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Amit Shah asks Northeast insurgents to surrender



'AN OPPORTUNITY TO BOOST BILATERAL TRADE, INVESTMENTS'



'Loved the Story, left the Pay': Brahmaji on BAAPU



QUOTE OF THE DAY
The pioneer

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's lack of commitment is evident in him ignoring the 125-foot Ambedkar statue and his failure to pay respects. The entire cabinet should visit the statue and offer floral tributes by Ambedkar Jayanti on April 14. If the government fails to do so BRS leaders would break open the gates and pay their respects themselves. A Chief Minister who does not respect Ambedkar cannot understand Dalits' hunger

- Kavitha, BRS MLC

P2

DON'T MISS...

357 DRF personnel to assist HYDRAA

In all, 357 newly recruited Disaster Response Force (DRF) personnel through outsourcing who narrowly missed police jobs will join and assist operations of Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Agency (HYDRAA), said Commissioner AV Ranganath. He said that HYDRAA must work in alignment with government objectives and public expectations, urging everyone to remain vigilant in their responsibilities. The Commissioner addressed the 357 newly recruited Disaster Response Force (DRF) personnel at the training ...

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Mayawati calls Congress casteist'

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Thursday accused the Congress of 'dual character and casteist mindset' after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi questioned her party's present political approach. "Wherever the Congress is strong or in power, it harbours hostility and casteist attitudes towards BSP and its followers. But in states like UP, where it is weak, it tries to mislead people by talking about an alliance with BSP. If this is not hypocrisy, then what is?" Mayawati said in a post on X...

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Finmin to meet heads of PSBs

The finance ministry has called a meeting of heads of public sector banks (PSBs) on March 4 to review financial performance of banks and progress of financial inclusion schemes, among others. The meeting is scheduled to be chaired by Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju. According to sources, the meeting would also discuss and review the progress of various financial inclusion schemes including PM SVANidhi Schemes. This is going to be the first meeting after presentation of Union Budget...

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'Having smile solves half the problem'

Even if it's tough to do... Just forgive and move on." Mahendra Singh Dhoni became a life coach for once to share his secrets for a stress-free existence, describing himself as a carefree person who would not give up on a good night's sleep by paying attention to what others think of him. The 43-year-old former India wicketkeeper-batter, considered one of the game's greatest for captaining India to two World Cup titles in a storied international career, set a high benchmark for a leader with his calm...

-SPORTS

TG inks power banking deals with UP & MP

NAVEENA GHANATE naveena.ghanate@gmail.com HYDERABAD

Telangana has entered into power banking agreements with the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (UPPCL) and the Madhya Pradesh Power Management Company Limited (MPPMCL) to ensure uninterrupted power supply during peak summer.

The power swap agreements will help Telangana balance electricity supply and demand efficiently, particularly from February to April when energy consumption is at its peak.

As per the agreement, UPPCL will supply power to TGPCC/TGDISCOMs between February and March 2025, ranging from 1,000 MW to 3,000 MW. Telangana will return the power to UPPCL between May and July, with an additional 5% of the availed power as a returnable quantum.

Similarly, MPPMCL will provide 150 MW of power from March to April, while Telangana has the flexibility to draw up to 500 MW between February and April based



on availability and needs.

In return, Telangana will bank power with MPPMCL from December 2025 to January 2026, ensuring 105% returnable quantum of availed energy. These strategic agreements will help the state manage demand fluctuations and mitigate any shortages during peak summer months.

Official sources said the power banking agreements will complement these efforts, ensuring grid stability and a reliable electricity supply to industries and households.

With Telangana's energy demand continuing to rise, agreements like this have a crucial role in maintaining a sustainable and efficient power distribution system.

BRS betrayed TG in Krishna, Godavari water disputes: Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister Capt. N. Uttam Kumar Reddy accused the BRS of spreading lies to defame the Congress government.

He also blamed the BRS government for failing to protect Telangana's water rights and causing massive damage to the irrigation sector.

Addressing a press conference at the Jala Soudha here on Thursday, along with Ministers Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and Ponnampalapati Prabhakar, he ridiculed the BRS leaders' criticism of the Congress government.

"BRS leaders are repeatedly lying

Accuses the party of spreading lies to defame govt



to cover up the failures of the BRS admin. Under the BRS the irrigation sector was riddled with scams and irregularities. The BRS government

borrowed over Rs 1 lakh crore for the Kaleshwaram Project, which was plagued by faulty design, poor construction and zero maintenance.

The Medigadda Barrage, which the BRS described as the 'heart of Kaleshwaram,' collapsed during their rule, and instead of admitting failure, KCR, Harish and other BRS leaders shamelessly claim that only one pillar had collapsed," Uttam said.

He revealed that the BRS government had spent Rs 1.81 lakh crore on irrigation projects but had failed to achieve any significant expansion in irrigated area. The funds were borrowed through high-interest, short-term loans, placing a huge financial burden on Telangana.

Continued on Page 2

72,045 INDIRAMMA HOUSES

CM to lay stone today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will lay the foundation stone for 72,045 Indiramma houses in the first phase of the state's housing scheme at the Appakapalle village in the Narayanpet mandal of Narayanpet district on Friday.

The Telangana government has reaffirmed its commitment to providing houses to all homeless families, ensuring that all beneficiaries get financial assistance to construct their homes. Under this scheme, each house will receive a subsidy of Rs 5 lakh, with Rs 1 lakh directly



transferred to the beneficiary's account upon completion of the basement.

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AP drawing 10,000 cusecs: Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao has accused the Congress government of negligence and inaction as Andhra Pradesh continues to divert Krishna waters illegally, severely affecting Telangana's irrigation and drinking water schemes.

Addressing a press meeting at the Telangana Bhavan on Thursday, Harish said that while lakhs of acres in Telangana are facing drought-like conditions and drinking water shortages loom, the Congress government remains indifferent.

He stated that under Congress rule, Telangana has been left vulner-

able, with Andhra Pradesh drawing 10,000 cusecs of water daily from the right canal of Nagarjuna Sagar without any resistance from the Telangana government. "The Irrigation Minister is silent, and the Chief Minister is watching helplessly while our rightful water is being stolen," he remarked.

He said that either Revanth had surrendered to Chandrababu Naidu or this is the government's failure.

Harish pointed out that while the BRS government had ensured water supply to Telangana, the Congress government is only watching as water is diverted.

Continued on Page 2

'KCR was first betrayer'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said that former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhara Reddy was the first betrayer who conspired against Telangana by colluding with Andhra Pradesh. It was the Congress and the BRS that committed injustice against Telangana in the Krishna water dispute. The Congress and the BRS are responsible for delaying the SLBC project, Sanjay said.

Speaking to the media here on Thursday, Sanjay said the BRS is facing a shortage of MLC candidates. "What is the BRS's status now? The BRS and the Congress are secret allies. What happened to the Kaleshwaram, drugs, phone tapping case and Formula E race case? The Congress and the BRS conspired to stop the BJP," Sanjay said. He demanded that both the BRS and the Congress should publicly apologise to the people of Telangana. How is it fair to allocate 10% of seats to Muslims from the 42% OBC reservation? The population data



itself is incorrect. If there are 3.95 crore Aadhaar cards, how can the population be 3.7 crore? People are ready to teach Congress a lesson using the six guarantees as their main weapon, he said.

"We are completely opposed to reservations based on religion. Even Congress MLAs are dissatisfied with their own government and are holding secret meetings," Sanjay said.

He said that in this year's Union Budget, Rs 1.08 lakh crore has been allocated to Telangana as taxes and schemes.

Continued on Page 2

People must approach govt if they face threat from BRS: Venkat

Alleges Rajalingamurthy was killed for exposing BRS's corruption

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Roads and Buildings (R&B) Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy said that social activist Rajalingamurthy was killed for questioning BRS's corruption.

He condemned the murder of Rajalingamurthy and said that the BRS had encouraged murder politics during its 10-year rule. Rajalingamurthy had filed a case against KCR, BRS MLA T. Harish Rao and three others. Former Bhupalpally MLA Gandra Venkatramana Reddy is behind this murder, Venkat said.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday along with MLAs Beerala Ilaiiah, G. Madhusudan Reddy, Congress leaders Charan Kaushik, Sangishetty



Jagdish, Srikanth Yadav, Minister Venkat Reddy said that Rajalingamurthy's wife and daughter are saying that KCR and KTR are behind this murder due to the fear that KCR may get punished for engaging in corruption while executing the Kaleshwaram Project.

"KCR's family looted Telangana. Won't they kill if their irregularities get

exposed? The government will protect Chakradhar Goud who is waging a legal battle against Harish Rao. We can earn money but cannot get back lost lives. People should approach the government if anyone faces a threat from BRS leaders. Rajalingamurthy fought against the looting of public funds through the Kaleshwaram Project. We will meet Chief Minister Revanth Reddy regarding the Rajalingamurthy murder case," Venkat said.

He said that everybody knows who murdered the Vamana Rao couple. However, KCR gave the BRS ticket to the same person, Venkat said. He said that the then CP of Warangal, Ranganath, said that BRS leaders murdered the MPDO in Warangal.

Continued on Page 2

Minor bureaucratic reshuffle in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has issued transfer and posting orders for eight IAS officers, alongside key Full Additional Charge (FAC) arrangements in various administrative departments.

As part of the reshuffle, K Surendra Mohan (IAS, 2006), Commissioner, Transport, has been given the FAC of Commissioner for Cooperation & Registrar of Cooperative Societies and Director, Marketing, Relieving P Uday Kumar (IAS, 2016) from these additional charges. Meanwhile, RV Karnan (IAS, 2012), Director, Health & Family Welfare, has been placed in FAC of CEO, Arogyasri, replacing Siva Sankar Lotheti (IAS, 2013), who has been directed to report to the General Administration department.

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Rekha sworn in Delhi CM along with six ministers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Debutant legislator Rekha Gupta was sworn in as Delhi chief minister along with six ministers on Thursday in a grand show of strength full of colour and spectacle to mark the BJP's return to power in the city after more than 26 years.

The ceremony at the sprawling Ramila Ground was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the top BJP brass and NDA leaders. Gupta is Delhi's fourth woman chief minister after her party's Sushma Swaraj, the Congress's Sheila Dikshit and AAP's Atishi. The 50-year-old MLA from Shalimar Bagh, who took charge of her office at the Delhi Secretariat in the afternoon, is also the only woman in the NDA team of chief ministers and the second in the country after TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal.

The former student leader presides over an all-male cabinet that includes giant slayer Parvish Verma, who defeated Arvind Kejriwal in the elections, Hindutva poster boy Kapil Mishra and the BJP's Sikh face Manjinder Singh Sirsa. Besides, Ashish Sood, Ravinder Indraj Singh and Pankaj Singh were also administered the oath of office by Lt Governor V K Saxena

istered the oath of office by Lt Governor V K Saxena.

All the ministers took oath in Hindi, except for Sirsa who did so in Punjabi.

Congratulating the new chief minister, Modi expressed confidence that she will work for the city's development with full vigour.

"She has risen from the grassroots, being active in campus politics, state organisation, municipal administration and now MLA as well as Chief Minister..." he said.

About 50,000 people crammed into the historic ground, which has seen many a rally and protest through the decades, festooned with marigold flowers and bunting. There was dance, music and drumbeats with many waving BJP flags, chanting "Jai Shri Ram", "Modi, Modi" and a bunch of enthusiastic supporters singing "Ram Ji Ko Keh Dena, Jai Arya Ram".

The high on optics event was attended by chief ministers of states ruled by the BJP and its NDA allies -- Maharashtra's Devendra Fadnavis, Andhra Pradesh's Chandrababu Naidu, Goa's Pramod Sawant, Haryana's Nayab Singh Saini and Meghalaya's Conrad Sangma.

BRS blasts Congress over LRS charges, demands free regularisation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Vemula Prashanth Reddy has accused the Congress Government of betraying the public by imposing a heavy financial burden through the Layout Regularisation Scheme (LRS). He said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's government, which had promised transparency, is now using LRS as a tool to extort money from the public.

Speaking on Thursday, Vemula said that the BRS government had tried to ease the burden of LRS on the people, ensuring that they were not unfairly charged. However, the Congress government is now misleading the public in the name of concessions while planning to collect nearly Rs 20,000 crore. He accused Congress leaders of making one statement while in the opposition



and another after coming to power. "When the BRS government introduced the LRS, Congress leaders created a huge uproar, claiming that they would regularise plots free if voted to power. Now, how can they impose such a massive burden on the people?" he asked.

Vemula criticised the government's plan to charge approximately Rs 1 lakh per plot, pointing out that with nearly 25 lakh applications submitted for regularisation, lakhs of families would suffer.

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TG govt slashes LRS fees by 25% Amends regularisation rules

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major relief to property owners, the Telangana government has announced a 25% reduction in Layout Regularisation Scheme (LRS) fees, alongside key amendments aimed at simplifying the regularisation process for unauthorised layouts. The decision, issued through a Government Order (GO), is expected to benefit thousands of applicants who had raised concerns over the high financial burden and procedural delays.

According to officials, the fee reduction is aimed at making regularisation more accessible while ensuring compliance with urban planning norms. Additionally, the new amendments streamline approval mechanisms, clarify penalty structures and introduce a faster verification process

to address long-standing grievances of applicants.

The government has also simplified documentation requirements, reducing ambiguities that previously delayed approvals. With thousands of applications pending under the existing system, the revised guidelines are expected to accelerate approvals and provide a transparent framework for layout regularisation.

Urban development authorities have welcomed the move, stating that the amendments will not only benefit individual plot owners but also enhance planned urban expansion. Further details on the implementation of the revised LRS rules are likely to be released in the coming days, with officials urging applicants to review the updated guidelines and comply with necessary regulations.

Continued on Page 2

CMO probing Rajalingamurthy murder case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Chief Minister's Office (CMO) has launched an inquiry into the murder of Rajalingamurthy (47), who had filed a case against the government regarding the collapse of the Medigadda Barrage. After the incident, intelligence agencies were asked to collect information on the motive behind the murder. Sources said CMO officials have collected details as per the orders of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, indicating that the government is treating the case with urgency. Rajalingamurthy's legal action against the barrage collapse had raised concerns about the structural integrity and financial dealings of the project, making his murder a matter of heightened legal significance.

Continued on Page 2

Court acquits Sanjay in 'Dandupalyam' case

PNS ■ HYDERABAD
A special court for trying cases involving MPs and MLAs on Thursday acquitted Union MoS for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar in a case filed at the Marriguda police station for referring to the BRS as the 'Dandu Palyam batch' during the Munugode by-election campaign. The case was dismissed by the court.

It may be recalled that BRS leaders had filed a case against Sanjay at the Marriguda police station alleging that Sanjay had described BRS leaders as the 'Dandupalyam Batch'.

Sanjay campaigned for BJP candidate Komatireddy Raj Gopal Reddy in the Munugode by-poll held in 2022. However, Komatireddy Raj Gopal Reddy who had quit his MLA post and had joined the BJP lost the election to BRS candidate Kuskuntla Prabhakar Reddy.

Minister stresses collective efforts for biodiversity conservation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Biodiversity Board, in collaboration with the National Biodiversity Authority, has launched the National Biodiversity Conference - 2025 at Kancha Shanti Vanam in Rangareddy district. The three-day event, which began on February 20, aims to highlight the urgent need for biodiversity conservation and promote research in this critical field. Minister Konda Surekha, who attended the inaugural session, called for collective participation in protecting biodiversity, emphasizing that every individual has a role to play in preserving the environment, water bodies, and land resources.

Minister Surekha underscored the importance of this conference in guiding conservation, research, and academic efforts in biodiversity. Addressing the gathering, she urged students and young scientists to actively contribute to biodiversity protection. "Telangana is home to



diverse ecosystems, including forests, grasslands, wetlands, and unique flora and fauna. Ensuring environmental balance through biodiversity conservation is our responsibility, and it requires collective action," she stated.

Expressing concern over the rapid extinction of plant and animal species due to human activities, the minister highlighted the irreversible loss of genetic resources when a species disappears. She stressed that genetic

diversity holds the true value of biodiversity, and it is imperative to safeguard it for future generations. "We must recognize that with each species lost, we also lose valuable genetic wealth," she remarked.

Minister Surekha also acknowledged the significant role played by state governments and various organizations in biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilization. She noted that biodiversity preservation efforts across India are gaining momentum, with many institutions working towards its protection and effective management.

The conference has brought together 70 students from different states and Union Territories, providing them with a platform to engage in discussions and gain insights into biodiversity conservation strategies. The minister reiterated that the collective efforts of scientists, researchers, and policymakers are essential to tackling biodiversity challenges and ensuring ecological balance.

Justice Ghose Commission's term extended

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has extended the term of the Justice PC Ghose Commission until April 30, as it continues its judicial probe into irregularities in the construction of the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation barrages. Initially, the commission's tenure was set to conclude this month, but fresh orders from the Irrigation Department have extended

the inquiry.

Justice PC Ghose is scheduled to visit Hyderabad on February 23, where the next phase of the Kaleshwaram inquiry will resume. The commission is expected to complete its remaining probe and cross-examinations during this period.

The commission's findings are expected to play a crucial role in determining accountability for the controversies surrounding the project.

Country steeped in hatred can never progress: Rahul

Slams BJP gov't, urges people to embrace love



PNS ■ RAEBARELI (UP)

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the BJP-led Union government of diverting attention from real issues and promoting capitalists while asserting that a country steeped in hatred can never progress.

Urging people not to accept hate, the Congress leader stressed that India "was and shall always remain" a country of love.

Kickstarting a two-day visit to his parliamentary constituency Rae Bareilly, Gandhi interacted with party workers and youths in Bachhravan and then went to Jagatpur in Unchahar where he unveiled a statue of Rana Beni Madhav

Singh, a hero of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.

Speaking at a public event, he took a jibe at the news media. "I have to say they (media) are our friends, but in reality, they are friends of Modi, Adani and Ambani."

"This is because they don't talk about the public, have you seen any news about farmers, labourers or inflation on TV? They will show you weddings of the Ambanis and Adanis, dance shows and watches worth Rs 15 crore," Gandhi said.

"Their work is to put pressure on the government. If the government does anything wrong, they hold it accountable. But they are not doing their work properly now," he added.

Bhatti blasts Centre's edu policy, calls for state autonomy

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu has strongly criticised the Centre's approach to higher education, comparing it to a system where "one must pay the bill but cannot order food."

Speaking at the National Convention on Higher Education at Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday, he emphasised that education is in the concurrent list and is not the monopoly of the Centre.

Representing Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy at the convention, Bhatti highlighted the need for state governments to have autonomy in shaping their own education policies.

He pointed out that while the Centre expects states to fund universities and run them, it is attempting to strip them of their authority in key matters like the appointment of Vice Chancellors and student admis-

sions. "If this continues, state governments will be reduced to mere spectators at inauguration ceremonies," he remarked.

Stating that states are not just administrative units but the lifeline of the nation's progress, he urged all state governments to take a firm stand on this critical issue instead of limiting discussions to closed-door meetings.

He warned against allowing the Centre to run the education sector through remote control, asserting that only states truly understand the hopes and challenges of students. "Consultation, not coercion, should define the Centre's approach to education," he added, reiterating that if the Centre genuinely believed in federalism, it should engage in meaningful discussions with states.

During his presentation, Bhatti elaborated on the reforms initiated in Telangana's education sector under the leadership of Revanth Reddy.

CM has no role in SC categorisation: Kavitha

Demands release of Dalit Bandhu funds

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha has asserted that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has no role in the Scheduled Caste (SC) categorisation issue and that the process was facilitated by a Supreme Court verdict.

She criticised both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Revanth Reddy, alleging that neither had taken any concrete steps on the matter. She reminded that during BRS rule, KCR had passed a resolution in the Assembly and sent it to the Centre for approval.

She warned the government against creating divisions among Dalits and insisted that categorisation should be implemented in a fair manner



ensuring justice for all sections.

Speaking at a meeting held at her residence under the leadership of Dalit Bandhu Sadhana Samithi President Mahesh Kogila, Kavitha demanded that the government make the Shamim

Akhtar Commission report public and start the categorisation process immediately.

She accused Revanth Reddy of misleading Dalits by linking categorisation to job recruitment and urged that the job calendar should not be stalled under this pretext.

CM appears before Nampally court

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy appeared before the Nampally Special Court in connection with THE cases registered against him for alleged violations during the election campaign.

The cases, filed at Nalgonda Two Town Police Station, Begumbazar PS, and Kaudipalli PS (Medak district), accuse him of breaching election norms.

Another case pertains to a video release during the last election, in which Revanth Reddy, as THE then TPCC chief, said that the BJP was planning to remove reservations. In total, nine cases have been registered against him, and today's court appearance was part of the legal proceedings.

A heavy police force was deployed around the Nampally Court premises during his arrival. The court adjourned the hearing to February 23.

PHONE TAPPING CASE
Court grants bail to 3 accused



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant development in the phone tapping case registered at the Punjagutta Police Station, the Nampally Court granted bail to three of the accused - Vamsi Krishna, Santosh Kumar and Parashuram - who were recently arrested in connection with the case.

The accused's counsel, Kiran, said they had submitted an affidavit saying that they were pressured by the police to testify

against BRS MLA Harish Rao. The affidavit said that a DCP had coerced them into making statements against Harish, and that both the DCP and the ACP used offensive language during interrogation.

He said that attempts were being made to implicate Harish in the case and that they had approached the High Court seeking relief. Taking the arguments into consideration, the Nampally Court approved bail for the three accused.

Congress to appoint 1 in-charge for 50 voters in MLC elections

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU
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■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy asked the party to prepare a well-planned campaign strategy BY appointing one in-charge for 50 voters in MLC elections.

The CM said the Youth Congress and NSUI leaders should formulate strategies from the village level.

"We should take responsibility to get voters to vote even if they have a good opinion of us. We should widely publicise the development and welfare works we have done. Ministers, MLAs and in-charges should work with a complete election strategy," the CM said.

He said that first and second priority votes should also be given priority. Since votes are counted in the eliminate system, every vote should be taken very seriously, he added.

The CM said that things like voter mapping, meeting voters separately, taking them to the booth from the village level are very crucial. There should be no negligence anywhere. A control room should be set up from Gandhi Bhavan and monitored continuously.

AICC in-charge Meenakshi Natarajan said this MLC election is very crucial and should be taken seriously.

"It is our sitting MLC seat and we are in power in the state. We have undertaken

many welfare and development programmes. All these should be publicised well among youth and made successful," she said.

The zoom meeting was held under the auspices of TPCC President Mahesh Kumar Goud. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, AICC in-charge Meenakshi Natarajan, Ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, Sridhar Babu, Ponnamm Prabhakar, Seethakka, Jupally Krishna Rao and Konda Surekha attended the meeting.

The in-charges of 42 Assembly constituencies in the MLC election area, MLAs, MPs, in-charges, Youth Congress, NSUI Seva Dal, and Mahila Congress presidents attended the meeting.

People must...

Continued from page 1

Venkat said that BRS leader rowdy-sheeter Suresh tried to kill the collector in Kodangal. The BRS's objective is to block development in Telangana. So KCR has been saying that the Congress graph has fallen, he said and asked KCR whether murder politics would raise the BRS graph. KCR can do nothing except carry out murders using hired hands, Venkat said.

"The government should take the Rajalingamurthy murder case seriously. KCR, KTR and Harish Rao have a hand in this murder. The government should arrest the culprits within 24 hours and order a CB CID probe. Set up a fast-track court and ensure immediate punishment for the murderers," Venkat said.

He said that BRS leaders should fight adversaries legally and that it is not right to kill them.

BRS blasts Congress over LRS ...

Continued from page 1

He demanded that the government implement LRS without imposing any fees, as per the Congress election promise. "If Congress leaders are honest about their commitment to the people, they must implement LRS without charging a

single Rupee. Otherwise, Revanth Reddy, Uttam Kumar Reddy, Seethakka, Komatireddy and Deputy CM Bhatti Vikramarka should resign," he declared.

Warning the ruling party of serious consequences, Vemula said the public would not forgive such betrayals.

Minor bureaucratic reshuffle...

Continued from page 1

In the Finance department, K Haritha (IAS, 2013), Joint Secretary to Government, Finance, has been appointed as the Director, Commercial Taxes, relieving Syed Ali Murtaza Rizvi (IAS, 1999) from the additional charge. Similarly, Sk. Yasmeen Basha (IAS, 2015), Director, Horticulture & Sericulture, has been assigned the FAC of Managing Director, Telangana Seeds Development Corporation, relieving P Uday

Kumar (IAS, 2016).

Further, K Chandra Sekhar Reddy (IAS, 2019), Managing Director, HACA, has now been placed in FAC of Managing Director, Telangana Foods, replacing B Srinivas Reddy, who has been transferred and repatriated to his parent department as Additional Director, Handlooms & Textiles. Additionally, Sanchit Gangwar (IAS, 2021), Additional Collector (Local Bodies), Wanaparthy, has been transferred to Narayanpet in the same role.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha
Tithi: Ashtami: Feb 20 09:58 AM to Feb 21 11:58 AM
Navami: Feb 21 11:58 AM to Feb 22 01:19 PM
Nakshatram: Anuradha: Feb 20 01:30 PM to Feb 21 03:53 PM
Jyeshtha: Feb 21 03:53 PM to Feb 22 05:40 PM
Rahukalam: 11:03 AM to 12:29 PM
Yamagandam: 3:23 PM to 4:49 PM
Varjyam: 09:54 PM to 11:37 PM
Gulika: 8:09 AM to 9:36 AM
Amritakalam: None
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:06 PM to 12:52 PM
HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 33°
Humidity: 57%
Sunrise: 6:40 AM
Sunset: 6:20 PM
Updated: February 20, 2025 5:00 PM

BRS betrayed TG in Krishna, ...

Continued from page 1

Despite spending Rs 27,000 crore on the Palamuru-Rangareddy Project and Rs 9,000 crore on the Sitarama Lift Irrigation Project, not a single acre of land received irrigation water. Long-pending projects like Devadula, Kalwakurthy, Nattampadu, Bhima, Koyal Sagar, SLBC and Dindi remained incomplete. The Kaleshwaram Project alone, which consumed nearly Rs 1 lakh crore, delivered minimal irrigated area and suffered from structural failures, Uttam said.

"The BRS government did not construct irrigation projects for farmers. They built them to fill their pockets. They destroyed the sector in terms of manpower, HR policies, water allocation, ayacut expansion and approvals," he said.

CM to lay stone... AP drawing 10,000 ...

Continued from page 1

This scheme is designed to empower beneficiaries by allowing them to construct their own homes with full government support.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will visit Vikarabad and Narayanpet districts on Friday, where he will participate in various development and welfare programmes.

As per schedule, the CM will arrive in the Polepally village in Dudyala mandal of Vikarabad district at 12 noon, where he will pray at the Renuka Yellamma Temple. After this, he will proceed to Appakpally village in Narayanpet mandal.

A major highlight of the visit will be the inauguration of a petrol bunk run entirely

by women, set up under the District Women's Federation with the support of BPCL. This is the first-of-its-kind petrol bunk in Telangana, marking a significant step towards women's empowerment.

Later, the CM will lay the foundation stone for Indiramma housing projects in Appakpally and also inaugurate the construction of the academic block and other buildings of the Narayanpet Medical College. At 2 pm, he will address a public meeting on the Gurukul Hostel premises. The visit is expected to focus on the government's welfare programmes and new schemes aimed at boosting infrastructure and community development in the region.

Continued from page 1

"Since the last three months, Andhra Pradesh has been removing 10,000 cusecs daily from the Nagarjuna Sagar. What are the Chief Minister and Irrigation Minister doing?" he asked.

He said that Andhra Pradesh has already exceeded its temporary allocation of 512 TMC by utilizing 657 TMC from Krishna waters, yet the Congress government remains passive.

He criticised the government's failure to take control of the Nagarjuna Sagar, despite the Assembly passing a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the CRPF and asserting Telangana's authority over the project. Harish Rao presented alarming statistics, revealing that in the last 25 days alone, 60 TMCs had been diverted by Andhra Pradesh, averaging 2 TMC per day. He said that as per the agreed water-sharing ratio, Telangana should receive 343 TMC, but it has only used 220 TMC so far, meaning 123

TMC is still pending. Andhra Pradesh, on the other hand, should have received only 666 TMC but has already taken 657 TMC, leaving only 9 TMC as per the agreement.

He accused the Congress government of failing to prevent water theft, questioning why it had not pressured the Centre or confronted Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. "They lack the guts to challenge Chandrababu or question the Centre. The same leaders who shout at the opposition in the Telangana Assembly are silent when it comes to Andhra Pradesh," he said.

Harish warned that the existing 100 TMC of water in Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar is at risk of being diverted, leading to severe shortages for drinking water in Hyderabad, Khammam, Mahabubabad, Nalgonda, and Suryapet.

He pointed out that nearly 6.38 lakh acres of farmland under the Sagar left canal and AMR SLBC project need urgent irrigation, requiring at least 30 to 35 TMCs.

'KCR was first...

Continued from page 1

Claiming that Telangana was wronged in the Union Budget is completely false, Sanjay said.

"Congress leaders cannot see despite having eyes and cannot hear despite having ears. Lies are being spread against the Centre to divert attention from the six guarantees. The Congress is following the same path as the BRS," he said.

"We are ready for an open debate on what the Centre did and what the State did for villages and towns in Telangana. We are ready for a public debate on what the Centre has given to Telangana and who committed injustice. It is not appropriate to use disrespectful language against the office of the Prime Minister," Sanjay said.

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City Pioneer

Crime Scene

Woman drug peddler held, 60 grams of MDMA seized

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant crackdown on synthetic drug trafficking, the Cyberabad Police, in collaboration with the Telangana Anti-Narcotics Bureau (TGANB), arrested a woman drug peddler and seized 60 grams of MDMA, a commercial quantity valued at Rs 6 lakh. The accused, identified as Shatabdi Manna, a resident of Sola Devanahalli in Bengaluru and a native of Jamsherpur village, Jharkhand, was intercepted at Miyapur bus stop while attempting to deliver the contraband.

Investigations revealed that Manna was part of an inter-state drug network operating under the direction of a foreign supplier, identified as Warren Kokarango, an African national who is currently absconding. She allegedly came in contact with him in 2024 and, facing financial difficulties, agreed to store and distribute MDMA on his behalf.

She is suspected of having handled multiple consignments ranging between 100 to 200 grams and supplying drugs over 10 times in Bengaluru before being caught in Hyderabad.

Earlier on February 11, two Rajasthan-based peddlers were arrested in Cyberabad with 40 grams of MDMA, while on December 25 last year, three local peddlers were apprehended in Film Nagar with 17.38 grams of the drug. In October, a Rajasthan-based gang was busted in Hyderabad, leading to the seizure of 350 grams of MDMA, with cases registered at Abids, Afzalgunj and Choutuppal police stations.

TG ACB nabs two govt officials in bribery cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) of Telangana arrested two government officials on bribery charges in separate incidents on February 20. The accused were caught red-handed while accepting bribes for granting official favours.

In the first case, ACB officials apprehended Boppuri Anand Kumar, Executive Director and FAC General Manager of the Telangana Scheduled Castes Co-Operative Development Corporation, Hyderabad.

He was caught at his office by the ACB City Range-2 unit while accepting a bribe of Rs 1 lakh from a complainant. He had initially demanded Rs 1.33 lakh as a reward for processing a sanctioned bill of Rs 33.32 lakh and for ensuring further payments.

The tainted cash was seized from him, and chemical tests confirmed traces of the bribe on his hands and office items. He was taken into custody and produced before the Special Judge for SPE and ACB Cases at Nampally.

In another case, the ACB Khammam unit arrested Shanthan Kumar, Mandal Agricultural Officer of Ashwapuram, Bhadradi Kothagudem district. He was caught red-handed at his office while accepting a Rs 30,000 bribe to issue coupons for a complainant to sell his cotton crop cultivated on 10 acres.

The bribe money was recovered, and chemical tests confirmed positive results. He was presented before the Additional Special Judge for SPE and ACB Cases at Warangal.

The Telangana ACB has urged the public to report any demands for bribes through its toll-free helpline 1064 or via WhatsApp (9440446106) and social media platforms. The bureau assured that complainants' details would be kept confidential.



CITY EVENTS

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

World Mother tongue Day
By Arifuddin Ahmad
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
February 21, (9 am to 5 pm)

Marathi Play
By Health League
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
February 21, (6 pm)

Session on public relations for startups
With Jefferies & Bain
Venue
T-Hub Foundation
February 21, (3 pm)

Live Musical Orchestra
By Sri Nataraja Gana Kala Vedika
Venue
Sri Thyagaraja Gana Sabha
February 21 (4 pm)

Fraudulent rental car scam busted

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Jagadgirigutta Police have arrested a man involved in a large-scale rental car scam that left several victims in financial distress. The accused, identified as Appari Vishwa Phanindra, was operating a fraudulent vehicle leasing scheme under the name VVV Car Tours & Travels. The scam involved leasing cars from individuals on a monthly rental basis and later selling or mortgaging the vehicles without informing the owners.

The case was reported on January 27, when complainant Shashidhar stated that he had given his car to VVV Car Tours & Travels on November 4 under an agreement that promised Rs 23,000 per month as rent. While the accused initially made payments for two months, he later stopped paying and kept postponing repayment when questioned. On January 23, when Shashidhar visited the accused's office at Devender Nagar, Jagadgirigutta, he found it closed, and several other victims were present with similar complaints. It was later discovered that the accused had absconded with multiple vehicles.

The police have registered multiple cases under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). Three of the accused, identified as Chivakala Ramana, Jakkamsetty Satyanarayana, and Reddy Venkatesh, are absconding.

Five youth arrested for waving swords at mosque

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Nacharam Police arrested five youth for waving swords and allegedly raising slogans in front of a mosque in Mallapur, Nacharam, on Wednesday night.

The incident took place near Masjid-e-Aashraf in Chanakyapuri Colony, within the Nacharam police station limits. A video circulating on social media shows the youth carrying swords, holding saffron flags and reportedly chanting slogans in front of the mosque.

According to Nacharam Police, the group was returning from a Chhatrapati Shivaji Jayanti procession when they stopped near the mosque, where worshippers were engaged in prayers.

G Rudvir Kumar, SHO, Nacharam, said, "Five youth have been arrested. They are all pursuing graduation. A case has been registered under the Arms Act. We are investigating if there is any evidence of them shouting slogans in videos - if so, a communal section will be added.

As of now, they acted without realising this is a crime."

The incident occurred around 10 pm and the swords were immediately seized.

The area remains peaceful, with no communal tensions reported near the mosque, added Nacharam Police.



The newly recruited DRF personnel

357 newly recruited DRF personnel to assist HYDRAA operations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In all, 357 newly recruited Disaster Response Force (DRF) personnel through outsourcing who narrowly missed police jobs will join and assist operations of Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Agency (HYDRAA), said Commissioner AV Ranganath.

He said that HYDRAA must work in alignment with government objectives and public expectations, urging everyone to remain vigilant in their responsibilities. The Commissioner addressed the 357 newly recruited Disaster Response Force (DRF) personnel at the training inauguration, which will take place over a week at the Amberpet Police Training Centre.

He reminded the recruits that HYDRAA plays a vital role both in society and in government operations, and that they should carry out their duties with dedication. He was highlighting DRF's importance in disaster management that the force is instrumental in minimising loss of life and property during natural calamities.

"The government entrusts us with various critical tasks due to its confidence in our abilities. Recently, we have also been assigned to regulate illegal sand transportation. It is our duty to handle these responsibilities with utmost sincerity and accountability," he added.

Encroachments removed in Pariki Lake

Hyderabad Disaster Response and Assets Agency (HYDRAA) has removed encroachments at Pariki Lake in Quthbullapur mandal of Medchal-Malkajgiri district.

On Thursday, HYDRAA has demolished two under-construction buildings and two more in the foundation stage within the Full Tank Level (FTL) limits of Pariki Lake.

The Pariki Lake Protection Committee had earlier complained to HYDRAA, stating that the lake once spanned over 60 acres but much of it had been encroached upon. The committee representatives alleged that a local leader named Balakrishna was illegally selling government and lake FTL land as plots through



notarized agreements. Both the buyers and sellers were being asked for their Aadhaar details to facilitate notarized transactions. Local residents also complained that over 1,000 square yards of land was encroached upon under the guise of a school playground, with illegal constructions taking place. HYDRAA has now launched a full-scale

investigation into all ongoing encroachments in the Pariki Lake area. The victims also claimed they bought 50-square-yard plots for Rs 15 lakh, believing they were legally valid but later realised the land was part of the lake area. However, HYDRAA did not interfere in the construction and people living in houses and only took action on ongoing constructions.

Numaish: SHE Teams nab 247 men for misbehaving with women

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

SHE Teams of Hyderabad City Police have apprehended 247 offenders red-handedly at the Nampally Exhibition (Numaish) 2025 held from Jan 3 to Feb 17.

SHE Teams, in a statement said that among the 247 red-handed cases, 37 petty cases were booked out of which two offenders received 2-day convictions and 33 offenders were fined Rs 1,050 each, one offender was fined Rs 50, one offender was sentenced to two days

of simple imprisonment along with a Rs 50 fine.

In all, 190 individuals were warned and let off after counselling and 20 cases are pending for disposal. Among the 247 offenders, 223 were majors and 24 were minors.

The Hyderabad SHE Teams continue to monitor public spaces to prevent harassment of women. "We urge citizens to remain vigilant and report any incidents through the Dial 100 service," added the SHE Teams.

GHMC splurges Rs 110 cr for flyover beautification

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has initiated a major beautification project for flyovers across the city, with an estimated cost of Rs 110 crore. The project, which includes aesthetic enhancements and junction improvements, is reportedly funded by the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA).

Official sources indicate that the actual expenditure is expected to be closer to Rs 110 crore. "So far, works worth Rs 54 crore have been completed under aesthetic improvements, which encompass not just fly-



over facelifts but also junction enhancements."

As part of the project, flyovers are being adorned with colorful paintings, artistic murals and thematic designs,

giving them a fresh and vibrant look. Additionally, junctions are being upgraded with fountains, artistic installations and landscaping to further elevate the city's aesthetics. Official sources said, the beautification drive also includes lighting enhancements to make Hyderabad's roads more visually appealing, especially at night. GHMC officials emphasise that these upgrades will contribute to making Hyderabad a more vibrant and aesthetically pleasing urban space. With extensive painting and artwork in progress, several flyovers have already started showcasing a renewed and visually engaging appearance.

Surge in patient inflow at Basti Dawakhana, PHCs in city

DEEPIKA PASHAM
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr J Venkati conducted inspections of four Basti Dawakhana and three Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Hyderabad on Thursday.

The patient inflow has risen from 80 to 100 per day at Basti Dawakhana and from 100 to 110 at PHCs.

Dr Venkati directed that all clinics must provide quality healthcare services during designated hours, ensuring the



DMHO Dr J Venkati inspecting Basti Dawakhana and Primary Health Centres

availability of medical staff and necessary facilities.

Speaking to The Pioneer, Dr J Venkati said, "These inspections are routine. We covered four Basti Dawakhana and

three PHCs in Begumpet, Nallakunta and Amberpet. The patient inflow has increased significantly. We collect samples for diagnostic tests, which are sent to

Telangana Diagnostic Centres by 4 pm. Once processed, results are sent to the respective Basti Dawakhana, PHCs, and directly to patients' mobile phones."

He added that Diabetes and hypertension patients receive monthly follow-ups to ensure they are adhering to prescribed medications. The department is also considering expanding services to cancer patients at Basti Dawakhana.

Doctors are available from 9 am to 4 pm and essential medicines are regularly provided to patients, the DMHO stated.

GHMC approves proposals worth Rs 700 cr

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Standing Committee meeting of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) was held on Thursday presided over by Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi.

The committee approved proposals for road expansion and the construction of multi-level flyovers, recommending government approval through the corporation. A total of 15 agenda items and 6 tabled items were approved during the meeting.

During the discussion, the Mayor Vijayalakshmi said that all Standing Committee meetings have been conducted in a healthy and friendly atmosphere, and several development projects have been initiated and completed with the full cooperation of the committee members. She



The Standing Committee meeting of the GHMC presided over by Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi and GHMC Commissioner Ilambarathi

expressed gratitude to the State government for releasing Rs 700 crore for GHMC

development in the past year. The Standing Committee members collectively thanked

the government for these funds.

Mayor Vijayalakshmi directed the officials to closely monitor sports complexes and ensure they generate revenue for the GHMC. She also stressed the need to focus on high-revenue sports facilities.

GHMC Commissioner Ilambarathi urged all officials and public representatives to work in coordination for the benefit of the citizens, stating that working with committee members has been a valuable experience.

He reiterated GHMC's focus on road expansion, junction development, parks, and sports facilities, announcing that Rs 25 crore would be allocated per zone for development projects.

CM Revanth Reddy assures medical aid, charging vehicle for ailing youth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has extended immediate medical assistance to a young man suffering from a rare muscular disorder after learning about his plight. Moved by the condition of Rakesh, a poor youth from Rangayyapalli village in Bhimadavurapalli mandal, Hanamakonda district, the Chief Minister directed officials to ensure that he receives the necessary treatment free of cost. Additionally, Revanth Reddy instructed officials to provide a charging vehicle for Rakesh to facilitate his mobility.

Following the Chief

Minister's instructions, his OSD Vemula Srinivasulu personally contacted Rakesh's family and assured them of full government support. Rakesh, who has been battling pseudo muscular dystrophy for a long time, recently reached a stage where he is unable to walk due to the severity of the disease. Doctors have recommended costly injections to improve his condition, but his family, struggling with financial difficulties, could not afford the treatment.

The Chief Minister, upon reading about Rakesh's situation in the media, immediately intervened to ensure that the government bears the cost of

his treatment. Rakesh, currently an Intermediate first-year student at a private college in Mulkanur, requires regular transportation between his village and the college. In response, the government has decided to provide him with a charging vehicle to ease his daily commute.

Expressing their gratitude, Rakesh's parents, Gulla Sammayya and Lakshmi, thanked the Chief Minister for coming to their aid in their time of distress. The government has assured continued support to Rakesh and his family, ensuring that he receives all necessary medical assistance.



Social activist Rajalingamurthy murder sparks outrage

His wife, Sarala, blames leaders, including former MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy, for the murder

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

The murder of social activist, Nagavelli Rajalingamurthy has sparked outrage in the district.

He was attacked by unidentified assailants who stabbed him to death on Wednesday. The attack took place in the backdrop of a previous case filed by Rajalingamurthy against the K Chandrashekar Rao government. His wife, Sarala, has alleged that the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders are behind her husband's murder.

Sarala claimed that former MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy, former Sarpanch Burra Chandrayya, and former ward Councillor Kottha Haribabu had engineered the murder of her husband.

A gang of masked assailants waylaid him and brutally stabbed him to death. He could not be saved though the local people, who recognised him, rushed to the government hospital within minutes of the incident.

A land dispute in Bhupalapally reportedly led to the murder of the social activists. It may be recalled that Rajalingamurthy had previously filed a case against the BRS government following the sinking of the Medigadda barrage, part of the Kaleshwaram project. He had accused the government of misusing public funds in the construction of the Kaleshwaram project, which cost Rs 1.35 lakh crore. The Telangana government has taken the case seriously in light of the political allegations surrounding it.

Sarala and her family held a protest on the national highway, demanding justice for the victim. According to preliminary reports, four masked men were involved in the attack.

Rajalingamurthy was the husband of



former Municipal councillor Sarala from the 15th ward. She had previously been expelled from the BRS party. He and his wife had been living in the Reddy colony of the town since their expulsion.

The murder occurred when Rajalingamurthy was on his way home from the Ambedkar Centre in Bhupalapally town. When he reached a deserted area near the TBKES office, he was waylaid by assailants who came in an auto and fatally attacked him. The brutal attack left him severely wounded, and he died on the spot, the police said.

Rajalingamurthy had filed a private case in the Bhupalapally district court against former chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, former minister T Harish Rao, and project officials over the sinking of the Medigadda barrage pillars. The Bhupalapally court had taken the case on file and issued notices to several persons, including KCR, Harish Rao, Rajat Kumar, Smita Sabharwal, former CM's secretary, and several engineering officials.

Shortage of small coins affects traders in Nirmal

PNS ■ NIRMAL

Traders in the district are facing a growing issue with the shortage of small coins, which are not being reintroduced into circulation. While business owners have no trouble attracting customers or boosting sales, small change has become a challenge.

As customers make purchases, they often receive coins as change, but these coins are not finding their way back into the market. Many people are not carrying coins anymore and instead give the small change they receive to their children or drop them in piggy banks. This practice has contributed to the ongoing shortage.

Temple authorities have also noted a decline in small coin donations to temple hundi, which used to be a common source of coins.

During recent counting of hundi collections, officials found only a small number of coins, further exacerbating the problem. Additionally, banks have not been able to supply enough coins for daily transactions.

As a result, traders have been seeking out private individuals who supply small change, but at a



cost of 5 per cent commission. For example, someone buying Rs 1,000 worth of coins need to pay an additional Rs 50 as commission.

Store owners have been encouraging customers to bring small change, warning that the situation could worsen if the private suppliers are unable to meet demand. Some traders have resorted to

offering customers goods worth Rs 1 or Rs 2 instead of change, though many customers are not accepting these substitutes and are instead reducing their purchases to match the available change. The shortage of coins is proving to be a significant challenge for businesses, with no immediate resolution in sight.



District Collector Adarsh Surabhi having lunch with students at Telangana Social Welfare Girls Residential School at Kothakota in Wanaparthy district on Thursday

Collector asks residential school to constitute mess committee

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

District Collector Adarsh Surabhi conducted a surprise inspection of the Telangana Social Welfare Girls Residential School at Kothakota in Wanaparthy district.

The Collector inspected the store room and inspected the registers. He emphasised that there must be a mess committee in the school and instructed that when essential commodities are delivered, they should be unloaded in the presence of the students' mess committee. He also said that entries must be made in the register when stock is

unloaded, and the stock should be checked in the students' presence.

The Collector asked school authorities if the students were signing the register when stock arrived. He emphasised that the expiry dates of commodities should always be rejected.

The Collector had lunch with the students and during the occasion. He instructed supervisors to taste the food before serving it to the students and only then should the food be served. If the food is not tasty, it should be cooked again and served to the students. He stressed that only quality food should be provided to the students.

Large quantities of marijuana seized in Ramagunda, Mancherial

PNS ■ RAMAGUNDAM

The police in the Ramagundam Police Commissionerate limits seized a large quantity of marijuana. Police Commissioner M Srinivas produced the individuals, who were arrested on charge of smuggling marijuana, before the media here on Thursday.

During vehicle checks near the Godavari Khani 2 Town 11 A mine, two suspicious cars were searched, and 96.775 grams of dry marijuana were seized, said Police Commissioner Srinivas. He mentioned that the value of the seized contraband is approximately Rs 50 lakh.

Four individuals were arrested, while two others are absconding. The police also seized two cars and mobile phones from them.



Suspected smugglers of marijuana and contraband substance displayed in Ramagundam police headquarters on Thursday

Similarly, based on reliable information, the Mancherial police conducted checks near the CC cameras warehouse on the I B X road and seized 23.5 kilograms of marijuana. The value of this ganja is estimated to be around Rs 12 lakh.

A case has been registered against 22 individuals who

were storing ganja near the CC cameras and 11 of them were arrested. The remaining accused are absconding.

The Ramagundam Police Commissioner urged the people to provide information about suspects. Police deployed sniffer dogs also to sniff out narcotic substances.

Collector, SP inspect sand reaches in Suryapet district

PNS ■ SURYAPET

District Collector Tejas Nandlal Pawar, accompanied by District Superintendent of Police and others, inspected the sand reaches at Jajireddigudem Moosi river and Tungagudem sand reach.

The sand from the Moosi river should be monitored through GPS to ensure that it is being transported to the authorized projects. In this regard, the GPS tracking system must be closely monitored by the concerned Tahsildar Office and Mining Office.

During the sand transportation from the reach, measurements should be taken in presence of the CCTV cameras. The details such as time, date, vehicle number, etc., should be logged in the register, and the Police, Revenue, and Mining departments should carry out inspections, the Collector instructed the officials.

He further asked the officials to install high-resolution CCTV cameras at the reaches. Only authorised vehicles should be allowed to transport sand from the reaches.

If anyone is found illegally transporting sand, their vehicles should be immediately seized, and strict action



District Collector Tejas Nandlal Pawar inspecting sand reaches in Suryapet district

should be taken against the vehicle owner as directed by the Police department.

Regarding the sand taxis, it is mandatory to have GPS tracking. The Police department must ensure that these vehicles are inspected.

MDC Department, Circle Inspector, Sub-Inspector, Tahsildar, Revenue Inspector, and officials were present.

Mango growers cautioned against indiscriminate use of pesticides

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

Mango, which is known as the king of fruits, is cultivated in over 32,105 acres in Khammam district. Primarily, the mango orchards are concentrated in areas such as Sathupally, Vemsoor, Penuballi, Kalluru, Tallada, Errupalem, and a few other mandals. The main varieties cultivated are Banganapalli, Dasher, Himayat and Totapuri, Rasalu.

Currently, the mangoes are in the fruit development stage. District Horticulture and Sericulture Officer MV Madhusudhan has advised the following precautions to be taken during this stage. In the fruit-setting stage, water management is crucial. Water should be given in smaller amounts, as over-irrigation can lead to issues like stem borers pest attack, honeydew pests, and powdery mildew diseases.

The dropping of fruit is a significant problem, which can occur due to water shortage, hormonal imbalances, or nutri-

tional deficiencies. During the fruit-setting stage and in the 15-20 days after that, giving 2-3 irrigations to the trees in areas where water is available can significantly improve the fruit set, preventing fruit drop and helping the mangoes grow larger and of better quality. Even if water is not available in the area, tankers can be used to irrigate the trees, which will be a worthwhile investment as it leads to better revenue than the irrigation cost.

During the fruit-setting stage, applying 500-1000 grams of Potash and 500-1000 grams of Urea mixed with 2 kilograms of neem powder to each tree will promote large, high-quality mangoes and improve yield, the horticulture.

To achieve the best results in pest control, it is advised not to apply the same pesticide more than once. This could lead to pests developing resistance to the chemicals. Therefore, for each problem, more than one pesticide is recommended. The growers were cautioned against indiscriminate use of pesticides.



Two get life imprisonment for rape of minor girl

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

The First Additional District Judge, K Uma Devi, delivered a verdict on Thursday an auto-rickshaw driver Kalepalli Sampath to life imprisonment for sexually assaulting a girl. The incident took place on February 7, 2021. The judge also sentenced his accomplice Pasuvula Naveen also to a life sentence. The court imposed Rs 2,10 lakh fine on each of the convicts.

According to the prosecution, the duo had kidnapped a 12-year-old girl while she was playing outside her house and sexually assaulted her. Khanapuram Haveli Police registered a case and invoked the Protection of Children from sexual offences (POCSO) against the duo.

While 25-year-old Pasuvula Naveen was a painter, the 25-year-old Kalepalli Sampath was an auto-rickshaw driver.

The Khanapuram Haveli Police Station completed the investigation quickly and filed the charge sheet in court. Public Prosecutor A Shankar conducted the prosecution. Inspector Venkanna Babu, Inspector Bhanuprakash, and court duty constables Srinivas Rao and Nageswararao investigated the case.

On this occasion, Khammam Police Commissioner Sunil Dutt congratulated the police officers who investigated the case.



District Collector Muzammil Khan participating in a programme at ASR Government Junior College in Khammam on Thursday

Students exhorted to scale new heights

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

District Collector Muzammil Khan has emphasised that students should study well and reach greater heights.

On Thursday, the District Collector presented a cheque of Rs 3.8 lakh from Malabar Gold Charitable Trust to 47 students studying in the local ASR Government Junior College, to provide training and books required to achieve better results in competitive examinations.

During this event, Muzammil Khan mentioned that parents are striving hard to provide quality education to their children. Some students came from financially stable families, while others came from underprivileged backgrounds. He urged the students to be inspired by the struggles of others and study well to reach greater heights.

Education would bring respect in society and for girls, it would provide an identity, he added.

The Collector pointed out that the available opportunities now were not available to our ancestors, and the youth should never let these opportunities slip away.

The Collector further emphasised that Malabar Gold Charitable Trust has generously provided Rs 3.8 lakh rupees to support 47 students at the Government Junior College so that they can prepare for competitive examinations without any hurdles in their education.

The event was attended by District Intermediate Officer Ravi Babu, College Principal Govind Rao, Teachers Pavan, Bharat Kumar, Rani, Srinivas, Kiran, Malabar Gold District Head Vishnu, Manager Ram Rao, and other staff members.

Inter-state drug syndicate busted, 300 kg marijuana seized

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The Special Operations Team (SOT) of Maheshwaram Zone, in collaboration with Abdullapurmet Police, busted an interstate drug syndicate and arrested a drug peddler. The police seized 300 kg of marijuana, along with a container vehicle, with the total value of the seized property estimated at Rs 1.05 crore.

The arrested accused has been identified as Ahmed Gulab Shaik (56), a resident of Nigidi in Pune. He was reportedly working as a transporter in the illegal drug trade. Another accused, identified as Bujji Babu from Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, who supplied the contraband, is absconding.

According to police reports, Ahmed Gulab Shaik, originally from Pune, was working as a driver but turned to drug trafficking due to financial difficulties. He allegedly collaborated with two drug peddlers, Vaibhav and Deva



G Sudheer Babu

from Pune, who offered him Rs 3 lakh per consignment to transport ganja from Visakhapatnam to Maharashtra. Having successfully transported two consignments earlier, he was on his third delivery when he was caught.

Following instructions from Vaibhav and Deva, Ahmed collected 300 kg of marijuana (packed in 138 packets) from Bujji Babu in Visakhapatnam. To avoid police

detection, he concealed the contraband within plastic scrap inside a container and proceeded towards Pune via Hyderabad.

Acting on a tip-off, the SOT Maheshwaram team, along with Abdullapurmet Police, intercepted the vehicle near the Film City on Hyderabad-Vijayawada highway in the early hours of Thursday. The police apprehended Ahmed Gulab Shaik and seized the contraband under a formal panchanama.

A special team has been formed to track down the absconding accused, including Vaibhav, Deva, and Bujji Babu.

The arrested suspect is being produced before the court for judicial remand. The operation was conducted under the direct supervision of Rachakonda Police Commissioner G Sudheer Babu. Additional DCP SOT, LB Nagar-Maheshwaram Md Shakir Hussain and the SOT and Abdullapurmet police personnel conducted the operation.

Three members of a family die of electric shock

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

In a tragic incident in Nizamabad district, three members of the same family lost their lives due to an electric shock. The wife, husband, and their son died on the spot after coming in contact with electric wires set up in a field to trap wild boars.

The incident took place in the fields near Pegadapalli village in the Nizamabad district. The deceased were identified as Gangaram (45), his wife Balamani (40), and their eldest son Kishan (22) from Satapur village under Renjal mandal had gone to the field. A farmer had set up electric wires in

the field to protect his crop from wild boars. Unaware of the electric wires, Gangaram came in contact with them and was electrocuted. In an attempt to save her husband, Balamani was also electrocuted, followed by their son Kishan, who tried to save his mother. All three died on the spot.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA					
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL DEPUTY COLLECTOR, LA, HAML, HYDERABAD					
FORM-F					
Notification by the Collector (LA), HAML (See rule 7 (c))					
File No. : C6/06/2025-LHS-811		Dated: 20-02-2025			
Where as the following notifications were issued and published in the Gazettes for the acquisition of land under Extension of Metro Rail Project, Hyderabad Airport Metro Limited, Phase-II, from MGBS to Chandrayyanga, Corridor-VI, situated at Share-E-Hyderabad Village, Bahadurapur Mandali of Hyderabad District for the Public purpose.					
In response to the said Notifications the following affected person (Property owners and others) have come forward to settle their claims through Negotiations.					
The details of the willing affected persons/Land Owners are as follows:					
S.NO.	NOTIFICATION NO. & DATE	GAZETTE NO. & DATE			
II	No. C6/20/2024 - LHS (301 to 325)	HAML No.45, Dated 07-12-2024			
Sl.No./PN No.	Name and address	Sketch No.	Premises No.	Extent in Sq.Yds.	
1	2	3	4	5	
1/23	Sri C.Nagaraj S/o C.Narayana R/o 23-5-432A, Shah Ali banda, VTC, Charminar, Hyderabad-500055	LHS-324	23-5-437, 438	26.83	
S.NO.	NOTIFICATION NO. & DATE	GAZETTE NO. & DATE			
II	No. C6/20/2024 - LHS (326 to 350)	HAML No.45, Dated 07-12-2024			
Sl.No./PN No.	Name and address	Sketch No.	Premises No.	Extent in Sq.Yds.	
1	2	3	4	5	
2/1	Sri C.Narayana S/o Late C.Balaiah R/o 23-5-434, 435, Shah Ali banda, Charminar, Hyderabad-500055	LHS-326	23-5-434, 436	4.15	
It is hereby notified calling for claims and objections if any, to be filed before the District Collector, Hyderabad District/Special Deputy Collector, LA, HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad within the Seven days of publication of this Notification i.e., by 27-02-2025.					
Sd/- Special Deputy Collector, LA, HAML, Rasoolpura, Hyderabad.					
Date: 20-02-2025.					
DIPR No.702/LA-PPI/Advt/Agency/2024-25					

ACROSS THE STATES



Haryana CM pushes for policy reforms

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday directed officials to take all possible measures to ensure significant investment across various sectors in the state. He stressed the need for revising existing policies, where needed, to maximise industrial growth, which will not only attract maximum investments but also foster job creation. The Chief Minister made the remarks while presiding over a meeting of the Industries and Commerce Department here, as per an official statement. Saini said Haryana has already planned to establish 10 modern industrial townships across the state, modelled on the success of Industrial Model Township, Kharkhoda. He said in the meeting on Wednesday that proactive steps should be taken to facilitate the establishment of industries and attract global investment. He proposed the creation of a modern IT Park in Haryana, along with special incentives for both industries and MSMEs, to make the state a more attractive destination for investment. The Chief Minister also acknowledged the steps taken by the Centre to boost manufacturing and promote MSMEs across the country.



Jammu to host 'national startup festival' on Feb 22

A two-day 'national startup festival' will commence here on Saturday, with 50 startups from across the country showcasing their innovations and technologies, said CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR-IIIM) Director Zabeer Ahmed. The key focus of the event to be held at Government College for Women, Gandhi Nagar, is to empower local youth, students, women and farmers from across the Jammu region, Ahmed told reporters here. He said Union Minister Jitendra Singh will inaugurate the mega event, while Jammu and Kashmir Minister for Science and Technology Satish Sharma would be the guest of honour. The event is part of the institute's continued efforts towards promotion and fostering the startup ecosystem in the region, said the director of CSIR-IIIM, Jammu. During the inaugural event, Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) will be signed by IIIM for collaborative research with industry and Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM), Ahmed said.



Harbouring terrorists endangers safety: Delhi HC

The Delhi High Court has said harbouring terrorists led to creation of 'safe havens' for them and endangered the safety of citizens by providing them with a 'veil of secrecy'. A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Amit Sharma made the observations on February 18 and denied bail to Zahoor Ahmad Peer, a resident of Wahama in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district. Peer was arrested in 2017 for allegedly providing logistical and material support to terrorists infiltrating from Pakistan into Kashmir for carrying out subversive activities. The high court said providing food and a safe shelter to persons associated with terror organisations, encouraged terrorism over a long period and harbouring of terrorists was a serious offence under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, attracting the maximum penalty of life imprisonment. "Harbouring of terrorists may not be seen to be a serious offence, especially when it is claimed that the same is under duress or coercion. However, a deeper analysis would reveal that harbouring is not an innocent act," the bench said.

Amid 'Mrityu Kumbh' controversy, Mamata says she respects all religions

Amid the controversy over her remarks describing Maha Kumbh as 'Mrityu Kumbh', West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she respects all religions and cultures. The Trinamool Congress supreme also emphasised that a religion could belong to an individual but religious festivals are for all. While addressing the assembly on Tuesday, Banerjee criticised the Uttar Pradesh government over its management of the ongoing Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj, and said the event has turned into



"Mrityu Kumbh" with people losing their lives in incidents of stampede. She also accused the authorities of suppressing the death toll. The BJP has been attacking the chief minister over the remark. "Who said I do not respect my religion? Remember religion belongs to an individual but festivals are for all."

Amit Shah asks Northeast insurgents to surrender

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday appealed to insurgents in the Northeast to lay down their arms and join the mainstream saying their participation in India's development journey is most welcome.

Participating in the 'Unity Utsav - One Voice, One Nation' organised by the Assam Rifles here, Shah also said everyone knows that the Northeast wants peace and development and the region wants to work as an integral part of the country.

"I appeal to all those insurgents who have not surrendered yet to lay down the arms and join the mainstream. Your participation in India's development journey is welcome," he said. The home minister said there has been 70 per cent reduction in violence in the Northeast in the last five years, 70 per cent less casualties in security forces and 85 per cent less deaths among civilians.

He said over 10,000 insurgents have surrendered in the last five years, 12 peace

Says the region wants peace, development

"I appeal to all those insurgents who have not surrendered yet to lay down the arms and join the mainstream. Your participation in India's development journey is welcome"



accords were signed with different outfits and two border agreements were also signed among the states.

"The Northeast wants peace, Northeast wants development, Northeast wants to work as an integral part of India," he said.

The home minister said if the youth of the Northeast put forward two steps to be part of India's development process, the whole country will put forward four steps with open heart to welcome them.

"Every part of the country has a special place for the

Northeast in their hearts," he said. Shah said the Northeast has rich tradition and rich cultural heritage for which the country is proud of. Without the rich cultural heritage of the Northeast, India is incomplete, he said.

"Unity in diversity is our strength," he said and highlighted that the Northeast has over 220 different communities, over 160 tribes, over 200 languages and dialects, over 50 unique festivals, over 30 classified traditional dance forms and over 100 different cuisines.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a new dimension to the identity of the Northeast by naming the region, comprising eight states -- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim -- as 'Ashtalakshmi'. "From economic and cultural fields to sports, education, agriculture and entrepreneurship, works have been done to open the doors of unlimited opportunities for the youth of the Northeast in every field," he said.

'Haryana launches witness protection scheme'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Taking a big stride towards implementing the three new criminal laws, the Haryana government has rolled out a new programme -- the Haryana Witness Protection Scheme, 2025 -- to ensure the protection of witnesses in the state.

A notification to this effect has been issued by the home department, an official statement said on Thursday.

The scheme will be applicable to witnesses of those offences which are punishable with death or life imprisonment or a jail term of seven years and above.

"It will also cover punishments under Sections 74, 75, 76, 77, 78 and 79 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), as well as under Sections 8, 10, 12, 14 and 15 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012," it said.



71% of newly-sworn in Delhi ministers face criminal cases: ADR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Five, including the chief minister, out of seven newly sworn-in ministers in Delhi have declared criminal cases against themselves, while two are billionaires, according to poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms.

The findings are based on the self-sworn affidavits submitted by the ministers ahead of the 2025 Delhi Assembly Elections. According to the analysis by the ADR, five out of seven ministers (71 per cent) have declared criminal cases against themselves, while two ministers (29 per cent) are billionaires. The report highlighted that five ministers, including Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, have declared criminal cases against

themselves. Among them, one minister, Ashish Sood, faces serious criminal charges.

On the financial front, two ministers, accounting for 29 per cent of the cabinet, are billionaires. The minister with the highest declared total assets is Manjinder Singh Sirsa from Rajouri Garden constituency with assets worth Rs. 248.85 crores and the minister with the lowest declared total assets is Kapil Mishra from Karawal Nagar constituency with assets worth Rs 1.06 crores.

The average assets of the seven ministers analysed stand at Rs 56.03 crores. All seven ministers have declared liabilities, with Parvish Sahib Singh of the New Delhi constituency having the highest liabilities at Rs 74.36 crores.

Previous central govts neglected Northeast: Shobha Karandlaje

PNS ■ AIZAWL

Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment Shobha Karandlaje on Thursday alleged that previous governments at the Centre had neglected the Northeast, and asserted that the NDA government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is according top priority to the region in terms of development.

Karandlaje, who arrived here on Wednesday on a two-day visit to Mizoram, said that the fund allocation to the northeastern states was very less during the previous governments.

"In the past, the Northeast was financially weak as the previous central governments did not focus on the region.



The fund allocation to the region was very less," the Union minister claimed while addressing a press conference here.

She said that during the 10 years (from 2004 to 2014) of Congress-led UPA government, the tax devolution given to Mizoram was only Rs 4,734 crore, which was very low compared to the tax devolution given during 10 years of Modi government.

During 10 years from 2014-2024, the Modi government has given tax devolution

amounting to Rs 33,178 crore to Mizoram, a 600 per cent increase from the tax devolution during the UPA rule, she said.

The grant-in aid to the hilly state had also increased by 94 per cent during 10 years of the NDA rule from Rs 21,359 crore given during the 10 years of the UPA government, she said.

Karandlaje said that Mizoram will receive tax devolution amounting to Rs 7,112.23 crore and Rs 3,853 crore as grant-in-aid as allocated in the Union budget during the new financial year 2025-2026.

She said that the NDA government gives priority to the Northeast and is focused on infrastructural development in the region.

4 Naxals killed in MP collectively carried Rs 62L bounty

PNS ■ BALAGHAT

The four hardcore women Naxalites, including a commander - who were killed in a police encounter in Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district - hailed from Chhattisgarh and collectively carried a bounty of Rs 62 lakh on their heads, officials said on Thursday.

The Maoists, killed in the gunfight on Wednesday, were wanted by police forces of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra, who all had declared bounty of different amounts for their capture. One of them, commander' Asha, was facing 18 criminal cases in MP, they said.

A senior official said due to mounting pressure on Maoists from security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, some of them have sneaked into Balaghat to escape police action in the adjoining state, where dozens of rebels have been killed in encounters in the last few months.

Mayawati calls Congress casteist' and 'two-faced'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW



Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Thursday accused the Congress of 'dual character and casteist mindset' after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi questioned her party's present political approach.

"Wherever the Congress is strong or in power, it harbours hostility and casteist attitudes towards BSP and its followers. But in states like UP, where it is weak, it tries to mislead people by talking about an alliance with BSP. If

this is not hypocrisy, then what is?" Mayawati said in a post on X.

Mayawati's post came soon after Gandhi, on the first day of his visit to his Raebareilly Lok Sabha constituency on Thursday, virtually accused her of staying away from anti-BJP front or the INDIA bloc during the 2024 LS polls.

"I wanted Behenji to fight alongside us against the BJP, but for some reason, she did not. That was deeply disappointing. If all three parties had united, the BJP would never have won," Gandhi said while interacting with Dalit students in Raebareilly.

Congress and Samajwadi Party had contested the 2024 polls together in Uttar Pradesh and succeeded in limiting the BJP's advance in the most populous state winning 43 seats including Faizabad Lok Sabha seat.

'VERY DISTURBING'



SC stays Lokpal order on hearing complaints against HC judges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the Lokpal order on entertaining complaints against sitting high court judges saying it was "something very, very disturbing" and concerned the independence of the judiciary.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai, Surya Kant and Abhay S Oka issued notice and sought responses from the Centre, the Lokpal registrar and the person who filed complaints against a sitting high court judge.

"Issue notice to the Union of India, Registrar, Lokpal of India and the complainant, returnable on March 18 at 10.30 am," the bench said.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said a high court judge

would never fall within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

Dealing with Lokpal's order on two specific complaints against the sitting high court judge, the bench, issued an injunction to prevent the complainant from disclosing the name of the judge and directed him to keep the complaint confidential.

The apex court was dealing with a suo motu case initiated after the Lokpal passed the order on January 27.

The bench directed the registrar concerned to mask the identity of the complainant and serve notice upon him at his residence through the registrar (judicial) of the high court. "In the meantime there shall be stay of the order dated January 27, 2025 passed by the Lokpal of India...", it added.

Modi govt putting India's national security at risk: Kharge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday hit out at the Modi government over reports that China was settling 90 new villages along the Arunachal Pradesh border and accused it of putting India's national security, territorial integrity and sovereignty at risk.

In a post on X, Kharge alleged that the priorities of the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi were "PR stunts" and "false advertisements" and "not national security".

"Narendra Modi ji, you are adopting the policy of giving a 'red salute' to China instead of showing 'red eyes'. India's national security, territorial sovereignty and integrity are paramount, the Modi government is putting it at risk," he said in his post in Hindi.

"Our allegation is made with great responsibility and is



based on facts. China has started settling 90 new villages on the Arunachal border. Earlier, China had settled 628 such villages on our border, according to newspapers.

"The Modi government promotes the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' on the border a lot, you have exaggerated it in Parliament. But the truth is that 90% of the funds of the 'Vibrant Villages Programme' have not been spent in the last two years. This scheme was launched in February 2023 and out of the Rs 4,800 crore allocated fund, only Rs 509

crore has been spent," he said. The Congress chief said that in Himachal Pradesh, where 75 villages need to be improved, the Modi government at the Centre has given almost no funds for it.

Kharge claimed that in December 2024, China announced plans to build the 'world's largest dam' on the Brahmaputra River, which could prove disastrous for our national security, environment and the north-eastern states.

The Brahmaputra River, he said, accounts for 30 per cent of India's freshwater resources, making its flow vital to India. The Congress president said according to a reply by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in the Rajya Sabha in 2022, your government said that "in March 2021, China adopted its 14th Five-Year Plan, which mentions plans for hydropower projects in the lower reaches of the Brahmaputra River".

WHO identifies encephalitis as increasing global threat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organization and Encephalitis International have launched a critical Technical Brief on encephalitis which identified the infectious and autoimmune disease as an increasing global threat, making it an urgent public health priority.

The Technical Brief outlines the worldwide burden of encephalitis, key actions required to improve prevention, data collection and surveillance, diagnostics and treatment, and research innovation.

"Encephalitis is an increasing global threat. Without urgent

attention and investment, we will see more needless deaths and disabilities from the condition," said Dr Ava Easton, the chief executive of Encephalitis International.

Encephalitis, caused by infectious and autoimmune factors, is an often-deadly brain inflammation that can affect anyone regardless of age, sex or ethnicity. It can lead to severe neurological consequences, including permanent brain injury.

It arises either from an infection invading the brain, such as Japanese Encephalitis and Scrub Typhus which are more prevalent in India or from the immune system mistakenly attacking the brain.

According to a survey in 2024, as many as 1,548 Japanese Encephalitis cases were reported from 24 states and Union Territories in the country. WHO and

Encephalitis International urged policymakers, public health professionals, healthcare providers, and researchers to implement its recommendations to save lives and reduce

disability associated with encephalitis.

"WHO's recognition of encephalitis as a growing global threat marks a pivotal moment. We must act decisively

to improve prevention, diagnosis, and care for those affected. Encephalitis disproportionately affects individuals in low-to-middle-income countries, where healthcare resources are often limited," Dr Easton said.

The technical brief aims to focus attention on the increasing global threat of the disease, prevention strategies and existing gaps in the diagnosis, treatment and care which will help enable more people affected to receive the treatment and care they need to live fulfilling and healthy lives, said Dr Tarun Dua, Brain Health Unit, Department of Mental Health, Brain Health and Substance Use.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Delhi gets a woman CM

Rekha Gupta's appointment as Delhi's CM marks a historic milestone, making her the first woman to lead a BJP-ruled state

Rekha Gupta has been sworn-in as the Chief Minister of Delhi, marking a significant milestone as she becomes the fourth woman to hold this esteemed position in the national capital. Her ascension not only signifies the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) return to power in Delhi after 27 years but also highlights a transformative shift in the city's political landscape. Gupta's appointment is historic, as she is the first woman to lead a BJP-ruled state. Her leadership is expected to bring a fresh perspective to Delhi's governance, focusing on inclusivity and development. Born on July 19, 1974, in Julana, Haryana, Rekha Gupta pursued her education in Delhi. She graduated from Daulat Ram College under Delhi University and later earned an LLB in 2002. Her legal background has equipped her with a strong foundation to navigate the complexities of political and administrative responsibilities. Gupta's political career commenced in 1992 with her involvement in the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) at Delhi University. Her leadership qualities were soon recognised, leading to her election as the President of the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) for the 1996-97 term. She further expanded her political footprint by serving as a councillor from North Pitampura in 2007 and 2012, where she initiated various community development projects.



Her dedication to public service and effective governance paved the way for her election as the MLA from Shalimar Bagh in 2025, defeating AAP's Bandana Kumari by a significant margin. Rekha Gupta hails from a respected family that values community service and education. Her father was an officer at the State Bank of India and her family relocated to Delhi when she was two years old. As the new Chief Minister, Gupta faces several pressing challenges. Delhi's persistent air and river pollution require immediate and sustained interventions to safeguard public health. Besides, addressing the city's infrastructure deficits, including transportation and public amenities, is crucial for enhancing the quality of life for residents. Building upon her campaign promises, Gupta aims to revamp government schools, ensuring quality education for all. Expanding access to free and efficient healthcare services remains a priority to meet the needs of Delhi's diverse population. Implementing programs such as monthly stipends for economically disadvantaged women reflects her commitment to social equity. Rekha Gupta's rise to the Chief Minister's office embodies a blend of experience, dedication, and a vision for Delhi's progressive future. Her leadership is poised to navigate the complexities of the capital's governance, striving for sustainable development and inclusive growth. Now that there would be a double engine government in Delhi, Delhiites can expect some radical changes in the city. The earlier dispensation was at loggerheads with the central government and so many of the policies and programs could not be implemented due to the tussle between the Centre and the State Government,

of India and her family relocated to Delhi when she was two years old. As the new Chief Minister, Gupta faces several pressing challenges. Delhi's persistent air and river pollution require immediate and sustained interventions to safeguard public health. Besides, addressing the city's infrastructure deficits, including transportation and public amenities, is crucial for enhancing the quality of life for residents. Building upon her campaign promises, Gupta aims to revamp government schools, ensuring quality education for all. Expanding access to free and efficient healthcare services remains a priority to meet the needs of Delhi's diverse population. Implementing programs such as monthly stipends for economically disadvantaged women reflects her commitment to social equity. Rekha Gupta's rise to the Chief Minister's office embodies a blend of experience, dedication, and a vision for Delhi's progressive future. Her leadership is poised to navigate the complexities of the capital's governance, striving for sustainable development and inclusive growth. Now that there would be a double engine government in Delhi, Delhiites can expect some radical changes in the city. The earlier dispensation was at loggerheads with the central government and so many of the policies and programs could not be implemented due to the tussle between the Centre and the State Government,

PICTALK



Tourists ride a hot air balloon in Kullu

A perilous challenge for India's soft diplomacy



SANTHOSH MATHEW

The fate of Nimisha Priya, accused of murder in Yemen, hangs in balance. Her case tests India's diplomatic resolve to protect its citizens abroad

In the volatile heart of Yemen's capital, Sanaa, an Indian national, Nimisha Priya, faces dire circumstances, accused of killing a Yemeni citizen. The charges are serious, but the true gravity of the situation lies in the potential consequences. Nimisha's case is not just about the allegation; it is a call for India to step forward decisively to protect one of its own. The environment in Houthi-controlled Sanaa is precarious, with little hope of a fair trial or a peaceful resolution. This situation, which has escalated into an international diplomatic challenge, demands India's immediate intervention. Yemen has been mired in conflict for years, with the Houthis rebels now in control of the capital. With power dynamics in constant flux and the justice system fractured, foreign nationals, especially from countries like India, are particularly vulnerable.

India's foreign policy has long been defined by its commitment to human rights and justice. In this case, the Indian government must continue to stand firm on these principles, ensuring that Nimisha's life is not negotiated for a price. Blood money, in particular, must not be allowed to govern the fate of an innocent individual. India's insistence on this point will not only safeguard her but also reaffirm India's role as a leading advocate for justice and human dignity in the glob-



WITH POWER DYNAMICS IN CONSTANT FLUX AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM FRACTURED, FOREIGN NATIONALS, ESPECIALLY FROM COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA, ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE

It is feared that Nimisha Priya, if left without diplomatic intervention, could face the harshest of outcomes, including arbitrary punishment or worse, in an environment where blood money—a custom rooted in Yemeni culture—may become a mode of resolution. This practice, deeply embedded in parts of the country, contradicts the ideals of modern justice and the humanitarian values upheld by India. The Indian government has already taken significant steps to address the crisis. India's diplomatic response to this case has been commendable, with swift actions to ensure that the matter does not escalate further. Notably, Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, raised the issue with the Houthi envoy, showing a growing recognition of the case's importance on the regional diplomatic stage. This cooperation reflects the urgency of India's intervention and highlights the potential for multilateral diplomacy to resolve the issue without resorting to traditional tribal customs like blood money.

al arena. More crucially, Nimisha Priya's situation places her life at risk due to the volatile political and security environment. The Houthi-controlled justice system may not provide the due process or fairness one would expect in a modern, civilized society. Foreign nationals are often treated with disdain, and Nimisha could fall victim to a miscarriage of justice. To prevent this, India must

leverage all diplomatic channels, including informal backdoor negotiations and Track Two diplomacy, which have proven effective in navigating complex international conflicts. India has a long history of maintaining close ties with the Middle East, and it is through these alliances that India can garner support for its position. Countries like Iran, which shares strong historical ties with India, have shown willingness to mediate in this case, as evidenced by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi's intervention. Track Two diplomacy is a critical tool in this regard. Informal dialogue through trusted intermediaries can often achieve results when official channels are bogged down by bureaucracy and political sensitivities. India's ability to operate through both formal and informal diplomatic avenues offers it a unique advantage in resolving this crisis and ensuring that Nimisha receives a fair and just resolution. The Indian government's actions to address this case are a testament to its commitment to protecting its citizens abroad. This case also highlights the

importance of India's soft power diplomacy. Indian nurses, who play a vital role in providing healthcare across the Middle East, are viewed not only as healthcare providers but also as cultural ambassadors of India. The protection of Nimisha Priya, a nurse working abroad, is thus more than just a personal concern. It reflects India's broader commitment to safeguarding its citizens and maintaining their trust in the government's ability to protect them. The Indian government's proactive measures, including diplomatic outreach and coordination with international partners, underscore the country's growing stature as a global player. As India's diplomatic outreach continues to develop, the importance of soft power—exemplified by its citizens abroad—becomes increasingly evident. Nimisha's case is not merely an isolated incident; it represents an opportunity for India to assert its influence and diplomatic capability on the global stage. The government's efforts to safeguard Nimisha Priya should be lauded.

By engaging with regional powers, leveraging backchannel diplomacy, and ensuring that international standards of justice are upheld, India demonstrates its growing leadership in global affairs. Through such strategic actions, India can also affirm its position as a nation that champions human rights and justice for all its citizens, regardless of where they are in the world. In conclusion, Nimisha Priya's situation presents a serious challenge, but it is also an opportunity for India to reaffirm its values and demonstrate its diplomatic maturity. By taking swift and comprehensive action, India will not only save her life but also reinforce its reputation as a responsible global leader, protecting its citizens and upholding the ideals of peace, justice, and human dignity. India must continue to press forward, ensuring that Nimisha Priya's case is resolved with the fairness and respect she deserves, signalling a victory for Indian diplomacy on the world stage.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SINS CANNOT BE WASHED

Madam — The article, 'Faith's double edged...' (February 20) presents valid points worth pondering over by one and all. Irrespective of the positive effects any religious faith is able to emit the rulers have, since centuries, found the best use of faiths to sentimentally tame the people to cover up their mistakes and misdeeds. Plunging the people in superstition continues to be a strategic ammunition in the hands of the rulers. Every rational argument and scientific inventions had to meet with a rigress and many a times fatal reaction from the rulers. Religious faith is an innate affair and the rulers should have no role to influence or denounce it. The rational behind the belief that a simple dip redeems all the accumulated sins in an instant is a matter to be pondered over. The same religion says no one can escape from paying for sins. It is also said that even death cannot redeem one of sins, and the sinner takes birth again to pay them off. The practice of committing sins and wiping them off with a holy dip promotes sinners to feel at ease or prevents them from committing sins. The quest continues. It is strange indeed that a party questions the scheme of government funding pilgrimage by believers of a faith on one hand and spends thousands of crores to promote holy dip on the other. The simple visible fact is that for rulers it is a tool to tame the people and also to reap a good harvest of income. Our constitution is very clear with its secular character and directs the state to promote scientific temper. It is time the secular character of the ruling dispensation is analysed to set it on the right track. People resting their belief is not an issue, but the government using it or misusing it is definitely an issue. The course needs to be set on the right path before it takes ugly turns.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

SC CRITICISES OFFENSIVE SPEECH

Madam — Recently, the Supreme Court took a firm stand on the controversial statements made by YouTuber Ranveer Allahabadi, making it clear that "freedom of speech does not mean a license to say anything." This remark is not limited to a single individual but serves as a warning for the entire society. Ranveer's comments contained indecency, offensive language, and words that hurt social dignity. The Supreme Court stated that the choice of words is not merely a matter of personal thought but has an impact on the entire society. Any statement that harms the dignity of women, sisters, mothers, fathers, and families is condemnable and unacceptable. Today, social media has given every individual a platform, but that does not mean it should become a battlefield of obscenity. The power of words is greater than that of a sword—they can either unite society or divide it. In a democracy, freedom does not mean absolute liberty but responsibility. The Supreme Court's decision serves as a lesson for everyone who forgets the dignity of language and, in the name of freedom, disrespects others. True freedom lies in discipline and decorum. The restraint of words is the true hallmark of civilisation.

Protest over Nepalese student suicide



Nepalese student Prakriti Lamsal's death by suicide at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology in Bhubaneswar is tragic and a wake-up call for the central government. KIIT seemingly disregarded Prakriti's complaints of harassment against an Indian student. Later, without investigation, it labelled her suicide a result of heartbreak. When hundreds of other Nepalese students protested, they were bundled out to Cuttack railway station and told to stay away. In one viral video, two KIIT staff are reportedly heard shouting at them that the institute's expenditure on tuition and board exceeds Nepal's budget. Such arrogance! By this logic, Indians in the US should shop at Walmart with a sense of gratitude because the retail giant's revenue exceeds the central government's budget. Many had scoffed when a global survey claimed India was among the most racist countries. Our record on people from our own Northeast isn't great either. Surveys showed how they were stigmatised as 'Chinese' during the pandemic. India wants 500,000 foreign students a year by 2047 but is stuck at the 50,000 mark. Accepting what's wrong might be a good place to start.

R K Jain | Barwani

REKHA GUPTA BECOMES DELHI CM

Madam — Rekha Gupta officially took charge as Delhi's Chief Minister in a grand oath-taking ceremony at Ramlila Maidan, symbolising the BJP's political comeback after 27 years. The event saw the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and other prominent dignitaries. A seasoned political figure with a strong grassroots background, Gupta—formerly a student leader and three-time councillor—reaffirmed her dedication to tackling Delhi's pressing challenges, including curbing pollution, upgrading infrastructure, and improving public amenities. The BJP's sweeping victory, securing 48 out of 70 seats, reflects a decisive shift in voter sentiment. As the fourth woman to hold this office in Delhi, Gupta's leadership is expected to bring strategic governance reforms, with a sharp focus on environmental sustainability and administrative efficiency.

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Budget powers India's green transition with clean tech push



N VAMSI REDDY

By balancing economic growth with environmental responsibility, the budget boosts India's long-term energy transition and reinforce its commitment to a greener future

While FM Nirmala Sitharaman's budget is tailored to drive consumption, propel long-term growth, and reinforce India's commitment to a greener world, proposals to power India's journey towards sustainability and net zero through various energy sector reforms, policies, and incentives stand out as they provide for a transformative shift in India's energy landscape. India's demand for power will continue to increase. The country has set an ambitious target of achieving net zero by 2070, a tall order. The power sector accounts for nearly one-third of India's total greenhouse gas emissions. While a country like India can't eliminate its reliance on coal-fired power with one stroke, transformative reforms in the power sector couldn't and must not wait. The path to carbon neutrality has to be paved with renewables. The Budget has provided the much-needed push to nuclear energy with the target of achieving 100 GW capacity by 2047 as part of India's long-term energy



transition strategy and achieving long-term economic and environmental goals. The government wants to position nuclear energy as a significant pillar of the energy mix. This aligns with India's broader objectives of a Viksit Bharat that will be less reliant on fossil fuels. The proposal to launch a Nuclear Energy Mission will promote domestic capabilities, private sector participation, and enhanced deployment of advanced nuclear technologies such as small modular reactors. With an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore for promoting research and development of SMRs, the government targets developing at least five indigenous designs and operational SMRs by 2033. The government will also bring in necessary amendments to the

Atomic Energy Act and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act to facilitate the Mission and encourage private sector participation in nuclear power projects. This is a great initiative! The Budget proposal to incentivise electricity reforms and augmentation of inter-state transmission capacity by states will advance power distribution companies' financial health and capacity. Upon meeting the reforms initiated under the revamped distribution system scheme, states can borrow an additional 0.5 per cent of their gross domestic product over and above what they get under the FRBM Act. This will significantly improve the efficiency of the power sector. These reform measures are part of the government's plans to support clean technology. The government also intends to promote clean tech manufacturing to improve domestic value addition and build a local ecosystem for solar cells, electrolyzers, wind turbines, high-voltage transmission equipment, and grid-scale batteries, among other technologies. The Budget marks a transformative step for India's renew-

able energy sector. The government's commitment to the 'Make in India' initiative and the new clean tech manufacturing policy will augment the development of solar PV cells, batteries, and other sustainable technologies locally in India. These moves will contribute to the nation's clean energy journey while fostering sustainable economic growth. The full BCD exemption of the scrap of lithium-ion batteries, Lead, Zinc, and 12 more critical minerals will help boost battery manufacturing in India and promote more jobs for our youth. By reducing the BCD on solar panels by half to 20 per cent, the FM has provided animal spirits to the wind energy sector, which would further reduce the price of the panels and reduce India's imports by facilitating domestic production. The increased allocation for solar power to promote rooftop solar projects is positive for solar module manufacturers and will boost RE capacity. (The writer is Director, Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING GRIEF

A fragile mind, burdened by irrational fears and unresolved emotions, struggles to find clarity



RAVI VALLURI

Bill Maher writes, "Suicide is man's way of telling God: you can't fire me, I quit." But do brave men commit suicide? Fear, anxiety, emotional upheavals, unpleasant feelings, panic attacks and phobias are all symptomatic of a fragile and delicate mind. It is an expression of an unpleasant emotion caused by the threat of danger or pain.

A fragmented mind is invariably a victim of irrational fear. Such an individual is unable to distinguish between what is logical and what is not. People suffer from extreme or irrational fear or aversion. This is nothing but what is called phobia (the Greek word for fear). A contributor to the magnification of fear is our pent-up emotions. These emotions are not based on a rational or scientific thinking pattern. We end up reacting violently or irrationally rather than responding in a coherent and clear-sighted manner. Humans should be prudent to ponder that if left untreated this situation can become mourning regalia.

A person can suffer from psychosomatic illnesses, loss of appetite, self-deprecatory behaviour or even schizophrenia. This has a multiplier effect in the form of morbid thoughts, persecution complexes and even hallucinations. An element of fear is perhaps required, because then we can patrol our fences. However, this needs to be distinguished from false bravado. Such an attitude will only be tantamount to mere filibustering or posturing. The brain is an organ and the mind is our intellect. The power of the mind needs to be magnified and enhanced to conquer fear. The mind is a movie theatre where the soap opera



of our life is enacted. We play, rewind and rerun an enormous number of movies. These are based on our idiosyncrasies and quality of thoughts. Thoughts are impacted by the kind of food we partake in (Tamasik, Rajasik, Sattvik), the company we keep and the amount of rest we take. The quality (guna) of food has a bearing on our disposition and approach to life. Tamasik food makes us sluggish, Rajasik food makes us feverish or anxious in disposition and Sattvik food makes us feel calm.

The first two lead us to fearful situations. If we are closeted to individuals who have a negative thought process, we imbibe such attributes and evince such a behavioural pattern. "Man is known by the company he keeps" is a very old adage and so is "man is born free but always in chains". Suppose we have inspirational friends and achievers in our orbit, we will tread such a path. It is cardinal to have adequate physical and mental rest. If we are rested, then we are at peace and do not complain or quibble. Then we are physically and mentally alert and high-yielding. In our minds, we need to keep space to just dump the garbage that disappears into the recycle bin, never to appear again.

We need to pursue passions, hobbies, indulge in sports, participate in extracurricular activities, avoid negative company, take up initiatives, practice meditation, keep the mind occupied, footslog on the treadmill, go for long walks, go for treks, and read autobiographies of entrepreneurs and achievers. Others adopt the spiritual path by practising pranayama, learning yoga, undertaking the Art of Living course or observing the breath through the Vipassana technique. These holistic techniques metamorphose the mind to be in the present moment and overcome fear. To conquer fear, we need to log out of our comfort zone so that the virus of fear does not enter our operating system. And if nothing works out, one should surrender to the Divine and feel grateful.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

A year of cinematic innovation, AI controversies and global synergy



CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

The global film festival circuit in 2025 is set to redefine storytelling, balancing tradition with cutting-edge innovation

Every year, the international film festival circuit brings forth a renewed sense of energy, enthusiasm, innovation and cinematic craftsmanship to audiences across the globe. Each festival curates a unique paradigm shift in content, programming, outreach and presentation, making every year distinct yet interconnected through the shared language of cinema.

The year 2025 is no exception. With the Berlinale 2025 already setting the tone, the world is getting a glimpse into the new formats, styles, and narratives that will dominate global screens this year. The Berlinale 2025 has kicked off the festival season, giving cinephiles a head start in understanding the emerging trends in storytelling. This year, the jury is presided over by acclaimed American filmmaker Todd Haynes, known for his originality, thematic focus, and innovative cinematic techniques that have spanned four decades.

The jury comprises a diverse matrix of global filmmakers, costume designers, film critics, and actors, ensuring that a wide spectrum of perspectives will shape the awards decisions. The challenge for the Berlinale jury, like many others in 2025, is whether to adhere to traditional cinematic standards or to adapt to new advancements, particularly the growing influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in filmmaking.

As storytelling tools evolve, the jury must decide how to balance imagination, tradition, and technological innovation while maintaining the core of cinematic expression. The Cannes Film Festival 2025, scheduled from May 13 to May 25, 2025, promises a blend of legacy and forward-thinking innovation. French actor Juliette Binoche has been named the President of the Jury, a role she describes with both humility and nostalgia. In her acceptance, Binoche said, "In 1985, I walked up the steps for the first time with the enthusiasm and uncertainty of a young actress.

I never imagined that, 40 years later, I would return as the President of the Jury." Binoche holds the rare distinction of winning the Best Actress Award at Cannes in 2010, Venice in 1994, and Berlin in 1995, along with a BAFTA and an Oscar, which she shared with Julianne Moore. Cannes 2025 is expected to continue its tradition of blending mainstream and experimental films, with AI-driven narratives anticipated to make a significant impact. The 82nd Venice International Film Festival, set to run from August 27 to September 6, 2025, will feature a dedicated section on the restoration of cinematic classics.

This addition acknowledges the importance of preserving the past while exploring the future of cinema. Venice remains a unique experience where audiences do not merely watch films but immerse themselves in living art and culture against the backdrop of one of the world's most extraordinary cities.

As with Berlinale and Cannes, the Venice jury will face the challenge of evaluating films that push traditional boundaries. Will they reward those that adhere to classic storytelling structures, or will films leveraging AI tools for scriptwriting, editing, and visual effects find greater recognition?

The challenge will be to balance the classical, contemporary and tech-driven



THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN HUMAN CREATIVITY AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT IS BECOMING A CRITICAL ASPECT OF JURY DELIBERATIONS, PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WHAT DEFINES AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING.

tools of storytelling on the celluloid screen. AI's increasing role in filmmaking has sparked a debate across festival juries. Should AI-generated content be evaluated on par with traditionally crafted films? Festivals in 2025 are contemplating introducing new categories to accommodate AI-assisted storytelling.

The interplay between human creativity and technological advancement is becoming a critical aspect of jury deliberations, pushing the boundaries of what defines authentic storytelling. India is set to initiate a new platform within the global cinematic landscape with the inaugural edition of the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) scheduled to be held in Mumbai from May 1 to 5, 2025. WAVES 2025 aims to bring together the global media and entertainment (M&E) industry with global talent, fostering collaborations, business opportunities, and cross-cultural dialogue. It is an initiative of the Government to highlight and present India as a juggernaut of creative excellence, encourage co-productions, and promote film tourism and management holistically.

This summit is expected to catalyse growth by attracting international investments, sharing global best practices, and enabling policy discussions.

The four-day event curated along the four broad pillars of Broadcasting and Entertainment, AVGC-XR, Digital Media and Films is expected to create an unprecedented buzz and collaborative partnership amongst key stakeholders leading to a much-

needed global media dialogue, involving key stakeholders from B2B, B2C and B2G verticals. WAVES 2025 also aims to encourage the sharing of ideas and resources, positioning India as an attractive destination for media investments, partnerships, and collaborations and establishing India as a global content hub. Beyond the celebration of cinema, international film festivals have increasingly become instruments of soft power diplomacy.

These festivals act as avenues for cross-cultural dialogue, collaborations, and international partnerships. For countries like India, participating in such festivals goes beyond screenings and accolades; it is about leveraging the medium of cinema to strengthen diplomatic ties and cultural exchange. The insights gained from WAVES 2025 will be crucial for the 56th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) later in the year. IFFI must focus on curating an international jury that mirrors the diversity seen in Berlinale and Venice.

The festival can also benefit from introducing categories that acknowledge AI-generated content, thus staying in step with global trends. Moreover, IFFI 2025 has the potential to strengthen India's position as a hub for filming destinations, partnerships and collaboration. By promoting India's e-visa facility for filmmakers and highlighting scenic and culturally rich locations across the country, the festival can attract global filmmakers and producers.

The festival's role in soft power diplomacy can be further ampli-

fied by organising networking sessions with international delegates and facilitating collaborations that go beyond cinema into the realms of cultural exchange and education.

In the current scenario where geostrategic communication is critical, soft power diplomacy through film festivals will play a critical role in integrating cinema, people and excellence. The film festival circuit in 2025 is not merely about showcasing films; it is about witnessing a transformation in storytelling techniques, jury deliberations, and international collaborations.

The challenge for juries this year lies in balancing tradition with innovation, human creativity with technological advancements, and local narratives with global perspectives.

For India, 2025 stands as a pivotal year to strengthen its cinematic presence globally. WAVES 2025 and IFFI 2025 together offer an opportunity to not only showcase India's prowess in storytelling, weaving it with contemporary styles, but also to position the country as a forward-thinking, globally connected cinema powerhouse.

As the year unfolds, the world will watch closely to see how these festivals respond to the evolving dynamics of cinema, ensuring that the magic of storytelling continues to resonate across borders and generations alike. 2025 will surely be a game-changer for cinephiles and creative geniuses.

(The writer is former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; Inputs by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan. Views are personal)

Beyond academics: How study abroad shapes personal growth and leadership skills

In an increasingly interconnected world, the decision to study abroad is no longer just about acquiring a degree. It is a transformative journey, one that shapes individuals

Studying abroad allows students to see the world through a different lens. By engaging with global issues firsthand, be it climate change, social justice, or economic policies, they gain a deeper understanding of how interconnected and interdependent our world truly is. This global perspective is invaluable in shaping informed leaders. It instils a sense of responsibility and encourages students to think beyond their immediate surroundings.

Leaders who understand global challenges and can approach them with a holistic mindset are better equipped to create meaningful change.

Collaboration and Networks
Studying abroad offers

unique opportunities to build a global network of peers, professors, and professionals. These connections often serve as invaluable resources, providing insights, guidance, and opportunities long after graduation. Collaborating with people from different parts of the world teaches students how to harness diverse strengths and ideas to achieve common goals. They become adept at creating inclusive environments where everyone feels valued—a critical skill for leaders in today's multicultural workplaces.

Growth in Emotional Intelligence

Living away from home in an unfamiliar setting often stirs a range of emotions. These emotional highs and lows contribute significantly to the



DALJEET SANDHU

development of emotional intelligence. Students learn to manage their emotions, empathise with others, and build meaningful relationships despite cultural differences. Emotional intelligence, often considered more critical than IQ in leadership roles, is cultivated naturally during the study-abroad experience. Moreover, going through relationships in a

foreign setting teaches students how to build trust and rapport, even in challenging circumstances.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Effective communication is a cornerstone of leadership, and studying abroad is an excellent training ground for this skill.

Navigating a foreign environment requires students to communicate with clarity and intent, often across language barriers. They become adept at listening, interpreting non-verbal cues, and tailoring their messages to suit diverse audiences. Furthermore, participating in group projects, extracurricular activities, or even casual social interactions with peers from different cultural



contexts enhances interpersonal skills. Students learn to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and inspire those around them, qualities that define great leaders.

Building Resilience and Independence

Moving to a new country requires immense courage. From finding accommodation to dealing with administrative paperwork, students often have to manage tasks

that they may have never encountered before. The absence of a familiar support system forces them to rely on their abilities, building resilience and self-reliance. Moreover, students gain confidence as they navigate and overcome these hurdles. This newfound sense of independence not only shapes their identity but also prepares them for leadership roles where decisiveness and self-assurance are paramount.

Embracing Cultural Diversity

One of the most profound aspects of studying abroad is exposure to cultural diversity. Students find themselves immersed in a society that often operates on different values, customs, and traditions than their own. This

immersion fosters adaptability and open-mindedness, as they learn to respect and appreciate perspectives vastly different from their own. Engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds teaches valuable lessons in empathy and cross-cultural communication.

Whether it's understanding the nuances of a local festival, navigating a new language, or simply sharing a meal with someone from another culture, these experiences challenge preconceived notions and build cultural intelligence. In short, studying abroad is much more than an academic pursuit; it is a journey of self-discovery and transformation.

By embracing cultural diversity, building resilience, and

developing critical leadership skills, students emerge as well-rounded individuals ready to tackle the challenges of a globalised world. The lessons learned during this time extend far beyond the classroom.

They shape character, nurture empathy, and inspire vision—qualities that define true leaders. For those who take the plunge, studying abroad is not just an investment in their education but also a stepping stone toward becoming agents of change in an ever-evolving world. For students who choose to study abroad, the richness comes not just in knowledge but in the experiences that mould them into future leaders.

(The writer is CEO of Daltin AI Portal; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Govt extends tenure of CEA till March 2027

The government on Thursday extended the tenure of Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) V Anantha Nageswaran for two years till March 2027. Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the tenure of Nageswaran on a contract basis up to March 31, 2027. With the approval of ACC, the tenure of V Anantha Nageswaran as Chief Economic Adviser on contract basis is extended up to March 31, 2027, or until further order whichever is earlier, an office order said. Nageswaran assumed charge of the CEA on January 28, 2022, for a three-year term. The office of CEA is responsible for giving advice to the government on various economic policies and drafting the Economic Survey which is tabled in Parliament a day ahead of the Union Budget. Nageswaran, an academic and former executive with Credit Suisse Group AG and Julius Baer Group, succeeded K V Subramanian. His extension comes weeks after the Economic Survey 2024-25 projected a growth of 6.3-6.8 per cent for the next financial year amid Asia's third-largest economy showing signs of moderation.

'An opportunity to boost bilateral trade, investments'

Comm min on India, US trade pact

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India and the US preparing to start negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), the commerce ministry will soon start engaging with different departments on the India-US trade aspects and related developments, sources said.

They said the agreement is an opportunity to boost bilateral trade and investments between the two countries.

"We will meet different ministries, we are sensitising them. We have to understand their issues because if we have to do a bilateral trade agreement, all ministries will need to be on the same page. We will talk about reciprocal tariffs and India-US trade aspects," the source said.

They added that the commerce ministry will cover 3-4 ministries in the coming weeks.

The ministry takes views of all ministries concerned on proposed trade agreements.

The talks between the two countries on trade-related



matters will start once the trade team takes charge in the US.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce to USD 500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025.

Asked about the nature of the proposed pact, one of the sources said it will be decided after bilateral meetings.

The idea to reach out to all

departments is to inform them about the US circulars, "what will be there in BTA? What is the meaning of reciprocal tariffs? Any agreement we do, we involve all the ministries also," they added.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal recently stated that the two countries can offer concessions and duty reductions, as their economies complement each other.

Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them.

India's GDP growth to slow to 6.4 pc: Moody's Analytics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Analytics on Thursday said India's growth will slow to 6.4 per cent in 2025, from 6.6 per cent in 2024, as new US tariffs and softening global demand weigh on exports.

In its report titled 'Asia-Pacific Outlook: Chaos Ahead', Moody's Analytics said growth across the Asia-Pacific economy will slow in 2025 as trade tensions, policy shifts, and uneven recoveries knock the region's fortunes.

"Growth across the region will slow as new tariffs and softening global demand weigh on exports," it said.

It projected Chinese GDP growth slowing to 4.2 per cent in 2025 and 3.9 per cent in 2026 from 5 per cent in 2024. Growth in India will creep into the low-6 per cent range in the coming years from 6.6 per cent in 2024. As per its APAC forecast, India's GDP is expected to grow 6.4 per cent both in 2025 and 2026 fiscal years.

Finmin to meet heads of PSBs to review performance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has called a meeting of heads of public sector banks (PSBs) on March 4 to review financial performance of banks and progress of financial inclusion schemes, among others.

The meeting is scheduled to be chaired by Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju.

According to sources, the meeting would also discuss and review the progress of various financial inclusion schemes including PM S V A N i d h i Schemes.

This is going to be the first meeting after presentation of Union Budget 2025-26 in Parliament.

PSBs have posted highest-ever net profit of Rs 1.29 lakh crore in the April-December period of the current fiscal year, marking an annual increase of 31.3 per cent.

The performance of PSBs has shown significant improve-

ment on key financial parameters, like record net profit growth, improved asset quality, and build-up of adequate capital buffers, during the period under review.

The 12 state-owned banks recorded net profit growth of 31.3 per cent (year-on-year) to achieve highest-ever aggregate net profit of Rs 1,29,426 crore and aggregate operating profit of Rs 2,20,243 crore in the nine months of the financial year.

Further, improved asset quality is also visible from significantly low net NPA ratio at 0.59 per cent (aggregate net NPA outstanding of Rs 61,252 crore), the

finance ministry had said in a statement.

They posted aggregate business growth of 11 per cent (year-on-year), with improved aggregate deposit growth at 9.8 per cent. Total aggregate business of PSBs reached Rs 242.27 lakh crore during the period.



Tata Power partners with Amazon Web Services

Tata Power on Thursday announced its partnership with Amazon Web Services to drive smart and consumer-centric energy transition in India through modernization of its digital infrastructure and energy management. Tata Power has embarked on a data-driven transformation with Amazon Web Services (AWS) to accelerate the country's transition to a greener, smarter, and more consumer-centric energy ecosystem, the company said in a statement. The evolution of energy systems demands real-time analytics, automation, and decentralized power generation to optimize supply and demand. Digitalization enables grid stability, predictive maintenance, and seamless energy transactions, ensuring sustainability and operational efficiency, it said. Tata Power's partnership with AWS exemplifies this digital-first approach, harnessing cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), and IoT to build a smarter, more efficient power ecosystem.



FSIB selects candidates for 2 LIC MD positions

FSIB, the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, on Thursday recommended the names of Dinesh Pant and Ratnakar Patnaik for the posts of managing director of insurance behemoth LIC. The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) interviewed eight candidates for the positions, it said in a statement. "Keeping in view their performance in the interview, their overall experience and the extant parameters, the bureau recommends Dinesh Pant and Ratnakar Patnaik for the vacancy dated June 1, 2025," it said. The final decision on the FSIB recommendations would be taken by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The FSIB is headed by Bhanu Pratap Sharma, former secretary, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT). Other members of the headhunter are the secretary, Department of Financial Services, secretary, Department of Public Enterprises, IRDAI Chairman Debashish Panda, former LIC managing director Usha Sangwan and former Oriental Insurance managing director A V Girija Kumar.

Gujarat govt presents Rs 3.70 lakh crore budget

NO NEW TAX PROPOSED

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

Gujarat Finance Minister Kanubhai Desai on Thursday presented a Rs 3.70 lakh crore budget for the state for the financial year 2025-26, giving tax reliefs of Rs 148 crore.

Also, no new tax was proposed in the budget, presented by Desai in the state assembly here on the second day of its budget session.

Desai informed the House that the budget outlay of Rs 3,70,250 crore for 2025-26 indicates an increase of Rs 37,785 crore, or 11.3 per cent, compared to the previous fiscal.

The state government proposed a tax relief of Rs 148 crore in the form of reduction in stamp duty on mortgage deeds and on motor vehicle tax on electric vehicles.

In his budgetary address, Desai announced a host of new schemes and projects and said the budget was based on five pillars - social security, human resource development, infrastructure development, green growth and development of economic activities.

Desai said the state government has prepared a roadmap for 'Viksit Gujarat 2047' to realize Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. "To transform this vision into reality, we are committed to formulating and implementing well-planned projects and public welfare schemes. For this, I propose to create a Rs 50,000 crore Viksit Gujarat Fund over the next five years.

NSDL aims to launch Rs 3,000-cr IPO by next month: Official

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Depository firm NSDL is targeting to launch its much awaited Rs 3,000-crore initial public offering (IPO) by next month, a senior official said on Thursday.

As a market infrastructure institution (MII), National Securities Depository Ltd (NSDL) also needs other approvals apart from the draft red herring prospectus, the official said, adding that it is this approval which has a looming deadline.

"Our dates are expiring next month. We are rushing against time to get things done fast. We will try (to launch the IPO before that)," the official said, replying to a specific query on the timeline for the IPO.

The 12-month deadline for the DRHP expires in

September, but it is the MII approval given by Sebi which is prompting the depository handling a bulk of India's dematerialised accounts to expedite the share sales process.

Asked if the choppy market conditions are leading to a delay, the official said even in this situation there are some offerings hitting the market. Responding to a question on the reasons behind the delay in share sale, the official pointed towards challenges on the manpower front, saying the amount of work to be done is very large.

NSDL had received a go-ahead from Sebi for the IPO in September last year.

As per reports, NSE, State Bank of India (SBI) and HDFC Bank plan to offload 5.72 crore equity shares in the issuance which will be a complete offer for sale (OFS).

Sensex, Nifty fall for 3rd day on selling in blue-chips

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined for the third day on Thursday as fresh tariff threats, weak Asian markets and foreign fund outflows hurt investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 203.22 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 75,735.96. During the day, it tanked 476.17 points or 0.62 per cent to 75,463.01.

The NSE Nifty dipped 19.75 points or 0.09 per cent to 22,913.15.

Selling in frontline stocks HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, ITC and Maruti dragged down the key indices.

Broader markets, however, bucked the trend with midcap and smallcap indices gaining more than 1 per cent.



breather, according to exchange data.

"Domestic equity indices experienced minor losses as rising concerns over potential US tariffs on Indian goods led to capital outflows. Additionally, the proposed trade policy is expected to exert inflationary pressures, with the latest Fed Minutes indicating that an interest rate cut may be delayed," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Benchmark indices closed slightly lower on expiry day after a rangebound and volatile session.

The FOMC minutes hinted that the US Federal Reserve might pause rate cuts due to inflation concerns," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Gold gains to hit fresh peak of Rs 89,450 per 10 gm

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices hit a fresh high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, advancing Rs 50 amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 89,400 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity went up Rs 50 to establish a record of Rs 89,050 per 10 grams.

"Gold hit fresh record highs on Thursday as the news flow regarding Trump's tariff policy continues to attract safe haven flow towards gold and also to prevent investors from profit-taking in gold," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst -- Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

President Trump stated on Wednesday that he would impose tariffs on timber, vehicles, semiconductors, and pharmaceuticals over the next month or sooner.

"The news fuelled market



700 to Rs 1,00,300 per kilogram from Rs 99,600 per kg in the previous market close.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery jumped Rs 500 to Rs 86,410 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded positively with a gain in MCX. A weaker dollar index has further aided gold's upward momentum, while ongoing tariff adjustments from the US continue to fuel uncertainty, keeping demand for gold high," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency,

LKP Securities, said. Silver futures for March delivery rallied Rs 1,224, or 1.27 per cent, to Rs 97,630 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Globally, Comex gold futures for April delivery rose USD 36.81, or 1.25 per cent, to hit a fresh peak of USD 2,972.91 per ounce.

According to experts, the yellow metal futures increased amid reports that President Trump stated that a trade agreement with China would be possible.

India's e-commerce market size to jump over 4 times: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The market size of India's e-commerce sector is estimated to jump more than four-fold to USD 550 billion by 2035, according to a report by Anarock and ETRetail.

In 2024, the market size of the e-commerce stood at USD 125 billion, the report said.

Real estate consultant Anarock and ETRetail released their joint report at

'The Economic Times Great India Retail Summit 2025' in Mumbai on Thursday.

"Indian e-commerce is expected to touch USD 550 billion by 2035, growing at a CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) of 15 per cent. In 2024, the value of this vibrant and disruptive retail segment was estimated at USD 125 billion. It is likely to touch USD 345 billion by 2030-end," the consultant said in a state-



ment.

Increasing internet penetration, smartphone adoption, digital payment infrastructure, and a young, tech-savvy

population are driving this growth, Anarock said.

Government initiatives like 'Digital India' and rapid improvements in the country's logistics and supply chain networks have further boosted its growth prospects.

"Besides the metros, e-commerce players are also tapping the growing demand from smaller towns and cities," said Anuj Kejriwal, CEO & MD, Anarock Retail.

Number of EVs in India likely to cross 28 mn-mark: IESA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The total number of operational electric vehicles (EVs) in India is likely to cross the 28 million-mark by 2030 fuelled by increasing demand and incentives, the India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA) said in a report.

India continues to make significant and sustained inroads in its decarbonization journey, with rapid increase in sales of EVs, supported by demand and supply incentives, growing consumer demand, and a focus on developing charging infra-

structure, IESA said in a statement.

The outlook for electric vehicle sales continues to be positive, driven by increasing environmental awareness, customer interest, advancements in battery technology, and readily available and easily accessible EV charging infrastructure, it said.

India's cumulative electric vehicle (EV) sales crossed 4.1 million units in the fiscal year 2023-2024.

IESA, a leading alliance focussed on e-mobility, energy storage, and hydrogen, forecast that the cumulative



number of EVs in operation will likely cross 28 million units in 2030, generating significant demand for energy from the grid.

It is projected that 83 per

cent of the annual sales would be electric two-wheelers, 10 per cent would be electric four-wheelers, and commercial vehicles such as trucks, buses, and three-wheelers

doubled compared to 204 GWh in 2022-2023.

Additionally, he said that with the majority of EV users opting for the convenience of home charging, IESA estimate of energy demand for EV charging in FY 2024-2025 is 4,000 GWh and it is likely to increase to 38 TWh by FY32 with maximum power demand estimated at 366.4GW.

According to the IESA report, the total installed capacity in the country is required to grow from 466 GW in January 2025 to 900 GW by 2032.

able energy in its total energy production could increase from 24 per cent in 2023 to around 70 per cent by 2047, it noted.

Likewise, the auto-component export sector is projected to reach USD 200-250 billion (2047) driven by share capture in ICE market and longer-term shift to EVs.

"Five key sectors including electronics, energy, chemicals, automotive, and services would act as strategic growth levers due to alignment with global trends and scalability, with the potential to address India's unique challenges and advan-

India to be high-income country by 2047: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is set to become a high-income country by 2047 with a projected GDP of USD 23 trillion to USD 35 trillion, buoyed by the services sector, a report has said.

By 2047, the services sector is projected to make up 60 per cent of India's GDP, while manufacturing will account for 32 per cent, both becoming crucial drivers of economic growth, the report by Bain & Company and nasscom said.

"With nearly 200 million individuals expected to enter the workforce in the coming decades, India has a unique opportunity to drive high-value job creation and unlock significant economic potential," the report said.

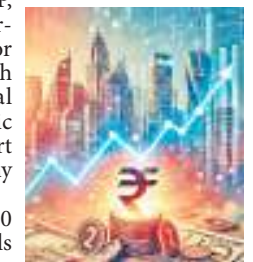
A sectoral technology roadmap could play a pivotal role in enabling this transformation, it noted. Advances in AI-driven chip design, touchless manufactur-

ing, and backward integration into component manufacturing and design could enhance cost competitiveness and innovation, driving the sector's export share from 24 per cent to 45 per cent-50 per cent by 2047 and its GDP contribution from 3 per cent to 8 per cent-10 per cent.

India's proportion of renewable energy in its total energy production could increase from 24 per cent in 2023 to around 70 per cent by 2047, it noted.

Likewise, the auto-component export sector is projected to reach USD 200-250 billion (2047) driven by share capture in ICE market and longer-term shift to EVs.

"Five key sectors including electronics, energy, chemicals, automotive, and services would act as strategic growth levers due to alignment with global trends and scalability, with the potential to address India's unique challenges and advan-



OOPS! AB KYA?

A MADCAP WHOLESOME RIDE THAT TRIPS OVER ITS OWN TWISTS



TEJAL SINHA
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PLOT

Oops! *Ab Kya?* follows Roohi (Shweta Basu Prasad), a young woman whose life takes an unexpected turn after a medical mix-up leads to an accidental artificial insemination. Raised in a traditional household with her mother, Paakhi (Sonali Kulkarni) and grandmother (Apara Mehta), Roohi finds herself navigating a whirlwind of emotions, societal expectations and romantic complications.

As she processes her pregnancy, Roohi's world becomes even more chaotic due to the people surrounding her. Her long-term boyfriend Omkar (Abhay Mahajan), an Intelligence Bureau officer, is caught up in an undercover investigation, while Samar (Aashim Gulati), the owner of the Madh Island hotel where Roohi works, unknowingly turns out to be the biological father of her child. Meanwhile, the hotel itself becomes a backdrop for a web of crime, hidden identities, and unresolved past relationships—including a rekindled romance between Paakhi and Vanraj (Jaaved Jaaferi).

The series juggles multiple storylines—family drama, romance, crime and comedy—delivering a fast-paced narrative packed with twists and turns, all while exploring the changing dynamics of love, tradition and modern womanhood.

ANALYSIS

Oops! Ab Kya? attempts to bring the charm of *Jane the Virgin* into an Indian setting, blending humour, drama and chaos. The series shines in its depiction of generational conflicts, with Roohi, Paakhi, and her grandmother forming a compelling trio whose interactions provide some of the most heartfelt moments. However, the show's biggest

challenge is its pacing—by condensing a long-format telenovela into just seven episodes, it rushes through crucial plot points, often sacrificing depth for speed.

While the concept of a virgin protagonist dealing with an accidental pregnancy is intriguing, the emotional weight of Roohi's journey feels underexplored. The story frequently shifts focus to external subplots—crime investigations, business rivalries and love triangles—sometimes at the cost of its central theme. The Madh Island hotel, though an interesting setting, becomes overused, with almost every major event unfolding within its premises.

Despite these drawbacks, the show delivers plenty of laughs and entertaining twists. Shweta Basu Prasad leads with confidence, and the ensemble cast adds charm to the storytelling. However, the hurried execution leaves viewers craving more depth, making *Oops! Ab Kya?* an enjoyable but uneven adaptation.

HIGHLIGHTS

The core strength of *Oops! Ab Kya?* lies in its lead performances and its fresh take on unconventional motherhood. Shweta Basu Prasad brings a natural charm and emotional depth to Roohi, portraying her confusion, resilience and wit with great ease. The show also excels in its light-hearted, self-aware humour, particularly in the way it references the original series. One notable meta moment is when a character jokes about Samar (Aashim Gulati) resembling Justin Baldoni, a clear nod to his *Jane the Virgin* counterpart.

Another highlight is the unexpected romance between Paakhi and Vanraj (Jaaved Jaaferi), whose past love story resurfaces after decades. Their chemistry adds a nostalgic and heartwarming touch, proving that love stories don't always have to be limited to the younger generation. The show's approach to breaking societal taboos, particularly



around surrogacy and single motherhood, is also commendable. Instead of heavy-handed messaging, it weaves these themes naturally into the story, showing how love and support can triumph over judgment and criticism.

DRAWBACKS

Despite its entertaining premise, *Oops! Ab Kya?* struggles with pacing issues. By compressing a 22-episode telenovela season into just seven episodes, the show ends up cramming in too many plotlines, leaving some underdeveloped. The series introduces multiple subplots—drug rackets, undercover investigations, infidelity, hidden identities and even a murder mystery—within the confined space of the Madh Island hotel. While this adds layers of intrigue, it also overwhelms the central narrative, making it difficult to fully connect with Roohi's personal journey.

Moreover, the characters' reactions to major revelations sometimes feel oddly muted. Roohi's unexpected pregnancy, which should have led to intense emotional conflicts, is treated with surprising nonchalance by those around her. This lack of high-stakes drama reduces the impact of what should have been pivotal moments.

PERFORMANCE

Shweta Basu Prasad delivers a strong performance, balancing comedy and emotion effortlessly. Having previously taken on more intense roles, this light-hearted portrayal is a refreshing change for her. Aashim Gulati steps into the role of Samar with ease, though his character's development feels somewhat rushed.

Sonali Kulkarni and Aparna Mehta shine as Roohi's mother and grandmother, respectively, bringing warmth and depth to their roles. Jaaved Jaaferi, in his limited screen time, adds charm to the narrative with his old-school romance. Abhay Mahajan, as Roohi's boyfriend Omkar, has an interesting role as an Intelligence Bureau officer, but his subplot often feels like a separate storyline rather than an organic part of the main plot.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Visually, *Oops! Ab Kya?* maintains a vibrant, glossy appeal, capturing the charm of its beachside hotel setting. However, the overuse of a single location for almost all key events can make the show feel somewhat repetitive. The cinematography effectively complements the show's playful and dramatic tones, while the background score helps

heighten the comedic and emotional beats. One of the standout elements of *Jane the Virgin* was its clever use of narration and editing techniques, which added to its satirical edge. In *Oops! Ab Kya?*, while the transitions and exaggerated reactions attempt to recreate a similar energy, they sometimes feel overdone, making certain scenes appear more chaotic than engaging.

VERDICT

Oops! Ab Kya? is a fun, breezy watch that successfully blends humor, drama, and romance but struggles to maintain a steady pace. Shweta Basu Prasad anchors the show with her compelling performance, while the supporting cast adds charm and depth. However, the series' attempt to juggle multiple storylines in a limited timeframe leaves some moments feeling rushed and underdeveloped. While it may not capture the satirical brilliance of *Jane the Virgin*, it does offer an enjoyable, light-hearted take on an unconventional story. If you're looking for a quick, entertaining binge with doses of chaos and comedy, *Oops! Ab Kya?* is worth a watch. Just be prepared for a whirlwind ride that packs in more than it can fully explore.

Director: Prem Mistry & Debatma Mandal

Produced by: Dice Media

Cast: Shweta Basu Prasad, Aashim Gulati, Jaaved Jaaferi, Sonali Kulkarni, Aparna Mehta, Abhay Mahajan and Amy Aela

Streaming on: JioHotstar

Rating: 3/5

Revolutionising baby & skincare

PMS|HYDERABAD

What factors influenced the choice to enter the adult skincare market?

Akanksha: It began as a newborn care founded on scientifically supported natural substances and generational wisdom. Our in-depth knowledge of formulations that are both gentle and effective led us to naturally transition into adult skincare! Given our hot and muggy atmosphere, we identified a demand in the market for high-performance skincare specifically designed to meet the specific requirements of Indian skin. It has its roots in the Sanskrit word 'Chit' (consciousness), it has always been about attentive formulations that put an emphasis on efficacy, transparency and purity. By branching out into adult skincare, we will be able to address common issues like dehydration, hyperpigmentation and environmental stressors and share our knowledge with a larger audience.

"Clean beauty" has gained popularity due to the rise of conscious consumerism. Do you think this is a trend driven by marketing or a long-term change?

Tanay: Unquestionably, the movement toward clean beauty and the emergence of mindful consumption are long-term changes rather than fads. This shift is indicative of a larger cultural trend toward self-care, environmental responsibility and better lifestyles. This way of thinking is in line with the growing awareness of the importance of respecting the environment and our bodies. By being completely open and honest about the substances we use in our formulations and on our labels, we avoid greenwashing.

What, in your opinion, sets your ingredient philosophy apart from those of other clean beauty companies?

Akanksha: Since our baby care line, this has served as our compass and we have continued it into our skincare line. Using natural components is only one aspect of our ingredient philosophy; we also make sure that each ingredient has a specific function and produces noticeable effects without sacrificing the health of your skin. We combine science-proven actives like AQUAXYLTM, Hyaluronic Acid, Ceramides and Niacinamide with powerful



ingredients like Centella Asiatica, Saffron, Aloe Vera, Pomegranate and Ashwagandha, which are renowned for their restorative, energising and healing qualities. Deep nourishment, moisture and skin repair are guaranteed by this potent combo. We prioritise texture and application innovation above formulas!

While many skincare use traditional or Ayurvedic treatments, few are able to successfully combine tradition and modern technology. Could you explain how you combine the two without lessening their effectiveness?

Tanay: We have created skincare that are both natural and efficient by skillfully fusing traditional knowledge with contemporary science. Furthermore, humus extract—the top layer of mud known for its microbiome-restoring qualities—is used in our recently launched Protection Range. This line blends modern science with age-old customs, such as the idea that kids might boost immunity by playing in the mud. Additionally, we use the proprietary component AQUAXYLTM, which guarantees strong hydration.

Particularly in India, skincare is frequently quite personal and connected to family customs. How do you cultivate cultural and emotional ties?

Akanksha: Daily activities in India are heavily influenced by customs and cultural beliefs. By fusing these age-old methods with contemporary research, we respect these traditions. With each use, they are carefully crafted to be an extension of the care and rituals that our mothers and grandmothers have passed down through the years. We bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and contemporary skincare demands by combining cutting-edge, scientifically supported active ingredients with traditional ones like saffron, rice protein, coconut oil, turmeric, aloe vera and ashwagandha.

You joined as COO after it began as a mother-daughter business. How do you handle the difficulties of working for a family-run business?

Tanay: It has been incredibly rewarding to work with my mother and sister. Creating our very first moisturising baby balm in 2021 was one of the biggest obstacles we had to overcome! When procuring materials, for instance, we worked with suppliers for months to make sure we could stay away from potentially dangerous substances like parabens and sulfates, which not all vendors could supply. Additionally, we had to strike a careful balance between conventional wisdom and research-proven practices. My worldwide experiences, particularly in foreign markets, have given me a better understanding of the value of ingredient transparency and consumer trust, which I have observed in the success of natural skincare products overseas. I was able to introduce this viewpoint, making sure that we adhered to our Indian heritage while also meeting international standards. Benefits of working for a family-run company include common beliefs, but there are drawbacks as well, such as the need for ongoing communication to stay on the same page on our long-term goals.

Celebrating love's most precious moments

As relationships evolve, so do the symbols we choose to mark their milestones. From engagements and weddings to anniversaries and special celebrations, platinum has emerged as the preferred choice for couples who seek meaning, and timeless beauty in their jewellery. More than just a precious metal, platinum signifies the enduring nature of love—rare, resilient and everlasting—the perfect companion to celebrate every chapter of a couple's journey.

The growing demand for platinum

Once regarded as an exclusive luxury, platinum is now gaining immense popularity, especially among younger couples. In India, platinum is increasingly becoming a symbol of commitment for couples who value authenticity, individuality, and strength in their relationships. Platinum's rarity—30 times rarer than gold—appeals to those who want their jewellery to be as unique as their love stories. It's not just about owning something beautiful; it's about owning something that mirrors the essence of their bond.

A shift towards partnership

Today's couples define love as a partnership. It's about supporting each other's dreams, growing together, and celebrating the strengths each person brings to the relationship. Platinum serves as the perfect symbol of this commitment. Its rarity, purity and strength resonate with couples who value mutual respect and equality. Platinum's enduring quality reflects a relationship where both individuals retain their uniqueness while building something even greater together.

Platinum for every milestone

From first dates to anniversaries, platinum marks the significant moments in a couple's life. Whether it's the first "I love you," the first home together, or an anniversary celebration, platinum captures the essence of these milestones. With its lasting beauty and strength, platinum love bands sym-

bolise the journey from "Could this be?" to "This is everything."

Wedding bands and engagement rings in platinum are preferred because of the emotional values that are associated with it. Platinum has come to represent a love that transcends the ordinary—one that is built on trust, equality, and mutual support. It is a reflection of the bond that grows over time, turning shared dreams into a united future.

Affordability meets exclusivity

A common misconception about platinum is that its rarity makes it prohibitively expensive. In reality, platinum offers undeniable value. With 95% purity and an enduring, unchanging beauty, it remains a lasting symbol of love and commitment. Platinum offers the perfect combination of exclusivity and affordability for today's modern couples.

Why platinum for every chapter of love?

Platinum is not just a metal—it's a symbol of the enduring commitment that defines modern relationships. From the first exchange of rings to anniversaries and new beginnings, platinum reflects the strength, resilience and rarity that make each relationship unique. For couples who aspire to build a partnership based on mutual respect and shared dreams, platinum is the perfect companion, a lasting reminder of the milestones that have brought them closer.

The perfect gift for every milestone

As the year winds down, and you reflect on your own milestones, consider marking them with something as rare and enduring as the love you share. Whether it's a gift to your partner or a celebration of your shared journey, platinum is the perfect way to say, "I'm always there."

Mark your milestones with platinum.

(The author, Sujala Martis, is the Director - Consumer Marketing, of Platinum Guild International (India).)

In 2021, CITTA, the idea of three visionary people from Pune—Monisha Sharma, her daughter Akanksha Sharma and her son Tanay Sharma—rose to prominence in the field of tender, caring care for young children. This vibrant family created a high-end, all-natural skincare and bath line that was especially created with infants' sensitive needs in mind. It has swiftly established itself as the preferred option for discerning parents looking for the finest for their priceless bundles of joy thanks to its careful attention to detail and thoughtful blend of natural components. Tanay Sharma is a dynamic force in the business world, with a unique blend of global vision and entrepreneurial drive. As COO, he brings a distinctive perspective shaped by his undergraduate degree from the University of Toronto and his extensive travels around the world. His inclusive leadership style fosters a culture of collaboration, where every voice is valued and every opinion matters. Tanay started his first business venture at the age of eighteen when he established Aaha! Pav Bhaji, a cloud kitchen. He also collaborated with CBSN, that supports scientists of colour and people from many ethnic backgrounds, when he was overseas. His personal philosophy, which holds that every person can achieve greatness regardless of gender, color, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, was influenced by this collaboration with young, brilliant brains from all over the world. He embodies the legacy of The Lexicon Group with a keen business mind to foster change, both within communities and on a national level. On the other hand, we have, Akanksha Sharma who is the dynamic co-founder and CEO of CITTA. With a passion for innovation and a deep understanding of the industry, she is also revolutionising the premium baby bath and skincare sector. Her expertise stems from a solid foundation in Apparel Industry Management from the renowned Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in Los Angeles, which allows her to approach business with a unique, multifaceted perspective. Below are some excerpts from the interview:



what's brewing?

Celebs who have a dominant presence in the sports arena too

Meet the stars who own franchises in various sporting leagues

From Shah Rukh Khan and Juhi Chawla, co-owners of the celebrated IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders, to Preity Zinta, co-owner of Kings XI Punjab and the latest entrants, actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani and his wife, actor Rakul Preet Singh, who own Hyderabad Superstars in the World Pickleball League, celebrities bring undeniable charisma to any game.

Shah Rukh Khan and Juhi Chawla (Kolkata Knight Riders-IPL)

As IPL 2025 gears to kick off this April, all eyes will be on Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) as they aim to defend their title as reigning champions. One of the most successful franchises in IPL history, KKR's popularity isn't just due to its star-studded lineup including the formidable Sunil Narine and Andre Russell, but also because of the presence of Shah Rukh Khan and his co-owner, Juhi Chawla. With this celebrity duo at the helm, KKR is expected to put up a strong performance once again. Beyond its celebrity ownership, KKR has cemented its legacy with championship victories in 2012, 2014 and 2024.

Abhishek Bachchan (Jaipur Pink Panthers - Pro Kabaddi League)

Jaipur Pink Panthers (JPP) is a professional Kabaddi team from Jaipur that competes in the Pro Kabaddi League, a premier tournament showcasing one of India's traditional sports. Adding to its star power, the team is owned by Abhishek Bachchan. JPP plays its home games at the Sawai Mansingh Indoor Stadium and is the second-most successful team in league history, having won two titles.

Riteish Deshmukh & Genelia D'Souza (Pune United - World Pickleball League)

Joining hands with a consortium of owners, including corporate leaders Sudhir and Sunanda Mehta from EKA Mobility and Pinnacle Industries, Bollywood couple Riteish and Genelia Deshmukh are co-owners of Pune United in the World Pickleball League. The duo states that their mission is to nourish a deep love for the game. The couple says that beyond the financial aspect, pickleball is an exciting activity that uplifts and energises people.

Jacky Bhagnani & Rakul Preet Singh (Hyderabad Superstars - World Pickleball League)

The World Pickleball League (WPBL) is revolutionising professional pickleball with innovative rules that make the sport more strategic and engaging. A dynamic blend of tennis, badminton and table tennis, pickleball is rapidly gaining popularity among celebrities and players of all ages worldwide. With stars like Jacky Bhagnani and his wife, actor Rakul Preet Singh, co-owning the Hyderabad Superstars franchise, the sport has become a prime attraction for its ability to cultivate a culture of camaraderie, wellness and enjoyment.

John Abraham (Northeast United FC - ISL)

Northeast United FC, representing the eight states of Northeast India, is owned by actor John Abraham and Shillong Lajong Football Club. The team's biggest success came last year when it defied all odds to defeat Mohun Bagan in the Durand Cup final. After 11 years of owning the franchise, John's perseverance against corporate-backed teams proved that determination and belief ultimately lead to success. Though Northeast United has yet to win an ISL title, John's support and inspiration have built a strong fan base and huge popularity for the team.



The 18th edition of BAJA SAEINDIA commenced on Thursday at BV Raju Institute of Technology, Narsapur. This year marks a decade of eBAJA, an initiative promoting electric mobility and sustainable engineering. At a press conference held at Hotel Plaza, Greenlands, Hyderabad, key industry leaders, including Balraj Subramaniam, K. Aditya Vissam, Shraavan Kumar, Simona Adelina Popovici and Vinoth Kumar Balasubrahmanyam, announced details of the 11th edition of eBAJA SAEINDIA 2025. The event continues to serve as a crucial platform for fostering innovation and industry collaboration.



The Organization for Rare Diseases India (ORDI) announced the 10th edition of its annual awareness run, Racefor7, set to take place on February 23, 2025, across 21 cities. This year's theme, "For Rare, Everywhere," highlights ORDI's commitment to raising awareness, accelerating treatment and strengthening collaborations with Centers of Excellence (COEs) for Rare Diseases. At the launch event, Dr. Meenakshi Bhat, along with patients and caregivers, emphasised the need for sustainable funding and effective implementation of the National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021.

PARTY

Photos by - SV Chary



FUN

ARCHIE



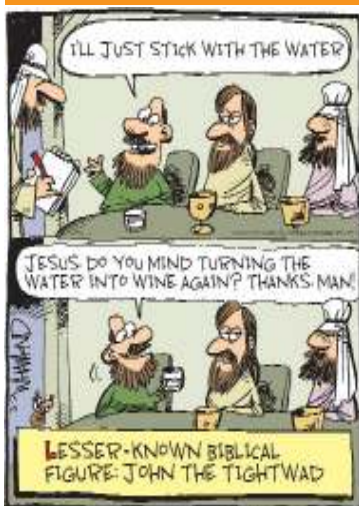
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



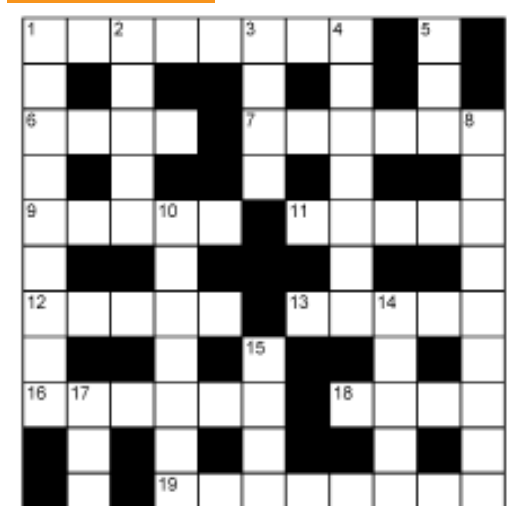
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

3		2			5	6
	2		5			
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5	2			8		3

Yesterday's solution

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

- 1 Cold floating chunks in the sea
- 5 A passenger vehicle
- 6 Peas grow in these
- 8 Occurring
- 7 A type of bird
- 10 A hair near your eye
- 9 Of greater age
- 14 Get to
- 11 A long narrow piece
- 15 A heavy metal
- 12 Opposite of outer
- 17 Enquire
- 13 Seven plus five minus nine
- 16 Keep a car in here
- 18 A hired car
- 19 A prickly animal

DOWN

- 1 Getting better
- 2 Came to a finish
- 3 Animals like large mice
- 4 Make longer by pulling



GINGER MEGGS



'LOVED THE STORY, LEFT THE PAY': BRAHMAJI ON BAAPU

Senior actor Brahmaji opens up about his film *Baapu*, sharing his experience of shooting in a village, his thoughts on the project and insights into his upcoming films

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Senior actor Brahmaji, one of the most versatile performers in Telugu cinema, has played a variety of roles—from lead and villain to character roles and comedy—throughout his four-decade career. Known for his non-controversial image, he is now seen playing the lead role in *Baapu*, directed by debutant Dayakar. Interestingly, Brahmaji chose not to take any remuneration for this film, as he was deeply drawn to the character. "When director Dayakar narrated the story, I loved it because it was something completely new for me. It wasn't a regular role, and I was eager to do it. However, the film had budget constraints, so I told the producer I wouldn't take any payment," said Brahmaji. He added that if the producer earns profits post-release, it's up to them to decide if they want to compensate him. The film's journey began nearly two years ago, and the shoot was completed a few months back, though it was filmed in intervals due to the actors' schedules. The team shot in a village near Karimnagar, avoiding the

use of caravans. "We had lunch in villagers' homes and even took naps there. That's why everything in the film looks so natural," said Brahmaji. Other actors also reduced their remuneration and adapted to village life.

Recalling a memorable moment, he shared, "We shot a scene in the market yard with real farmers. They didn't recognise me—they thought I was one of them."

Brahmaji also spoke about how film sets have changed over time. "In the early days of my career, everyone ate together and didn't use caravans. But now, as soon as the shot is done, people rush to their caravans, even for meals," he observed.

He praised actress Dhanya Balakrishnan, saying, "She might look like a rich girl in real life, but she transformed herself with makeup and delivered an excellent performance as a farmer's daughter."

The senior actor, who is selective about his roles, said, "I reject characters with double-meaning dialogues or vulgarity. I want to do meaningful roles, even as a father, but not just as a guest appearance in one or two scenes."

Brahmaji was excited to be part of *Pushpa 2*, which has gained massive national attention. "In *Pushpa*, Sunil got a great role, which led to many Tamil film offers for him. I didn't get any Tamil films, but Sunil got a 'National Permit' with *Pushpa*," he joked.

On the bright side, *Baapu* has already secured its OTT and satellite rights, which Brahmaji sees as a positive sign. "Many big films are struggling to sell their OTT rights, but *Baapu* has done it before release, which boosts confidence," he said. The film is being compared to *Balagam*, but Brahmaji clarified, "The stories are completely different, except for the Telangana cultural backdrop."

His upcoming projects include *Vishwambhara* with Chiranjeevi, a film with Raj Tarun and a small role in Siddhu Jonnalagadda's *Jack*, along with a few others in production.



NTR-Prashanth Neel film begins with massive action sequence

After the global success of *RRR*, NTR has become a pan-India star. His next film, *Devara*, further cemented his image as the "man of the masses." Now, he has teamed up with blockbuster director Prashanth

Neel (*KGF: Salaar*) for a much-anticipated project. Tentatively titled *NTRNeel*, the film's shoot began in Hyderabad with a massive action sequence featuring 2,000 junior artists. This schedule is focused on filming an intense, large-scale action episode, with NTR expected to join from the next schedule.

With a release date set for January 9, 2026, *NTRNeel* is being

produced by Mythri Movie Makers and NTR Arts. The film will be released in multiple languages, including Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam. Music is composed by Ravi Basur.

Given the star power of NTR and Prashanth Neel, the film is expected to set new benchmarks in Indian cinema. Fans eagerly await the cinematic spectacle the duo is set to deliver.



Massive set erected for Nagabandham song sequence

A grand set has been erected for a special song in the upcoming fantasy-adventure film *Nagabandham*, directed by Abhishek Nama. Starring Virat Karina in the lead role, with Nabha Natesh and Ishwarya Menon as the female leads, the film has been in production for a while. Currently, the makers are filming a song on a lavishly built set at Ramanaidu Studios, Nanakramguda, Hyderabad. Renowned choreographer Ganesh Acharya is overseeing the dance sequence featuring Virat Karina alongside the two leading ladies.

The story of *Nagabandham* is an adventurous treasure hunt, with the tagline Treasure Hunt. Music director Abhe has composed the song, which is sung by Anurag Kulkarni, Kaala Bhairava, and Mangli, with lyrics penned by popular lyricist Kakarla Shyam.

The film's narrative is deeply rooted in mythology, drawing inspiration from the Puranas and connecting with the treasures recently discovered at the Anantha Padmanabha Swamy Temple and Puri Jagannath Temple. *Nagabandham* boasts an impressive ensemble cast, featuring actors from multiple industries, including Jagapathi Babu, Rishab Sahani, John Vijay, John Kokken, Mathew Varghese and many more.



Raa Raja trailer grabs attention without showing actors' faces

Director B. Shivaprasad has taken a unique approach to promoting his upcoming film *Raa Raja*, which he is also producing. The film's trailer, launched by filmmaker Thammareddy Bharadwaj, has caught attention because it does not reveal any actors' faces.

The trailer suggests that the film is a thriller with horror elements, but its biggest surprise is how it keeps the identities of the characters hidden. "At first glance, the title *Raa Raja* may suggest a love story, but you'll notice that not a single face is shown. Director Shiva Prasad has taken a daring step by making a film without revealing actors' faces. Even Spielberg's *Duel* had faces, but this one doesn't," said Thammareddy.

Shivaprasad explained, "This is an experimental approach, and we hope the audience embraces it. The film focuses entirely on storytelling and narration."

The film is set to release in theaters on March 7.

Chiranjeevi celebrates wedding anniversary mid-air

Not long ago, Mega Star Chiranjeevi found himself in the middle of a controversy after expressing his desire for a grandson to carry forward his legacy. He also made a lighthearted remark, comparing his home to a "ladies' hostel" filled with granddaughters, joking that he feels like a warden. However, setting aside the controversy, the actor had a heartwarming moment to celebrate—his 46th wedding anniversary.

Chiranjeevi marked the occasion mid-air while traveling to Dubai, sharing a heartfelt message for his wife, Surekha. In an emotional note, he expressed, "I always feel I am very fortunate to have found a dream life partner in Surekha. She is my strength, my anchor, and the wind beneath my wings." His words reflected the deep bond he shares with his wife, who has been his pillar of support throughout his journey.

The anniversary celebration took place on a flight, where Chiranjeevi was surrounded by close friends, including Nagarjuna, Amala, Namrata Mahesh Ghattamaneni and others. Sharing pictures from the celebration, he wrote, "Celebrating our wedding anniversary on a flight with some very dear friends en route to Dubai!" The intimate yet unique celebration added a special touch to their milestone, making it an unforgettable moment for the Mega Star and his wife.



VISHWAK SEN ACKNOWLEDGES LAILA'S FAILURE, PROMISES BETTER FILMS

Actor Vishwak Sen has faced heavy criticism for his latest film *Laila*, released on February 14, which was outrightly rejected by audiences. Playing a dual role—one as a model named Sonu and the other as a female character, Laila—the film was filled with double-meaning dialogues and vulgarity, drawing severe backlash. Following the film's failure, Vishwak Sen issued a public apology, acknowledging the criticism. He also expressed regret for certain scenes in the movie, which led to financial losses for the producer. *Laila* was a passion project for him, but it backfired. In his statement, he admitted the film didn't meet expectations and vowed to be more mindful of his choices. "I promise that whether my films cater to class or mass audiences, they will never cross the line into vulgarity," he wrote. Vishwak Sen reassured fans that he is taking the feedback seriously and will work towards making better films. "Since the beginning of my career, I have chosen stories that resonate with me and I will continue to do so. However, from now on, every single scene will matter," he added. Ending on a positive note, he thanked audiences for their constructive criticism and promised to return with a strong and promising project soon.



Real Madrid pushes Manchester City out of Champions League

PTI ■ LONDON

Kylian Mbappé scored a hat-trick, Erling Haaland stayed on the bench injured and Real Madrid dumped Manchester City out of the Champions League. Mbappé's stellar trio of goals in the fourth, 33rd and 61st minutes in a 3-1 win gave Madrid a 6-3 victory on aggregate over the 2023 champion in their two-leg knockout playoff.

"This has been the complete performance — attack, defense, with the ball and without the ball, we showed such high levels of quality," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Almost the perfect night."

One superstar striker was watched by another from the sidelines. Haaland was not fit to start for an ultimately overmatched Man City because of a knee injury sustained late in a Premier League game Saturday.

Paris Saint-Germain beat French rival Brest 7-0, to run up a 10-0 aggregate score, and will play either Liverpool or Barcelona in the round of 16.

PSV Eindhoven ousted Juventus in the only one of the eight playoffs this week that went to extra time.

Defender Ryan Flamingo scored in the 98th minute for a 3-1 win on the night and 4-3 on aggregate. United States international Timothy Weah scored for Juventus.

"Honestly, we slipped up," Weah said. "I felt like they were more aggressive on the night and we lacked a bit of aggression and hunger."

In the early game Wednesday, Borussia Dortmund started with a 3-0 lead at home to Sporting Lisbon and was barely stretched in a 0-0 draw. Sporting's Champions League campaign imploded after coach Ruben Amorim left for Manchester United in November.

Mbappé mastery

Mbappé's first goal of the two-leg playoff in Manchester was a lucky miscue, a looping effort off his shin to level at 1-1 in what ended a 3-2 win.

His three goals in Madrid were classy and decisive. A first-time lob over City goalkeeper Ederson — who perhaps advanced too far, too soon — was followed by a low shot after leaving defender Joško Gvardiol on the turf.

The third was a powerful left-footer from the edge of the penalty area when he had lured six Man



City players toward encircling him. "I have always said I didn't come here simply to complete a dream," said Mbappé, a boyhood Madrid fan who never won a Champions League at Monaco and PSG. "I want to play well, I want to mark an era."

Coach Pep Guardiola's injury-hit side — with Ballon d'Or winner Rodri out since September and Kevin De Bruyne now rarely starting — has looked like a shadow of the heavyweight rival that met Madrid in each of the past three seasons, when each time the winner went on to lift the trophy.

Paris Saint-Germain hits 10

PSG has not lost anywhere since a Champions League defeat at

Bayern Munich three months ago, and the playoff against Brest proved a total mismatch.

Brest had impressed in its first European season but went out with a whimper at Parc des Princes, after a 3-0 loss in the home leg.

Wingers Bradley Barcola and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the first half. Midfielder Vitinha, Desiré Doué, left back Nuno Mendes, striker Ramos and Senny Mayulu netted after the break.

PSG also beat Brest 5-2 in a French league game this month.

Sporting slumps post-Amorim

With Ruben Amorim as coach, Sporting was unbeaten in four Champions League games and stood second in the 36-team standings. The team he left behind went winless in six Champions League games under two different coaches.

Dortmund also fired a coach midseason and newly hired Niko Kovac now has two wins on the European stage to offset two straight losses in the German league.

Still, Sporting's prospects to be in the Champions League next season look better than Dortmund's.

Portugal's champion advances direct to the next league phase and Sporting currently is top, two points clear of Benfica. Dortmund is 11th in the Bundesliga and could need to win this Champions League title to earn a place in the next edition.

Round of 16 draw

Real Madrid, PSG, Dortmund and PSV join Bayern Munich, Benfica, Club Brugge and Feyenoord, which all advanced Tuesday, as playoff round winners who will be unseeded teams in Friday's draw. They will host the first-leg games on March 4-5.

The top eight in the 36-team standings three weeks ago — Liverpool, Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Lille, Aston Villa — skipped the playoffs round and are seeded in the round of 16 draw. They host second legs on March 11-12. The round of 16 is in a new, tennis-like seeded bracket for the knockout stage in the expanded competition format.

Madrid, as the 11th-place team in the standings and No. 11 seed already knew its next opponent would be Atletico or Leverkusen, who respectively placed fifth and sixth.



WPL: RCB eye hat-trick against Mumbai Indians

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Having set the pace with back-to-back emphatic victories, defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru would be eyeing a hat-trick of success against a star-studded Mumbai Indians in a WPL match at home on Friday.

Smriti Mandhana's RCB hasn't put a foot wrong so far, be it chasing an imposing 200-plus target against Gujarat Giants or overhauling a tricky 140-odd runs against Delhi Capitals.

Their overall strength has come to the fore in the two games they have played this season and are now leading the five-team chart with four points and a healthy net run rate. No other team so far has won all its matches.

RCB would be guaranteed of an incredible reception when they play their first game this season at their iconic Chinnaswamy Stadium, and Mandhana, who had broken DC's back with a blazing 47-ball 81 in the previous game, would be eyeing an encore.

The India vice-captain has been in red-hot form, bagging the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award for 2024 and also being named to the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year, and that streak of genius was evident in the way she disdainfully amassed her runs against DC.

If it was a one-player show against DC, the resilience of the middle-order came to the fore against GG, whose lineup is a virtual who's who in

international women's cricket. The likes of Ellyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Richa Ghosh and young Kanika Ahuja rose to the occasion to make the task look easy, winning by six wickets with plenty of balls to spare.

Though RCB looked a bit thin on the bowling front, leaking far too many runs with teenage pacer VJ Joshihitha conceding 43 in her four overs and Australian stalwart Georgia Wareham giving away 50 in her three overs, it was a much-improved bowling performance against DC.

But Mumbai Indians, the inaugural edition champions, would be tough customers with India captain Harmanpreet a hard taskmaster.

They did lose to DC despite Nat Sciver-Brunnt's peerless batting (80 off 59 balls) and her 73-run run partnership with Harmanpreet, but the class and calibre of the side is something RCB would be wary of.

To add to the batting firepower is one of the most destructive top-order batters Hayley Matthews, along with Amelia Kerr. But MI's batting will still revolve around Sciver-Brunnt, who has scored consecutive half-centuries, and Harmanpreet.

If the team wants to go the distance, the two will, however, need the help of others. On the bowling front, the side has performed admirably with Sciver-Brunnt and Shabnim Ismail creating a lot of problems for the rivals with the pace they generate.

Having smile solves half the problem: MS Dhoni

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Even if it's tough to do... Just forgive and move on." Mahendra Singh Dhoni became a life coach for once to share his secrets for a stress-free existence, describing himself as a careless person who would not give up on a good night's sleep by paying attention to what others think of him.

The 43-year-old former India wicketkeeper-batter, considered one of the game's greatest for captaining India to two World Cup titles in a storied international career, set a high benchmark for a leader with his calm and focused approach on the field.

He is now gearing up for what most believe is his final IPL season as a player with Chennai Super Kings and at an event here, he turned philosophical when asked to give advice to fans and followers.

"I think, keep life simple. Be honest to yourself, have gratitude towards people for whatever they have been doing for you. Don't always think, 'this is my birthright' and ask for more," the enigmatic big-



hitter said here on Wednesday evening during the launch of his app 'DHONI' powered by Single. Id where injured India keeper-batter Sanju Samson was also present.

"I know the whole app (DHONI) says 'thoda aur' (a little more), but the whole thing is to have that gratitude, to say thank you, to respect the elders (and) to give love to the younger ones," he added.

He then went on to stress on the need to have a forgiving attitude, which he feels is in short-supply right now.

"I always felt having a smile on your face solves half the problem. Even if you're not in a comfortable position, even if it's tough to do, have the power

to-day life.

"We all feel the pressure. We always say the grass is greener on the other side. We always feel that his or her life is better, but what is important is how you manage that stress, how prepared you are," he said.

"I keep it very simple. Growing up, we were told 'you cannot be careless'. But I feel in today's environment, it is important to be a bit careless because you can't worry about each and everything that is happening around you. You cannot do things that are not in your control," he added.

Dhoni said those who are obsessed with perception are not particularly constructive. He felt not every opinion merits a response or even consideration.

"If you get carried away with what others are saying, what others are feeling, then that important thing of what needs to be done, often you are not really giving utmost attention to that," he said.

"I am a bit careless in life. I don't give everything my 100 per cent attention because I feel this is important, (or) that's not important," he explained.

Imam-ul-Haq replaces injured Fakhar Zaman in Pakistan squad

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan cricket team suffered a setback ahead of its Champions Trophy (CT) clash against India after opener Fakhar Zaman was ruled out owing to a recurring knee injury, prompting the inclusion of Imam-ul-Haq in the squad that left for Dubai on Thursday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) made the change after getting the approval from the International Cricket Council's Event Technical Committee. The match against India is to be held on Sunday at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

"Twenty-nine-year-old Imam, who has played 72 ODIs, was named as a replacement after Fakhar was ruled out due to an oblique injury," said an ICC media release. Zaman had suffered an injury during the opening Champions Trophy match against New Zealand here on

February 19.

"Unfortunately I am now out of ICC Champions Trophy 2025 but surely Allah is the best planner. Grateful for the opportunity. I will be backing our boys in green from home," Zaman posted on X.

The 34-year-old, who has played 86 ODIs and averages a little over 46, had suffered a muscle strain while fielding in the New Zealand innings and remained away from the field for most part of the innings.

The injury happened while he was chasing a ball to the boundary in the first over of the contest. Zaman's ouster is a blow to the side as he has been in reasonably good form.

He wasn't able to open the batting in the second innings on Wednesday, forcing Saud Shakeel to take stance as a stop-gap opener. Zaman batted at No.4, scoring 24 off 41, but seemed visibly struggling during his knock during the match which Pakistan lost by 60 runs.

Pankaj Advani clinches 14th Asian Championship title



PTI ■ DOHA

Indian cue sports maestro Pankaj Advani has once again showcased his brilliance on the international stage, capturing an unprecedented 14th gold medal at the Asian Snooker Championship here.

The triumph comes just days after he won the National Snooker Championship in Indore, proving yet again why he remains the country's

most celebrated cueist.

Advani's victory in Doha adds to an already staggering list of accolades. He now holds five Asian snooker titles (across 15-red, 6-reds, and team formats) alongside nine Asian billiards titles, and his two Asian Games gold medals (2006, 2010) further highlight his dominance.

With this latest win, he inches closer to an unprecedented achievement -- winning the National, Asian, and World Snooker Championships in a single calendar year.

Having already accomplished this feat in billiards, completing it in snooker would make him the only player in history to do so in both disciplines.

The final against Iran's Amir Sarkhosh was a battle of champions. Sarkhosh, a former Asian and world IBSF 6-red snooker champion, struck first, seizing an early lead. But Advani, known for his composure under pressure, responded in style.

Shami becomes fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star pacer Mohammed Shami became the fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets during the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) match against Bangladesh on Thursday.

Returning to international cricket after a long injury layoff, Shami grabbed three wickets to reach the milestone in his 104th match and better former India pacer Ajit Agarkar's record of reaching the mark in 133 matches.

Jaker Ali, who made 68, was his 200th wicket.

Overall, the 34-year-old fast bowler is the second quickest



to 200 ODI wickets, behind Australian left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc, who needed 102 games.

One of India's finest seamers, Shami averages less than 25

in the ODI format and has already taken five fifters and 10 four-wicket hauls.

Shami is the eighth Indian to complete 200 wickets in ODI cricket.

South Africa seek to shed chokers tag against Afghanistan

PTI ■ KARACHI

Debutants Afghanistan will aim to continue their impressive rise in white-ball cricket, while South Africa will once again attempt to shed the 'chokers' tag when the two sides kick off their Champions Trophy (CT) campaign here on Friday.

The inaugural Champions Trophy in 1998, which was called the Knockout Trophy at that time, remains the only ICC men's senior title that South Africa have secured despite having produced some of the world's greatest cricketers, especially in limited-overs format.

The Proteas boast of a well-balanced squad with a formidable batting lineup.

While skipper Temba Bavuma, Tony de Zorzi, Rassie van der Dussen, and Aiden Markram will anchor the top order, the big-hitting trio of Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller and Tristan

Stubbs are well-equipped to provide the final flourish.

South Africa's biggest challenge heading into the tournament is their depleted bowling attack as key pacers Anrich Nortje, Nandre Burger, and Gerald Coetzee ruled out due to injuries.

Known for his pace, aggression, and the knack of striking at crucial moments, Kagiso Rabada will be the Proteas' key weapon in both the powerplay and death overs.

Marco Jansen, too, will be expected to step up significantly. His ability to build pressure and deliver impactful spells will be crucial.

Meanwhile, Lungi Ngidi will be looking to rediscover his rhythm and confidence after a below-par showing in the recent tri-series.

In the spin department, Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi will have vital roles. Since the 2023 ODI World Cup, South Africa have won



only four of the 14 ODIs they have played. They enter the tournament on the back of a six-match losing streak. But one cannot overlook the fact that they were not able to field a full strength team in any of these games due to

multiple reasons. Clubbed alongside an off-colour England, injury-plagued Australia and Afghanistan, South Africa have a good chance of advancing to the knockout stage. But the Afghans could

prove to be the proverbial banana peel.

The war-torn nation has emerged as strong contenders to make the semifinals.

Their impressive performances in recent ICC events include dominant wins over England, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka in the 2023 ODI World Cup and reaching the semifinals of the T20 World Cup last year. They have proved more than once that they are no longer

underdogs but a force to be reckoned with.

The Adghans have won four of their five bilateral series since the ODI World Cup, including one against South Africa in the UAE.

Their biggest strength expectedly remains their spin attack comprising the redoubtable Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and left-armers Noor Ahmad and Nangeyalla Kharote.

They will play all three group matches in Pakistan where spin will be a decisive factor.

Pacer Azmatullah Omarzai has been a key figure in Afghanistan's ODI success, with his ability to swing the new ball providing them the powerplay edge.

Fazalhaq Farooqi will be another crucial weapon with ability to provide early breakthroughs and effective variations at the death.

In the batting department, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran will once

again be expected to provide a solid start.

Their weakness, however, lies in their middle order, which has often struggled to maintain momentum. This inconsistency has been a concern, and addressing it will be crucial for their success in the tournament.

Squads:

South Africa: Temba Bavuma (c), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen, Corbin Bosch.

Afghanistan: Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran.