolling the Panam village area received a tip-off that Sohan, a resident of the same village, had allegedly conspired with his brother-in-law Sagar to sell his infant son, they said. The child was allegedly sold to a resident of Jalandhar's Salarpur for Rs 1 lakh, the police added. According to preliminary investigations, a part of the payment was allegedly made in cash, while the remaining amount was transferred to Sagar's bank account, they said. An officer from Garhshankar police station investigating the case said that an FIR under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act has been registered. Raids are being conducted to trace the child and arrest the accused, the police said.



CBI arrests 5 railway officials for graft in exam

The CBI has arrested five railway officers, including two of the Indian Railway Personnel Service posted at the Vadodara Division, for alleged bribery in favouring candidates in departmental examination, officials said Wednesday. The federal probe agency seized 650 grams of gold and Rs 5 lakh cash during its searches at 11 locations, including in Gujarat's Vadodara, a CBI spokesperson said. The CBI has arrested 2008-batch IRPS officer Sunil Bishnoi posted as a senior divisional personnel officer in Vadodara, 2018-batch IRPS officer Ankush Wasan, posted as divisional personnel officer there, Deputy Chief Commercial Manager Sanjay Kumar Tiwari posted at Mumbai's Churchgate, Deputy Station Superintendent Neeraj Sinha and Nursing Superintendent Dinesh Kumar posted at Divisional Railway Hospital in Ahmedabad, officials said. The agency has also arrested Mukesh Meena in the case, they said. The CBI swung into action after registering an FIR on Tuesday against Wasan, Tiwari, Sinha and Meena on allegations that these officials in conspiracy with a private person were collecting money from candidates.

'Punjab's deportees share largest'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann taking exceptions to US flights carrying Indian deportees landing in Amritsar, government sources Wednesday defended the move, saying the state makes up for the biggest share of these illegal immigrants.

Sharing figures of the three flights that have arrived in India since February 5, they said Punjab residents total 126 of the 333 people deported in US military aircraft, followed by 110 from neighbouring Haryana and 74 from Gujarat.

Eight of them were from Uttar Pradesh, five from Maharashtra, two each from Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Rajasthan and Goa, and one each from Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand.

Each of the three flights on February 5, 15 and 16 carried over 100 Indians and 333 of them have been deported so far, they added. The total includes 262 men, 42 women and 29 minors, the sources added.

As many as 23 flights carrying Indian deportees have arrived in the country since May 2020 and all of them landed in Amritsar, they said. Since Donald Trump's inau-

GOVT SOURCES DEFEND FLIGHTS LANDING IN AMRITSAR



● Sharing figures of the three flights that have arrived in India since February 5, they said Punjab residents total 126 of the 333 people deported in US military aircraft, followed by 110 from neighbouring Haryana and 74 from Gujarat.

● Eight of them were from Uttar Pradesh, five from Maharashtra, two each from Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, Rajasthan and Goa, and one each from Jammu and Kashmir, and Uttarakhand.

● Each of the three flights on February 5, 15 and 16 carried over 100 Indians and 333 of them have been deported so far, they added. The total includes 262 men, 42 women and 29 minors, the sources added.

guration as US President, whose campaign promises included a crackdown on illegal immigrants, three military aircraft have arrived in India carrying the deportees.

Opposition parties protested the treatment meted out to the deportees, including them being shackled, and asked the Indian government to take up the issue with the US.

After the first flight landed on February 5, Mann accused the Centre of trying to defame Punjab and said a holy city like Amritsar should not be made a "deport centre". This flight had 30 deportees from Punjab and 33 each from

Haryana and Gujarat. He kept up his attack and said on Tuesday that if another US plane carrying deportees arrives in India, it may not land in the state following strong objections raised by him.

The second flight had 65 deportees from Punjab, 33 from Haryana and eight from Gujarat. The corresponding numbers for the third flight were 31, 44 and 33.

Following the opposition's protest, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told Parliament on February 6 that the government was engaging with the US to ensure that

deported Indians are not mistreated. The minister, however, added that the process of deportation is not a new one, and the standard operating procedure for deportation by aircraft provides for the use of restraints. Women and children were not restrained, he added.

Government sources said the rules of the US' Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency tasked with such deportations, stipulate that the "detainees transported by ICE aircraft" will be fully restrained by the use of handcuffs, waist chains and leg irons.

MUDA CASE



Lokayukta says no evidence against Siddaramaiah, wife

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Lokayukta police probing the MUDA site allotment case on Wednesday said the charges against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his wife Parvathi could not be proved for want of evidence.

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, R Ashoka, addressing the media said the Lokayukta report giving clean chit to Siddaramaiah was on the expected lines, while the petitioner in the case, activist Snehayasi Krishna, told PTI: "Only those officials who have sold their conscience can give such a report".

The probing officers said they have submitted the final report to the High Court. "Since the above allegations

against accused-1 to accused-4 in the case have not been proven due to lack of evidence, the final report is being submitted to the High Court," the Lokayukta police said in a letter to Krishna.

Besides Siddaramaiah and his wife, his brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and the land owner Devaraju are the accused. The Lokayukta police said that further investigation will be conducted into the allegations of Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) providing compensatory plots in the ratio of 50:50 from 2016 to 2024 and an additional final report will be submitted to the High Court under Section 173 (8) CrPC.

4 Naxalites killed in encounter

PNS ■ BALAGHAT

Four Naxalites including three women were killed on Wednesday in an encounter with the police in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district, an official said.

The anti-Naxal Hawk Force of the state police and local police teams took part in the operation that took place in a forested area, said additional superintendent of police Vijay Dabar.

Balaghat shares borders with Gondia district of Maharashtra and Rajnandgaon, Khairagarh and Kawardha of Chhattisgarh.

India, Malaysia to address maritime security threats

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Malaysia on Wednesday identified ways to deepen existing defence collaborations between the two nations, particularly in the fields of maritime security, multilateral engagements and defence industry, as they agreed to form a "joint focus group" to address non-traditional maritime security threats.

Both sides also identified steps to further enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Indian



defence ministry said. The 13th Malaysia-India Defence Cooperation Committee (MIDCOM) meeting took place in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

The meeting was co-chaired by Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Lokman Hakim Bin Ali, Secretary General, Ministry of Defence, Malaysia. "Both sides

expressed happiness at the growing bilateral defence cooperation with regular engagements between the two armed forces in recent years," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The two sides held wide-ranging discussions on effective and practical initiatives to further expand bilateral defence engagements, and on regional and global issues.

"Both chairs identified steps to further enhance cooperation in emerging areas such as cybersecurity and AI. They identified ways to deepen the existing col-

laborations, particularly in defence industry, maritime security, and multilateral engagements," the statement said. They also agreed to form a "joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats", it said.

"Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the new initiatives under the defence pillar of the comprehensive strategic partnership, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim during the latter's visit to India in August 2024," the statement said.



'You will be accountable for election results'

KHARGE TO CONGRESS TOP BRASS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday told top party leaders that they would be held accountable for election results in the future and warned them against turncoats, remarks that came in the backdrop of the party's Delhi poll debacle.

Addressing the new office-bearers at a meeting held at the party's headquarters at Indira Bhawan, he urged party leaders to work at the grassroots level and strengthen the party from the booth level and promote such people who are ideologically committed to the organisation.

Kharge also hinted at some more changes in the organisation, saying some changes have already taken place and some more are in the offing.

"I want to talk to you about the most important thing of accountability. You all will be

held accountable for revamping the organisations in states and for all future election results," he told the office-bearers.

The party recently brought in new office bearers in the revamped organisation.

Among those who attended the meeting included former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, all general secretaries and in-charges in various states.

"It is your responsibility to strengthen the organisation at the grassroots level from the booth to headquarters. You must bring in people who are ideologically committed and who have stood behind the party like a rock during difficult times," Kharge said.

"Sometimes while attempting to strengthen an organisation, such people are brought in haste who run away in difficult times. We must stay away from such people," he told the party leaders.

Ensure child care, feeding rooms in public buildings:SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday outlined the importance of separate spaces for child care and feeding of infants in public buildings and asked states to ensure such facilities were provided.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Prasanna B Varale said setting up such facilities would ensure privacy of mothers and prove beneficial for infants.

In existing public spaces, as far as practicable, the state governments may ensure such facilities were provided, added the court.

India-Egypt joint special forces exercise Cyclone-III underway

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Indian and Egyptian troops are undergoing rigorous combat conditioning and tactical training under the ongoing joint special forces exercise Cyclone-III at Mahajan Field Firing Range in Rajasthan's Bikaner, officials said on Wednesday.

The military drill is aimed at strengthening joint operational capabilities, defence spokesperson Col Amitabh Sharma said in a release. The third edition of 14-day exercise, which started on February 10, includes joint training on close quarter battle (CQB) drills, survival techniques, demolition train-



ing and combat medical skills, among others, he said.

"High-intensity drills being carried out in the exercise have been designed to enhance the soldiers' ability to respond effectively to complex operational scenarios, particularly in

desert and semi-desert terrain," the spokesperson added.

The joint training sessions emphasised agility, endurance and precision, ensuring that both contingents operate seamlessly as a cohesive force in real-world combat situations.

YAMUNA REJUVENATION

Delhi panel presents action plan to PMO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the change in government in the national capital, an action plan to rejuvenate the Yamuna river has been submitted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), focusing on boosting sewage treatment capacity and other critical measures, officials said on Wednesday.

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) under the Department of Environment presented a document to the PMO last week regarding the cleaning and rejuvenation of the Yamuna.



The plan, accessed by PTI, also outlines key measures, including tapping of major drains, setting up new sewage treatment plants (STPs), connecting drainage system in JJ clusters, trapping all drains, upgrading common efflu-

ent treatment plants (CETPs), removing encroachments from floodplains and beautifying the riverfront.

Cleaning of the Yamuna was at the centre of politics in the run-up to the Delhi assembly polls

with the BJP slamming the then ruling AAP for failing to rejuvenate the river during its 10-year rule. The BJP, which has come to power winning 48 out of the 70 assembly seats in the recent polls, has said cleaning of the Yamuna will be among the top priorities of its government in Delhi.

According to the document sent to PMO last week, the DPCC has highlighted that the 48-km stretch of the Yamuna from Palla to Asgarpur village in the city has been classified as a "Priority-1" (top priority) polluted stretch.

India already exceeding key climate targets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is already meeting and exceeding key climate targets and has a real opportunity to grow even faster using clean energy and industry, UN climate chief Simon Stiell has said. In an email interview with PTI, Stiell said India's vast geography and large population mean a significant number of people are vulnerable to climate impacts. Therefore, he said, it is crucial to invest in making people, communities, infrastructure, and businesses more resilient. "India is already meeting

and exceeding key targets. For example, by installing 100 GW (gigawatts) of solar in record time or providing electricity in every village.

"I see a real opportunity for India to grow even faster, using clean energy and industry, which will be a huge benefit to India's economic prosperity, with millions more jobs, better health outcomes, more affordable and secure energy accessible to all, and faster-rising living standards for the Indian people," the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) said.

Can grow faster using clean energy: UN climate chief



"I see a real opportunity for India to grow even faster, using clean energy and industry, which will be a huge benefit to India's economic prosperity, with millions more jobs, better health outcomes, more affordable and secure energy accessible to all, and faster-rising living standards for the Indian people"

He noted that from melting glaciers in the north to stronger storms, cyclones, and food insecurity, India's geography and population make a large

number of people vulnerable to climate impacts. "And the need to invest in ensuring people, communities, infrastructure, and businesses

are resilient is clear. But that population and geographic diversity is also what makes India so strong. This is a growing population being educated with the skills needed to prosper in the clean and climate-resilient industries of this and future decades," he said. Stiell, who visited India last week, called the country a "solar superpower" and urged it to develop an ambitious climate plan covering its entire economy. He said that fully embracing the global clean energy boom would accelerate India's economic rise. He praised India's efforts to

tackle climate change, saying that while some governments only talk, "India delivers".

As part of its climate commitments or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted to the UNFCCC in 2022, India aims to reduce its GDP emission intensity by 45 per cent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. It also aims to achieve 50 per cent of its installed electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. India has also pledged to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

'Throw away personal ego'

Panneer's veiled message to Palani



PNS ■ COIMBATORE (TN)

Former Chief Minister and expelled AIADMK leader O Panneerselvam on Wednesday said "personal ego" must be thrown away for the AIADMK's good, which is seen as a message to Edappadi K Palaniswami, the chief of the main opposition party. Speaking to reporters here,

Panneerselvam, when asked about chances of him speaking to senior leader KA Sengottaiyan or meeting him here, said he has been talking over the phone to those in the AIADMK who are supportive of "joining hands." Apparently, he referred to the readmission of expelled leaders, including him, into the party, and those in the AIADMK who supported it. Asked about AIADMK general secretary Palaniswami's comment that the party would win the 2026 Assembly election, he said all the parties had the same claim.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Towards strategic partnership

Qatar, India sign historic agreements to strengthen cooperation in trade, energy, investments, technology and culture

Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, recent two-day official visit to India marks a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between the two nations. During this visit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Emir Al-Thani agreed to elevate their ties to a 'strategic partnership,' focusing on key areas such as trade, energy, investments, technology, food security, culture and people-to-people connections. India and Qatar have maintained a robust relationship for decades, characterised by strong economic, cultural and diplomatic ties. The Indian expatriate community in Qatar, is 830,000 strong and plays a pivotal role in the country's development and serves as a vital bridge between the two nations. A primary outcome of the Emir's visit is the ambitious goal to double bilateral trade to \$28 billion within the next five years. Both countries are exploring the possibility of signing a free trade agreement to facilitate this growth. Energy cooperation



remains a cornerstone of the India-Qatar relationship. The discussions during the visit emphasised broadening energy ties, which could involve increased supply of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Qatar to India, thereby enhancing India's energy security. The visit underscored the importance of cultural exchange and strengthening people-to-people connections. Initiatives in this area are expected to foster mutual understanding and goodwill between the populations of both countries. But the biggest takeaway from this visit is the security cooperation. By elevating their relationship to a strategic

partnership, India and Qatar have committed to a more structured and comprehensive engagement, addressing regional and global issues of mutual interest. This strategic alignment is anticipated to enhance their collaborative efforts on various fronts. Besides, both countries have agreed to take their trade to next level. The targeted increase in trade volume and potential free trade agreement are expected to stimulate economic growth, create job opportunities and attract investments in both nations. For India, securing a stable and diversified energy supply from Qatar is crucial for its growing energy needs. For Qatar, strengthening ties with a major economy like India offers new markets and investment opportunities. Enhanced cultural exchanges will promote mutual respect and understanding, enriching the social fabric of both societies. A closer partnership between India and Qatar can contribute to regional stability, with both countries collaborating on security and diplomatic initiatives. The Emir of Qatar's visit to India has set the stage for a deeper and more multifaceted partnership between the two nations. By focusing on strategic areas India and Qatar are poised to reap significant benefits, reinforcing their longstanding ties and contributing to regional and global stability.

PICTALK



A black-naped oriole bird perches on a bloomed cotton tree, in Birbhum

Confronting the escalating migration and refugee crises



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The refugee crisis is a perplexing issue for governments, requiring a delicate balance between maintaining national security and extending compassion to those in need

The paradoxes of rapid global changes are proving to be a contemporary reality, one that sheds light on the philosophical aphorism proposed by Samuel P. Huntington, that of "Political Decay." This concept is becoming increasingly evident in highly developed societies, particularly in the face of numerous challenges concerning security. The issue of illegal migration, human trafficking, and the plight of refugees has become a significant concern, with its implications stretching across borders, creating tension among nations, and fueling rising anxieties about national security.

A few years ago, the discovery of fifty refugees dead near eastern Austria, along the Slovakia-Hungarian border, prompted widespread discussion on the issue of illegal migration and related crimes. This tragic event highlighted a larger issue facing European countries-illegal migration and the security risks that come with it. Many individuals from underdeveloped regions, in their search for survival and opportunities, attempt to migrate to European countries, often taking illegal routes. The tragic drowning of more than 80 illegal migrants in a boat off the coast of Libya is just one example of the deadly risks faced by those desperate for a better life. In light of these challenges, it is imperative that European nations develop more sophisticated mechanisms to address this issue, one that has already caused significant tension between countries.

The broader problem of migration and refugees, particularly in regions such as Afghanistan and Central Asia, has created a complicated and often violent dynamic. As refugees flee war and persecution, they find themselves subject to not only economic exploitation but also social discrimination. According to reports, over 70 per cent of the 26 million refugees worldwide are women and children. These individuals are uprooted and displaced due to wars, ethnic conflicts, political instability and religious persecution. Since the mid-20th century, the number of



refugees has dramatically increased, driven by factors such as civil wars, regional conflicts, and natural disasters. The refugee crises have been particularly severe in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia and the West Asia, with countries such as Afghanistan, Rwanda, Vietnam, Bosnia and Iraq seeing millions displaced. These refugees often seek shelter in neighbouring countries, adding pressure to already fragile systems. While refugees are often subjected to exploitation and abuse, the refugee crisis has also attracted the attention of illegal and anti-social actors who exploit the vulnerability of displaced populations. The rise of global connectivity and the post-modernisation phase calls for new frameworks and models of governance to address these challenges.

The world is increasingly interconnected, and young generations must be equipped with the tools and understanding to overcome divisive and biased perceptions that arise from ignorance. It is essential that global societies shift their focus to new models that emphasise reforms in democracy, the environment, globalisation, and governance. These reforms should prioritise finding solutions that reduce manipulation and nepotism, addressing the core needs of vulnerable populations. The refugee problem is a com-



THE TRAGIC DROWNING OF MORE THAN 80 ILLEGAL MIGRANTS IN A BOAT OFF THE COAST OF LIBYA IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE DEADLY RISKS FACED BY THOSE DESPERATE FOR A BETTER LIFE

plex and multifaceted issue, and efforts have been made to create legal definitions and frameworks for addressing the crisis. The United Nations has provided a general consensus on defining refugees as individuals who are forced to leave their country due to war, foreign invasion, or other forms of aggression. However, individual nations often adapt this definition to suit their national interests, leading to inconsistencies in refugee treatment. For instance, Uganda's President Idi Amin's expulsion of foreign nationals in 1972 resulted in the displacement of over 38,000 people, highlighting the role of political instability in driving refugee crises. Several key factors contribute to the refugee crisis, including atrocities, civil wars, and regional conflicts. Over time, efforts have been made to improve the situation, with various organisations and countries attempting to address the economic and social needs of refugees.

To address the refugee crisis, it is crucial to develop local infrastructure that promotes refugees' self-sufficiency and to involve NGOs more extensively in the solution. Comprehensive training for staff involved in rescue operations and coordination between local governments and the UNHCR will enhance effectiveness. Increased financial support is needed to

implement new programmes for refugees.

Challenges persist in addressing the refugee crisis, particularly due to inadequate infrastructure and logistical support in host countries. A global burden-sharing approach is needed to prevent undue strain on any single nation. Refugees often face detention based on illegal immigration suspicions, and camps are sometimes attacked, increasing their vulnerability. Governments, NGOs, and international bodies must ensure refugee protection, especially for women and children, while fostering long-term solutions like job creation and education.

Though eliminating illegal migration entirely may not be possible, nations must manage migration while safeguarding refugees' rights. The rise in human trafficking and exploitation adds complexity, requiring swift action from governments.

In regions like South Asia, the Rohingya refugee crisis has intensified security and humanitarian concerns, with policies often facing international criticism. A coordinated, inclusive approach is vital to meeting the needs of displaced populations without compromising national interests.

(The author, a recipient of Bharat Gaurav award is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAM PITRODA SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The latest controversial statement of Indian Overseas President Sam Pitroda negating Chinese threats to India has stoked a fierce controversy. Though Congress has distanced himself, very obviously his statement is in tune with the Congress line on China and statements of Rahul Gandhi praising and advocating China. His statement may be seen in the light of the recent successful visit of PM Modi to the US, causing heartburn and discomfort in Congress leadership. His timing of the pro-China statement is very conspicuous and contradicts the foreign policy of India. The security threats from China need no elaboration. Sam Pitroda is no stranger to controversies. Sam Pitroda had ignited a firestorm while speaking on the diversity of India, referring to how people in the South "look like Africans and those in the East look like Chinese and those in the East look like Arabs."

In June 2023, amid anticipation for the grand opening of the Ram Mandir, Sam Pitroda sparked controversy by asserting that temples wouldn't address India's pressing issues such as unemployment, inflation, education, and health. In May 2019, Sam Pitroda drew ire by dismissively remarking, 'hua to hua, so what,' when questioned about the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. During the aftermath of the Pulwama attack in February 2019, Sam Pitroda ignited controversy by questioning the efficacy of retaliatory airstrikes conducted by the Indian Air Force on Balakot. His remarks stirred debate on India's response to terrorist incidents and the appropriate diplomatic approach to such crises. Despite all controversies, he continued to be Indian Overseas President. Congress is experimenting through Sam Pitroda but his controversies are maligning the country.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY FAILS

Madam — Refers to the article 'Bangladesh wipes out history, shuns India at its own peril.' India's neighbour first policy is a

Gyanesh Kumar is new CEC



This refers to the main page headline "Gyanesh Kumar is the 26th CEC." Notwithstanding a dissenting note from the LoP Rahul Gandhi, Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the CEC by a three-member panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, comprising Home Minister Amit Shah and LoP

Rahul Gandhi. The reason behind Gandhi's dissent was that the matter is still pending before the court, raising the question of why the appointment was rushed.

Previously, the Chief Justice of India was part of the selection panel; however, this changed after the NDA government passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Keeping this in mind, the Vice President recently voiced his support for excluding the CJI from the selection process. It appears that the power to choose the next CEC and other election commissioners is now tilted entirely in favour of the central government.

Aarooh Gupta | Ujjain

MAMATA SLAMS KUMBH MANAGEMENT

Madam — West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has asserted that the Maha Kumbh has turned into a "Mrityu Kumbh" due to incidents of stampede, claiming that the actual toll at the mega religious gathering was suppressed by authorities. At least 30 people died and 60 were injured in a stampede in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, while 18 people lost their lives in a recent stampede at an overcrowded New Delhi railway station. More than 54 crore people had so far taken a dip at the Sangam. During Maha Shivrathri, a further surge of crowd is expected. More than half the total population of India, by that time, should have taken a dip. The indiscipline of the people, coupled with poor crowd management, led to the stampede. But her comment that it is a mirthy Kumbh is unwanted and uncalled for. It is an attack on sanatana dharma and people's belief and faith. It is an attack on Hindus.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Faith's double-edged sword: Reflections on the Mahakumbh



ASHA IYER KUMAR

The Mahakumbh presents a profound paradox: can a moment of divine immersion truly cleanse years of sin, or have we reduced the quest for spiritual evolution to mere ritual

In the predawn darkness, millions of pilgrims converge at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, their faith burning brighter than the stars above. The Mahakumbh, humanity's largest gathering of spiritual seekers, presents a profound paradox of our times – the sublime beauty of collective devotion juxtaposed against the perils of unquestioning faith. What compels ordinary men and women to undertake arduous journeys, risking life and limb in pursuit of divine grace?



are poignant reminders of how religious fervour, when unchecked by reason, can transform the path to salvation into a road to suffering. There is something deeply moving about the unwavering conviction that draws millions to these sacred waters. Yet, as I watch the faithful immerse themselves in the river's embrace, I cannot help but wonder: Can the complex tableau of human actions, choices, and consequences truly be undone by a moment's submersion? Does spiritual transformation work in such absolute terms, where years of misconduct can be erased in an instant? The Ganges itself presents another layer of this spiritual paradox. In our rush to cleanse our souls, have we forgotten our duty to preserve the very source of that purification?

The question that haunts me is not whether faith has value – it undoubtedly does – but whether we have reduced the profound journey of spiritual evolution to mere ritual. True transformation, I believe, lies not in momentary acts of devotion but in the sustained practice of compassion, integrity and mindful living. The real pilgrimage is not to a geographical location but to the depths of our consciousness, where we confront our shadows and choose, day after day, to act with kindness and purpose. What if the purest form of spiritual practice is simply this: to live each day with such awareness and empathy that we leave every person and place better than we found them? To cultivate a heart so clear that no wily thought finds root there, to build relationships so genuine that they become temples of mutual growth?

Perhaps this daily practice of goodness is the true holy dip our souls need. None of this is to diminish the power of faith or the beauty of religious tradition. The Mahakumbh remains a remarkable proof of human spirituality, a mirror reflecting our deepest yearnings

for connection with the divine. But perhaps its greatest lesson lies not in the promise of instant release but in showing us how collective faith can move millions to action. Imagine if this same power could be channelled into sustained ethical living, into creating communities of care and consciousness.

As the sun sets over the Mahakumbh, casting long shadows over the devoted masses, I am reminded that faith, like the Ganges itself, must flow between the banks of reason and compassion. When it overflows these boundaries, it risks becoming a force of destruction rather than salvation. The challenge before us is not to abandon faith but to evolve it – to transform it from a series of external rituals into an internal compass that guides us toward genuine goodness. The true miracle, perhaps, is not in the holy dip but in the daily choice to live with such purity that our very existence becomes a prayer, our actions a continuous act of worship. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. Views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

True forgiveness requires honesty, self-awareness, and the willingness to release resentment



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

People across the globe, from all cultures and traditions, embrace love and forgiveness in daily life. These values are universally viewed as central to the fabric of humanity. But is it as easy to forgive as it sounds to be? Forgiveness, like so many other things in life, is easier said than done. We all seek forgiveness when we do something wrong right? But our stance is quite different when someone seeks forgiveness from us. We find it hard to let go of what's happened to us. The ability to forgive others depends on how honest we are with ourselves. We must remember that forgiveness can only occur because we have been given the gift of the ability to make choices. Hence, if we want to forgive someone, no one can stop us, no matter how poorly they may act, because ultimately, it's our choice to forgive or not to forgive. This ability to forgive is a manifestation of the personal control we have over our lives. Hence each one of us should ask this question to ourselves: Have we journeyed through life pure, perfect, and clean, with never a wrong thought, a wrong word, or action? If we look at ourselves honestly, then how can we not forgive another? Most of us regret many



things that we have said or done in the past. It's a fact that we all have acted wrongly, either because of not knowing what is right, or out of fear or misunderstanding. However, with time and knowledge, we realize what is right and begin to make amends. Just by having this desire to change ourselves, we begin the process of forgiving ourselves, which in turn helps us to forgive others. If this process is to progress, we have to forgive others. We just cannot condemn others and excuse ourselves. This is cheating, and the universally applicable Law of Karma will not allow it. Remember! If we do not learn to forgive, resentment will poison us, and we will end up carrying a double burden: both the resentful thoughts of others' injustice and the hidden reality of our injustice. The power to forgive comes from compassion, which means we should compassionately and peacefully move forward with what is good, towards what is better. Forgiveness dissolves the compulsive need to prove ourselves right. It removes the indignation we feel at imagined injustice. It melts the hardness of another's heart. Our forgiveness, at first, may puzzle them. To forgive and forget is love in action. But we must first learn to forgive ourselves, as well as others, otherwise, the process of releasing this burden neither begins nor progresses. Forgiving ourselves means letting go of the past. But it also means not making the same mistakes again and again; not inventing convenient ways to excuse ourselves. Remember! A person who has hardened his own heart against others cannot feel even God's forgiveness and compassion. Hence, if we want to be forgiven, then we must be willing to forgive first because the one who forgives first not only proves his justice but especially proves his love. That is why it is said that 'A life well lived is your best revenge.' So, instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain the power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. This will make the world a better place to live in.

A tribute to my Guru Dr Nalini Didi

With profound grief, I share that Rajyogini Brahmakumari Dr Nalini Didi, a Senior Functionary of the Brahma Kumaris and my revered teacher, passed away in Mumbai on February 9, 2025. A renowned columnist and spiritual mentor, she dedicated 66 years to the service of humanity, spreading spiritual wisdom to millions. Her journey began at 16 after a transformative lecture by Prajapita Brahma, inspiring her lifelong mission of world transformation through Rajyoga education. A gifted speaker, writer and artist, she tirelessly promoted social harmony and earned numerous accolades, including an honorary D.Litt. Her guidance profoundly shaped my spiritual path.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and columnist, views are personal)

Lord Dannatt's Chagos proposal: A testament to imperial arrogance



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

In a stunning display of imperial indifference, a former British Army chief has urged Keir Starmer to abandon plans to return the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and instead hand them over to the US



The call made by Lord Dannatt, former British Army chief, as reported by The Independent (UK), urging Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to abandon plans to cede control of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius and instead consider handing the islands to the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump, is a moment of brutal clarity in the ongoing saga of colonial legacy, imperial arrogance and military hegemony. It is, perhaps, the most unambiguous and openly cynical articulation of an attitude that has plagued British foreign policy for decades: indifference to justice when the imperial or military agenda is at stake. In this shocking proposal, Lord Dannatt not only trivialises the long-standing historical injustice suffered by the Chagossian people but also reveals a chilling truth about the global order — one in which the rights of dispossessed peoples are inconsequential when the might of military power is involved.

The Chagos Islands, particularly Diego Garcia, remain a crucial outpost for both British and American military operations in the Indian Ocean, a key region for global military and economic dominance. The brutal truth is that the displacement of the Chagossians, the abduction of their homes, their lands, and their futures, was merely a strategic calculation by the British government, sanctioned and enabled by the United States.

These islands have been stripped of their rightful inhabitants, and instead of facing international condemnation, they remain a linchpin in the projection of military power. Lord Dannatt's proposal that the UK should relinquish control of the islands not to Mauritius, but directly to the US, serves as a blunt reminder that this military realpolitik is not just a policy but an ideology — one that continues to shape decisions about sovereignty, justice and human lives in ways that are both morally



THE TRUTH IS THIS: THE CHAGOS ISLANDS ARE NOT JUST A STRETCH OF LAND — THEY SYMBOLISE EVERYTHING THAT IS CORRUPT IN THE GLOBAL ORDER. A SYSTEM WHERE POWER ECLIPSES JUSTICE, AND HUMAN LIVES ARE SACRIFICED FOR THE SAKE OF GEOPOLITICAL DOMINANCE

bankrupt and legally indefensible. The truth is that the Chagossians were forcibly displaced, their lives uprooted, their families scattered across the world, and their right to return systematically denied. These are not mere footnotes in a distant history; this is an ongoing systematic injustice that has been buried beneath the murky layers of military necessity and imperial prerogative.

The United Nations and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have ruled unequivocally that the separation of the Chagos Islands from Mauritius was illegal, that the Chagossians' forced expulsion violated fundamental human rights and that their right to return to their homeland must be respected. These rulings are binding principles of international law, upheld by the court of global conscience. Yet the British government, in collusion with the United States, has continued to flout these legal rulings, with a callousness that is matched only by the complicity of global institutions that have failed to hold them to account.

The UK and its allies continue to demonstrate a dissonance between the legal obligation to return the islands to Mauritius and the military significance of Diego Garcia. The £18 billion (approximately \$22.52 billion USD) leaseback deal designed to ensure that the UK retains control of the islands is a financial burden, a sum that could instead be better spent on bolstering Britain's own defence capacity. But here's the crux: the Chagos Islands, specifically Diego Garcia, are not just a military base. They are a symbol of the power dynamics that have defined the post-war world order — a world where military interests, not

human dignity or sovereignty, govern the actions of nations. It is worth noting that Lord Dannatt's rhetoric is not an anomaly.

He is merely the latest in a long line of British military and political figures who have justified colonial dispossession in the name of military expediency. Diego Garcia, a military outpost of unparalleled strategic importance, is where American bombers take off for strikes in the West Asia, where naval forces project power across the Indian Ocean, and where the surveillance apparatus of the global superpowers monitors and controls vast swathes of the world. In short, Diego Garcia is a symbol of global military dominance — a fortress built upon the foundation of historical dispossession, suffering, and legal nullification. The fact that the Chagossians' right to return to their homeland is still not respected is a contemptuous affront to international law. The UK government's refusal to comply with ICJ rulings, while continuing to enjoy a special relationship with the US, sends a clear message to the world: law and justice are subordinate to power and strategy.

The international legal community can issue as many judgments as it likes, but it is all for naught when the major powers choose to ignore or bypass those rulings in favour of military interests. The declassified documents from the 1960s and 1970s reveal the collusion between the US and the UK to create a military enclave on Diego Garcia, with the forcible removal of the Chagossians merely an administrative detail to be swept under the carpet. In those documents, we see the foundations of a dirty deal that placed

geopolitical strategy above the basic human rights of a people. It is colonialism dressed as military necessity, and those who challenge this narrative are dismissed as idealists, outliers, or irrelevant. This is not just a matter of the Chagossians' rights; it is a fundamental crisis of the global legal and moral order.

It is a scandal that has gone largely ignored, an injustice that has been swept under the rug of strategic necessity, and an entire people's history erased in the name of military convenience. How can anyone with even a hint of conscience ignore these flagrant breaches of international law, perpetrated by those who claim to champion human rights while posing as defenders of democracy? Our complicity, fuelled by willful indifference, contributes to the erosion of international law and the degradation of fundamental human dignity.

The truth is this: the Chagos Islands are not just a stretch of land — they symbolise everything that is corrupt in the global order. A system where power eclipses justice, and human lives are sacrificed for the sake of geopolitical dominance. The silence that surrounds this injustice is as damning as the apathy that sustains it.

The Chagossians have been denied their homeland for over half a century. It is high time that the world demands the return of their land, not just out of legal obligation, but out of a moral imperative to right the wrongs of the past and give these forgotten people the future they have been denied for so long.

(The writer is a journalist and policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Empowering India's workforce: The crucial role of upskilling and inclusive hiring

With evolving industry demands and a rising need for skilled labour, organisations must bridge skill gaps and create sustainable employment opportunities

In today's rapidly changing job market, skill development and inclusive hiring are more critical than ever, particularly for the blue-collar workforce. As industries evolve and the demand for skilled labour increases, organisations must focus on bridging skill gaps and creating pathways to meaningful employment. By prioritising upskilling and inclusive hiring practices, companies can empower individuals, enhance service quality, and contribute to the overall growth of the economy.



DHIRAJ SINGH

pool. According to a report by the Global Labor Market Conference (GLMC), 55 per cent of professionals fear their skills may become partially or fully obsolete within the next five years, prompting many to consider reskilling. Organisations are increasingly offering a variety of skill

development programmes tailored specifically for their blue-collar employees. These programs encompass technical training, crisis management, digital security and leadership development, equipping workers with the expertise necessary for career advancement. In recent years, many companies have implemented structured upskilling initiatives that have led to significant improvements in service quality, efficiency and employee satisfaction. **Empowering the Grassroots Workforce**

Blue-collar workers, who make up over 80 per cent of India's non-agricultural workforce, are essential to the country's economic growth across various sectors. According to McKinsey and Company, by 2030, 70 per cent of the 90 mil-

lion new jobs expected in India will be blue-collar positions. These roles account for about 80 per cent of jobs in both the organised and unorganised sectors, acting as the primary engine of the economy. Their fulfilment is crucial for the growth of key sectors such as manufacturing and logistics. Recognising the unique challenges faced by grassroots workers, many organisations have developed targeted skilling initiatives that address the specific needs of this demographic.

These programs are designed to empower individuals at the community level, providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in their roles. Through hands-on training and mentorship, companies are fostering a cul-



ture of skill enhancement that encourages employees to take ownership of their career paths.

Success Stories:

Behind every blue-collar worker is a story of ambition and determination. Many individuals have experienced transformative career journeys through upskilling initiatives. For instance, frontline workers have advanced to supervisory

roles after completing leadership training, while others have gained expertise in emerging technologies, securing higher-paying positions. However, a report by WorkIndia reveals that more than 40 per cent of blue-collar workers are employed but actively seeking new job opportunities. The drive for better salaries, career growth, and personal motivations are leading factors. Concerns over layoffs and financial instability also prompt job searches.

Expanding Opportunities:

Inclusive Hiring Practices Organisations are not merely filling positions; they are creating futures. With a commitment to inclusive hiring, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities where job opportunities can be limited, companies are

working to ensure that more individuals, regardless of gender or background, can build stable and rewarding careers. With an increasing focus on safety and a surge in residential and commercial complexes, the private security industry has become one of the biggest generators of jobs.

Women in the Workforce:

Breaking Barriers Empowering women in the workforce is a crucial aspect of inclusive hiring. More women are stepping into roles as individual contributors, frontline managers, and even executive leadership positions, demonstrating that gender is no barrier to success. These initiatives foster a workplace culture where women can not only succeed but thrive.

The Road Ahead: Looking ahead, organizations are set to expand their upskilling programs to cater to India's growing middle class and evolving job market needs. By integrating technology-driven training and fostering a culture of continuous learning, companies aim to set new standards in workforce development.

With strategic hiring approaches and robust skill enhancement initiatives, organisations are not just providing jobs; they are building careers and transforming lives. Investing in upskilling and creating employment opportunities at the grassroots level is not just a matter of social responsibility; it is also a key economic imperative.

(The writer is CEO SIS Ltd; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Hyundai aims to be production hub for exports

Hyundai Motor India is looking to position itself as a manufacturing hub for exports for emerging markets like Africa and neighbouring nations, according to a top company executive. The company, which is looking to diversify its export markets as it continues to face challenges regarding shipments to regions like the Middle East due to the Red Sea and other geopolitical issues. "We are positioning the company as a production hub for emerging markets. We are manufacturing and exporting our cost-optimised vehicle to the emerging markets," Hyundai Motor India MD Unsoo Kim said. He noted that the automaker has a balanced mix of domestic and export volume, which gives it not only good profit but also a natural hedge against any market fluctuation. "We have a very suitable product line up for emerging markets," Kim said. Hyundai witnessed growth in almost all regions like Africa, Mexico and Latin America, he said. "However, the Middle East continued to face headwinds due to the Red Sea crisis. We will be closely monitoring the situation and will also plan to mitigate the risk by focusing on other regions," Kim said.

TO ACHIEVE NET-ZERO PLEDGE India's power sector needs USD 700 bn investment: Moody's

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's power sector - the biggest carbon emitter - will need massive USD 700 billion investment over the next 10 years to help the country achieve its 2070 net-zero pledge, Moody's Ratings said on Wednesday.

Stating that the power sector accounts for around 37 per cent of carbon emissions in the country, the rating agency said the investments required by the power sector during fiscal 2026-51 to be of the order of 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent of GDP (around 2 per cent for the next 10 years), which is manageable for India.

The sector, which currently is highly dependent on coal-fired generation, has to make significant decarbonization investments for the country to meet its emission cut goals.

"Our expectation of strong

economic growth over the next 10 years implies an expansion of India's coal-based power generation capacity in that period, hindering carbon transition," it said.

In a note, Moody's pegged power sector's annual investment requirement between



Rs 4.5 lakh crore to Rs 6.4 lakh crore (USD 53 billion to USD 76 billion) of investment until fiscal 2034-35 (fiscal year ending March 2035), and around Rs 6 lakh crore to Rs 9 lakh crore annually over fiscal 2026-51.

"We estimate India's power sector investments... would be in the range of Rs 4.5 lakh crore to Rs 6.4 lakh crore (USD 53 billion to USD 76 billion) until fiscal 2034-35 (total investment of around USD 700 billion over the next 10 years), and Rs 6.0 lakh crore to Rs 9.5 lakh crore annually over fiscal 2025-51," it said.

STPIs to help keep pace with changing tech: Min

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) set up with the mandate to promote IT and ITeS exports, will help the country keep pace with changing technology in the world, Union minister Jitin Prasada said on Wednesday.

Inaugurating an STPI incubation facility centre at Salt Lake Electronics Complex in the metropolis, Prasada said the government will provide opportunities by giving access to cheaper space, handholding and financial help to start-ups.

"The new STPI incubation centre shows the government's commitment in making India the tech hub in the world," the Union minister of state for commerce, industry, electronics and information technology said.

The new STPI incubation facility will be one of the 67 centres spread across the country. With the new centre, West Bengal will be home to a total of five such facilities. The other four STPIs are located in Kharagpur, Siliguri, Haldia and Durgapur.



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The Salt Lake facility has a built up space of two lakh square feet on three acres of land provided by the West Bengal government. The facility will offer plug and play facilities, an auditorium and conferencing centres among others.

Prasada also said India is also gearing up towards making India as a leader in artificial intelligence (AI) using large language models. Aided by Aadhaar, mobile and internet connections, there is no dearth of data availability in the country.

For this, Rs 10,000 crore has also been allocated under the IndiaAI scheme, he said, adding Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is monitoring the progress in this regard.



EAM to visit South Africa for G20 Meeting

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will be on a two-day visit to South Africa beginning February 20 to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the MEA announced on Wednesday. The minister is expected to hold a few bilateral meetings on the margins of the meet. South Africa is currently the chair of the influential grouping. "External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr S Jaishankar will be visiting Johannesburg, South Africa on 20 & 21 February 2025 to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) at the invitation of the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Ronald Lamola," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. The minister's participation in the G20 FMM will "strengthen" India's engagement with G20 countries and "bolster the voice of the Global South" in this important forum.

Gold reclaims all-time high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price jumped by Rs 900 to revisit the all-time high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid strong global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 88,500 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. On February 14, it rallied by Rs 1,300 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 89,400 per 10 grams in the local markets.

So far this year, price of gold has surged Rs 10,010 or 12.6 per cent to Rs 89,400 per 10 grams as compared to Rs 79,390 grams on January 1. Additionally, the yellow metal of 99.5 per cent purity rallied by Rs 900 to reclaim its all-time high level of Rs 89,000 per 10 grams. It had closed at Rs 88,100 per 10 grams in the previous session.

According to experts, gold extended its gain on Wednesday, buoyed by safe haven demand and persistent buying amid President Trump's new tariff threats, combined with rising geopolitical uncertainty. Silver price also increased by Rs 600 to Rs 99,600 per kilogram on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery climbed Rs 479 to hit a record high of Rs 86,592 per 10 grams in the afternoon trade.

Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower amid volatile trade

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile trade on Wednesday dragged by blue-chip IT stocks.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dipped 28.21 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 75,939.18. Intra-day, it hit a high of 76,338.58 and a low of 75,581.38, gyrating 757.2 points.

The NSE Nifty skidded 12.40 points or 0.05 per cent to 22,932.90.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Consultancy Services and Infosys fell over 2 per cent each. Hindustan Unilever,

Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Tech Mahindra were also among the laggards.

Among the gainers, Zomato jumped nearly 5 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were also among the gainers.

Among BSE sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT dropped 1.33 per cent, teck (1.31 per cent) and IT (1.21 per cent).

BSE Industrials jumped 2.59 per cent, capital goods (2.19

per cent), metal (1.41 per cent), services (1.41 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.05 per cent), and commodities (0.95 per cent).

"The national benchmarks exhibited a range-bound performance with a slight downward bias, though selective buying in the broader market was evident, driven by bargain hunting in beaten-down stocks. A reversal in FII flows also influenced market dynamics; however, the durability of this trend remains uncertain. Despite concerns over potential US tariff impositions and

delays in anticipated interest rate cuts, market sentiment remains optimistic about a rebound in India's Q3 GDP growth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended in positive territory on Tuesday. "While markets ended flat with a slightly negative bias due to selling in IT stocks, broader markets witnessed a lot of optimism as mid and smallcap stocks rallied after the recent sell-off.

Mysuru layoffs: Infosys denies using force, intimidation tactics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT services company Infosys on Wednesday said it did not use force or intimidation tactics when it laid off trainees at Mysuru campus over performance-related issues, and that it was explaining the circumstances to the labour department authorities.

In an interview to PTI, Shaji Mathew, Chief Human Resources Officer at Infosys, however, conceded that assessment failure percentages this time around have been "slightly higher" than in the past but dismissed charges that the tests had been designed for failure. On whether the layoffs



would severely dent Infosys' brand as the company goes out to campuses for FY26 hiring, he said that plans to hire 20,000 freshers for next fiscal are on track and they should have nothing to worry about as they

will get one of the best corporate training.

Responding to allegations that testing parameters, assessment criteria and syllabus were altered and intimidation tactics were resorted leading to the 300

plus terminations at Mysuru campus recently, Mathew said that given that the company invests money and effort to select and put trainees through the training program "it is in the interest of Infosys to see that all these people are successful, and that is when we are able to put them into our projects".

"There is training investment that goes in and we also pay them salary during the training...It is not in the interest of the company to let any of these people go...It is a loss to us as well, he said, adding that the particular batch of trainees had not cleared internal assessments after three attempts.

Rajasthan Budget focuses on jobs, water supply

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Recruitment for up to 2.75 lakh positions in the government and private sector, water supply projects, and the construction of nine greenfield expressways were the highlights of the Rajasthan Budget 2025-26 presented by state Finance Minister Diya Kumari in the assembly on Wednesday.

While presenting the Rs 5.37-lakh crore Budget,

Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister of the state, announced that 20 lakh new houses will be provided with drinking water connections and Rs 400 crore will be spent for this purpose.

"We are committed to creating a USD 350 billion economy by 2030... We have increased capital expenditure by more than 40 per cent in a short period and have constructed more than 9,600 km of new roads



and upgraded more than 13,000 km of roads," Kumari said. Calling this the state's first "green Budget", Kumari said

special focus will be given on climate change adoption, forest and environment, sustainable agriculture, water harvesting, recycling and waste disposal, circular economy, and capacity building.

"Under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, the GDP, indicating the development of the state, is estimated to increase to more than Rs 19,89,000 crore in 2025-26," she said.



India Yamaha Motor expands retail footprint in TN

Two wheeler manufacturer India Yamaha Motor, the subsidiary of Japanese auto major Yamaha, strengthening its footprint, has inaugurated two new 'Blue Square' showrooms in the city taking the overall presence to 79 in Tamil Nadu, the company said. The Blue Square dealerships - Walters MotoHub in Kolathur and Samukh Motors in Sholinganallur come in the backdrop of the company aiming to solidify its market position in the country, a company statement here said on Wednesday. The Blue Square showrooms are designed as hubs for India Motor Yamaha's premium motorcycling experience and embody Yamaha's racing legacy through the 'Blue' symbol to aspiring buyers. The retail outlets showcase premium displays of motorcycles and scooters, accessories, spare parts, among others. India Yamaha Motorcycle currently retails 321cc YZF-R3, MT03, 155 cc motorcycle, YZF R15M, MT-15 and FZ series range of bikes. It also sells a range of scooters, including Aerox155, Fascino S125 cc among others in the country, the company added.

Irdai: Provide ASBA facility for premium payments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance regulator Irdai has asked life and health insurers to provide Bima-ASBA, a facility wherein a policyholder blocks the amount towards premium in his or her bank account which gets debited only when the policy is issued.

According to Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) norms, premium is required to be paid only after the insurer communicates the decision of acceptance of the proposal to the customer.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) One Time Mandate (OTM) feature allows users to block funds in their bank accounts for specific transactions, ensuring availability of funds while deferring actual payments.

With an aim to facilitate smooth transactions of payment of premium, Irdai said UPI-OTM is enabled to be used by insurers.

"Under this facility called the Bima Applications Supported by Blocked Amount (Bima-ASBA), transfer of money from the prospect to the insurer happens



only when insurance policy is issued," it said. Irdai said that insurers are allowed to use Bima-ASBA mechanism for blocking of

premium up to the limit specified by NPCI from time to time. "Insurers are mandated to offer Bima-ASBA facility to its prospects for life and

health insurance policies," it said and added that currently the facility is being extended to individual policyholders.

Insurers have been asked to go live and offer Bima-ASBA facility by March 1.

The regulator also said insurers should partner with multiple banks and have appropriate systems and process in place.

UPI-OTM service is useful in multiple scenarios where the customer prefers to authorise a block on funds without immediate debits, facilitating smoother transaction processing.

ASBA facility or blocking of funds through UPI is widely used by retail investors in stock market.

HYDERABAD METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
4th Floor Swarnajayanti Commercial Complex, Aareonagar, Hyderabad.

Public Notification U/s. 15(3) of HMDA Act, 2008
(Government Memo. No. 17828/Pg.11/2024, dt:05.02.2025)

In exercise of the powers conferred by Sub-Section (1) of Section 15 of HMDA Act 2008 (Act No.8 of 2008), it is proposed to make the following draft variation to the land use envisaged in the notified Master Plan MDP-2031 approved by the Government V/S G.O.Ms.No.33 MA & UD Dept. dt: 24.01.2013. The site in Sy. No.162/P, 163/P, 196/P, 197/P, 198/P, 199, 200, 202/P situated at Anantharam (V), Shamirpet (M), Medchal-Malkajgiri (D) to an extent of 194384.48 Sq.Mts., with road affected area 169.75 Sq.Mts., and net extent is of 194224.73 Sq.Mts., which is presently earmarked for Conservation use zone, as per the notified MDP-2031 approved by the Government vide G.O.Ms.No.33 MA & UD dt:24.01.2013, is now proposed to be designated as Residential use zone. The details of the above are available in Web sites <http://gazette.telangana.gov.in/> and <http://hmda.gov.in/>. Objections/Suggestions would be considered from any person or body to the said proposals. They can submit objections/suggestions in writing either to the M.C, HMDA or to the Principal Secretary, MA & UD Dept., Telangana Secretariat, Hyderabad within Fifteen (15) days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Sd/- For Metropolitan Commissioner
Director Planning-I, HMDA

DPR R.O. No.: 1631-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/11/2024-25

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
NOTIFICATION Dt: 19/02/2025

Sealed quotations are invited from the eligible firms/agencies for supply of the following sports items to GHMC, Gajulararaman circle. The details are as follows.

S.No.	Model	Description	Unit
1	18x36 size tent	Supply, delivery and fixing of 18/36 size Tents on hire basis including all charges.	each
2	Round tent	Supply, delivery and fixing of round Tents on hire basis including all charges.	each
3	carpels	Supply, delivery of carpets on hire basis including transportation.	each
4	Mine set	Providing mine set including accessories including all charges.	each
5	Empty drum	Providing Empty drums with white cloth for covering (for Drinking) including all charges etc., complete.	each
6	Plastic chairs	Supply, delivery of plastic chairs on hire basis including all charges etc., complete.	each
7	Iron tables	Supply, delivery of Iron Tables on hire basis including all charges etc., complete.	each
8	Side walls	Supply, delivery and fixing of side walls on hire basis including all charges etc., complete.	each

Note: (i) Quotations should be submitted on or before 21/02/2025 to the Office of Executive Engineer, Gajulararaman Circle 25, GHMC on the letter head of the firm/agency. (ii) GST will be 18% extra on the quoted rate. (iii) GST No. should be mentioned on the letter pad. (iv) For complete specifications kindly contact the Circle Office @ 799507963.

Sd/- Executive Engineer,
Gajulararaman Circle-25, GHMC

R.O.No: 1643-PP/CL/ADVT/11/2024-25, Dt: 19-02-2025

With a mission to ensure no child starts their day hungry, Kellanova, India's Bright Start feeding programme is tackling child malnutrition head-on, providing over 9.3 million meals since 2019. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, the founder speaks in detail about this initiative much in detail

Hyderabad

NOURISHING FUTURES & CHANGING LIVES!



TEJAL SINHA
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In a country where malnutrition remains a pressing issue, with 36% of children under five stunted and 32% underweight, the need for accessible and nutritious food solutions has never been more critical. Addressing this challenge head-on, Kellanova India launched the Bright Start feeding program in 2019 under its global 'Better Days Promise'. Since its inception, the initiative has provided over 9.3 million meals to underprivileged children, ensuring that they start their day

with a nourishing breakfast. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Prashant Peres, Managing Director, South Asia at Kellanova, sheds light on the inspiration behind the program, its impact and the company's vision for the future. Peres explains that the program was born out of a deep concern for India's widespread malnutrition crisis. "We recognised that micronutrient deficiencies severely affect children's cognitive development, immunity, and overall growth. A nourishing breakfast is essential to bridge this gap. Through Bright Start, we provide fortified cereals with milk, an accessible and nutrient-dense solution." Initially launched as a pilot program

servicing 1,500 children, Bright Start has since grown to reach over 17,500 children weekly across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The initiative aims to nourish 400 million people facing food insecurity by 2030. With its rapid growth, Bright Start has already served 3.3 million meals in 2024 alone. Peres emphasises that the program's long-term vision is to expand further, ensuring that more children receive the essential nutrients they need. "We are committed to scaling our impact year on year. By 2030, we aim to reach a significantly larger number of children, tackling morning hunger on a much broader scale." Targeting the most vulnerable communities has been central to Bright Start's mission. The programme prioritises underprivileged areas where access to balanced nutrition is limited. "We've focused on regions across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka," Peres explains. "Working closely with NGO partners like Shri

Satya Sai Annapoorna and The Breakfast Revolution, we ensure that nutritious breakfasts reach children in both urban and rural areas." One of the key reasons these regions were selected is the high prevalence of malnutrition and food insecurity among children. Through strategic local partnerships, they have been able to distribute fortified, multigrain cereals with milk, ensuring children receive a consistent, balanced meal. For any large-scale nutrition programme to be sustainable, collaboration is key. He credits Bright Start's success to a well-structured partnership model. "We work closely with NGOs, local communities and government bodies," he says. "For instance, in Karnataka, the state government provides milk, while Kellanova supplies Kellogg's cereals and sponsors SaiSure Fortified Ragi in collaboration with Annapoorna Trust, enhancing the nutritional value of school meals." Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh, the state government has granted permissions for the initiative, allowing Kellanova and Annapoorna Trust to jointly implement the Morning Feeding Programme in rural schools. This collaborative approach ensures that children receive a nourishing start to their day without financial burden on their families. Since its launch, they have made a tangible difference in children's health and well-being. Teachers and school authorities have reported notable improvements in students' immunity, energy levels and overall growth.



Peres shares a story from a rural school in Chikkaballapura, Karnataka, where the program has had a profound impact. "Previously, students were provided plain milk, which many found difficult to consume. With the introduction of products like Chocos along with milk, children now enjoy their breakfast, leading to increased participation and improved health." School principals have also observed noticeable growth in students' height and weight, reinforcing the importance of fortified nutrition in early childhood development. Running a large-scale feeding program comes with its challenges, particularly in coordinating with multiple stakeholders. However, Peres believes that a shared commitment to tackling malnutrition has helped overcome these hurdles. Neelam Jethwani, Managing Trustee at Decimal Foundation, has been a strong

advocate of the programme. "Breakfast fuels a child's learning, growth and success, fostering active minds, healthy bodies and positive ambitions. We are grateful to Kellanova India and our on-ground partners for enabling the nourishment of thousands of urban and rural children in Maharashtra and Gujarat." Looking ahead, they remain committed to expanding Bright Start, strengthening its partnerships, and reaching more children in need. "We believe that no child should start their day hungry. With the continued support of our stakeholders, we are determined to make nutrition accessible to the communities that need it the most." As Bright Start continues to grow, it stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, innovation, and purpose-driven action in addressing one of India's most pressing challenges—child malnutrition.



POWERING INDIA'S TRANSPORT HUBS

As India's metro stations and airports handle millions of passengers daily, ensuring seamless operations is critical. One key factor in keeping these transport hubs running smoothly is pump technology. Wilo, a global leader in pump solutions, plays a vital role in water supply, drainage, fire safety, HVAC and wastewater management in these high-traffic facilities! Metro stations and airports require a steady water supply for drinking, restrooms, cleaning, comfort cooling and firefighting. Wilo pumps provide reliable water flow, ensuring uninterrupted service even during peak hours. Additionally, their efficient drainage systems prevent water accumulation and flooding, enhancing safety and operational continuity. "Efficiency and reliability are paramount in transport hubs that serve millions of people every day," said Vinod Pawar, Segment Head Building Services Commercial at Wilo India. "The advanced pump solutions help ensure smooth operations, from water supply to fire protection, contributing to the safety and sustainability of these vital facilities." Temperature control is crucial in India's diverse climate. HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) systems, powered by Wilo pumps, help regulate temperature and air quality. Designed for energy efficiency, these pumps support sustainability while maintaining comfort for passengers and staff. Passenger safety is a top priority in transport hubs and the pumps are integral to fire suppression systems. Equipped with high-pressure water delivery, jockey pumps for consistent pressure and diesel-powered backups, they ensure rapid response during emergencies. As a part of sustainability drive the wastewater management is another essential aspect of metro stations and airports. The volume of waste generated requires efficient disposal systems. Wilo sewage pumps and solid separation systems, equipped with advanced cutter systems and non-clogging impellers, facilitate smooth waste transportation while ensuring compliance with environmental standards. "As India's transport infrastructure expands, the demand for reliable and sustainable solutions is increasing," added Hemant Watve, Managing Director at Wilo India. "It is committed to providing cutting-edge technology that supports the evolving needs of modern infrastructure." With urbanisation accelerating and transport networks expanding, smart and sustainable infrastructure solutions are more crucial than ever. Its technology is powering India's metro stations and airports, ensuring efficiency, reliability and sustainability in these critical transit hubs.



Decoding India's personal loan growth story

India's personal loan landscape is undergoing a remarkable transformation, reshaping how millions access credit in the world's fastest-growing major economy. Personal loans, once approached with caution, have become as routine as morning chai at a local tapri, marking a significant shift in consumer financial behavior.

Market growth and fintech impact

The numbers paint an impressive picture of this evolution. According to Markets and Data, the personal loan market is set for exponential growth - from \$8.34 billion in FY2024 to a projected \$54 billion by FY2032, advancing at a robust CAGR of 26.55%. This surge reflects not just changing attitudes toward credit but also the increasing accessibility of financial services. In this new era of lending, fintech companies have emerged as game-changers, particularly in the small-ticket loan segment. Statista's findings for FY2023 reveal a telling trend: an overwhelming 68% of personal loans disbursed by fintech companies were under Rs 5,000, while 17% fell between Rs 10,000 and Rs 50,000. This concentration on smaller amounts suggests a democratisation of credit, making financial assistance available to a broader segment of the population.

Top 3 key drivers behind surge in demand of personal loan

Hassle-free loan application process: Before the internet, loan applications were tedious and uncertain, requiring in-person visits and extensive paperwork. Now, online platforms enable quick, hassle-free loan processing with minimal documentation. Today, 75% of personal loans are approved digitally in India, ensuring faster, easier access (Source: RBI).

Flexible loan tenure: Personal loans offer flexibility with tenures from 6 to 60 months, empowering borrowers to customise repayment plans while considering potential interest implications. According to a report by Statista, over 60% of personal loan borrowers in India opt for tenures between 12 and 36 months, striking a balance between manageable EMIs and interest obligations.

Debt consolidation with personal loans: The rising demand for personal loans in India stems from financial challenges like credit card debt, offering debt consolidation, lower interest rates, and simplified repayments for better financial discipline. A 2023 TransUnion CIBIL report reveals a 23% year-on-year growth in personal loans in India, largely fueled by their use for debt

consolidation and emergency expenses.

Additionally, the report indicates that 20% of personal loan borrowers in India utilise these loans to consolidate credit card debt and other unsecured obligations.

Key challenges confronting India's bankers and lenders in journey of debt recovery

Increasing default rates: Foremost among these challenges is the rising tide of defaults, particularly among small borrowers juggling multiple loans. This trend is especially concerning in the personal loans and micro-credit segments, where over-leveraging has become increasingly common. The situation calls for more robust credit assessment mechanisms and better monitoring systems.

Following RBI rules: The regulatory environment adds another layer of complexity. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has implemented stringent guidelines to ensure fair lending practices. These regulations, while necessary, require lenders to maintain a delicate balance between effective recovery and compliance. Banks must now follow elaborate procedures, including providing adequate notice periods and fair opportunities for borrowers to respond before taking serious actions like fraud classification.

Communication gaps: Communication emerges as another critical challenge in this ecosystem. A significant information gap exists between borrowers and collection agencies, creating friction in the recovery process. While many borrowers remain unaware of their rights and obligations, collection agencies struggle with outdated contact information, making the recovery process inefficient and sometimes contentious.

Technology problems: The technological infrastructure of many lending institutions has also failed to keep pace with market growth. Legacy systems and outdated processes hamper efficient loan management and collection efforts. The need for digital transformation is evident, but implementing modern solutions while maintaining operational continuity presents its own set of challenges.

Balancing recovery and ethics: Perhaps the most nuanced challenge is maintaining ethical standards while ensuring effective recovery. Lenders must walk a fine line between pursuing collections and respecting borrower rights. Aggressive recovery tactics, while potentially effective in the short term, can lead to legal complications and severe reputational damage in the long run.

Solutions for future

As the personal loan market evolves, technology-driven solutions are emerging to address the challenges faced by lenders. Modern debt collection platforms are revolutionizing the recovery process through digital transformation and innovative approaches.

Digital process automation: In the evolving landscape of debt recovery, digital process automation has emerged as a cornerstone of efficiency. Advanced



field force automation systems now enable lenders to track recovery efforts in real-time, ensuring optimal resource allocation and improved collection outcomes. The integration of predictive analytics helps identify high-risk accounts early, allowing for proactive intervention and strategically optimised collection approaches.

Cost-effective solutions: The financial aspect of debt recovery has been transformed through technology-driven solutions that significantly reduce operational costs. By outsourcing to specialised agencies equipped with advanced systems, lenders can avoid the substantial expenses of maintaining in-house recovery teams. These solutions are inherently scalable, capable of adapting to institutions of all sizes—from small fintech startups to large traditional banks. The automation of routine processes further enhances efficiency, reducing manual intervention and associated costs while improving accuracy.

Enhanced regulatory compliance: Maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements has become significantly more manageable through technological innovation. Modern systems incorporate automated compliance checks that align with RBI guidelines, ensuring every recovery action meets regulatory standards. Systematic documentation and tracking capabilities provide a clear audit trail of all collection activities. Through standardized processes, these systems significantly reduce the risk of legal complications, protecting both the lender's reputation and regulatory standing.

Customer-centric recovery: Approach the modern approach to debt recovery places the customer experience at its core. Through integrated multi-channel communication systems, borrowers can be reached through their preferred channels, whether SMS, email, or mobile applications. Flexible repayment plans can be tailored to each borrower's financial situation, acknowledging individual circumstances and capabilities.

Data-driven decision making: The power of data analytics has revolutionised decision-making in the debt recovery process. Dynamic dashboards provide real-time monitoring of collection efforts, offering instant visibility into recovery performance. Sophisticated performance analytics tools help evaluate and optimize

collection team effectiveness, identifying areas for improvement and training needs. These insights enable strategic decision-making, allowing lenders to continuously refine their recovery strategies based on concrete data rather than intuition.

Impact on non-performing assets (NPAs)

The implementation of technology-driven collection processes has shown promising results in addressing India's NPA challenges. According to industry stakeholders and market observations, digital collection strategies have demonstrated measurable improvements in recovery rates, helping institutions better manage their NPAs.

Road ahead

As India's personal loan market continues its exponential growth, the integration of technology in debt collection becomes increasingly crucial. The future of lending belongs to institutions that can effectively balance growth with prudent risk management, leveraging digital solutions while maintaining ethical standards.

In this evolving landscape, Mobicule, a full-stack debt collection company, is leading the transformation by bridging the gap between traditional collection practices and modern consumer expectations. Their comprehensive digital platforms and data-driven strategies are helping financial institutions transition from conventional recovery methods to more sophisticated, consumer-centric approaches. The success of India's personal loan market will increasingly depend on such technological partnerships that can effectively address the dual challenges of scale and complexity. As lending institutions continue to expand their reach, the adoption of comprehensive digital collection solutions becomes not just an advantage but a necessity for sustainable growth in this dynamic market.

Siddharth is a computer engineering graduate from a premier institute of Mumbai University. After working with organizations like Zycus & Mindcraft Siddharth founded Mobicule in the year 2008, with a vision to help organisations leverage the power of mobility and wireless, thereby offering a competitive edge to these organizations by solving business problems. With his passion for technology and entrepreneurial spirit, Siddharth has created Mobicule as a preferred mobility partner for India's blue-chip organisation with products across 8 industry verticals. Mobicule is a pioneer in products focussed on mobile field force and has successfully deployed and managed some of the largest mobile field force implementations across sales & distribution, telecom, and BFSI. With its experience and domain knowledge now spanning 2 decades, it has established its niche in debt collection & gamification, digital KYC integrated end-to-end with internal (core banking, rep, CRM) and external systems (credit bureaus, government portals). Backed by strong R&D and adopting the latest and upcoming technologies, it has managed to establish a niche market position.

(The author, Siddharth Agarwal is the founder and managing director of Mobicule Technologies Pvt. Ltd.)

what's brewing?



● Soujanya



● Priyanka Arul Mohan

Pattu Cheera Collections launched at Xiti Weavers Showroom by actress Priyanka Arul Mohan, along with Xiti managing directors Soujanya, Bobby Tikka and T Srinivas, who showcased the new collection. The brand emphasises its commitment to offering "Saree for Every Reason, Saree for Every Season," at Road No. 45, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad



● Srinivas



● Aishwarya



● Sravanya



● Monalisha

PARTY

Photos by- SV Chary



Deepshikha Mahila Club had their meeting at Badruka College, with a jamming drumming session by renowned drummer Siddharth Salvi from Pune. Members Anju Poddar, Neena Patny, Rekha Pokharna and Shoba Bansal shared their experiences at the Kumbh Mela. Members created a musical rhythm and connected to each one.



The Indian Garage Co. (TIGC), continues to strengthen its offline presence with the launch of two Exclusive Brand Outlets (EBOs) in Hyderabad. The brand opened its second outlet at Sarath City Mall, following the successful launch of its first store in Vanasthalipuram a few months ago.



SMFG India Credit has made history by achieving a Guinness World Record for the 'Largest Cattle Welfare Lesson (Multiple Venues)' with 517 participants across 6 venues in India. This milestone was accomplished as part of the company's 7th edition of Pashu Vikas Day (PVD), the largest one-day cattle care camps across the country. These camps were simultaneously held in 500 locations across 16 states, benefiting around 1,90,000 beneficiaries (1,50,000 cattle and 40,000 cattle owners).



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



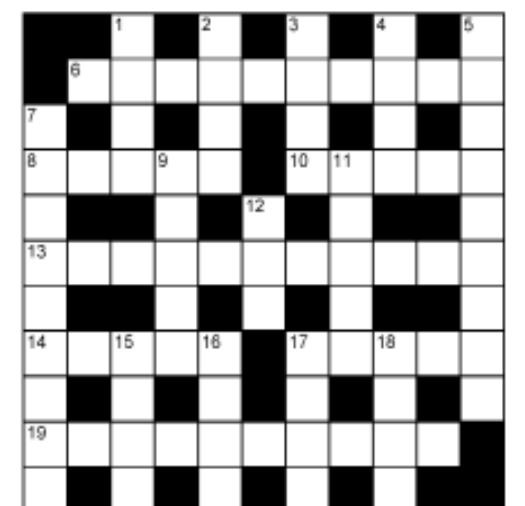
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- 6 An old record-player
- 8 Set fire to
- 10 Has a conversation
- 13 A very rich person
- 14 Someone who cares for the sick and injured
- 17 Part of a flower
- 19 Not willing to be friends

- 11 Not asleep
- 12 Say "yes" with your head
- 15 A flat squarish thing used like a boat
- 16 Wicked
- 17 Mix red and white to make this colour
- 18 Story

DOWN

- 1 Boast
- 2 Leave out
- 3 Small mark
- 4 This covers a sheep
- 5 Find these on a beach
- 7 A light metal
- 9 Raised land smaller than mountains

SOLUTION

S	T	A	M	P	S	C	O	L	
U	S	E	V	I					
R	O	S	E	M	O	N	S		
E	S	T	A	P	H				
P	A	T	I	R	D	S			
A	O	C	T	O	B	E	R		
S	S	H	R	G	S				
T	U	N	N	E	L	O	T		
E	U	D	D	A					
R	A	I	G	S	C	O	M	E	D

GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

RITU VARMA

I NEVER SAW MYSELF AS AN UNSUCCESSFUL ACTOR

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Actress Ritu Varma, who was last seen in *Swag* opposite Sree Vishnu (released last year) and Mark Antony with Sundeeep Kishan (released the year before), is now gearing up for her next film, *Mazaka*. Despite her recent films not performing well at the box office, Ritu remains unfazed and continues to focus on projects that excite her.

Talking about *Mazaka*, in which she is paired with Sundeeep Kishan once again, Ritu said she chooses her scripts based on her personal interest. "When writer Prasanna narrated the story, apart from the entertainment factor, it was high on emotional quotient. Both female characters have substantial roles to perform, which I found very appealing. While he was narrating the story, I was laughing throughout," she shared.

Ritu started her career on a high note with successful films and strong performances. However, many of her recent films haven't done well at the box office. Despite this, she remains positive about her journey.

"I am happy with my journey and very content as an actor. I never even thought I would become an actor, yet I have come this far and done many films. That itself is a big achievement for me. I have been part of some memorable films that people will remember for a long time. I don't hold any bitter feelings, and I never saw myself as an unsuccessful actor," she said.

Lately, except for a few, most Telugu actresses are not being cast opposite top heroes. When asked about this, Ritu responded, "I don't know why this question is asked only to actresses repeatedly. You should ask the same to directors and producers." However, she added, "Of course, I would love to work with top actors if I get the opportunity."

Speaking about her role in *Mazaka*, Ritu revealed, "I play a young college girl. She is quite stubborn and due to some emotional

conflicts from her childhood, her love life takes a certain turn—that's the crux of the story." She assured that the film is packed with entertainment and humor. "There are a lot of positive vibes around this film," she said.

The film also stars Anshu of *Manmadhudu* fame as the other female lead. Talking about her co-star, Ritu said, "She is like a sister to me. This is her comeback film, and she worked really hard for it. To get into her character, she even started taking Telugu lessons. It was a great experience working with her."

Ritu believes in bringing variation to her performances. "This phase is definitely different for me because, for the first time, I am doing a full-fledged commercial film. It's a new space and I am excited about it," she said.

When asked about frequently sharing screen space with another female lead, she explained, "Honestly, I never gave it much thought. I like a story and if I want to be a part of it, I sign the film. I don't look at other actors and their roles."

Ritu has been doing fewer films lately, with just one release last year and another the year before. When asked if she had deliberately slowed down, she clarified, "It wasn't a conscious decision, and I never think about it that way. What is in my control is choosing films I like. If I connect with a script, I sign it. That's how I operate."

Ritu admitted that earlier, she

would feel disappointed when a film didn't perform well, but now she has learned to take it in stride. "Initially, I used to get affected by box-office results. But over time, I have learned to handle both success and failure equally. When a film becomes successful, I feel great. If it doesn't do well, I move on and focus on my next project," she said.

When asked if she felt the same way about Dhruva Natchathiram, the Gautham Vasudev Menon directorial that has been stuck in limbo for years, Ritu said, "Initially, I felt bad about it, but now I have moved on. I have done so many films since then. If it releases, I will be very happy, but that is not in my control."

Ritu recalled a special moment from *Mazaka* when she received high praise from veteran actor Rao Ramesh. "There is a scene in the second half between me and Rao Ramesh garu. That day, the scene came out so well that the entire unit was happy about it. Later, when he was dubbing for the scene, he got emotional, called me and appreciated my performance. He told me he hadn't seen such an impactful scene in his 16 years of experience. That was truly a memorable compliment for me," she shared.

Director Nakkina's remarks at a promotional event recently went viral for being inappropriate. Addressing concerns about whether *Mazaka* has similar humor, Ritu clarified, "It is a clean comedy and full of fun. The director is very respectful and I don't think he meant to say anything offensive."

When asked about the kind of roles she dreams of doing, Ritu said, "I want to do an action role. Also, people think I am a serious actor, so I would love to do a full-length comedy film. I am also keen on a period drama. Though I did *Swag*, my role in it was quite small. I want to do a full-fledged period drama."

As for her future projects, she confirmed that she has signed a new Telugu film. "The production house will officially announce the details soon," she said. Additionally, she is set to make her Telugu web series debut.

"My first web series in Telugu will be releasing soon," she concluded.

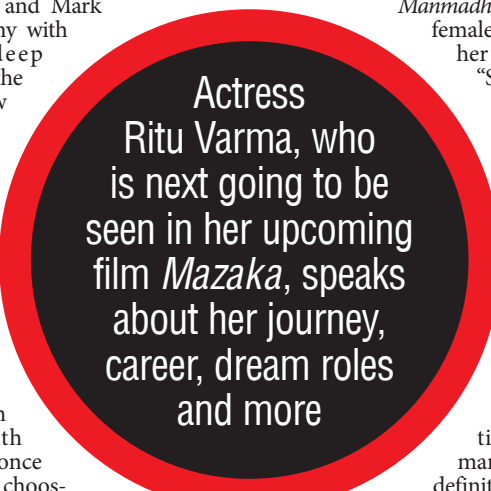


Kiran Abbavaram takes on a powerful role in *Dil Ruba*

Kiran Abbavaram plays the lead role in the upcoming film *Dil Ruba*, with Rukshar Dhilon as the female lead. Ravi, Jojo Jose, Rakesh Reddy and Saregama are the producers, while Vishwa Karun is the director. The film is slated for release on March 14, and the makers have recently released the second song, *Hey Jingili*.

Actor Kiran Abbavaram expressed his pride and happiness about working on *Dil Ruba*. "It's an intense musical love story that will captivate the audience. Producer Ravi and director Vishwa Karun have worked tirelessly on this project for three years, and I sincerely

hope it's a success for them," said the actor. He added that the team initially planned to release the film on Valentine's Day, but they hesitated. "After the Sankranthi films were released, we double-checked the content, planned the promotion, and decided to release it on March 14, which coincides with *Holi*," he said. Kiran also shared his excitement about working with Rukshar. "Our pairing in the song *Hey Jingili* is fantastic," he said. Talking about his role, Kiran described it as intense, with equally intense action sequences. "The action episodes are fresh on-screen and I'm sure the audience will enjoy them," he added.



Actress Ritu Varma, who is next going to be seen in her upcoming film *Mazaka*, speaks about her journey, career, dream roles and more



Pradeep Ranganathan expands his horizons with *The Return of the Dragon* in telugu

Pradeep Ranganathan, who is just two films into his career, gained significant attention after directing *Love Today*. Despite the film's low budget, it became a sensation both as an actor and a director. The film was also dubbed into Telugu, where it was successful.

Now, Pradeep is stepping into the lead role with the film *Dragon*, directed by Aswath Marimuthu. The film was released simultaneously in Tamil and Telugu under the title *The Return of the Dragon*. Pradeep aims to expand his market not only in Tamil but also in Telugu, following the success of *Love Today*. This film marks a new challenge for Pradeep, as he is acting under a different director for the first time, having previously directed his first two films.

Anupama Parameshwaran, a popular actress in Telugu, plays the female lead. She has a huge fan following in the region, and the team is confident that her presence will help boost the film's success. The film is set to release on February 21 and the makers are hopeful for its success.

Pradeep also mentioned that he had promised to speak in Telugu while promoting *Love Today* and he is continuing that effort

now. "I'm trying to speak in Telugu. The important thing isn't whether I speak perfectly, but that I'm making the effort," he said. "I sincerely thank the Telugu audience for their support. If we keep trying, we will achieve something great one day. The Telugu audience gave great support to *Love Today*," he added.



VN Aditya's tribute to Sirivennela

Director VN Aditya, known for hit films like *Manasantha* and *Nenunna*, recently directed a musical video to pay tribute to the late lyricist Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry. The music video *Swapnala Nava* has now surpassed one million views on YouTube, resonating deeply with music lovers.

Gopikrishna Kotaru, a Dallas-based NRI, initiated this music video as his first venture. His daughter Sreeja lent her voice for the song and also acted in it. The song carries a powerful message, motivating students who face academic setbacks. It is dedicated to the legendary lyricist Sirivennela Seetharama Sastry as a heartfelt tribute to his extraordinary legacy.

Parthasarathy Nemani is the music director, while Yeshwanth Alooru wrote the lyrics. With *Swapnala Nava*, the team honors Sastry once again, and the response from audiences has been overwhelmingly positive.



Manchu Manoj speaks out on police custody reports, denies wrongdoing

Actor Manchu Manoj has finally addressed the recent rumors that claimed he was taken into police custody on Monday. In a video statement, Manoj expressed his frustration with the crisis he has faced while standing up for causes he deeply believes in.

Manchu Manoj began by referring to the ongoing challenges he has faced over the past few months, starting from December 2024. "You have seen what's been happening these last few months," Manoj said. "I have been fighting for the students and people working at our college. Instead of addressing the issue, my family and I have been targeted. Numerous attempts have been made to indirectly threaten me in hopes that I'll be scared. But I haven't done anything wrong to be afraid."

The actor revealed that around 32 cases have been filed against him and his wife from various places, including Delhi, Tirupati, and other regions. He continued, "There's only one version of the truth, and numer-



ous versions of lies. I stand by what I've said before. My family is being accused of using bouncers to intimidate college students and others. I have provided all the evidence to Chandragiri CI."

Manchu Manoj further clarified the situation, explaining that he went to the police station voluntarily. "Those trying to file complaints against me are being sent back for trivial reasons. Last night, the police came to question us at the resort we were staying at, claiming they were sent by the CM. But when I questioned them, their story changed. They said they were done with the CM's work and I had misunderstood the situation. I decided to go to the station willingly because I wanted everything on record," he explained.

Manchu Manoj also described how he waited at the police station, but no one seemed interested in questioning him. "If something like this can happen to me, just imagine the struggles of those I'm fighting for," he added.

Mohanlal's upcoming film with Anoop Menon promises an emotional journey



Mohanlal, one of the most iconic actors in the Malayalam film industry, continues to build an impressive legacy with his 45 years of dedication to cinema. The actor is currently busy with his next project, *L2: Empuraan*, a sequel to the 2019 blockbuster *Lucifer*, directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran. In a recent update shared on his official Facebook page, Mohanlal revealed exciting news about his upcoming project, which will be helmed by renowned actor and director Anoop Menon. The actor shared that the film is deeply personal to him and will be extensively shot in locations such as Thiruvananthapuram, Shillong and Kolkata. Mohanlal described the project as a

'dramatic journey traversing love, longing, and music,' adding that it holds significant meaning for him. The film will be produced by Timeless Movies and Mohanlal posted a photo with Anoop Menon and his team on Facebook, showing his enthusiasm for the project. This upcoming film marks Anoop Menon's fourth directorial project, following his work on *King Fish* and *Padma* in 2022, as well as *Nalpathukaraante* (Irupathonnukaari) in 2023. Fans are eagerly anticipating what fresh and intriguing perspective Anoop Menon will bring to Mohanlal's character in this highly anticipated film. In addition to the exciting new venture with

Anoop Menon, Mohanlal is currently working on *L2: Empuraan*, the sequel to *Lucifer*. Directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, *Empuraan* boasts an impressive ensemble cast, including Manju Warrier, Tovino Thomas, Sanjya Iyappan, Indrajith Sukumaran, Saikumar, and Sshivada, among others. Written by Murali Gopy, *Empuraan* is expected to be a high-octane drama with stunning cinematography by Sujith Vassudev, a powerful musical score by Deepak Dev and crisp editing by Akhilesh Mohan. The film is produced by Aashirvad Cinemas and Lyca Productions and fans are eager to see what unfolds in this thrilling sequel.

Shubman Gill becomes No 1 ODI batsman

PTI ■ DUBAI

India vice-captain Shubman Gill on Wednesday dethroned Babar Azam of Pakistan from the Number one spot in the ICC ODI Rankings for batters on the back of his strong show against England in the recent home series. The ICC issued the latest rankings just ahead of the start of the eight-team Champions Trophy (CT) in Karachi with the match between Pakistan and New Zealand.

"India right-hander Shubman Gill overtakes former Pakistan captain Babar Azam to become the top ranked ODI batter in the world," the ICC said.

Gill, who scored two fifties and a century in the recent three-match ODI series against England at home which India won 3-0, jumped one place to the No. 1 spot. He now has 796 rating points compared to Babar's 773.

India skipper Rohit Sharma is placed at the third spot with 761 points followed by South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen and New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell at fourth and fifth respectively.

"It's a major shake-up at the top of the rankings just prior to the start of the Champions Trophy and leaves an interesting sub-plot to what will transpire over the coming



weeks during the eight-team tournament in Pakistan and Dubai," the ICC said.

"This is the second time Gill has held the No.1 ranking in ODI cricket, with the India batter having also gone past Babar to claim top

spot midway through the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023.

"Gill has been in excellent form of late, with his century against England in Ahmedabad during the third ODI of the recently concluded series enough to

catapult the 25-year-old to the top of the rankings," the global governing body added.

Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana, meanwhile, has taken the first position in the ODI rankings for bowlers as he replaced Afghanistan

captain Rashid Khan. "While Sri Lanka won't be featuring at the Champions Trophy, Theekshana earned the top spot following his exploits against the Aussies that included an excellent four-wicket haul in the opening match of that series in Colombo," the ICC said.

Sri Lanka had recently handed a 2-0 whitewash to Australia with Theekshana taking four wickets. The Sri Lankan spinner has 680 rating points, followed by Rashid at second, Namibia's Bernard Scholtz at third, India's Kuldeep Yadav at fourth and Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi at fifth.

"Meanwhile, Afghan spin wizard Rashid drops to second and will be keen to regain the No.1 spot as he trails his Sri Lankan counterpart by just 11 rating points," the ICC said.

"While a trio of spinners in India's squad Kuldeep Yadav (up one place to fourth), South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (re-enters the rankings in sixth) and New Zealand's Mitchell Santner (up four rungs to seventh) are all inside the top 10 after making ground this week."

Afghanistan veteran Mohammad Nabi remains the top ranked all-rounder in ODIs, followed by Sikandar Raza, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Rashid.



Ex-Mumbai captain, selector Milind Rege passes away at 76

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Mumbai captain and selector Milind Rege, a highly respected figure in domestic cricket, died after suffering a heart attack on Wednesday, just days after turning 76.

Rege, who turned 76 last Sunday, was admitted in the intensive care unit of the Breach Candy Hospital here and passed away around 6am on Wednesday morning. He is survived by his wife and two sons.

The all-rounder had suffered a heart attack at the age of 26 but returned to the cricket field and even captained Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy. He played 52 First-Class matches between 1966-67 and 1977-78, taking 126 wickets with his right-arm off-break bowling. He also contributed with the bat, scoring 1,532 runs at an average of 23.56. Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar recalled Rege's contribution in the early days of his career.

"Sad to hear about Milind Rege Sir's passing. He was a true Mumbai cricketer with immense contributions to the city's cricket. He and other CCI members saw potential in me and asked me to play for CCI, which, as I look back now, was a landmark moment in my career," Tendulkar wrote on 'X' in a tribute.

"He could pick out a talented player from a sea of hardworking hopefuls. He had a special sixth sense to pick talent at all levels, but especially at junior levels.

"He leaves behind a void, one that's tough to fill. He may not be around, but his imprint on people's lives will always live on. He made a difference to so many lives and definitely made a difference to mine. Thank

you, Sir, for everything. Heartfelt condolences to his friends and family," Tendulkar added.

The Indian cricket board also conveyed its condolence message. "The BCCI mourns the passing of Milind Rege, former Mumbai captain and selector. A pillar of Mumbai cricket, he played a key role in its growth and legacy. His keen eye for talent and contributions as a commentator earned admiration across the cricketing fraternity," it said.

"The Board extends its heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the @MumbaiCricAssoc," the BCCI added.

Former India all-rounder and coach Ravi Shastri described Rege as a "true champion". "Really sad to hear about the demise of a dear friend Milind Rege. A true Champion in his contribution to Mumbai and Tata's cricket all-round. A Mentor Par Excellence. Heartfelt condolences to Raj and family. God bless his soul," he said.

A childhood friend of former India captain Sunil Gavaskar, Rege attended the same school and college as Gavaskar and played alongside him at the Dadar Union Sporting Club.

As one of the most revered figures in Mumbai as well as domestic cricket, Rege held several roles through his career and was also associated with with the Mumbai Cricket Association as a cricket advisor.

The Mumbai cricket team, which is currently playing their Ranji Trophy semifinal against Vidarbha in Nagpur, took the field on the third day wearing black armbands to honour Rege.



Raducanu loses to Muchova in Dubai Championships

PTI ■ DUBAI

Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships.

The 2021 US Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2.

After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and court-side screening before Muchova moved over to console her.

Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match. The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tiebreaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova.

Organizers of the women's tour issued a statement later saying Raducanu was approached in a public space Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behavior" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday... And subsequently ejected."

"He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment. The WTA said it was working with Raducanu and her team "to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary

support." A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022.

Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property. Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the US Open as a qualifier, one of the most unlikely achievements in tennis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries.

The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5.

Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023.

Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot into the quarterfinals.

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eliminated Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-4, and defending champion Jasmine Paolini defeated Eva Lys 6-2, 7-5.

Ranji Trophy semifinal: Vidarbha lead by 260 runs against Mumbai

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Yash Rathod and Akshay Wadkar shared an unbroken 91-run partnership as Vidarbha recovered from a mini collapse to lead by 260 runs against Mumbai at stumps on day three of their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Wednesday.

After Vidarbha dismissed Mumbai for 270 to take a first-innings lead of 113 runs, the hosts found themselves in trouble after being reduced to 56 for four, thanks to Shams Mulani's (2/50) two-wicket burst.

However, Rathod (59) and Wadkar (31) steadied the ship, guiding Vidarbha to 147 for four in 53 overs.

At stumps, the duo, who train at the same academy in Nagpur, remained at the crease, but with Mulani and the spinners making the ball talk, Vidarbha are aware that the job is far from over, with



two full days of play remaining. With a 113-run first innings lead in hand, the hosts had a solid foundation, but Mumbai all-rounder Shardul Thakur (1/14) gave them a glimmer of hope with an early breakthrough in the second over.

Thakur, who is set to join Essex for the County Championship, removed Atharva Taide for a duck, trapping him in front with an inswinger.

Danish Malewar (29), who scored a vital 79 in the first innings, looked in good touch, hitting five boundaries before Mulani dismissed him off his own bowling with a sharp caught-and-bowl effort, leaving Vidarbha at 40 for two.

Karun Nair (6), in scintillating form, joined opener Dhruv Shorey (13) at the crease, but Tanush Kotian (1/33) made an impact, dismissing Shorey LBW after he missed a classic off-break delivery.

Much was expected of Nair, but he too fell, sent back by Mulani, as Vidarbha slumped to 56 for four. Nair was rapped on the pads while trying to defend and although he challenged the on-field umpire's decision, he lost the appeal. Wadkar and Rathod then regrouped, building a steady partnership to bring Vidarbha back on track.

Earlier, Akash Anand completed his second first-class century and shared a 69-run stand with Tanush Kotian (33) to lead Mumbai's recovery after they ended the second day at 188 for seven.

Anand, who resumed his innings on 67, played a gritty knock, facing 256 balls and hitting 11 fours. His partnership with Kotian took Mumbai close to the 250-mark before left-arm spinner Parth Rekhade broke the stand, removing Kotian with a delivery that drifted in from around the stumps to bowl him out.

Always liked Champions Trophy as tournament: Virat

pressure. The pressure is from the first game itself and that is why I like it, you have to be at your best from game one," said the former India captain. India will play their remaining league games against Pakistan on February 23 and New Zealand on March 2. While the tournament host is Pakistan, India will be playing all the games in Dubai as part of the event's hybrid model.

Kohli will be aiming for a bagful of runs in the tournament after a tough Test tour of Australia. He was back amongst the runs in the preceding ODI series against England, scoring a half-century in the final game in Ahmedabad.

Always liked Champions Trophy as tournament: Virat

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian superstar Virat Kohli has always liked the format of Champions Trophy (CT) as it demands the eight participating teams to be at their best from the get go. The Champions Trophy is taking place for the first time since 2017 when India lost the final to Pakistan.

India open their campaign against Bangladesh here on Thursday. "The tournament is happening after a long time. I have always liked this tournament. It represents consistency as you have to be in the top 8 of the rankings (to qualify). The level of competition is



always good," Kohli told Star Sports. Kohli, who has played three editions of the 50-over event in 2009, 2013 (when India won) and 2017, likened the tournament to the fast-

paced T20 World Cup. "In ODI format, it creates the pressure of a T20 World Cup. There also you have three or four games in the league stage. If you don't start well, you are under

Bangladesh can beat any team in Champions Trophy: Shanto

PTI ■ DUBAI

Heading into their Champions Trophy (CT) opener against formidable neighbours India, Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was filled with optimism. He was particularly emboldened by the rise of pace sensation Nahid Rana, who has added a new dimension to their bowling attack.

The 22-year-old Rana holds the record for the fastest ball (152kph) bowled by a Bangladesh cricketer, hits 150kph on occasion, and averages 145kph for most of his spells.

Besides the presence of Rana and experienced pace colleague like Taskin Ahmed, the team also has few useful all-rounders and spinners, and some good batters. "Obviously, all-rounders always balance the team and we have got some good all-rounders. I hope they will perform tomorrow," Shanto said in the pre-match press conference here on Wednesday.

"If you look in this format, our team is quite balanced and we believe we can beat any team in this tournament. All teams are capable of winning this trophy but I am someone who is not thinking about the opponents much. If we execute our plan properly we can beat any team in any day," Shanto said.

After years of struggle, Bangladesh are now in a position to boast a good pace-bowling attack, feels Shanto. "Yes, obviously, I think we always struggle with our seam attack, but last couple of years we have got some quality fast bowlers. Now we have got Nahid Rana, Taskin the way they are bowling. I think it helps a lot.

"As a captain, we love to see them bowling fast. So, I'm really happy that we have got a good fast bowling unit and under lights the ball might swing. So, if they bowl in the good areas, it will help our team."

Rana has done well in his nascent career, having taken 20 wickets in six Tests and four scalps in three ODIs. Bangladesh are in a group in

which the spotlight is on traditional rivals India and Pakistan, and Shanto was asked if this is a favourable position to be in before a big tournament. "Yeah, obviously, I think if you look at all eight teams - they are quality teams. And against

India, Pakistan, New Zealand, we have good memories. We won a couple of matches in recent times.

"Last year, when we played India in Bangladesh, we have some good memories from then. But that is past, I think if

we play well tomorrow and execute our plan, we will have a good match tomorrow," he said. Shanto refused to read much into the absence of India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib al Hasan.

After their opener in Dubai, Bangladesh will be playing their last two group games in Pakistan, and the conditions there are going to be different. "Yes, here I think we need to adjust, because if you look at this wicket, probably it's not that high scoring if you compare to Pakistan. So, we have to adjust. "Recently we played against Pakistan in a Test match in Rawalpindi. We have that experience how the wicket will behave. But as a cricketer, I think we all understand when we need to adjust and how to play the game. I don't think it will be difficult."

Talks around fast-bowling unit With Rana linking up with the likes of Taskin, a lot of people have started talking about Bangladesh's fast bowling department, and Shanto said factors such as switching to Duke balls and arrival of experts from overseas have contributed to the improvement in the country's pace attack.

"I think the important thing is the wicket and the ball has been



changed in first class cricket. We play with the Duke ball, so the fast bowlers wanted to bowl a lot of overs and we get a little bit charged.

"And obviously there is a lot of local coaches and obviously overseas coaches there, so they helped and they motivated the fast bowlers, how they can compete in the international arena."

"So that is one thing... The ball has changed and the wicket, and thanks to BCB the way they think about our fast bowlers," he said.

Shanto is also expecting a lot of crowd support for his team in Dubai. The Bangladesh skipper added that he is not solely relying on his pacers to power their bowling attack, but they also have experienced spinners in their ranks.

"I am not just depending on our pace bowling attack, to be very honest. What I mentioned is that we did not have a lot of pace bowlers now unlike earlier times. We have always had spinners, so we now have good balance of pace, and spin."