

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer

Harish Rao is staging a political drama over a tragedy. Does he think he knows more than top tunnel engineers? Is he trying to insult the Army, Navy commandos and BRO teams who are risking their lives in this operation? The BRS left this project incomplete. If they had functioned efficiently, this project would have been finished long ago, and Telangana would have had 30 TMC feet of extra water benefiting three to four lakh acres

- Uttam Kumar Reddy, Minister



BJP using 'fake voters' to win polls, alleges
Mamata



INDIA NEEDS
 TO RAMP UP BILATERAL TIES FOR TRADE, INVESTMENT: FM



Guard film shot entirely in Australia:
VIRAJ REDDY



DON'T MISS...
State neglected Central alert

The Telangana government was alerted about illegal transplants by the Central government nearly five months before the kidney racket in Saroornagar was busted. The National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) reportedly sent a letter via email to the Health Secretary, the Director of Medical Education, and Jeevandan. However, no action was taken in response. After the illegal kidney racket was exposed, discussions began among health officials regarding the necessary measures to address the issue. A highly placed source ... -PAGE: 3

Maha Kumbh 'truly global event'

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the successful organisation of Maha Kumbh 2025, calling it "a truly global event". Addressing journalists at the media centre here, a day after the conclusion of the Maha Kumbh, Adityanath said, "Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj truly became a global event, and the credit goes to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His vision has helped us successfully ... -PAGE: 5

'ONOP' to expand port footprint

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday launched a consortium consisting of India Ports Global, Sagar Mala Development Company and India Port Rail and Ropeway Corporation to expand their maritime footprint and strengthen supply chains, among others. In addition to this, Sonowal, who is the Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, also rolled out a slew of other initiatives including 'One Nation-One Port Process (ONOP)' to standardise and streamline operations.... -PAGE: 8

'Rohit knows how to work under pressure'

Former opener Shikhar Dhawan believes Rohit Sharma has matured as a leader over the years and shares a close bond with his teammates, which augurs well for the Indian team. Dhawan, who was Rohit's opening partner for a considerable period of time, said the Mumbai batter is experienced enough to handle the team. "From 2013 to 2025, 12 years of experience is a lot. Rohit has been through a lot. He knows how to work in a pressure situation, how to gather the boys. As a leader, he has become mature.... -SPORTS



Dewatering, silt removal in progress at SLBC tunnel

SCR deploys experts and machinery to clear debris

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

Rescue teams working to save eight people trapped for over five days in a partially collapsed SLBC tunnel in the district have started cutting parts of the tunnel boring machine and other obstacles hindering their access to the area where the victims are believed to be. Piles of sludge are coming out while dewatering and silt removal is in progress. Irrigation Minister Uttam assured that rescue operations at the SLBC (Srisailem Left Bank Canal) tunnel are progressing at full speed, with top national and international agencies working in coordination to save the trapped workers. Addressing the media at the accident site near Domalapenta in Nagarkurnool district on Thursday, he said that the multi-agency operation, utilizing advanced equipment and expertise, would be completed within the next two to three days. He further said that tunnel works would resume within two to three months. Describing the accident as one of the most complex tunnel disasters

'This is an extremely challenging operation, and the best experts in the field are risking their own lives to ensure a successful rescue,' he said. Strict safety restrictions have been imposed at the site to protect both workers and rescuers'

In Indian history, Uttam Kumar Reddy said, "For the first time, so many specialized agencies are working together under a unified command for a rescue mission." Eleven expert agencies, including military and disaster response teams, are leading the operation, he noted. The minister highlighted the deployment of advanced plasma cutters, high-grade shutters, tunnel boring machines, and dewatering systems to clear debris and safely extract the workers. "This is an extremely challeng-

ing operation, and the best experts in the field are risking their own lives to ensure a successful rescue," he said. Strict safety restrictions have been imposed at the site to protect both workers and rescuers, he added. In this regard, the Collector of Nagar Kurnool sought the help of South-Central Railway to help in the rescue operation by clearing the debris of steel and iron which has been hindering rescue works at the site. SCR quickly responded to the call and deployed two teams of metal-cutting experts to help in the rescue mission. The 1st batch led by S. Murali, IRSME, Divisional Mechanical Engineer, SCR along with 01 Section Engineer, 13 Welders and 02 Technicians from Secunderabad, Lallaguda and Rayanapadu workshops have reached the site and taken up the required works. The second batch of experts consisting of 01 Sr. Section Engineer along with 04 Technicians will also be reaching the site to support the first team. **Continued on Page 2**

85 per cent quota for locals

Telangana revises admission rules for prof courses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has announced amendments to the admission rules for undergraduate and postgraduate professional courses like engineering, pharmacy, law, business administration, and physical education, following the completion of the 10-year transition period under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2014. According to a Government Order issued on Tuesday, 85% of seats will be reserved for local candidates in educational institutions in

the Osmania University (OU) region, while the remaining 15% will be unreserved. The decision comes after a high-level officers' committee reviewed the existing reservation policies and submitted recommendations which were approved by the state cabinet's sub-committee on education sector reforms. **As per the revised rules:**

- Candidates who have stayed in Telangana for at least 10 years or whose parents meet this residency requirement will be eligible for

the 85% local quota. **•** Children and spouses of state and Central Government employees, public sector corporations, local bodies and universities in Telangana will also be eligible for local candidate status. The amendments are in line with Article 371-D of the Constitution, which provided special provisions for admission policies in Telangana after bifurcation. The government asked the Telangana Council of Higher Education, universities and concerned departments to implement the changes immediately.

BRS leaders skip voting in Graduate MLC elections

Karimnagar Teachers constituency saw a significantly higher 83.24%



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS leaders KCR and Harish Rao did not cast their votes in the recently held MLC elections, raising eyebrows. Karimnagar MP and MoS Bandi Sanjay too didn't cast his vote. The polling for Graduate and Teacher constituencies saw moderate to high voter turnout across different segments. Harish Rao and KCR declared themselves as graduates as per affidavit. However, Siddipet recorded lowest turnout while local MLA Harish Rao was at SLBC tunnel, KCR was nowhere to be seen. Medak MP Raghunandan Rao cast vote and Minister Ponnampalapati Prabhakar too. A total of 56 candidates are contesting in the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar graduates' constituency, while 15 candidates are in the fray for the teachers' segment. **Continued on Page 2**

KRMB allocates water to TG & AP

Advises judicious use



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) has allocated water from the Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar reservoirs to Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, emphasizing the necessity of judicious usage due to limited availability. The Board directed officials of both states to review and release water every 15 days to ensure efficient management. KRMB officials said that only 70 TMCs of water are available in these projects, making it imperative for both states to use the allocated water economically. Telangana will receive 9,000 cusecs from the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal, while Andhra Pradesh will get 7,000 cusecs from the Right Canal. 2,400 cusecs will be released from Srisailem to Telangana, and 2,200 cusecs will be diverted from Srisailem to Handreenuva and Mallya in Andhra Pradesh. Officials cautioned both states against wasting water and asked

them to plan water distribution carefully. The allocations have been made considering the current availability of water in the two reservoirs, KRMB stated. KRMB advised Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to use the available water in Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar reservoirs judiciously, prioritising drinking water needs and planning irrigation accordingly. A special meeting of the Board was held at the Hyderabad Jala Soudha under the chairmanship of Atul Jain to review water availability and allocation for both states. Telangana Irrigation Department Principal Secretary Rahul Bojja, ENC Anil Kumar, Andhra Pradesh Water Resources Department Special Chief Secretary Sai Prasad, ENC Venkateswara Rao, and senior engineers attended the meeting. Officials from both states presented their water requirements, with Telangana seeking 63 TMCs and Andhra Pradesh requesting 55 TMCs by May-end.

'Decision to store water in barrages taken by KCR'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The inquiry into the Kaleshwaram Project intensified as retired engineers and officials appeared before the Justice PC Ghose Commission of Inquiry. Former ENCs Nalla Venkateswarlu, Muralidhar Rao, Hari Ram, and former CDO CE Narendar Reddy were cross-examined by Commission Chairman PC Ghose. The questioning of retired ENC Muralidhar Rao took an unexpected turn as he repeatedly answered "I don't know" and "I don't remember" to the commission's questions. This prompted Ghose to comment on how a senior official could forget crucial decisions taken under his supervision. When asked about his retire-

ment date, Muralidhar replied that he had retired in February 2024. Responding, Justice Ghose said, "I still remember the verdicts I have given, and you have already forgotten decisions made just a year ago?" Muralidhar then claimed loss of memory, prompting the commission to advise him to read books to improve his memory. During the hearing, Ghose questioned Nalla Venkateswarlu on the rationale behind changing the locations of Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla Barrages. Responding, Venkateswarlu said the locations were altered to reduce the gravity canal length, increase capacity, minimise forest land acquisition and lower lift irrigation and power costs.

'I am not afraid of blackmail, threats'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is engaging in blackmail politics aggressively, Telangana BJP president G. Kishan Reddy said. He said he is not afraid of the CM's blackmail politics and threats. Speaking to the media in New Delhi on Thursday, Kishan asked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to show proof that he has blocked even a single project meant for Telangana. The incompetent, cowardly CM is trying to write my hands, he said. "Did Chief Minister Revanth Reddy ask us to give promises to the public and come to power? Did the CM say that he would launch development projects only if Prime Minister Modi and the BJP govern-



ment gave him money? Did he plan the projects? How are states justified in engaging in blackmail politics like Revanth Reddy? It has become a habit to say that there is something that does not exist. I have been talking to various departments about many projects meant for state governments from time to time and writing letters to

ensure that development projects are executed," he said. "Today, if we engage in the politics of intimidation, no one is afraid. No one believes Revanth Reddy's words. People have understood the empty words Revanth speaks after believing him during the Assembly elections. I did not come to Parliament due to the charity of Revanth and the Congress. I am responsible only to the people of Telangana. I am not responsible for Revanth's words. If Revanth Reddy has the guts, I challenge him to prove that I have blocked even a single project meant for TG. An incompetent Chief Minister, a Chief Minister without guts, is trying to wash off his hands with words," Kishan said. **Continued on Page 2**



Union Cabinet approves Waqf Bill

Likely to come up in Parliament during second part of Budget Session

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Union Cabinet on Thursday approved amendments to the Waqf Bill which is likely to come up before Parliament during the second half of the Budget Session, sources said. **Continued on Page 2**

Govt declares Feb 4 as Social Justice Day

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has declared February 4 as "Telangana Social Justice Day" to commemorate its commitment to social justice, equity and inclusive development. The decision was announced through an official order issued by Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari on Tuesday. According to the government, the declaration comes in recognition of landmark decisions taken on February 4, 2025, concerning socio-economic, educational, employment and political initiatives, including the caste survey and recommendations on Scheduled Caste sub-classification. The State aims to reaffirm its dedication to equality



and empowerment by marking this day annually. The government has directed that the day be observed with official ceremonies, awareness programmes, lectures, and cultural events to highlight Telangana's commitment to social justice. Special initiatives, including recognition awards, welfare camps and public dialogues, will also be conducted.

Govt plans Legal Experts' Committee to resolve Emaar dispute

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Dubai-based Emaar Properties' representatives met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and Industries Minister Sridhar Babu at the secretariat on Thursday to discuss pending projects and legal disputes about the company's investments in Hyderabad. The Chief Minister ordered the formation of a Legal Experts' Committee, in addition to the committee constituted in 2015, to examine the matter in detail and speed up resolution. Emaar's Founder and Managing Director Mohammed Alabbar, former UAE Ambassador to India Ahmed Al Banna, Emaar Group CEO Amit Jain, and the company's International Affairs Head Mustafa Akram participated in the discussions. Several sen-



ior government officials including Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari, Advocate General Sudarshan Reddy, Special Chief Secretary of Industries Jayesh Ranjan, Special Chief Secretary of Finance Ramakrishna Rao, CMO Secretary Seshadri, Special Secretary to the CM, Ajith Reddy, TGIC MD Vishnuvardhan Reddy and Law Secretary Tirupati were also present. Emaar Properties signed agreements with the then United Andhra Pradesh government in 2011 to build a convention centre, hotel, golf course and residential villas in Hyderabad.

TRUMP ON GOLD CARD VISA

US companies can now hire Indians under new citizenship plan

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump has said that the newly proposed 'gold card' initiative will allow American companies to hire Indian graduates from top US universities like Harvard and Stanford. Trump on Wednesday unveiled the 'gold card' initiative for wealthy foreigners, giving them the right to live and work in the country and offering a path to citizenship in exchange for a USD 5 million fee. "We're going to be selling a gold card," Trump said from the Oval Office. "You have a green card. This is a gold card. We're going to be putting a price on that card of about USD 5 million and that's



going to give you green card privileges, plus it's going to be a route to citizenship. And wealthy people will be coming into our country by buying this card," Trump was quoted as saying by the CNN. Trump said the current immigration system has hindered top international talent, especially from India, from staying and working in the US.

KTR for ethical innovation & inclusive tech at Bengaluru meet

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Former Telangana IT and Industries Minister KT Rama Rao (KTR) emphasised the need for responsible innovation and ethical technology use. He was delivering the keynote address at the Entrepreneur Tech & Innovation Summit 2025 in Bengaluru on Thursday.

Speaking to a diverse audience of tech leaders, innovators and policymakers, KTR outlined a vision for India's digital future while cautioning against the unintended consequences of unchecked technological growth.

Reflecting on the rapid evolution of technology in his speech, "Driving Digital India: Innovations and Strategies for a Technologically Advanced Future," KTR noted how perceptions of technology have shifted. "Growing up, we thought technology meant the future. Today, we're talking about the future of technology. That is evolution," he said.

He identified Artificial General Intelligence (AGI),



Quantum Computing, Extended Reality (XR), and the Internet of Bodies (IoB) as transformative fields all set to reshape industries and life. However, he reminded attendees that while technologies evolve, fundamental human needs remain unchanged.

He stressed that innovation should prioritise societal well-being, asserting, "The future isn't something we enter — it is something we create," he said.

While he praised the role of drones in agriculture, he also raised concerns over privacy risks. "Create great technology without educating society, and you risk chaos like handing a nuclear weapon to a maniac," he cautioned, calling for ethical frameworks to accompany technological progress.

Harish insulting Army, Navy, BRO teams: Uttam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy launched a sharp attack on BRS leaders, particularly Harish Rao, accusing them of staging a political drama over a tragedy. He blamed the BRS government for the accident, stating that they had neglected the SLBC project for a decade.

"The BRS leaders left this project incomplete. If they had functioned efficiently, this project would have been finished long ago and Telangana farmers would have had 30 TMCs of water benefiting three to four lakh acres," he said.

Responding to Harish's criticism, Uttam said, "Does he think he knows more than the top tunnel engineers? Is he trying to insult the Army, Navy commandos and BRO teams who are risking their lives through this

rescue operation?"

He dismissed the BRS leaders' visit to the site as a mere drama saying, "They came here to stage a drama and left after putting on a show."

He pointed out that during the Srisailem (Left Bank Power Station blast), in which nine workers lost their lives no BRS leader visited the site.

"When Revanth Reddy tried to visit the victims back then, he was arrested and taken to a police station," Uttam recalled.

Similarly, he said that in the Devadula Project mishap in which seven workers died, their remains were recovered only after five years. "Why didn't Harish speak up then?" he questioned.

He accused KCR and Harish of mismanaging irrigation projects despite spending Rs 1.81 lakh crore. He alleged that the Palamuru-Rangareddy project cost Rs 27,500 crore but failed to deliver water to even a single acre. He also pointed out that the Kaleshwaram Project, which BRS leaders boasted about, has collapsed.

'BRS neglected Krishna Basin projects'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Tourism, Culture and Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao criticised the BRS leadership for deliberately neglecting irrigation projects in the Krishna Basin during its tenure and for now attempting to shift the blame



onto the Congress government.

Addressing a press conference in Wanaparthy along with MLA Megha Reddy and MP Mallu Ravi, Jupally accused the BRS of failing to complete crucial projects like the Palamuru-Rangareddy and the SLBC.

Rajamouli tried to destroy me: Uppalapati

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Filmmaker SS Rajamouli has found himself at the centre of a major controversy after grave allegations were made against him by Uppalapati Srinivasa Rao, who claims to be a long-time friend of the director. Srinivasa Rao, an executive producer on Rajamouli's 2007 film Yamadonga, accused the Baahubali director of destroying his life and causing him significant emotional distress. In a viral video, he claimed that Rajamouli was responsible for his decision to commit suicide.

In the video, Rao stated, "India's number one directors, SS Rajamouli and Rama Rajamouli, are the reason for my suicide. You might think I am doing this for publicity, but this is my final letter. Everyone from MM Keeravani to Chandrasekhar Yeleti and Hanu Raghavapudi knows how close I have been to Rajamouli for years. I never thought a woman could come

between us. Rajamouli is the reason I am still single at 55. We worked together until Yamadonga, but he ruined my career for a woman."

He alleged that their fallout stemmed from a love triangle and that Rajamouli had pressured him to give up his love interest. According to Rao, after he complied, Rajamouli suspected that he had spoken about the matter to others, leading to years of alleged harassment. Additionally, Srinivasa Rao accused Rajamouli of engaging in black magic and undermining other filmmakers to maintain his dominance in the film industry. However, he did not provide any evidence to support these claims. Srinivasa Rao reportedly sent a letter regarding his allegations to the Mettuguda police, but since Mettuguda falls under the jurisdiction of Lalaguda Police Station where no case has been registered. As of now, SS Rajamouli has not responded to the allegations.

No shortage of urea in Telangana, says Agriculture department

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Agriculture Department has assured that there is no shortage of fertilizers in the state and that urea supply is being managed efficiently during the Yasangi (Rabi) season.

A high-level review meeting was held at the secretariat on Thursday as per the directions of the Agriculture Minister. The meeting was chaired by Agriculture Secretary Raghunandan Rao and attended by Agriculture Director Gopi, Additional Directors and officials overseeing the fertilizer supply chain.

During the review, officials reported that 10.36 lakh tonnes of urea have been made available to farmers so far this season, with 9.21 tonnes already procured by farmers. Currently, 1.08 tonnes of



urea are available across the state. Officials said that the government is continuously coordinating with the Centre to ensure timely supply and has secured an additional 41,000 tonnes of urea for the state, with another 30,000 tonnes being arranged.

Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao has asked district agriculture officials and cooperative

societies to ensure that fertilizer procurement centres remain operational and accessible to farmers.

He directed MARKFED and district agriculture officers to monitor fertilizer availability and ensure that adequate stocks are maintained in advance. He also assured farmers that there is no need for panic as the government has taken all possible precautions.

Stop telling cock and bull stories, Kiran tells Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, asked BRS MLC Kavitha to stop telling cock and bull stories to the people of Telangana.

He said that it is not proper for Kavitha to say that the Congress and the BJP are enacting dramas and are a single team. The people of Telangana know very well who all are a team, Kiran pointed out.

In a statement issued on Thursday, he said that people are watching all the moves of the BRS from supporting the BJP and enabling it to win eight LS seats and the decision not to field candidates in the MLC elections.

"The people of Telangana saw what BRS leaders did in the last 10 years. Kavitha is once again trying to tell the same cock and bull stories she told during the Telangana Movement like 'We don't want power and we will make a Dalit the CM and we will give

three acres to Dalits' etc. Once again BRS leaders, after losing power, are saying that their aim is to protect the interests of Telangana and giving the impression that their life is meant for Telangana. However, the people of Telangana know very well about BRS leaders," Kiran said.

He asked Kavitha, who responds to everything, to explain why she is not responding to the death of her brother KTR's close friend Kedar in Dubai. He said that the people of Telangana know well that Kedar, who managed programmes at the Eye Life Pub in Hyderabad, was very close to the Kalvakuntla family. He said that it is ridiculous on the part of Kavitha to link the demand for an inquiry into the death of Kedar with the interests of Telangana. The Kalvakuntla family not only made the state debt-riddled but also did liquor business in Delhi resulting in the APP government collapsing, Kiran added.

Harish Rao stopped from going to SLBC Tunnel

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao went to the SLBC tunnel to take stock of the situation was stopped by the authorities. He protested briefly and launched a broadside at the Telangana government, accusing it of complete inaction during the ongoing SLBC tunnel rescue operations.

He said that six crucial days were wasted without any meaningful efforts to rescue the trapped workers.

"For six days, the government has done nothing but delay and mislead. Not a single effective step has been taken. This is criminal negligence," he said while addressing the media at the site.

He criticized the administration for failing to clear the debris or make progress in the rescue operation. "What should have been done in 24 hours has not been done in six



days. This isn't just inefficiency. It's a complete breakdown of governance," he said.

Harish questioned the absence of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy from the site, pointing out that he was busy with election campaigns instead. He alleged that some ministers were making brief visits without taking any decisive action.

"Who is leading this operation? What's the plan? Who is responsible? It's clear the government has no direction. Are they waiting for a miracle?" he asked.

He highlighted the non-functional conveyor belt, which he said was crucial for clearing debris, and criticized officials for their failure to fix it promptly.

Can show PM's degree to court, not strangers

DU tell Delhi HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University (DU) on Thursday informed the Delhi High Court that it was willing to show to court its records on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's degree but not disclose it to strangers under RTI.

Appearing before Justice Sachin Datta, solicitor general Tushar Mehta made the submission following which the court reserved its verdict on DU's plea against a CIC order directing disclosure of information with respect to the bachelor's degree of the prime minister.

"DU has no reservation in showing it to the court (but can't) put the university's record for scrutiny by strangers," Mehta said.

The order of the CIC, he said, deserved to be set aside for the "right to privacy" superseded the "right to know".

"What is demanded is the degree of an erstwhile student who is the Prime Minister. As a university, we have nothing to hide. We have the year-wise record. University has no objection in showing the record to the court. There is a degree from 1978, bachelor of art," Mehta submitted.

We came out moments before it collapsed: SLBC tunnel worker

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A shocking revelation has emerged from one of the workers inside the SLBC tunnel, Sukar Sahu, who narrowly escaped the collapse. Speaking about the incident, he stated that the workers on the night shift had already noticed loose rocks and soil falling, raising concerns about the tunnel's stability. "We warned the morning shift workers not to go inside, but officials forcibly sent them in," Sukar Sahu alleged. He further revealed that just moments after he and his team exited the tunnel, it collapsed, trapping those inside.

These statements have raised serious questions about the safety measures in place at the project site and the decision-making of the authorities. As rescue operations continue, the workers' accounts are bringing to light the alleged negligence that led to the disaster.

Harish's dharna at SLBC tunnel improper: Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

It is shameful on the part of former Irrigation Minister T. Harish Rao to stage a dharna at the SLBC tunnel, TPCC Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud said.

It is also not proper for Harish Rao to go to the SLBC tunnel and pose for media photos, he said and asked whether the BRS admin had allowed the media inside the Kaleshwaram Project when it being constructed?

The BRS has a history of stopping the media kilometres away from the Kaleshwaram Project he said and asked whether the BRS is ready for a debate on this issue?

In a statement issued on Thursday, Mahesh asked Harish to explain with whom the BRS government had coordinated after the construction of the Kaleshwaram Project. Why did the it was constructed with such care, he asked.

Mahesh said that Harish is trying to pluck feathers from a chicken egg while the BRS government is busy putting experienced rescue teams to work.

He said that it has become a habit of making everything political. The accident happened, rescue teams are working round the clock, ministers and officials are continuously monitoring.

Dewatering, silt removal in...

Continued from page 1

The staff have been deputed along with requisite machinery viz 01-plasma cutting machine, 01-Brocho cutting machine and consumables, 01-portable air compressor, 06-plasma cutters, 01-Ultra Thermic Cutting Equipment, 20 Packets-Electrodes, 01-Battery, 06-Oxygen cylinders, 02-Welding machine, 04 Packets-Welding electrodes, Helmets and Retro reflective jackets.

At present, South Central Railway is at the forefront of the operations to clear the debris and accelerate the mission to rescue the workers and provide relief.

Uttam Kumar Reddy assured that the Congress

government is working with full transparency and commitment to complete the SLBC project. He contrasted the current government's approach with that of the previous regime, stating, "Unlike them, we are not sitting in farmhouses or looting public money."

Responding to criticism over his travel, he quipped, "I am a pilot. I have flown several fighter jets. I do not fly helicopters for luxury like BRS leaders."

He reiterated that the rescue operation is being carried out with complete dedication and assured that once the trapped workers are safely evacuated, tunnel works will resume within two to three months and be completed on schedule.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Prati-pada: Feb 28 06:14 AM to Mar 01 03:16 AM
Dvitiya: Mar 01 03:16 AM to Mar 02 12:09 AM
Nakshatram: Shatabhisha: Feb 27 03:43 PM to Feb 28 01:40 PM
Purva Bhadrapada: Feb 28 01:40 PM to Mar 01 11:22 AM
Rahukalam: 11:01 AM to 12:28 PM
Yamaganadam: 3:23 PM to 4:51 PM
Varjyam: 07:27 PM to 08:54 PM
Gulika: 8:06 AM to 9:33 AM
Amritakalam: 07:05 AM to 08:33 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:05 PM to 12:51 PM
HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly Cloudy
Temp: 33°C
Humidity: 56%
Sunrise: 6:35 AM
Sunset: 6:22 PM
Updated: February 27, 2025 5:00 PM

CAG report exposes major anomalies, refers to PAC for probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CAG report on the Delhi liquor policy has been referred to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) for examination, with the committee expected to submit its report within three months, assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta said Thursday.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on the regulation and supply of liquor in Delhi has highlighted serious irregularities in the implementation of the excise policy by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government.

Following discussions in the assembly, the report has

DELHI LIQUOR POLICY



been referred to the PAC for a detailed probe, with findings expected within three months.

Gupta made the announcement, stating that the matter required urgent attention due to the financial losses incurred by the government.

The audit, conducted for the period between 2017 and 2021, pointed to significant lapses in the licensing process, pricing mechanisms, and regulatory oversight.

It alleged that the policy led to substantial revenue losses, benefiting private companies at the expense of public funds. The report said that a revenue loss of Rs 2,002 crore was recorded due to various irregularities, including failure to re-tender surrendered licences, excessive discounts, and waivers in license fees.

During the assembly session, several members expressed serious concerns over the findings, demanding strict action against those responsible.

MLA quota tickets for Jetti kusuma Kumar urged

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TPCC's Working President, T. Jagga Reddy, said that he did not ask for an MLA quota MLC ticket and also made it clear that he would not even ask for an MLC ticket.

However, Jagga Reddy said that he had told Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and TPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud and Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy to give MLA quota MLC tickets to former TPCC Working President Jetti Kusuma Kumar, who is from the Kamma community and was working for the party for the last 30 years.

Union Cabinet approves...

Continued from page 1

During its meeting on February 19, the Cabinet is learnt to have given its nod to the 14 amendments proposed by the panel examining the Bill, they said.

The report of the panel, headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal, was tabled in Parliament on February 13 amid uproar and a walkout by the opposition parties.

The Bill aims to streamline the registration of Waqf properties, besides preventing their misuse. With the Cabinet nod, the Bill is likely to come up before Parliament during the second part of the session -- scheduled to be held from March 10 to April 4.

Several top BJP leaders have claimed that the Bill was likely to be passed during this session itself.

BRS leaders skip voting...

Continued from page 1

In the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda teachers' constituency, 19 candidates are trying their luck.

According to official figures, the Karimnagar Graduates constituency recorded a 63.09% turnout, while the Karimnagar Teachers constituency saw a significantly higher 83.24% voter participation. The Nalgonda Teachers constituency reported the highest turnout at 93.55%. The absence of two senior BRS leaders from the voting process has led to speculation, especially given their strong political influence in the State. Their decision not to participate comes at a time when the BRS is facing stiff competition from the Congress and BJP in the ongoing elections.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that the information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

City Pioneer

the pioneer

HYDERABAD | FRIDAY | FEBRUARY 28, 2025

03



CITY EVENTS

CV Raman Birth anniversary

Science Day Celebrations

Venue

Ravindra Bharathi
February 28, (9 am)

Nehru's Vision And India Today

Speech By Aditya Mukherjee

Venue

Vidyaranya High School
February 28, (6:30 pm)

Miss & Mrs Strong & Beautiful

Beauty Pageant

Venue

Jawaharlal Nehru College
Of Architecture & Fine Arts
University - JNTU
February 28, (9 am)

Activism And Social Change

LGBTQ Event

Venue

Lamakaan
February 28 (6 pm)

Public Lecture On Evolution

Talk By Dr LS Shashidhara

Venue

Lamakaan
February 28, (3 pm)

Specialised bootcamps for tech grads

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TalentSprint, a global leader in Deeptech education powered by AI, has launched three specialised bootcamps: Java Full Stack Developer, AI-Powered Software Developer, and AI ML. These programmes help learners develop job-ready tech skills to meet industry demands. With 15 years of experience and 30,000+ professionals trained, TalentSprint consistently delivers high-impact learning, with top earners securing salaries up to Rs 44 LPA.

India's IT sector is growing rapidly, with Global Capability Centres (GCCs) expected to exceed 2,500 by 2025, driving a 20% job growth. However, a widening skill gap leaves many graduates unprepared for industry needs. Employers now seek professionals with practical, deployable skills.

TalentSprint's bootcamps bridge this gap through hands-on training, real-world projects and corporate skill development. With 700+ hiring partners, regular job fairs and strong placement support, participants gain a competitive edge in high-growth tech roles.

CEO & MD Anurag Bansal said that the boot-camps equip learners with specialised skills to thrive in the evolving tech landscape. He noted that each boot-camp offers focused training: Java Full Stack Developer - Covers Java, OOP, databases, web development, and frameworks like Angular.



Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Commissioner Ilambarthi addressing officers at an orientation programme

Building approvals to be through 'Build Now' app

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Building construction approvals within the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits will now be processed faster, announced GHMC Commissioner Ilambarthi. On Thursday, an orientation programme was held at the GHMC head office for zonal and deputy commissioners on the State government's newly developed Build Now application, powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Ilambarthi stated that training has been provided on how to upload applications using the Build Now system. The training will continue until March 9 and the application is expected to be officially launched on March 10. The orientation

aims to familiarise zonal and deputy commissioners with the new system.

Since the Build Now application is AI-driven, it can automatically detect errors in uploaded plans, eliminating the need for a manual review of the entire plan. Applicants can simply correct the identified issues and re-upload their proposals. Additionally, the system will integrate government regulations, verifying aspects such as proximity to water bodies, ongoing court cases and zoning compliance. This will help expedite the approval process and allow site inspections to be conducted more efficiently.

Applicants will be required to submit a self-declaration confirming that there are no pending legal disputes regarding their construction plans. If any issues arise later, they will be held accountable.

VCIW varsity to receive necessary funds: Dy CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State government is committed to transforming Veeranari Chakali Iamma Women's University (VCIW) into one of the best universities in the country, and the required funds will be allocated for its development, said Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu. He visited the university, formerly known as Koti Women's College on Thursday and reviewed the plans for new infrastructure.

Bhatti Vikramarka stated that, as per the vision of Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, heritage buildings on the campus would be restored and preserved with government funding. He emphasised that essential facilities such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, hostels for students, residential quarters for faculty and staff, the Vice-Chancellor's office, guest house, auditorium and administrative buildings would be constructed. The Deputy Chief Minister personally



inspected the locations earmarked for the new buildings and reviewed the architectural models prepared by engineering officials.

During the visit, he also examined the recently restored Darbar Mahal heritage building. He viewed portraits of 57 British residents who served in Hyderabad between 1779 and 1947 and observed pictorial representations of Hyderabad's political, cultural and social developments during their tenure. The history of the former British Residency was explained in detail by visitor manager Satish.

A power-point presentation was made by engineering offi-

cial in the presence of education department authorities, detailing the proposed designs for the new university buildings. Plans for enhancing greenery on the campus, including integrating the landscape with the heritage surroundings, were also showcased to the Deputy Chief Minister.

Bhatti Vikramarka directed engineering officials to ensure that the newly constructed buildings would stand as legacy structures for future generations. The visit was attended by Principal Secretary of Education Yogita Rana, Commissioner of Technical Education Devsena, Joint Managing Director of Musi Riverfront Development Corporation Pujari Gouthami, Managing Director of Telangana Education and Welfare Infrastructure Development Corporation Ganapathi Reddy, University In-charge Vice Chancellor Surya Dhanunjay, Principal Lok Pavani, and other officials.

Hyd reports highest office completions of 145 lakh sq ft

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad recorded the highest new office completions in 2024, with 145 lakh sq ft, followed by Bengaluru at 140 lakh sq ft. According to Vestian's office market report, 2024 was challenging for India's office market due to global economic uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and inflation. Despite this, the country saw its highest-ever office space supply.

Demand for grade-A office

spaces kept developers active, leading to a 7% rise in construction, reaching 515 lakh sq ft. Among the top seven cities, Hyderabad and Bengaluru saw the most new supply.

With strong absorption and supply, vacancy rates slightly improved from 13.98% in 2023 to 13.91% in 2024. Rents increased by 3.8% to 8.2% across major cities.

Office space absorption hit a record 707 lakh sq ft, up 16% year-on-year. All major

cities, except NCR and Kolkata, saw peak absorption. NCR and Kolkata recorded declines of 14% and 36%, respectively.

Vestian CEO Shrinivas Rao noted that IT-ITes led leasing with a 36% share, up from 24% in 2023. Sustainability demand also rose, pushing developers to focus on green buildings. He noted that Southern cities (Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad) accounted for 57% of total absorption.



government hospitals about the issue.

The Jeevandan process is also taking years for individuals to receive an organ. Meanwhile, corporate hospitals

are willing to accept organs from Jeevandan while not contributing to the donation process themselves.

There was a discussion about enforcing a regulation requiring corporate hospitals - especially those boasting of advanced medical technology and operations - to contribute to organ donation. However, the Health Secretary has not yet responded to the proposal.

Officials stated that donations have declined compared to the past two years. They attributed this to high-end hospitals not coming forward, highlighting the need for a proper structure

TG witnessing fastest growth in country: CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy inaugurated the HCL Tech KRC Campus in Hyderabad on Thursday, highlighting Telangana's rapid economic growth and global investment appeal. Addressing the gathering, he emphasized the state's commitment to attracting multinational companies and creating new employment opportunities through strategic agreements.

Revanth Reddy stated that Telangana is witnessing the fastest growth in the country, with Hyderabad leading in investment inflows, job creation, and artificial intelligence adoption while maintaining the lowest inflation rates. He expressed pride in the state's ability to attract the highest domestic and multinational investments in just one year, cementing its position as an economic powerhouse.

Referring to his ambitious vision of making Telangana a one-trillion-dollar economy, the Chief Minister said that while some doubted its feasibility, the state's success in securing Rs 41,000 crore and Rs 1.78 lakh crore worth of MoUs during two Davos visits has proven the goal to be well within reach. "No one can



stop Telangana Rising," he declared.

He dismissed comparisons with other metros like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, asserting that Telangana is carving out its own space in EV adoption, data centers, green energy, life sciences, biotechnology, skill development, manufacturing, and agri-processing.

Revanth Reddy also pointed

out that global recognition for Telangana's progress is growing, citing the launch of Amgen's life sciences facility, the successful hosting of BioAsia, and now the inauguration of HCL's new campus as evidence of Hyderabad's rising stature.

Praising HCL Tech as a global leader in technology and innovation, he acknowledged the company's presence in 60 countries with over 2.2 lakh employees.

He lauded its contributions in digital, engineering, cloud, and AI, and recalled its steady expansion since first setting up operations in Hyderabad in 2007. The newly inaugurated 3.2 lakh square feet facility will provide 5,000 jobs, further strengthening Hyderabad's position as a tech hub.

Revanth Reddy concluded by affirming that Hyderabad Rising is unstoppable, with global investors and industry leaders recognizing the city's potential as a major center for innovation and economic growth.

HCL Technologies' growth is a matter of pride for Telangana, as the new campus will create 5,000 jobs, further strengthening our state's position as a leader in the IT sector, said IT Minister D Sridhar Babu on Thursday.

Arrangements reviewed for holy month of Ramzan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Director of Minorities Welfare Shaik Yasmeen Basha held a review meeting with officials and the District Minorities Welfare Officer, Hyderabad, regarding arrangements for the holy month of Ramzan 2025 at Mecca Masjid, Royal Mosque and Secretariat Mosques.

During the meeting on Thursday, the Director instructed the creation of a WhatsApp group for daily updates on the arrangements. Additionally, 30 staff members from the Minorities Welfare department were assigned to monitor arrangements from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm at these mosques.

The review covered permission granted for various works, including electrical repairs, carpet cleaning, installation of water coolers, labour deployment, generator servicing and house maintenance.

These tasks will be completed two days before Ramzan begins. Essential services like AC repairs, tap replacements and sound system upgrades were also reviewed.

Director Yasmeen Basha reviewed



Director of Minorities Welfare Shaik Yasmeen Basha in a review meeting on Thursday

the ongoing projects like extending the Wazu Khana, constructing washrooms, installing greenery at Secretariat mosques and setting up a 6 KVA UPS at Mecca Masjid.

She sent a proposal to the government for a Nazrana (one-month salary) for staff working during Ramzan.

Yasmeen Basha instructed officials to ensure the best facilities for worshippers and prioritize any additional needs at these mosques.

New Digital Sports Innovation Centre to come up in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Fanatics, a global digital sports platform with 22,000 employees in over 80 locations, has announced a new Digital Sports Innovation Centre in Hyderabad to expand AI initiatives and workforce growth.

As part of its global expansion, Fanatics will double its technical workforce in Hyderabad from 250 to over 500 employees within two years. The company will

also move to a larger office in HYTEC City by 2026, tripling its current space.

To lead the Hyderabad office, Fanatics appointed Abhishek Dhasmana as Vice-President and General Manager. He previously held leadership roles at Indeed, GoDaddy, and Microsoft. "I am honoured to join Fanatics, where sports and technology drive innovation," said Dhasmana. He noted that this expansion reinforces Hyderabad as a key tech hub.



Hyderabad District Collector Anudeep Durishetty visiting Government Nizamia General Hospital

Govt allocates Rs 52 cr for Nizamia General Hospital

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad District Collector Anudeep Durishetty has directed medical officers to ensure better healthcare services for patients at the Government Nizamia General Hospital. The government has sanctioned Rs 52 crore for the construction of a new hospital building and hostel facilities for medical students.

On Thursday, Collector Anudeep Durishetty visited the hospital and college premises along with Charminar MLA Mir Zulfeqar Ali. During the visit, Collector Anudeep reviewed the ongoing process of demolishing five old buildings within the hospital premises.

He directed contractors and engineering officials to proceed with the demolition as per regulations and provide details regarding the land after clearance. Additionally, since the current hostel will also be removed, he instructed officials to set up temporary accommodation for medical students in the Charminar area.

In fund allocations, Rs 10 crore is for the renovation of heritage buildings within the premises, Rs 42 crore for the new hospital building, hostel construction and canteen facilities.

The plans are underway to allocate two acres of land in Falaknuma for a permanent hostel for Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery students.

The Collector and the MLA also visited the Outpatient (OP) Block, interacting with patients and medical staff to assess the availability of medicines and healthcare services.

During the inspection, he visited the college library, reviewing ancient medical books in Urdu and Persian and engaging with medical students about the facilities available to them.

The Collector stressed the importance of continuous medical facilities for pregnant women and encouraged efforts to increase normal deliveries at the hospital. He inquired about student admissions and medical education standards at the college.

Hospital Principal Shaizadi Sultana highlighted the shortage of doctors and staff and requested additional personnel to meet the growing patient demand. In response, the Collector assured that once a formal request is submitted, it will be forwarded to the District Medical & Health Officer (DMHO) for necessary action.

Boss Wallah invests \$7M to build skill platform

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Boss Wallah, founded by investor and entrepreneur Sashi Reddi, has invested \$7 million to create a skill platform for entrepreneurs in tier 2 and tier 3 towns. It has signed an agreement to acquire Suvision Holdings' edtech platform, freedom app. Along with freedom's livelihood education, Boss Wallah will connect users to thousands of business experts.

Founder & CEO of Boss Wallah, Sashi Reddi said that there are many platforms for JEE and government exams, but India needs more business builders.

He noted that with an initial \$7 million investment (around Rs 60 crore), the platform will help entrepreneurs gain skills and expert advice to start and grow businesses. The focus is on digital businesses, home-based work, small-scale manufacturing, handicrafts, farming, animal husbandry, retail and food business ventures needing little capital but creating jobs.

3 hurt as UoH slab collapses

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A partially constructed slab collapsed at the University of Hyderabad (HCU) while workers were laying the foundation for a new administrative building. The incident occurred suddenly, injuring more than three workers.

A student from the university told The Pioneer that three individuals had been rescued, while one remained stranded. The injured have been rushed to the hospital for treatment. Authorities are assessing the situation.

State neglected Central alert on illegal transplants

DEEPIKA PASHAM
deepikapasham2015@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government was alerted about illegal transplants by the Central government nearly five months before the kidney racket in Saroornagar was busted. The National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) reportedly sent a letter via email to the Health Secretary, the Director of Medical Education, and Jeevandan.

However, no action was taken in response. After the illegal kidney racket was exposed,

discussions began among health officials regarding the necessary measures to address the issue.

A highly placed source confirmed to The Pioneer, "The Central government sent a letter warning the State government after receiving a complaint that South Indian states, especially Hyderabad, were witnessing an influx of people from other states seeking illegal transplants. For instance, the alert mentioned an individual from Bihar who had undergone an illegal surgery."

Despite this, the State neither issued any instructions to corporate hospitals nor alerted



government hospitals about the issue.

The Jeevandan process is also taking years for individuals to receive an organ. Meanwhile, corporate hospitals

are willing to accept organs from Jeevandan while not contributing to the donation process themselves.

There was a discussion about enforcing a regulation requiring corporate hospitals - especially those boasting of advanced medical technology and operations - to contribute to organ donation. However, the Health Secretary has not yet responded to the proposal.

Officials stated that donations have declined compared to the past two years. They attributed this to high-end hospitals not coming forward, highlighting the need for a proper structure

to strengthen the Jeevandan programme.

According to the Jeevandan website, as on September 10, 2024, the programme in Telangana has facilitated organ donations from 1,466 donors since its inception on January 1, 2013. In 2024 alone, there were 126 donors.

In 2024, a total of 188 brain-dead donors have contributed to 724 organ and tissue transplants. The total number of retrieved organs includes: Kidneys: 2,235, Livers: 1,369, Hearts: 203, Heart valves: 170, Eyes: 1,321, Lungs: 316 and Pancreas: 14.

31% women buy homes for investment: Survey

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Women have always played a key role in home buying in India, but now more are making independent purchases, according to the Anarock Consumer Sentiment Survey (H2 2024). While 31% of women buy homes for investments, 69% are end-users.

Chairman of Anarock Group, Anuj Puri said that with greater financial independence and higher incomes,



women are entering the housing market as serious investors. The end-use-to-investment ratio for women homebuyers has shifted from 79:21 in H2 2022 to 69:31 in H2 2024. Notably, 70% of women surveyed now prefer real estate

over other investment options, up from 65% in H2 2022 and 57% in H2 2019. Meanwhile, their interest in the stock market has dropped to just 2% in H2 2024, compared to over 20% in H2 2022.

Women's preference for premium and luxury homes has grown, with 52% now choosing properties above Rs 90 lakh. Demand for under-construction homes has also increased, reflecting a stronger investment mindset.



UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

DC orders show-cause notice to doctors

PNS ■ ADILABAD

Adilabad District Collector Rajarshi Shah took action against medical officers who were found absent from their duties. During a surprise visit to the primary health centre (PHC) in Indravelli mandal, Rajarshi Shah issued show-cause notices to several staff members, including Medical Officer Srikanth, CHO Sandeep, PHN Jyoti, Supervisor Suresh, and MLHP Pooja, for their unauthorised absence. The Collector spoke to Additional District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Manohar and sought clarification regarding the absence of staff members. He emphasised the importance of medical officers being on alert to ensure the delivery of quality healthcare services to patients and warned that neglecting their responsibilities would lead to disciplinary action.

Earlier, he sought information from Dr Pujitha about the status of various facilities within the hospital, including the medicine store room, outpatient department, delivery room, primary examination room, ECG rooms, ARU, ASV, and the provision of iron folic acid tablets to students in schools.

LRS fee concession may net additional revenue for govt

PNS ■ NIRMAL

The concession on LRS fees is anticipated to generate additional revenue for the government. The implementation of the Land Regularisation Scheme (LRS), initiated by the state government to legalise unauthorised layouts, is expected to gain traction following the municipality's announcement of a 25 per cent fee reduction for those who regularise their layouts by March 31.

This scheme now allows for the registration of housing plots within unauthorised layouts. The government's decision to offer a one-fourth fee concession is projected to enhance revenue for the registration department. Under the previous BRS administration, the registration of house sites in unauthorised layouts was suspended, with a policy that permitted registration only for sites located in DTCP-approved layouts.

The government has opted to regularise only those sites that were previously registered. Recognising the slow pace of prop-



erty registrations, the state government has introduced a 25 per cent fee concession for those who regularise their layouts before the March 31 deadline.

The government will determine the fee based on land costs, and the concession will apply if the realtor acts promptly. In Nirmal district, which comprises three municipalities—Nirmal, Bhainsa, and Khanapur—and 18 rural mandals, a total of 26,487 applications for layout regularisation have been submitted in the municipalities, alongside 18,483 applications from the rural mandals. Site owners have paid registration fees of Rs 1,000 for plots and Rs 10,000 for layouts. Three months ago, government officials conducted field inspections of the sites and layouts seeking regularization. However, the review of applications has been sluggish due to a lack of coordination among officials, insufficient personnel, and the ongoing MLC election activities. The fee concession is expected to facilitate the process.



Security forces with medical equipment seized from Maoist dump in Bhadradi Kothagudem district on Thursday

Maoist dump with sophisticated medical equipment unearthed

PNS ■ BHADRADI KOTHAGUEDEM

Security forces unearthed a massive dump of Maoists. The Cobra forces, CRPF 241st Battalion and district team forces found the dump during search operations. The dump was found near the Telangana-Chhattisgarh border in the border region of Charla mandal of Bhadradi Kothagudem district.

The dump contained advanced medical equipment, machinery, cutter machines, logistics supplies, and Maoist propaganda literature. Police revealed that, for the first time, an ophthalmoscope (advanced eye examination equipment), according to the District Superintendent of P (Police) Kiran Chauhan. The security forces, having gathered

reliable intelligence on Maoist movements in the Gonguda region's Meenagatta forest, launched a combing operation with special units. During the searches, they found the massive dump. The seized items include an eye examination machine (IOL Master Ophthalmometer), an eye examination lens kit, bulletproof plates (improvised tin sheets), cotton ribbon (black), an iron cutter machine with motor belts, an iron cutting blade, a folding ladder, a portable speaker, an electric switchboard, a comrade red flag, a hot water bag, and a stethoscope. After the operation, the soldiers returned safely to their camps. The SP confirmed that the security forces are closely monitoring Maoist movements. Security checks in the Sukma district have been intensified.

A 5 kg IED defused by security forces

PNS ■ BHADRADI KOTHAGUEDEM

Security forces defused a 5kg improvised explosive device (IED), allegedly planted by Maoists in the Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, bordering the Bhadradi Kothagudem district. The alertness of the security forces averted a major disaster. On the Kunta-Golapalli road, the police discovered and defused a 5 kg IED bomb. Maoists had allegedly planted the bomb targeting the security forces on the Kunta-Golapalli road in Sukma district. However, the CRPF 228 Battalion and district police responded promptly, identified the bomb, and defused it at the site. After the incident, the police launched an extensive combing opera-



Black smoke rising from defused IED allegedly being planted by Maoist

tion. Police authorities stated that the security forces are taking even stricter actions to counter the activities of the Maoists.

Woman charged with murdering husband

PNS ■ WARANGAL

A woman, who conspired to murder her husband with the assistance of her lover, as he was hindering her extramarital affair, found herself behind bars. Along with her lover and a friend of his, they were arrested by the Mills Colony police. The arrested included Armed Reserve Head Constable Raj Kumar.

On February 20, Dr. Sumanth Reddy was attacked by unidentified individuals after leaving his clinic in Kajipet and crossing SR School near the outskirts of Battupalli. Following a complaint, a case of attempted murder was registered. The police took the matter seriously, leading to an intensified investigation and the subsequent arrest of the suspects. The doctor later died while undergoing treatment.

According to police, Dr Sumanth Reddy and Flora Maria

were married in 2016. In 2018, they relocated to Sangareddy to oversee family-run educational institutions. In Sangareddy, Dr Sumanth Reddy served as a contract medical officer at the local Primary Health centre, while Flora Maria worked as a teacher. During her time at Siddhu Gym Centre in Sangareddy, she met Samuel, a coach from Adarsh Colony in Kondapur, which resulted in an extramarital relationship. This revelation led to frequent disputes between Sumanth Reddy and Flora Maria.

Due to ongoing conflicts, Sumanth Reddy decided to move his family to Warangal. In 2019, Flora Maria secured a government position as a lecturer at Pambarthi Social Welfare College in the Janagama district. Subsequently, when the college relocated to Rangashayipet in Warangal, Sumanth Reddy managed a private hospital in Kajipet



Warangal Assistant Commissioner of Police Nandiram Naik revealing the arrest of the accused in Dr Sumanth Reddy's murder case, in Warangal on Thursday

while residing in Vasavi Colony, commuting daily. Tension reignited between Sumanth Reddy and Flora as Flora Maria engaged in an extramarital affair by inviting her lover to her residence. Upon learning of this, Sumanth Reddy and Flora resumed their conflicts.

Against this background, Flora, Maria and Samuel conspired to murder Dr Sumanth Reddy.

Subsequently, Samuel confided in his friend Raj Kumar, the Head Constable, regarding their plan. He assured Raj Kumar that if he aided in the murder of Sumanth Reddy, he would construct a house for him in Sangareddy. Raj Kumar consented to the arrangement. Approximately fifteen days prior, Flora provided Samuel with s 1 lakh, from which Samuel retained Rs 50,000 for his expenses and transferred the remaining to Raj Kumar. On the afternoon of February 20 of this month, Raj Kumar went to Kajipet on his motorcycle. He selected a secluded and dimly lit area for surveillance.

When Dr Sumanth Reddy, after concluding his clinic duties, was driving towards Rangashayapet via Battupalli Road, slowed his

vehicle near a small bridge, which presented the opportunity Samuel had anticipated. He shattered the car's rear indicator. Startled by the noise, Dr Sumanth Reddy parked his car to investigate. At that moment, Samuel and Raj Kumar launched a vicious attack on Sumanth Reddy, inflicting severe injuries. Believing him to be dead, they fled the scene, the police said.

The investigation into this case was conducted under the supervision of Warangal ACP Nandi Ram, with support from Mills Colony Circle Venkata Ratnam, Task Force CI Ranjith Kumar, Mills Colony Sub-Inspector Suresh, and constables Babu Singh, Chandrasekhar, Venkanna, Raju Jendar, along with Task Force constable MD Ghouse, and technical assistance from AAO Salman and the IT core team constable Nagesh.

Intermediate student drowns in tank

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

A 16-year-old intermediate student, named Ramesh, from the Social Welfare Residential School in Jayaprakashnagar Thanda under Kalwakurthy mandal in the district, tragically drowned in a temple tank on Wednesday. Ramesh, along with four other students, visited the Sri Amba Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple in Veldanda on Wednesday to celebrate Mahashivaratri. While the group was at the temple tank, Ramesh, who could not swim, entered the water.

When Ramesh went missing, the other students immediately raised an alarm.

Bull sports competition draws crowds

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

The annual traditional bull sports event, a long-standing tradition in Alwala village under Keshampet mandal in Shadnagar constituency, was held with great enthusiasm on the day following Shivaratri. This age-old event deeply rooted in local customs saw villagers worship Basavanna before participating in the spirited "Bandalagudu" competition.

The competition, which has been celebrated for generations, drew villagers who honour their agricultural heritage by showcasing their bulls in a series of contests. Winners of the event were awarded cash prizes, further encouraging the preservation of this unique tradition.



Former Keshampet ZPTC and former Chairperson of the Rangareddy District Women and Child Welfare Department, Tandra Visala Sravan Reddy, graced the occasion.

She inaugurated the event by leading special pujas for the Basavannas participating in the competition.

Addressing the gathering, she emphasised the importance of preserving cultural traditions, stating that agriculture forms the backbone of rural life, and cattle are integral to this way of living.

She highlighted that in different regions, bulls and cows are honoured through various customs some communities celebrate them by decorating them on the full moon of Eruvaka, painting them, and preparing special sweets, while others organize contests like Bandalagudu. She noted that regardless of region or language, Indian traditions emphasize love and respect for all animals.

'Illicit relationship' leads to murder of woman

PNS ■ GAJWEL

The police have successfully unraveled the circumstances surrounding the murder of a woman who had been reported missing for 10 days. The police found her remains, confirming the tragic outcome of a case that had captured the community's attention. The individuals involved were from the same village, and their relationship had developed into a clandestine affair. Faced with increasing pressure from the woman to formalise their relationship through marriage, the man orchestrated her murder, leading to her untimely demise.

On Tuesday, law enforcement identified a deceased individual in the Komatibanda forest,

affirming that the case was indeed a homicide. The following day, Gajwel Assistant Commissioner of Police Purushottam Reddy provided insights into the investigation.

Dari Yadamma, aged 40, from Anantgiri Palli under Vargal mandal, had left her residence on February 15, claiming she was heading to the bank, but she never returned. Her son, Dari Saikumar, subsequently reported her missing, prompting a formal investigation by the Gauraram Police Station. Utilising advanced investigative techniques, the police examined various aspects of the case, including CCTV footage, geographical locations, and call records. During the inquiry, they

interrogated Bandla Chinna Lasmayya, aged 39, also from Anantgiri Palli.

It emerged that Lasmayya had been engaged in an illicit relationship with Yadamma for approximately 18 months. Over the past six months, Yadamma had been pressuring him to marry her, which led Lasmayya to seek a way to end the relationship.

On the day of her disappearance, he executed his plan by taking Yadamma to the Komatibanda forest on his motorcycle.

While consuming alcohol together, he surreptitiously added pesticide to her drink. After she consumed the toxic substance, he assaulted her, strangling her with a cloth and ultimately murdering her.

The accused has been charged with murder.

CM Revanth to visit Wanaparthy on March 2

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

Excise, Tourism and Culture Minister Jupally Krishna Rao announced that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will lay foundation stones for various developmental projects worth Rs. 721 crore in the Wanaparthy constituency on March 2. Addressing a press conference at the Wanaparthy MLA camp office on Thursday, Minister Krishna Rao emphasised that, despite the financial challenges posed by the previous government inflicting a debt blow on Telangana, the Congress government under Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is continuing to implement welfare schemes for the people.

On the SLBC Tunnel accident, the Minister informed that 11 agencies, including the



Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao speaking to reporters in Wanaparthy on Thursday

Navy and NDRF, have been deployed to rescue the victims.

He mentioned that he had personally entered the 11.8

km tunnel, describing the situation as terrifying. Rescue operations are ongoing with the help of national experts. Although the CM could not visit the site in person, he is regularly reviewing the relief efforts. He advised the BRS leaders to stop playing politics over dead bodies.

Minister Krishna Rao praised MLA Megha Reddy for spearheading extensive development initiatives in Wanaparthy.

CM Revanth Reddy will be visiting the region for the first time, and during his visit, he will lay the foundation for development projects worth Rs. 721 crore, which includes the development of the school. He also reminisced about his time studying in the area.

Congress govt criticised for stopping Harish in Nagarkurnool

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Former Chairman of the Telangana State Cooperative Union Raja Varaprasad, has strongly criticised the Congress government, accusing it of resorting to authoritarian tactics reminiscent of the Indira Gandhi era. He condemned the police for stopping senior BRS leader and former Irrigation Minister T Harish Rao at Nagarkurnool while he was on his way to inspect the SLBC tunnel accident site.

Raja Varaprasad recalled that the BRS government allowed Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to visit the Medigadda Barrage, but now the Congress government



prevented Harish Rao, a seven-time MLA and experienced leader, from assessing the situation at the SLBC accident site. He alleged that the Congress government was using the police force to sup-

press opposition leaders instead of facilitating coordination for rescue operations.

Expressing concern over the handling of the rescue efforts, Raja Varaprasad accused the government of negligence, stating that no significant progress had been made even after six days.

He criticised the authorities for failing to properly coordinate rescue teams and for restricting access to public representatives who wished to oversee the situation. "Shouldn't the public representatives meet the minister? Shouldn't they discuss the accident? Where is the governance here?" he questioned, slamming the Congress administration.

Cong, BJP clash at Naspur

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

Congress activists allegedly assaulted BJP members at Naspur. The altercation began when BJP members staged a sit-in at the station to protest the alleged assault of BJP leader Kamalakar Rao by local Sub-Inspector N Sugunakar Rao. The clash occurred during the MLC election. Tension erupted and the police had to intervene to disperse the warring groups. At the same time, some Congress activists appeared at the site and a heated argument broke out with BJP members.

The situation escalated when Congress activists reportedly beat the BJP members, prompting a retaliatory attack from the BJP.

ACROSS THE STATES



Police busts fake hair removal cream factory in Delhi

The Crime Branch of Delhi Police has busted an illegal factory in the Burari area, which manufactured counterfeit hair removal cream and packaging them in branded containers, officials said on Thursday. Police have arrested the owner of the factory, Pawan Kumar (33), and seized a large quantity of fake products, raw materials and machinery from its premises. Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime), Apoorva Gupta, said, "Acting on a tip-off, a team raided the factory in the Kamal Vihar area. During search, police found 14,184 tubes of counterfeit hair removal cream, along with packaging materials of many expensive brands. Machinery, including a tube-filling machine, pressing machine and printing equipment were also seized during the operation," the DCP said. "During interrogation, Pawan Kumar claimed that his cosmetics business ran into huge losses after the Covid-19 pandemic. After learning about the high demand for counterfeit beauty products, he set up the illegal manufacturing unit and supplied fake hair removal cream to Sadar Bazar," the officer said, adding that further probe is underway.



K'taka bans plastic use in idli preparation

Bengaluru, Feb 27 (PTI) Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Thursday announced a ban on the use of plastic in idli preparation after samples tested positive for carcinogenic elements due to the use of polythene sheets. He said the Karnataka Food Safety Department found that 52 hotels were using polythene sheets to prepare idlis. According to him, polythene, especially thin sheets, is carcinogenic, and the government will not allow such practices in the hotel industry. "The Food Safety Department collected idli samples from 251 places across Karnataka. Earlier, cloth was used for cooking idlis, but we received information that hotels have recently started using plastic. So, our officers conducted inquiries at various locations," Rao told reporters. Out of 251 hotels, 52 were found using plastic, the minister said, adding, "Hoteliers should never have done this because plastic is carcinogenic, meaning it can cause cancer."



Police use drones, dogs to look for rape accused

Amid mounting pressure, police on Thursday deployed drones and dogs in Shirur taluka of Pune district to trace the accused in the Swargate bus rape case, officials said. History-sheeter Dattatray Ramdas Gade (37) is accused of raping a 26-year-old woman inside a Shiv Shahi bus of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) at Swargate bus station in Pune two days ago. At least 13 teams of the Pune city police are trying to trace Gade, a resident of Gunat village, an official said. In coordination with the Pune Rural police, a search operation is being conducted in the sugarcane fields at Gunat village as there was suspicion that Gade was hiding there, the official said. Several senior police officials and more than 100 cops reached Gunat village in the afternoon, he said. Police are using drones for aerial imaging of the field so that Gade can be tracked down, he said. A dog squad was also called for the search operation in the village, he said. Pune police have already announced a Rs 1 lakh reward for any credible information that would lead to Gade's arrest, he said.

India is a trusted friend and strategic ally: EU President

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The top leadership of India and the European Union (EU) is expected to infuse on Friday a fresh momentum in sealing an ambitious trade deal at the earliest as the 27-nation bloc is keen to re-energize the two-way economic ties amid its looming friction with the US on tariffs.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by the EU College of Commissioners or senior political leaders of the bloc, began a high-profile two-day visit to India on Thursday afternoon. "In an era of conflicts and intense competition, you need trusted friends. For Europe, India is such a friend and a strategic ally," Von der Leyen said.

"I'll discuss with @narendramodi how to take our strategic partnership to the next level," she posted on X shortly after she was received at the Delhi airport by Union minister Anupriya Patel.

The talks between Modi and Von der Leyen are taking



place against the backdrop of increasing tensions between EU and the Trump administration over tariff. In sharp comments, American President Donald Trump on Wednesday said that the European Union was formed to "screw" the US even as he threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on imports from the European Union. On its part, the EU said it will react firmly and immediately against unjustified barriers to free and fair trade.

Von der Leyen and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will

Jaishankar met the European Commission president and discussed key bilateral issues.

"Appreciate her thoughts on reenergizing India's engagement with Europe," he said.

"The wide ranging participation of Indian Ministers and EU College of Commissioners during this visit stands testimony to the importance we place on deeper India-EU ties," he said on X. It is a very important partnership for us and we are looking at some "concrete" forward movement in a number of critical areas including trade and defence, a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs said. The two leaders are expected to deliberate on the FTA as we need to produce a mutually-beneficial deal at the earliest, he said.

On the EU looking at pressing India to bring down tariffs on cars, wine and agricultural products, the official said India too has certain expectations from the bloc. In their talks, Modi and Von der Leyen are also expected to explore ways to expand defence and security cooperation.

External Affairs Minister S



Rajasthan Assembly deadlock ends

Six Congress MLAs' suspension revoked

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The nearly weeklong deadlock in the Rajasthan Assembly over state minister Avinash Gehlot's remark on former prime minister Indira Gandhi ended on Thursday following Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma's intervention. The suspension of six Congress MLAs, including its state chief Govind Singh Dotasra, was also revoked after Leader of Opposition Tikaram July tendered an apology on behalf of the Laxmangarh lawmaker for his conduct towards the speaker. Sharma held a meeting with Speaker Vasudev Devnani and July in the

speaker's chamber to break the deadlock.

With the impasse ending, Congress legislators entered the House and took part in the proceedings. July thanked Sharma for taking the initiative to break the deadlock.

Sharma said such deadlocks, even if they occurred, should not last long. Devnani said Dotasra's conduct was not worth pardoning but he accepted July's apology. He described as unfortunate the words Dotasra had used for him and said the leader of the opposition should ensure that he did not conduct himself in such a manner in future.

Maha Kumbh 'truly global event': Adityanath

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the successful organisation of Maha Kumbh 2025, calling it "a truly global event".

Addressing journalists at the media centre here, a day after the conclusion of the Maha Kumbh, Adityanath said, "Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj truly became a global event, and the credit goes to the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

His vision has helped us successfully execute this grand event, and you (the media) have played a crucial role in conveying its significance to the country and the world. I thank you for that."

He also highlighted Modi's concept of integrating faith and economy, stating that spiritual tourism holds immense potential, with Uttar Pradesh emerging as the most suitable state to harness it.

Credits PM Modi for its success



"In 2024 alone, 64 crore pilgrims and tourists visited various religious sites across Uttar Pradesh, including Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura, Prayagraj, Chitrakoot, Vindhya, Gorakhpur and Naimisharanya," the chief minister said. Over the past 45 days, more than 66 crore pilgrims and tourists visited Prayagraj for the Maha Kumbh, creating new records in religious tourism, he added.

Adityanath also said that the Maha Kumbh led to the development of five major spiritual tourism corridors in Uttar Pradesh. The first corridor

connects Varanasi and Mirzapur to Ayodhya and Gorakhpur via Prayagraj. The second links Prayagraj to Lalpur and Chitrakoot. The third runs from Prayagraj to Lucknow and Naimisharanya. The fourth connects Prayagraj to Agra via the Bundelkhand Expressway, extending to Mathura, Vrindavan and Sukhteerth.

In the past 45 days, millions of devotees travelled through these five corridors, including not only locals but also pilgrims from across the country and the world, Adityanath said.

Shah's claim on delimitation process not 'trustworthy', says K'taka CM

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said Union Home Minister Amit Shah's claim that southern states will not be disadvantaged in the delimitation process is not "trustworthy" and that his statement appears to be aimed at creating confusion among the southern states.

The Chief Minister's remarks came a day after Shah assured the southern states that they would not lose a 'single Parliamentary seat' due to delimitation.

"Going by the Home Minister's vague remarks, it seems that either he lacks proper information or there is a deliberate intent to disadvantage the southern states, including Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh," he said in a state-



ment.

Siddaramaiah said that if the central government genuinely wishes to ensure fairness for the southern states, the Home Minister must clarify whether delimitation will be based on the latest population ratio or the current number of Lok Sabha seats.

"It is evident that if delimitation is carried out based on the latest population ratio, it will be a severe injustice to the southern states. To prevent such unfairness, previous

delimitation exercises were conducted using the 1971 census as the basis, following constitutional amendments," he stated. According to him, over the past 50 years, southern states have effectively controlled population growth while progressing significantly in terms of development.

Meanwhile, northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh have failed to regulate population growth and continue to lag in development.

"As a result, if delimitation is based on the latest census, southern states, including Karnataka, may see a reduction or stagnation in their number of Lok Sabha seats, while northern states will gain more seats.

In either scenario, the southern states will bear the loss. Is the Home Minister unaware of this?" he asked.

BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY

SC refuses to interfere with HC order on toxic waste disposal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to interfere with a Madhya Pradesh High Court order on shifting of toxic waste of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy and disposing it in Pithampur area in the state's Dhar district.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih disposed of a petition which challenged an order of December 3, 2024 of the high court directing the state government to take steps for removal of toxic waste material from the site of Union Carbide India Ltd (UCIL).

The bench said the high court had passed the order after considering views of an expert committee comprising directors of the National Environmental Engineering Institute (NEERI), the National Geophysical Research Institute

(NGRI) and chairman of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

It said both NEERI and NGRI were "institutes of repute and recognition" in their respective fields and courts had often relied on their views whenever faced with questions on environmental protection.

The bench took on record the affidavit filed by senior advocate Nachiket Joshi, appearing for the Madhya Pradesh government, that contained minutes of a meeting held on June 19, 2023, where views of experts from NEERI, NGRI and CPCB were noted.

The state government, the court said, took the decision after the approval from the expert panel. "The impugned high court order would reveal that it took a serious view of the lethargic manner in which the state government was dealing with the disposal of waste.

BJP using 'fake voters' to win polls, alleges Mamata

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused the BJP of adding fake voters from other states to the electoral rolls with the alleged backing of the Election Commission (EC), claiming that the party had used similar tactics to secure victories in the Delhi and Maharashtra assembly elections.

Speaking at a TMC state conference at Netaji Indoor Stadium here, Banerjee also raised concerns over the appointment of Gyanesh Kumar as the Chief Election Commissioner, alleging that the BJP was attempting to exert influence over the constitutional body.

"It is evident how the BJP is tampering with the voters' list

WARNS OF PROTEST AGAINST EC



with the blessings of the Election Commission," she alleged. Banerjee warned that if necessary action was not taken to correct the electoral roll, her party would stage a dharna in front of the EC office.

"If I could go on a 26-day hunger strike during the anti-land acquisition movement in

2006, we can also launch a movement against the Election Commission. If required, we will protest indefinitely in front of the EC office to demand the removal of fake names from the voter roll," she said.

However, she did not clarify whether the protest would be in Kolkata or New Delhi.

She accused the BJP of using "the same strategy in Delhi and Maharashtra by enrolling voters from Haryana and Gujarat to influence elections."

"In Delhi and Maharashtra, the BJP secured victory by adding fake voters from Haryana and Gujarat. Now, they aim to do the same in West Bengal.

"They know they cannot win if the elections are held fairly," Banerjee claimed.

Targeting the BJP, she instructed TMC leaders and workers to start physically verifying the voters' list, alleging that the BJP had manipulated it with "the support of the Election Commission of India (ECI)".

She emphasised that this task should be a priority for the party ahead of the elections.

MANUAL SCAVENGING

SC says dissatisfied with affidavits

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has expressed displeasure on the responses of the Delhi, Kolkata and Hyderabad authorities on how they stopped manual scavenging in their respective cities.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Arvind Kumar directed the municipal commissioner of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC), director (S&DM) of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and managing director of the Hyderabad Metropolitan

Water and Sewerage Board, Telangana, to remain present on the next hearing.

The apex court noted KMC, DJB and the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board did not explain how some deaths occurred in their cities due to manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning.

It also directed the commissioner of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike to also remain present saying neither an affidavit nor any representation was made in the court.



"Meanwhile, of the five affidavits, which are given before

this court, two of the affidavits filed on behalf of Kolkata Municipal Corporation and Delhi Jal Board are not at all satisfactory," the bench said on February 19.

While hearing a plea against the practice of manual scavenging, the apex court said there was no clarity whether manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning were stopped in these cities.

Regarding KMC's affidavit, it recorded the claim that the practices had stopped there. "... yet there is no explanation

from them which has come forward to explain to this court as to why even after manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning was stopped as per their claim, three deaths have occurred on February 2, 2025 due to manual scavenging as we have been informed at the Bar," the bench said.

The bench said the DJB affidavit was a "very evasive reply" to the question whether manual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning were continuing in Delhi or not.

"What it says, is that man-

ual scavenging and manual sewer cleaning in DJB is totally prohibited.

"This is not the reply that we had sought from them," it said. The court also found no explanation on how seven such deaths took place in the capital in the last one year.

It noted there was no explanation from the Hyderabad Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board as to how and when the practices were stopped and why three related deaths took place due in Hyderabad in the last one year.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Simmering linguistic tension

Finding a solution to the ongoing language row requires acknowledging India's pluralistic identity

The ongoing row over the three-language formula in school education—a policy embedded in the National Education Policy (NEP)—has once again ignited passionate debates. Most recently, Tamil Nadu's political leadership, led by Chief Minister MK Stalin, has sharply criticised the Centre for what is perceived as an imposition of Hindi on the state. This conflict, however, is not isolated; it resonates across states like Karnataka, Telangana and Punjab, each adding its own chapter to the language war. The current uproar finds its roots in the longstanding historical struggle over language imposition in India. In Tamil Nadu, memories of the anti-Hindi agitations of the past still echo, as the state's ruling DMK perceives the insistence on the three-language formula as a subtle attempt to undermine its linguistic identity. Critics argue that by prioritising Hindi alongside English and the regional language, the policy inadvertently sidelines local languages—a concern that resonates deeply in southern states with rich linguistic heritage.



While some view Hindi as a unifying force, many see its promotion as a threat to regional cultures and identities. The conflict is emblematic of a broader pattern where states feel compelled to assert their linguistic identity against perceived central overreach. Stalin and other leaders in Tamil Nadu argue that the implementation of the NEP's language policy is a thinly veiled attempt to erode Tamil's primacy. Similar sentiments have been echoed elsewhere: The Telangana state government has recently mandated Telugu in all schools to ensure that students learn their mother tongue. In doing so, Telangana is not only preserving its linguistic heritage but also simplifying the curriculum for easier comprehension. Even in the northern state of Punjab, the removal of Punjabi from the regional language curriculum in CBSE schools for the 2025–26 academic session has sparked outrage among Punjabis. Political figures like former deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal has called it an "attack on our mother tongue." Prime Minister Narendra Modi has attempted to soothe these tensions by emphasising that the BJP honours every Indian language and that each language reflects the soul of Indian culture. He maintains that it is a collective responsibility of every citizen to enrich and embrace all linguistic traditions. Even so, opinions remain deeply divided. Hindi imposition row is more than a policy dispute—it is a reflection of deep-seated historical, cultural, and political currents in India. MK Stalin's strong resistance to perceived linguistic hegemony is shared widely in his state. Language is an emotive issue and if not handled properly could snowball into a major crisis. The best solution lies in a balanced, flexible approach that honours India's linguistic diversity. Only through respectful dialogue, tailored policies, and a celebration of diversity can India navigate this complex linguistic landscape and move toward a truly inclusive nation.

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PICTALK



A visitor takes a selfie at Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology Tulip Garden, in Palampur PTI

Declining PhD enrolments threaten the research in the country

Research scholars are not merely assistants or trainees; they are integral to the progress of research institutions and the country

In recent years, India has witnessed a disturbing trend—a decline in PhD enrolments in national institutions. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22, the total number of PhD enrolments in India stood at approximately 2.02 lakh, accounting for only 0.5 per cent of the total student enrolment. While this figure has shown a gradual increase over the years, recent data from premier institutions such as IITs, IISc, and central universities indicate a worrying decline in PhD admissions. Research institutions are the bedrock of scientific and technological advancements, serving as hubs for innovation, discovery, and intellectual progress. While principal investigators, faculty members, and senior scientists often receive the limelight for breakthroughs, the research scholars—doctoral candidates, postdoctoral fellows, and junior researchers—form the backbone of these institutions. Despite their critical contributions, research scholars often face numerous challenges, including funding constraints, lack of job security, and the



pressure to publish. Long hours in the lab, coupled with the demand for high-quality research outputs, can affect their well being. Additionally, exploitation by supervisors is rampant in many universities, with scholars being forced to take on personal tasks. Institutions must recognise these challenges and work towards creating a supportive environment that ensures their intellectual and personal growth. Moreover, the lack of lucrative career opportunities post-PhD discourages many from taking up doctoral research. While undergraduate and postgraduate programs attract significant enrolments due to their immediate employability prospects, doctoral research is often viewed as a long, arduous journey with uncertain career rewards. Many PhD holders are forced to work on meagre salaries in many academic institutions. In industry, the salary package of a PhD holder is poor compared to people with mere diplomas and degrees. Higher qualification is a disqualification for many industries. The stagnation of

research fellowships, delays in stipend disbursement, and the lack of well-structured post-doctoral opportunities further deter students from pursuing research. Fewer PhD students mean fewer research publications, reduced global rankings, and decreased funding opportunities. Research scholars are not merely assistants or trainees; they are integral to the progress of research institutions. Recognising their contributions and supporting their journey is essential for the sustained advancement of science and technology. This, in turn, affects the credibility of national institutions, making them less attractive to international collaborations. A weak research culture forces India to rely on foreign technologies and innovations, increasing dependency on imports and reducing self-reliance. This hampers the government's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, making the country vulnerable to technological and economic dependencies. (The writer is the Dean-Academic Affairs, at Garden City University, views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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India's ascendant role in global diplomacy

As the nation navigates global issues from terrorism to climate change, India's blend of diplomatic acumen continues to forge a more secure, stable and prosperous future



SUDHIR HINDWAN

India's rising global influence is unmistakable, as it consistently takes center stage in high-level international forums and summits. A clear example is the recent Artificial Intelligence Summit in Paris, co-chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At this event, leaders discussed the need to increase access to AI infrastructure, ensuring that technological advancements serve the public good through inclusive policies and responsible use. The summit underscored India's commitment to diversifying AI applications and establishing highly safe and reliable decision-making frameworks—a testament to its forward-thinking approach in harnessing emerging technologies. India's leadership extends beyond technology. Its prominent roles at major gatherings such as the G20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) further solidify its status as an influential global player. In these forums, India has not only showcased its diplomatic acumen but also contributed to discussions on addressing multifaceted global challenges. In today's increasingly globalised world, power dynamics are often shaped by imbalances within the international economic system. The interconnectedness of socio-economic conditions across regions has amplified issues like terrorism, giving non-state actors psychological leverage and operational strength. In this context, combating the spread of misinformation and ideological distortions becomes crucial. Addressing these challenges requires a continuous transfer of talent and specialized training for experts in counter-terrorism—a process that can be significantly enhanced through dedicated foreign policy think tanks. Such institutions provide fresh perspectives and establish frameworks that harmonize diverse stakeholder interests, ensuring robust diplomatic negotiations even when perspectives differ. India's diplomatic journey has always been guided by a well-charted roadmap rooted in effective diplomacy. At its core, foreign policy is about making the right



gestures—cooperation, coordination, and timely crisis management. As a mature democracy, India leverages its resilient leadership to seize opportunities and craft strategies that blend tactical strength with pragmatic resilience. A key challenge remains: bringing neighboring countries together at the negotiating table to forge comprehensive strategies for maritime security and the protection of economic interests. Amid escalating global challenges, the issue of climate change has garnered increasing support. Efforts to limit environmental degradation and open gateways for renewable energy development, along with advancements in technological know-how, are paving the way for sustainable power generation. These initiatives not only address environmental concerns but also create a mechanism to counter sudden threats posed by expansive projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Over the past half-decade, trade relations between India and its neighbors have reached unprecedented heights. This growing economic interdependence, combined with initiatives to secure the Indian Ocean Area (IOA), reinforces economic growth, strategic security, and overall stability by ensuring the free flow of goods and services. The Quad summit's panel discussion on "The Quad Squad: Power and Purpose of the



AT ITS CORE, FOREIGN POLICY IS ABOUT MAKING THE RIGHT GESTURES—COOPERATION, COORDINATION, AND TIMELY CRISIS MANAGEMENT. AS A MATURE DEMOCRACY, INDIA LEVERAGES ITS RESILIENT LEADERSHIP TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES AND CRAFT STRATEGIES THAT BLEND TACTFUL STRENGTH WITH PRAGMATIC RESILIENCE

Polygon" in early 2023 further highlighted India's role in addressing expansionist plans and countering regional threats. The participating nations reaffirmed their commitment to support Pacific Island countries and strengthen regional institutions in combating challenges such as climate change, building resilient infrastructure, and enhancing maritime security. These discussions have played a critical role in reinforcing the framework of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which seeks to stabilize and secure this strategically vital region. In response to growing Chinese assertiveness—exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative and its "String of Pearls" strategy—India has actively pursued measures to safeguard its maritime security. This includes the deployment of naval bases in key Indian Ocean locations, such as Djibouti, and the development of sophisticated coastal radar systems in collaboration with regional partners like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius. Moreover, India has established a fusion system designed to enhance situational awareness in the Indian Ocean Region. Recent defense procurements, including the India-Russia joint venture BrahMos supersonic cruise missile and advanced aero-engines for MiG-29 jets, further bolster its

military capabilities. Complementing these initiatives is the "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy, which envisions establishing naval service bases and securing strategic ports from Singapore to Oman. India's proactive "Act East" policy underscores its commitment to deepening economic and trade ties with East Asian neighbors. By constructing an extensive network of ports and enhancing Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) systems, India is setting a clear path forward. Its leadership in finalizing cooperative frameworks within the IORA in the India-Pacific region has not only earned accolades but has also paved the way for future negotiations aimed at creating a robust shield against piracy, smuggling, cyber threats, and other non-state challenges. India's commitment to inclusive diplomacy and international cooperation lays the foundation for a more secure, stable, and prosperous world. India's foreign policy has always contributing to global security and prosperity. With its visionary leadership, strategic resilience, and adeptness at forging diplomatic alliances, India is uniquely positioned to lead the world toward a future defined by collaboration and mutual progress. (The writer is a recipient of Bharat Gaurav Award and is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAG REPORT EXPOSES AAP

Madam — The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report has revealed that the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22, formulated by the AAP government in Delhi, resulted in a revenue loss of over Rs 2,000 crore to the exchequer, adding insult to the injury to the AAP party, which was recently voted out of power. The 2021-22 policy was framed ostensibly to simplify the liquor trade, bring transparency, check monopoly, and generate optimum revenue. However, according to the CAG report, the changes effected were fraught with shortcomings, and the objectives stated for switching over to the new excise regime were not achieved. The party has justified its decision to do away with the 'flawed' old policy, but it has failed to explain how and why the new one ran into trouble. The excise scam and the extravagant renovation of the CM's residence—mockingly dubbed Sheesh Mahal by the BJP—belied AAP's grand promise of providing clean, hassle-free governance. Ironically, a party that owed its meteoric rise to its tough stand against corruption now finds itself unable to shake off the graft taint. AAP lost the battle of perception long before it was defeated in the 2025 Assembly elections. And the body blow dealt by the CAG findings will make it even harder for the party to regain public trust. N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

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MAHAKUMBH ENDS

Madam — With the end of the Mahashivratri celebration, it marks the end of the auspicious Mahakumbh as well. The rarest in 144 years, Kumbh, termed Mahakumbh, ended on a delightful note with more than 60 crore people taking a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam of Prayagraj. The beginning of the year 2025 could not be more auspicious with the ecstasy of Mahakumbh. The divine dip in the Sangam water has made all of us connect with spirituality and devotion, taking a break from our hectic schedules.

Rat Miners pushed into tunnel rescue



Water poses a threat to rescuers' lives." published on February 26. As the rescue operations inside the SLBC tunnel in Telangana pose significant challenges with slush and water seepage hampering the work, perhaps the popular method of 'rat mining' could be

a positive solution to locate and extricate the eight workers trapped inside. Rat miners are skilled labourers, proficient in navigating and excavating narrow, hazardous underground tunnels. Their name reflects their capacity to move through tight spaces, similar to that of rodents.

Although this practice is illegal due to safety and environmental issues, it continues, and the miners' skills are indispensable. When standard rescue techniques fail, rat miners come to the fore. Their deep understanding of underground conditions enables them to perform manual excavations with accuracy, accessing locations that machines cannot reach. A striking instance is the Uttarakhand tunnel collapse in November 2023, where 41 workers were safely rescued after 17 agonising days.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Mahakumbh has made the people experience true devotion and meditation and find the godly spirit in themselves by taking a divine dip. The time of taking departure from Mahakumbh. The experience was truly mesmerising, filled with pure adoration. Post Mahakumbh bath, as we pledge to have washed our sins, let us embrace practicing good deeds. Let's make a heavenly society, more tolerant, unified, and emphatic. Let's imbibe the spiritual learnings as a part and parcel of our personality and encourage social good by caring, sharing, and helping each other. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

RIISING AGGRESSION AMONG YOUTH

Madam — Recent news reports about youngsters turning violent and causing heavy disasters and deaths to others are something that the state, the society and the nation as a whole have to study, deliberate, debate and find solutions to urgently, or else, rather than taking the nation to progress, the youth of the nation is sure to push the society to the

'primitive age' clashes, conflicts and bloodshed. Be it the heart-wrenching murder of kith and kin by a youngster in Kerala, blood-curdling ragging incidents in some states, 'psycho-type' cyberbullying, gang assaults, vandalism of trains and vehicles, or a list of criminal activities that paralyse the hearts, it goes to show that the path taken by our present-day youth definitely is not good. A lot of factors are 'culprits' that make our youth uncontrollable, unsympathetic and coldhearted. Individual attention deficit, lack of checking of conduct and behavioural disorders at a low age, early involvement with alcohol and drugs, low intelligence and poor educational achievement, failure in academics, involvement in crime, and also the influence of mass media make many youths turn to anti-social elements.

M Pradyu | Kannur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

DONALD TRUMP'S GLOBAL GAMBIT

Trump's administration is rewriting the rules of global diplomacy, inching closer to Russia



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The world has undergone massive change since the new US President's inauguration nearly a month back. The disruptor in town, President Donald Trump is changing every lever of the established global world order, since World War Two. What was unimaginable a month back is a reality, this week! The fact is that, the US and Russia are almost on the same page, as far as Ukraine is concerned. President Trump has called for an early end to the war raging in Europe and is willing to negotiate and even travel to Moscow, if the terms of the negotiation are cosy for his worldview and more importantly can be sold to his domestic political constituency.

Putting an early end to the Ukraine war may be a blessing for several countries especially in the Global South, which are facing high inflation and economic rout. However, the way the US moved on Ukraine, by having a bilateral conversation with Russian President Putin, keeping Europe out of the negotiations and setting economic clauses for Ukraine instead of the billions of dollars worth of military aid it has received from the US, has shocked the global community. US President and his team A, led by billionaire Elon Musk and VP Vance have not minced their words regarding the way Europe and the UK etc. are weak nations, with much of their economy being bankrolled by the US since World War 2.

It has sent shock waves, being felt across the entire of Europe, where, there is renewed vigour for right-centric political parties, gaining



political legitimacy in democratic elections. There is open support for pro-right-leaning parties by the Trump administration, which means the left of the centre political forces, and those who have dominated the narrative for nearly three decades are facing the heat. Many analysts and policy space observers point out that, President Trump believes in creating a Shock and Awe scenario at the negotiating table rather than engaging in traditional surgical strikes to neutralise possible threats to the US.

It may be a smart tactical move, which can force the other parties to come up with out-of-the-box ideas to bypass the US wrath with a hundred and eighty degrees turn by the US on several global issues. It is disruptive and could very well be one of the most consequential events of the 21st century, where, global power equations are being reimagined. That brings us back to how India, with a firmly placed NDA government for more than a decade now, finds itself in the conundrum. Prime Minister Modi was one of the first visitors to the White House after President Trump's inauguration, to revive and remind of the old and cherished friendship between the two, while also trying to reassure that India, will reinvigorate the bilateral relation and take it to a different level.

India agreed to buy more oil and defence equipment from the US, while signalling it would also mean, buying less, from long-standing ally Russia. However, US, and Russia relations are almost on the verge of a reset, which could define how planet earth evolves at least in the next five years. Europe UK and India are feverishly trying to cut mutually beneficial bilateral trade deals, to hedge some of the tariff tirades being pushed by the US President. If not, anything, it has put the fire back in the cold ovens of the new world order.

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

Trump's deal-making redefines Ukraine's fate



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As Trump leverages his unique, transactional style—one that prioritises lucrative deals over rigid ideology—the global balance is shifting

Ukrainian President Zelensky's colossal misstep in dealing with President Donald Trump could ultimately become one of the most profound blunders in recent history. To Trump, Zelensky is merely a "modestly successful comedian" and a "dictator." However, it is a misguided assumption to believe that Russia will inevitably win this war, yet the divisions within Ukraine's ranks are deepening, fuelled by ambitions that go beyond territorial conquest, pushed by Western powers steering Ukraine down an uncertain path. It is not far-fetched to suggest that Zelensky's days are numbered. A professional comedian skilled in turning tragedy into spectacle, as Marx famously said of history, he now finds himself caught in a high-stakes game where the true motivations remain obscured. One cannot forget that Donald Trump is no traditional dictator, nor a political liberal.

At his core, he is a dealmaker—driven by the pursuit of fame and profit. Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu knows this; Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to understand it, while Russian President Vladimir Putin is exploiting it. Chinese President Xi has structured it, while the rest of the leaders, particularly in Europe, are struggling to grasp it. To grasp Trump's approach to global affairs, one must abandon the reductive comparisons to tyrants like Stalin, Hitler, or Mussolini. Trump operates in a different sphere entirely, one that requires a certain mental flexibility to understand. He is not concerned with maintaining power for the sake of ideology or historical legacy; his concern is to make deals that secure material gain.

The world should not mistake him for a man of irrational impulses, for Trump understands the machinery of influence as few others do. His transactional nature is evidenced in his interactions with foreign powers, where his primary concern is leverage, not political principles. A prime example of this comes from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to the White House. When an Indian journalist posed a question regarding India's role in countering China, Trump's response was strikingly unconventional. Rather than fall into the trap of aligning with India against China, Trump instead spoke of bringing China, Russia and India together for mutual benefit. This pragmatic approach—concerned not with antagonising one party but rather with securing cooperation from all sides—highlights the difference between Trump's brand of leadership and that of conventional political figures who cling to rigid ideologies.

Trump's worldview is not shaped by traditional political theories; his primary motivation lies in extracting profit from every situation. In this sense, he is a modern-day merchant who sees international relations not as a matter of diplomacy, but as an opportunity for lucrative transactions. This is, after all, a man who, in his bestselling book *The Art of the Deal* (1987), writes, "Sometimes by losing a battle, you find a new way to win the war." This is not the rhetoric of a conventional politician; it is the language of a businessman who understands that in the grand game of power, winning often means losing a few battles along the way. Trump was notorious for cultivating a media presence that exaggerated his



wealth and success, as evidenced by the time he manipulated Forbes magazine into listing him as one of the wealthiest individuals, despite his financial situation not reflecting the claim. This is the same man who views international politics through the lens of economic opportunity, where every diplomatic interaction is an avenue for profit. History is replete with similar deals between empires and powerful states—arrangements that were often secretive, strategic and ultimately aimed at controlling the flow of resources and wealth.

Take, for instance, the Treaty of Kadesh in 1259 BCE, a diplomatic agreement between Egypt and the Hittite Empire. While the public version of the treaty touted peace and cooperation, hidden elements revealed that both empires carved up regions like Syria for their benefit, securing timber from the cedars of Lebanon and ensuring access to crucial trade routes. These covert arrangements were not only about ensuring control over vital natural resources.

The very fabric of ancient geopolitics was woven from such secretive deals, where military confrontations were often avoided in favour of securing wealth through backdoor agreements. In the late 19th century, European powers engaged in secretive deals to partition Africa and exploit its resources. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 is the most notorious example, where the European powers divided Africa without regard for its indigenous populations. This was not merely an exercise in territorial expansion; it was a calculated effort to control Africa's mineral-rich regions—such as the Congo, with its vast deposits of rubber, ivory, and later, uranium and cobalt.

These resources were not just crucial to the European economies—they were the lifeblood of the empires' military and industrial prowess. It is a tragic irony that while European powers publicly championed the benefits of their imperial ventures, the truth behind their actions was one of resource exploitation, where local populations were trampled in the pursuit of wealth. East Timor, in the late 20th century, is one of the blunt examples. Following the region's independence from Portugal in 1975, East Timor was invaded by Indonesia, with the tacit approval of Western powers, particularly Australia and the United States.

While these nations publicly condemned Indonesia's actions, they secretly supported its annexation in exchange for access to the Timor Sea's oil and gas reserves. The 1989 Timor Gap Treaty was signed behind closed doors, securing Australia's share of East Timor's undersea resources despite the ongoing political turmoil.

The exposure of these secret dealings years later revealed how, even in the post-colonial era, resource-rich nations were still subject to exploitation by global powers looking to maximise their profits at any cost. Now, as we return to the present-day conflict between Russia and Ukraine, we see similar patterns at play. It is no secret that the United States has provided substantial military 'aid' to Ukraine, while making American defence industries the most profitable companies from the war, consequently indebting Ukraine with heavy financial burdens. Zelensky, in his pursuit of securing Ukraine's future, has unwittingly become a puppet of Western interests, never considering the long-term consequences for his country.

Meanwhile, Russia, with its military operations focused on specific regions rich in minerals, continues to tighten its grip on strategic areas like Donetsk and Luhansk, which are abundant in coal, graphite, and other vital resources. As of February 2025, Russia controls approximately 18.6 per cent of Ukrainian territory, including these resource-rich regions.

It is no coincidence that these areas, crucial for energy production and manufacturing, are the focal point of Russia's military campaign. US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, during his first visit to Europe recently, declared that a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is unrealistic, and the Trump administration does not view NATO membership for Kyiv as a solution. On the other hand, President Putin, with his characteristic bluntness, recently remarked that had the 2020 US elections not been 'stolen,' Donald Trump would have won, and the war in Ukraine would never have begun.

This is realpolitik in action. Putin knows how to play the game, not just with Trump, but with any leader, as Angela Merkel aptly noted. Therefore, Trump and Putin could sign a secret deal on Ukrainian minerals, marking a crucial point in history. What is particularly striking is the growing divide between the political circles in Ukraine.

Zelensky's leadership is increasingly seen as compromised, with many wondering if his time is up. Trump, whose sharp criticisms of Zelensky have become more pointed, continues to offer a path to deal with the mineral wealth of Ukraine—one that may well align more with Russia's interests than those of the West.

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



THE WORLD SHOULD NOT MISTAKE HIM FOR A MAN OF IRRATIONAL IMPULSES, FOR TRUMP UNDERSTANDS THE MACHINERY OF INFLUENCE AS FEW OTHERS DO. HIS TRANSACTIONAL NATURE IS EVIDENCED IN HIS INTERACTIONS WITH FOREIGN POWERS, WHERE HIS PRIMARY CONCERN IS LEVERAGE, NOT POLITICAL PRINCIPLES.

Beyond the hype: Reclaiming authenticity in an AI-driven social media era

With audiences now questioning whether that viral image or breaking news is genuine or simply automated clickbait, brands are challenged to move beyond polished posts

Social media was once a game-changer for brands looking to engage with their audience. It gave businesses a direct line to customers, fostering real conversations and community building. But in the age of AI-driven content, that dynamic is shifting. From content to images to news, AI-generated material is so scarily real that audiences are beginning to question everything they see. Was that viral image doctored? Is that news article genuine or just AI-generated clickbait? This scepticism has led to a trust crisis—where audiences are unsure if they are interacting with real content or an automated illusion. Naturally, now the audiences are sharper, more discerning, and less

tolerant of inauthenticity. They can spot a robotic, soulless brand from a mile away. The real differentiator isn't just what a brand posts—it's how deeply it connects on a "human" level. In this landscape, it's no longer enough to create routine posts or polished campaigns alone.

To stand out, we must truly understand our audience, which makes the value of data immeasurable. But what truly matters now is how we use that data to create meaningful connections. While data and analytics provide valuable insights, they only tell part of the story. Brands that stay relevant don't just analyse past trends; they incorporate real-time learnings into their content strategy. By actively engaging in ongoing discussions and tapping into



TANYA MICHAEL

recent themes, they make their audience feel seen and heard today and now.

This real-time approach is possible by identifying channels where brands can interact directly with their audience—be it customer support, social media, or community forums. And that's where AI can play a role in making advertisers' lives easier. The key is blending human intuition

with AI efficiency for smarter, more personalised engagement.

I-powered tools can help brands process vast amounts of data while human teams extract the most valuable customer insights. Ultimately, mastering social media connections comes down to truly understanding your audience. In a digital world where trust and authenticity are in short supply, building genuine connections is more important than ever. That's why making your brand as human and audience-centric as possible is key to standing out and fostering real engagement. Here are a few tips to keep in mind.

1. **Make It Fun, Not Just Promotional**
People don't come to social media to be sold to; they



come to engage, learn, and be entertained. Successful brands create content that feels like a natural part of their audience's feed rather than a disruption. Amul uses meme-inspired, quirky posts to entertain users while subtly reinforcing brand recall.

2. **Inject Personality into Your Brand**
Voice Jargon and generic content don't belong on social

media. A distinct and consistent brand voice—whether witty, warm, or bold—helps brands resonate with their audience. Zomato, for example, balances humour with real-time engagement, making its Twitter presence feel friendly rather than a marketing channel.

3. **Making Users Your On-Ground Advocates**

The perfect example of this is the beauty and lifestyle space. Many brands are moving away from celebrity endorsements and instead leveraging customer reviews, user-generated content, and a balance of macro and micro-influencers. Real user demos and authentic experiences have proven to be more effective in building trust and driving engagement, helping even

newer brands compete with industry giants.

4. **Engage in Meaningful Conversations**

Social media isn't just about broadcasting; it's about engaging. Brands that actively respond to comments, DMs, and discussions create a sense of community. For instance, Myntra's Facebook group, Myntra Insiders, fosters a community where fashion enthusiasts discuss trends and share style tips—prioritising conversation over sales.

5. **Tailor Strategies to Your Audience's Platform**

Every brand has a primary audience, and understanding where they spend most of their time online is key to crafting an effective strategy. Instead of relying on a generic approach that can be applied

across all platforms, take the time to understand which platform your audience prefers and create a strategy that's tailored to it. Use the platform's features strategically to ensure maximum visibility and engagement. For example, on Instagram, Reels are crucial for visibility, while on Facebook, interactive posts and community-building are the focus.

By aligning your strategy with the platform's strengths, you'll drive better results and engage your audience more effectively. By focusing on meaningful connections and genuine engagement, brands can rise above the noise, earning trust and loyalty that goes beyond the digital space.

(The writer is Co-founder and Creative Head at Voynic Media; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Punjab Cabinet approves new excise policy

The Punjab Cabinet on Thursday approved a new excise policy for the year 2025-26, which aims to collect Rs 11,020 crore of revenue. The nod was given in a meeting of the council of ministers, chaired by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting here, Finance and Excise Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said his department would mobilise Rs 10,200 crore by the end of March this year as against the target of Rs 10,145 crore for 2024-25. The target of mobilising revenue to the tune of Rs 11,020 crore has been set for the financial year 2025-26. He said during the previous regimes, the revenue from the excise used to be Rs 6,100 crore. The allotment of liquor vends would be conducted through e-tendering under the new excise policy, Cheema said, adding that the quota for country-made liquor has been increased by three per cent. Cheema also informed that to further strengthen enforcement, new excise police stations will be set up and a committee has been formed in this regard. Under this policy, an approval has been given for setting up a new bottling plant, he said.



Augmont enters lab-grown diamond market

Augmont, a gold trading platform, has entered the lab-grown diamond market by launching a store under the brand 'Akoiroh', and aims to have 100 retail stores in the next three years, Director Ketan Kothari said on Thursday. The company is initially investing Rs 100 crore, anticipating a good demand in coming years, where aspirational consumers may opt for LGD (lab-grown diamond) instead of mined diamonds due to cost savings, he said. The company has opened its first Akoiroh store in Pune, Maharashtra and has plans to expand in other cities targeting aspirational young consumers across the markets looking for LGD, which are visually, chemically and thermally identical to mined natural diamonds. "Around 100 stores planned in the next 3 years of Akoiroh. The initial investment outlay is Rs 100 crore. Later, there will be a combination of franchisee stores along with company owned stores and funds will be added accordingly," said Kothari at a media round-table here.



House price index rises 3.1 pc in Q3: RBI data

All-India House Price Index (HPI) increased 3.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2024-25 as compared to 4.3 per cent growth in the preceding three months and 3.8 per cent growth in the year-ago period, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The RBI released its quarterly house price index for the December quarter of 2024-25 on Thursday, based on transaction-level data received from the registration authorities in 10 major cities. The cities are Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Jaipur, Kanpur, Kochi, Kolkata, Lucknow, and Mumbai. The RBI said the annual HPI growth varied widely across the cities - ranging from a high growth of 8.1 per cent (Kolkata) to 0.1 per cent (Kanpur). On a sequential (q-o-q) basis, all-India HPI increased by 0.4 per cent in Q3:2024-25. Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Kolkata, Chennai, Jaipur and Kochi recorded a sequential rise in house prices during the latest quarter.

India needs to ramp up bilateral ties for trade, investment: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India needs to ramp up its bilateral relations for trade and investment, as the world is witnessing a churn, and bilateralism seems to be the new catalyst tool.

Speaking at BS Manthan, the Finance Minister said these are very interesting yet challenging times and the government is making all efforts to make India move up the ladder and be an engine of global growth.

"Bilateralism is now taking the top of the agenda... It is for us to ramp up our bilateral relations with many countries, not just for trade, but also for investment, but also for strategic relations. So multilateralism, sort of, out, I'm still saying with a qualifying word 'sort of out', but bilateralism is very much your only catalytic tool that you can use," she said.

Observing that multilateral institutions are increasingly fading away, she said, every attempt to revive them and energize them is not having the desired result.

"So, where you have to address issues which affect more than your own country. You have no more forums left which can effectively deliver... multilateral institutions and their contributions probably are fading away, at least in the near future, till an attempt is



"Bilateralism is now taking the top of the agenda... It is for us to ramp up our bilateral relations with many countries, not just for trade, but also for investment, but also for strategic relations. So multilateralism, sort of, out, I'm still saying with a qualifying word 'sort of out', but bilateralism is very much your only catalytic tool that you can use," she said

made to revive them with that kind of energy... It's not going to happen in the next few years," she said.

Asserting that global trade is undergoing a complete reset, she said, "the terms and references with which all of us played trade, with some kind of an anchor in the World Trade Organization are no longer available."

There is no Most Favoured Nation (MFN) concept, she said, adding, every country wants to be treated special, and every country wants to be sure that special treatment that they get is not by default.

"So if the WTO is getting weakened or multilateral institutions are not being effective... bilateral arrangements are going to be the order of the day in terms of trade," she said.

Sensing the movement toward a new world, India has initiated bilateral trade talks with many nations including the UK and is planning a bilateral trade agreement with the US. India is also in discussion with the 27-nation grouping - the European Union, for a free trade pact.

In the new global order, she said, India needs to ramp up its bilateral relations for trade, investment and boosting strategic relations.

With its technology and talent pool, the country can act as the engine of global growth in a new world order, she said.

"I think these are very interesting yet challenging times... India has to make a meaningful contribution to the global reset, as much as continuous-

ly make all the efforts to make India move up the ladder, both in terms of per capita income, and also in terms of a business destination, where talent can move, investors can move for the global good... we can be the engine of the global growth," she said.

Talking about reforms, Sitharaman said, it is something which the government will continue to do in various areas including debt management and maintaining fiscal prudence.

"Reform cannot be just an agenda only of the union government, it has to be taken up seriously by every state government... I would want a competition among states, a healthy one, to say my economy is far better than the others," she said.

NCLAT sets aside insolvency proceedings against Coffee Day Enterprises

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Thursday set aside the insolvency proceedings against Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd (CDEL), which owns the Cafe Coffee Day chain.

A two-member NCLAT bench of Chennai bench comprising justices Sharad Kumar Sharma and Jatindranath Swain set aside an earlier order passed by the Bengaluru bench of the National Company Law Tribunal.

The latest order was pronounced in the open court and a detailed order is still awaited.

CDEL is the parent company of Coffee Day Group which operates the Cafe Coffee Day chain of coffee houses. It also owns and operates a resort, renders consultancy services and is engaged in the sale and purchase of coffee beans.

Last week, insolvency pro-

ceedings against CDEL were resumed as the appellate tribunal NCLAT could not pass the order within the specified deadline of February 21, set by the Supreme Court.

Earlier on August 8 last year, the Bengaluru bench of the NCLAT (National Company Law Tribunal) admitted the plea filed by IDBI Trusteeship Services Ltd (IDBITS) claiming a default of Rs 228.45 crore and appointed an interim resolution professional to take care of the operation of the debt-ridden company.

The suspended board immediately challenged the order before the appellate tribunal NCLAT, which on August 14, 2024, stayed the insolvency proceedings initiated against CDEL.

This NCLAT order was challenged by IDBITS before the Supreme Court, which had on January 31, 2025 directed the Chennai bench of NCLAT to dispose of the appeal before February 21, 2025.

Gold tumbles Rs 1,150 to Rs 88,200 per 10 gm

Silver plunges Rs 1,000 amid weak global cues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices tumbled by Rs 1,150 to Rs 88,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, tracking a bearish trend in global markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also slumped by Rs 1,150 to Rs 87,800 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,950 per 10 grams.

Silver prices tumbled by Rs 1,000 to Rs 98,500 per kg from the last close of Rs 99,500 per kg. Bullion markets were closed on Wednesday for Mahashivratri.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for April delivery declined Rs 554 to Rs 85,320 per 10 grams.

"Gold prices traded weak as a sell-off was witnessed in MCX, where gold saw a decline touching Rs 85,000.



Further weakness may emerge if MCX gold breaches Rs 84,800," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. Market participants will closely watch the Core PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditures) Price Index data on Friday for further cues, Trivedi added.

In the overseas markets, Comex gold futures for April delivery fell by USD 23.10 per ounce or 0.79 per cent to USD 2,907.50 per ounce.

Also, spot gold slipped below the USD 2,900-mark as

'One Nation One Port' to expand port footprint

Minister Sonowal launches consortium

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday launched a consortium consisting of India Ports Global, Sagar Mala Development Company and India Port Rail and Ropeway Corporation to expand their maritime footprint and strengthen supply chains, among others.

In addition to this, Sonowal, who is the Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, also rolled out a slew of other initiatives including 'One Nation-One Port Process (ONOP)' to standardise and streamline operations across India's major ports, the Logistics Port Performance Index (LPPPI) Sagar Ankanal for FY 2023-24 and MAITRI (Master Application for International Trade and Regulatory Interface) APP during a post-Budget industry stakeholders meeting here.

Along with this, he also launched the National Centre of Excellence in Green Port and Shipping (NCoEGPS) website.

"India's Blue Economy is not just about ships and ports - it's about jobs, trade, sustainability, and economic growth. There is immense potential, and we are committed to ensuring that you have the right policies, the right financing, and the right

environment to thrive," the minister said.

He said, "We are not just aiming to be a top 10 shipbuilding nation by 2030, we are aiming to create an ecosystem that is world-class, efficient, and future-ready."

By developing robust port infrastructure, the Bharat Global Ports Consortium initiative will streamline logistics, strengthen supply chains, and support the 'Make in India' initiative by boosting exports, Sonowal said.



Bringing together the three different entities - IPGL, which is into ports operation, (operations), SDCL (finance), and IPRCL (infrastructure development), the consortium will drive port expansion, operations, and financing to position India as a key player in international trade and logistics, the Minister said.

He said that by focusing on efficiency, innovation, and global collaboration, the consortium aims to improve trade connectivity and enhance India's economic footprint.

LIC gets GST demand notice of Rs 479.88 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Thursday said it has received a demand notice of Rs 479.88 crore for short payment of Goods and Services Tax (GST) for 2020-21.

The company has received a communi cation/demand order for interest and penalty for Maharashtra on February 27 from Deputy Commissioner of State Tax, Mumbai, LIC said in a regulatory filing.

The demand notice pertains to wrong availment and short reversal of Input Tax Credit (ITC). Interest on late payments, short payment of tax liability, it said.

The order is appealable before the Joint Commissioner of State tax (Appeals), Mumbai, it said.

The financial impact of the demand is to the extent of the GST (Rs 242.23 crore), Interest (Rs 213.43 crore) and Penalty (Rs 24.22 crore), it said, adding, there is no material impact on financials, operations or other activities of the corporation.

'Business leaders prioritise AI adoption, but talent gap looms'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Generative AI has rapidly transitioned from a mere buzzword to a critical business imperative for Indian organisations, with most business leaders in India prioritising AI adoption, says a report.

However, a significant challenge remains: finding professionals with the right AI and related skills to unlock the technology's full potential, a report by professional networking platform LinkedIn has revealed.

"Around 54 per cent of HR professionals in India report that only half, or fewer, of the

job applications they receive meet all required and preferred qualifications. Finding candidates with the right technical (61 per cent) and soft skills (57 per cent) remains their biggest hiring challenge.

"The hardest-to-find skills in India include technical/IT skills such as software development, engineering (44 per cent), AI skills (34 per cent) and soft skills like communication and problem-solving (33 per cent)," the report said.

This scarcity of qualified candidates is forcing companies to become increasingly selective in their hiring processes.

According to the report,

companies are exercising 'selective hiring' in 2025 with more than half of HR professionals in India saying they would only consider reaching out to (55 per cent) and hiring (54 per cent) of candidates who meet 80 per cent or more of job qualifications.

India is LinkedIn's second largest market in terms of membership, growing more than 20 per cent year-on-year. LinkedIn has over 150 million members in India.

Ruchee Anand, India Country Head, of Talent & Learning Solutions at LinkedIn, emphasised the critical need for a skills-first approach to hiring.

"AI is reshaping how we hire and develop talent, but the real unlock isn't just adopting AI -- it's making it work for the business. Too often, companies pour resources into AI tools without the right talent to unlock their full potential, turning a game-changing opportunity into a missed one."

"To break this cycle, businesses need to approach hiring with a skills-first mindset -- because while AI will be the tool that unlocks innovation, it's human skills like creativity, communication, and collaboration that will help companies truly stay ahead of change," she said.

'AI in healthcare likely to contribute \$30 bn to GDP'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) in healthcare is projected to contribute USD 25-30 billion to India's GDP by 2025, enhancing accessibility, diagnostics, and treatment outcomes, according to a report by Deloitte.

Government-backed initiatives like the IndiaAI Mission and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, are setting the stage for a digitally empowered healthcare ecosystem, ensuring responsible AI integration and enhanced data security, it noted.

As per the report -- "Digital Healthcare - Top 10 Myths Debunked Digital Health & AI", AI adoption in healthcare has surged past 40 per cent, surpassing sectors such as FMCG (30 per cent) and manufacturing (25 per cent).

Deloitte India Life Sciences and Health Care Industry Leader Joydeep Ghosh noted that India's digital healthcare ecosystem is rapidly advancing, with AI-powered diagnostics, MedTech innovations and digital health records transforming patient care.

India's surgical consumables and disposables exports



reached USD 1.6 billion in FY 2022-23, showcasing its growing capabilities and presence in the global healthcare market, he added.

"However, to realise its full potential, the sector must overcome challenges such as regulatory alignment, workforce training and infrastructure

limitations. "With targeted investments and focused policy advancements, India can become a global leader in AI-powered healthcare, elevating patient outcomes and accessibility," Ghosh stated.

The report noted that despite advancements, the adoption of AI in healthcare is progressing more slowly than in banking and financial services.

This is largely due to concerns about data security, regulatory fragmentation and limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, it added.

Additionally, the shortage of

professionals trained in AI further complicates the seamless integration of these technologies into clinical workflows, the report said. While India has become a net exporter of surgical consumables, it still relies on imports for high-tech medical equipment, underscoring the need for a stronger domestic manufacturing base, it said.

Strategic investments in training, infrastructure and policy reforms can accelerate AI adoption, paving the way for technologically advanced and self-reliant healthcare system, it added.

Moderation in inflation opens up more policy space for RBI: NCAER

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moderation in inflation to five-month low of 4.3 per cent in January has provided RBI more space to cut interest rate in policy meet, according to the monthly economic review by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER).

Earlier this month, RBI slashed policy repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent.

The next monetary policy committee meeting is to be held in April. Even in the face of global headwinds, some of the high-frequency indicators of the Indian economy have turned more benign and the nascent turnaround is evident in indicators like Purchasing Managers' Index for manufacturing, GST collections and non-EV and EV sales, it said.

PMI for manufacturing

increased to 57.7 in January, signalling expansion, while PMI for services remained at an elevated level of 56.5.

The economic think tank added that GST collections, gross and net, achieved robust double-digit growth of 12.3 per cent and 10.9 per cent, respectively in January 2025, as compared to subdued a growth of 7.3 per cent and 3.3 per cent in December 2024.

"Moderation in inflation (headline inflation to 4.3 per cent) has opened up more policy space. The agriculture sector is also exhibiting much-needed resilience, which bodes well for both inflation control and rural push to the economy," NCAER Director General Poonam Gupta said.

Another factor that needs to be monitored is the continued outflow of FII flows, she said.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
NOTIFICATION
 REG. No. 61/EEIC/14/GHMC/K2/2024-25 Dt: 27-02-2025
 Inviting tenders for "Upgradation/ Renovation of existing facilities at Victoria Play Ground, Hyderabad under EE, Div-14, GHMC." Tender Notification/Bid calling date: 28.02.2025, Bid Submission Due date and time: 07.03.2025 @ 03:30 PM on e-Procurement portal (tender.telangana.gov.in). Opening of the Prequalification & Technical bids: 07.03.2025 @ 03:30 PM. Therefore the eligible agencies may submit their bid during above period with all necessary details. Sd/- Executive Engineer, R.O.No: 10784-PPCL/ADVT/110224-25, Dt: 27-02-2025
 Circle - 14, GHMC.

EMPOWERING INDIA'S ATHLETES!

PNSHYDERABAD

For more than 20 years, a trailblazing leader has been writing an incredible success story in the field of sports education in India. The Institute of Sports Science & Technology (ISST) in Pune has rapidly become India's leading center for sports and fitness education because of the innovative leadership of its founder and director, Dr. Vipul Lunawat. He, who holds a Ph.D. in Sports Management and has over 20 years of distinguished experience, has been the driving force behind ISST's unique programs, helping players, managers and sports support staff reach their full potential. He is an accomplished sports administrator, entrepreneur and certified coach who has instructed more than 3,000 children, represented India in international competitions and won multiple national honours. Under his inspiring direction, it has transformed sports education in India and produced a new generation of athletes who are becoming well-known throughout the world! Due to his outstanding qualifications, love of sports and dedication to quality, he has established himself as a preeminent expert in Indian sports education. A dynamic network of academics, athletes and professionals who share his vision for revolutionising India's sports ecosystem has been established as a result of his commitment to promoting a culture of innovation, inclusivity and excellence. It is the ideal starting point for your athletic career because of its cutting-edge programs, knowledgeable professors and dedication to quality.

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW:

When you switched from sports to education and enterprise, what was the most important turning point?

I found it somewhat challenging to balance my studies with competing as a full-time athlete. However, sports are so amazing that they teach you the most important life lessons. I've learned to work hard, never give up and most importantly, be resilient thanks to sports. Being a full-time athlete taught me how to efficiently manage my time so that I could concentrate on my schoolwork as well. When I applied to a few prestigious universities and institutes to pursue a master's degree in sports management, it was a turning point in my transition from an athlete to an educational entrepreneur. While I was doing research for my higher education studies at some of the world's best colleges, I had the notion to launch the first sports management program in India. I discovered that the majority of the concepts covered in these programs were comparable to those covered in the MBA degree I was pursuing. With my marketing master's degree and my understanding of sports from the viewpoints of coaches and athletes, along with the help of my mother Ujwala Lunawat and mentor Dr. P. C. Shejwalkar, we made the decision to start India's first sports management program in 2009 at the Institute of Sports Science & Technology in Pune.

What difficulties did you encounter in establishing ISST?

India's first sports education institute, it was founded with the goal of enhancing Indian sports and giving players and students the chance to pursue careers in sports while participating in them. In a tiny space in my garage, I launched ISST, a start-up project. At first, I had only my parents' and my mentor Shejwalkar sir's support—no financial backing, no investment and no prior experience managing an educational business. I was the founder, the director, the salesperson, the office boy and many other positions throughout the first few years of the company's existence. I recall talking to a number of sports gurus about this notion and many of them told me to give up because it would never work. Nobody could have predicted that this ambitious project would grow into such a distinctive business that offers different sports fans the chance to pursue careers in sports. Since the beginning, it has been a bootstrapped firm and there have been numerous times when I've considered quitting since managing the finances has been difficult. However, just as sports teach us to never give up, I kept up the good work and now we are among India's leading providers of sports instruction.

Based on your vast experience as a manager and coach, what are the most important qualities that you think aspiring athletes and sports professionals require?

To succeed in their sport, many athletes put forth a lot of

effort, blood, sweat, heart and soul. Due to the growth of sports, many athletes now achieve immediate financial success after winning medals at major competitions, championships, or events. Their social media following grows rapidly, they receive unexpected media exposure, advertisers want them to promote their brands and they have a sizable fan base. This fame and glory frequently diverts them from their goals for their athletic careers, leading them to make poor choices and say inappropriate things that could land them in legal hot water. Athletes are trained to improve their skills via practice and dedication. Athletes are trained to win; while some elite athletes are able to cope with setbacks, many are not taught how to maintain the success and notoriety they attain when at the top. In essence, sports management programs train students how to deal with all of these problems. These athletes may manage their jobs more easily and make growth investments even after their athletic careers are done if they have knowledge of good communication techniques, financial management, marketing, public relations and legal issues, among other things.

As an athlete and coach who has competed internationally for India, what structural or cultural adjustments do you think the country should do to raise its profile in international sports?

I firmly think that India's sports governance system has to undergo significant transformation. Even after all these years, India continues to suffer from inadequate sports governance, which has prevented many excellent sports organisations from making an impact on the global scene. Politicians and those with vested interests occupy many high positions in many sports federations and organisations. Top nations with solid administration through their national sports federations are typically the ones who perform well in international competitions. A successful sports organisation must have accountability, transparency, a strong governance structure and a long-term vision. These elements are mostly lacking in Indian sports, with the exception of a small number of organisations that have had success with its athletes abroad. Regarding culture, it is true that India and other major sports-playing nations like Australia, China, or the US have quite different perspectives on sports. While we still struggle to

provide students with an hour of athletics per day in schools, sports are a way of life in these countries. Therefore, it is crucial to have a strong sports culture that is ingrained in the nation's way of life in order to produce winners who will triumph at international competitions and bring honours home. It is urgently necessary to concentrate on grassroots sport development by increasing the number of sporting events and implementing a systematic program for identifying talent in each discipline.

How have sports professionals' needs changed, in your perspective?

I believe that technology has significantly changed the nature of sport during the past 20 years. In order to enhance athlete performance and examine how sports are seen and played, we must take into account the most recent developments in the field as well as the new technology being utilised at sporting events! Today's educational institutions must always be alert to how technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR) and others can alter the way people watch sports. More employment opportunities will arise as sports participation rises and as more opportunities arise, more positions for sports professionals will become available. Educational institutions must be prepared to investigate and impart the skill sets needed for these demanding new positions.

How can you modify your coaching techniques to motivate every person, regardless of where they are coming from?

A coach who can help pupils who struggle with mental blockages or who are not particularly engaged in sports or physical exercise is more successful than one who has a lot of medal-winning athletes. To deal with elite athletes and instruct a 3-year-old child, a coach needs to possess a variety of skills. Enjoying the game and the process is what matters most in sports. To improve in sports, a good coach should instill in his or her athletes a passion for the routine rather than viewing it as a challenging chore. An athlete doesn't need to train hard to get better once they discover how much they like the sport; instead, progress occurs naturally. When working with young athletes, gamification is a crucial coaching tool for grassroots sport development. It is equally successful when working with elite athletes.

How do you see this market developing in India given the rising popularity of adventure sports?

In the west, adventure sports are quite popular, but in India, they are viewed more as entertainment and leisure. Adventure sports are undoubtedly gaining popularity in India, but it will take some time before they become recognised as professional sports in which one may pursue a career. Through its many initiatives, it hopes to produce knowledgeable, seasoned experts who will lead Indian sports in the future and contribute to the growth of specialised sports to increase chances for adventure sports enthusiasts.

How has your business sense affected your approach to managing a sports institute as a professional qualified by IIM Ahmedabad?

Being a business owner requires full-time work. Prior to enrolling in the IIM Ahmedabad Young Entrepreneurs Program, I managed my company as an individual who was active in every step of the procedure. Delegating work, freeing up time for critical activities and automating procedures were the topics of our first session at IIM A. In order to put productivity at the forefront of development, we were instructed to establish procedures for every organisational process. Making effective use of the resources available to you is crucial while operating a self-funded business. Striking a balance between participation in daily operations and business development is crucial. I applied a variety of business management skills, such as marketing, financial management, business strategy and human resource management, which enabled me to quickly expand our institute's activities. In order to introduce a professional approach to our company, we have always aimed to operate this business as a corporate entity.

In the near future, how can technological advancements impact coaching and athlete development?

The application of technology has elevated sports science to a new level and significantly altered athletic performance. In today's professional sports, physical conditioning is crucial. Technology is practically used in every way to help sportsmen perform better. Numerous technologies, sensors and devices are employed to evaluate every one of these crucial elements of sports performance, from evaluation to analysis, performance improvement to injury recovery. The development of AI has significantly disrupted the tech sector today. AI applications that may be examined in the near future include performance analysis and sports program design. Sports-specific training may now be done from a different angle thanks to the use of technologies like AR and VR. Athletes of different skill levels can be managed and performance development tracked using a variety of coaching tools. Technology use will undoubtedly play a significant role in improving sports performance and identifying talent to win big international tournaments.

'Before I knew it, I started getting more calls for writing than for singing'

Siddhant Kaushal, the man behind some of Bollywood's most memorable lyrics, is currently riding high on the success of *Dhoom Dhaam*, where he penned the entire album and *Deva*, for which he crafted an intense, high-energy track. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, the versatile lyricist opens up about his unexpected journey from aspiring singer to sought-after songwriter, the challenges of writing across genres and the creative freedom that fuels his work

TEJAL SINHA
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In an industry dominated by larger-than-life personalities, Siddhant Kaushal has quietly built a reputation as one of Bollywood's most versatile and impactful lyricists. A silent performer Siddhant, his words have given voice to countless emotions across genres, seamlessly fitting into the narratives of films, independent music, and brand campaigns.

In an era where lyricists often go unnoticed, his words breathe life into melodies, seamlessly blending storytelling with rhythm. With a filmography that includes *Kill*, *Tumhari Sulu*, *Drive*, *Friday Night Plan*, *Loop Lapeta*, *Badla*, *Bob Biswas*, *Love Hostel*, *Jai Mummy Di*, *Darbaan* and *Khoobsurat*, he has quietly carved a niche for himself, working with some of the biggest production houses like Dharma Productions, Excel Entertainment, Red Chillies, Balaji, Anil Kapoor Films and T-Series. His versatility extends beyond cinema—he has penned independent hits such as *Guzar Jayega* (ft. Amitabh Bachchan), dance numbers like *Haaye Oye* and *Kehndi Haan Kehndi Naa*, as well as soulful ballads like *Piharva* and *Soch Ke*. Now, with *Dhoom Dhaam*, starring Pratik Gandhi and Yami Gautam, Siddhant takes on the rare challenge of writing an entire album, showcasing his range and deep understanding of cinema.

But songwriting wasn't always the plan. His journey began with a different dream—singing. Born and raised in Jalandhar, Punjab, with no formal training in writing, he initially moved to Mumbai in 2012 to pursue a career as a singer. "I had never written before. I didn't have any background in poetry or lyric writing," he admits. Coming from a boarding school education and a city where music was not a mainstream career option, he found himself navigating an unfamiliar world.

"In my first two years in Mumbai, I was just trying to find my footing—meeting composers, visiting studios and sending out my demos. I even started doing some jingles," he recalls. Then, a chance encounter changed everything. "I met a composer, who called me to sing a track. But when I got there, I realised the tune did-

n't have any lyrics. He casually asked me to write some dummy lyrics just for the rhythm." What followed was a moment of mixed emotions—within ten days, he got a call saying his lyrics had been approved, but his voice had been rejected. "That was the turning point. Before I knew it, I started getting more calls for writing than for singing."

Despite this unexpected shift, he faced his fair share of challenges. "Every artist experiences imposter syndrome at some point. I had no poetic background, so initially, I struggled with finding my own voice. I didn't want writing to feel forced—it had to come naturally. It took time to develop my style and understand my strengths."

His ability to adapt and explore different musical styles has been key to his success. *Dhoom Dhaam*, for instance, required him to write across various genres. "More than me, it was the situations in the film that defined the identity of each song. There's a romantic track, a wedding song, and a situational number called *Haseeno*—each one demanded a different approach. My job was to ensure that the lyrics seamlessly fit into the narrative and emotions of the film."

The opportunity to write the entire album for *Dhoom Dhaam* came through Shor Police, the music duo Clinton Cerejo and Bianca Gomes. "I was in my studio when Clinton called, saying he wanted me to speak to someone. I had no idea who it was until the call connected and I realised it was the director. Initially, I was brought on board for just one song—*How Are You*—but after working closely with the team, I was entrusted with the entire album." Writing *How Are You* turned out to be one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences for Siddhant. "It was the first song we cracked and it took multiple sessions to get it right. Since it was my first collaboration with this team, there was an initial phase of understanding each other's sensibilities. But once we got into the flow, everything fell into place." Another song, *Silsila*, holds special memories for him. "Some songs just stay with you and *Silsila* is one of them."

His ability to write across genres isn't something he consciously thinks about. "I don't actively adapt my style—it's the tune that drives me. Since I come from a singing background and have a deep love for classical music, I have an emotional connection to melodies. That naturally translates into my writing."

Before *Dhoom Dhaam*, he also worked on *Deva*, one of the most intense action films of the year. "The track I wrote for *Deva* was particularly exciting because the makers gave me complete creative freedom. They simply narrated the situation and told me to go crazy with it. There were no restrictions—I just had to follow the meter and the essence of the scene. That kind of trust is rare and it makes the process so much more enjoyable."

With multiple projects lined up, Siddhant remains tight-lipped about his upcoming work due to the agreements. However, he hints at exciting collaborations, including independent singles and film projects set to release in the coming months. "There's a lot happening, and I can't wait to share it when the time is right." For someone who stumbled into songwriting by accident, Siddhant Kaushal has not only embraced his craft but mastered it, proving that sometimes, destiny has bigger plans than we imagine.



I don't actively adapt my style—it's the tune that drives me. Since I come from a singing background and have a deep love for classical music, I have an emotional connection to melodies



THE LEARNING CURVE

Helping parents stay updated in their child's education

In today's fast, technology-driven world, the educational landscape is evolving quickly.

The modern curriculum is more comprehensive and complex than ever, and parents often struggle to keep up. This phenomenon is known as the "knowledge gap" and it can significantly impact a child's academic performance and overall learning experience. As a parent, have you ever felt like you're struggling to keep up with your child's education? The modern curriculum is constantly evolving, and it can be daunting to stay informed about the latest developments in your child's learning journey.

So, how can parents bridge this knowledge gap?

Stay involved in your child's education

Attend parent-teacher meetings, review your child's assignments and projects, and engage in conversations about their learning experiences. This will help you understand what your child is studying and how you can support their learning.

Leverage digital resources

Utilise online platforms, educational apps and websites that provide interactive learning experiences for children. These resources can help you stay updated on the latest curriculum developments and provide your child with engaging learning opportunities.

Encourage curiosity and exploration

Encourage your child to love learning by asking questions, exploring their interests and thinking critically. This will help them develop essential skills for



lifelong learning and stay motivated to learn.

Seek support from teachers and educators

Don't be afraid to ask teachers and educators for guidance on how to support your child's learning. They can provide valuable insights into the curriculum and offer suggestions for how you can reinforce learning at home.

Embrace lifelong learning

Recognize that learning is a lifelong process and it's essential to model a love of learning for your child. Pursue your interests, take online courses and engage in activities that challenge you and promote personal growth.

Create a learning environment

Establish a dedicated learning space in your home that is quiet, comfortable and free from distractions. Ensure that this space is equipped with the

necessary resources and tools to support your child's learning, such as textbooks, educational software and internet access. By creating a learning-conducive environment, you can help your child develop good study habits and a positive attitude toward learning.

Bridging the knowledge gap requires a proactive and engaged approach to parenting. By staying involved in your child's education, tapping into digital resources, encouraging curiosity and exploration, seeking support from teachers and educators and embracing lifelong learning. As a parent, you have the power to positively impact your child's educational journey. Don't let the knowledge gap hold you back—take the first step today and start bridging the gap between you and your child's education.

(The author, Manish Rastogi, is the CEO, of Zee Learn Ltd.)

what's brewing?



Sushimta



Matthew Partridge



Kathrin Misera



Lakshmi



Chandana Chakraborty

Srishti Art Gallery celebrated its 25th anniversary with an international exhibition, Topographies of Tents, Terracotta and Time. In collaboration with Goethe-Zentrum and curated by Matthew Partridge, the exhibition showcased captivating works by artists Arnaldo Drés González, Sudhakar Chippa and Swen Kahlert. The event was a wonderful opportunity to appreciate art and creativity at the gallery in Hyderabad, marking a significant milestone for Srishti Art Gallery.



Chippa Sudhakar



Swen Kahlert



Priya



Sakhina



Ramu



Nidhi

PARTY

Photos by - SV Chary

Rs. 10 cr donation to boost cancer research at BIACH&RI

Dr. Raghavendra Prasad and Kalyani, an NRI couple residing in the USA, have generously donated Rs.10 crores to Basavatarakam Indo American Cancer Hospital & Research Institute (BIACH&RI) in Hyderabad to establish an Advanced Cancer Research Centre. This donation will enable the hospital to expand its research wing, Indo American Cancer Research Organisation (IACRO) and set up a state-of-the-art cancer research facility with advanced equipment. As part of this initiative, IACRO will use the funds to purchase the latest research equipment and recruit qualified staff. The new research center will be named after Kalyani Prasad in honour of her contribution. The first installment of the donation, amounting to Rs. 5 Crores, was officially handed over to actor Nandamuri Balakrishna during a special function held at the BIACH&RI premises. This donation will significantly enhance the hospital's focus on conducting advanced cancer research, contributing to the fight against cancer.

Eco Run on March 2

The Mindspace Eco Run on March 2 at Mindspace Madhapur features 21KM, 10KM and 5KM races. Promoting sustainability with eco-friendly kits and waste management, the event blends fitness with environmental responsibility. Actors Abhinav Gomatam and Chandini Chowdary will flag off the run. Register easily with online or on-site options and be part of this run that's as great for your health as it is for the planet.

National platform for students to ideate

Vivo, the innovative global smartphone brand announced the tremendous response to the third edition of 'vivo Ignite', which has received over 37,000 registrations from 9,000 schools across more than 660 districts, covering over 85% of India's total districts. Among the 112 aspirational districts defined by NITI Aayog, 80 districts have participated, highlighting the initiative's deep reach and impact in empowering young innovators and providing them with opportunities to participate in such platforms across India. Expressing excitement over the overwhelming response, Geelaj Channana, Head of Corporate Strategy at vivo India, said, "The response to the third edition of vivo Ignite: T&I Initiative is a powerful reflection of the growing spirit of innovation among young minds in India. In just three years, we have seen participation soar—from 3,000+ registrations and 1,100+ submissions in the first edition to over 37,000 registrations and more than 5,600 submissions this year. Students from grades 8-12 submitted over 5,600 innovative project ideas as individual or group entries under the 'Tech for Good' theme, showcasing their problem-solving skills and commitment to social impact, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). The overwhelming participation highlights the creativity and passion for technology among India's youth. Notably, this year's participation has doubled compared to last year, significantly expanding the initiative's reach and impact."



The much-awaited annual Jashn-e-Haleem festival by Paradise has officially begun, adding to the festive spirit in Hyderabad. Starting today, Hyderabadis and food lovers across India can relish the signature Paradise Haleem, available at all Paradise outlets pan-India for dine-in, takeaway, and home delivery. This year, the festival brings back its exotic Mutton and Chicken Haleem, made with 29 premium ingredients and 10% pure ghee, offering a rich and authentic experience. The Mutton Haleem is priced at Rs 299, while Chicken Haleem is available for Rs 235. Notably, last year, these were priced at Rs 269 and Rs 219, respectively, reflecting a slight increase.

Numerous Motors has introduced its multi-utility e-scooter, the Diplos Max, in Hyderabad. Designed to revolutionize clean mobility, the Diplos Max marks the company's entry into the personal mobility segment under its flagship Diplos platform. The company has successfully completed India's largest-ever pilot test, covering over 13.9 million kilometers, a first for any Indian OEM.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



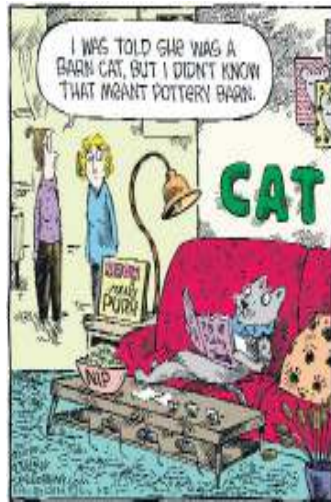
GARFIELD



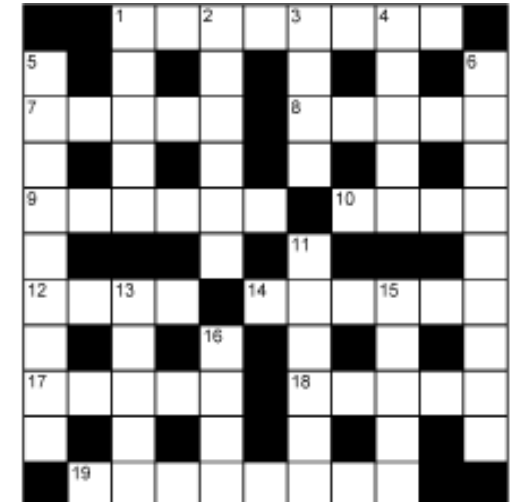
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

6				4				
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2				4		6	5	
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Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Motion
- A spicy Indian food dish
- Similar
- Quit your job
- At this place
- Remedy
- Mother or father
- Of greater age
- A fruit with pips
- A place for sick or injured people
- Loud sounds
- A figure in a field to frighten birds
- One third of fifty-one
- With nobody in it
- A communication device
- Kick out of school
- Catch a mouse with this

DOWN

- Dirty stains
- A long journey by sea or in space
- Animal flesh for eating



GINGER MEGGS



Guard film shot entirely in Australia: Viraj Reddy



I'VE ALSO PREPARED VERSIONS FOR OTT PLATFORMS IN ALL LANGUAGES



Debutant Viraj Reddy is making his debut this Friday with the film *Guard*, which also stars Mimi Leonard and Shilpa Balakrishna in the lead roles, with Jaga Peddi as the director. Viraj Reddy, originally from Nizamabad, shared that his father is a farmer. "I went to Australia to study and later settled there," said Viraj Reddy. He mentioned that he has been passionate about cinema since childhood, which led him to pursue acting at an acting school in Australia. "Since I stayed in Australia, this movie was entirely shot there. All the actors trained properly before we began the shoot," Viraj explained. He further revealed that he has known director Jaga Peddi for a long time and when it was time to make a film, he asked Jaga to direct it.

Despite being filmed in Australia, Viraj Reddy assured that the film has a distinct Telugu vibe, with an added Australian flavour. "The story revolves around the life of a security guard in Australia. In India, the life of a security guard is different, but in Australia, a security guard can own a BMW car," he shared.

Viraj further stated that he has invested all his money in this film and decided to produce it on his own. "I had said earlier that I wanted to release this film independently," he added. The film, which is set to release this Friday, combines elements of horror, action, comedy and revenge. Viraj believes that his role in the horror genre will help him connect with the audience.

Notably, Viraj's father is a farmer, and the teaser of the film was even released by a farmer. "The promotional videos are getting a good response. Although the film was entirely shot in Australia, all post-production work was done in India. The action sequences are made in the Chinese style," he revealed.

Guard is releasing in Telugu, and if successful, Viraj plans to release it in other languages as well. "I've also prepared versions for OTT platforms in all languages," he said, adding that he's already working on another film.



Kannappa teaser unveiled in Mumbai

The much-awaited Pan-Indian mythological film *Kannappa* unveiled its teaser in Mumbai on Thursday. Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar, along with actor and producer Vishnu Manchu, attended the event, where the teaser was showcased to the media. Starting March 1, the teaser will be released on public platforms. Akshay Kumar, Vishnu Manchu, director Mukesh Kumar Singh and key members of the cast and crew celebrated the event. The teaser, which has already generated significant buzz, offers a glimpse of a historical narrative of devotion, sacrifice, and grandeur.

The film, directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh and produced by M Mohan Babu, aims to take audiences on a visual and emotional journey by blending traditional sto-

rytelling with modern filmmaking techniques. "At first, I wasn't sure, but Vishnu's unwavering belief that I was the right person to bring Lord Shiva to life on the big screen in Indian cinema truly convinced me. The story is powerful, deeply moving, and the film has turned out to be a visual masterpiece. I'm honored to be part of this incredible journey," said Akshay Kumar about his role in the film.

Vishnu Manchu, who plays the title role of *Kannappa*, shared his personal connection to the story: "This film is not just a project for me; it's a personal journey. I'm currently visiting all the Jyotirlingas across India, and I've felt a deep, spiritual bond with the story of *Kannappa*. It's a tale of unwavering faith and sacrifice that touches the soul." The film is set to release worldwide on April 25.

Dulquer Salmaan makes history with *Lucky Baskhar*

Some films perform well in theaters and continue to do well when released on OTT platforms, but Dulquer Salmaan's latest film *Lucky Baskhar* is a standout example. The film was a hit in theaters and has since achieved remarkable success on Netflix, trending for an unprecedented 13 consecutive weeks.

This record-breaking achievement makes *Lucky Baskhar* the first South Indian film to trend on Netflix for 13 consecutive weeks. Directed by Venky Atluri and produced by Naga Vamsi S and Sai Soujanya, the film's gripping storyline and standout performances have been widely praised. Dulquer Salmaan delivers one of his finest performances as Baskhar, bringing both depth and charisma to a story that resonates with audiences across generations. In its first week, the film trended at number one on Netflix's Top 10 in over 15 countries and held the number two spot globally for two weeks, with an impressive 17.8 billion minutes viewed.



Vicky Kaushal's *Chhaava* arrives in Telugu on March 7

The historical epic *Chhaava*, starring Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna, has been a massive box-office success in Hindi, earning widespread acclaim, particularly for Vicky's powerful performance. Directed by Laxman Utekar, the film has now grossed over Rs 400 crore worldwide. Due to overwhelming demand from Telugu audiences, the film is set to release in Telugu on March 7, with Allu Aravind's Geetha Arts Distributions handling its release. The makers revealed that they have been receiving numerous requests from Telugu audiences to bring *Chhaava* to the region, as the film has generated immense buzz following its Hindi success.

Produced by Dinesh Vijan's Maddock

Films, the film's Telugu distributors are also banking on Rashmika Mandanna's popularity in the region as a key factor for its success.

Interestingly, *Chhaava* was originally scheduled for a December release but was later pushed to February 14. During that time, the makers of *Pushpa 2* were reportedly concerned about competition. With *Pushpa 2* eventually securing a solo release and *Chhaava* getting postponed, speculation suggests that Allu Arjun's father, Allu Aravind, decided to distribute the Hindi film's Telugu version as a token of gratitude.

With its gripping narrative and stellar performances, *Chhaava* is expected to make a strong impact on Telugu audiences upon its release.



Kuberaa locks release date

Director Sekhar Kammula is returning after a nearly four-year hiatus with the film *Kuberaa*, following the success of his last film *Love Story*, starring Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi. *Kuberaa* features Dhanush, Nagarjuna and Rashmika Mandanna in the lead roles. Sekhar Kammula, known for his sensible storytelling, has a dedicated fan following, and the film is eagerly anticipated.

Produced jointly by Suniel Narang and Puskur Ram Mohan Rao, the film is all set for a release on June 20. The makers officially announced the release date on Thursday and revealed

that the film will release not only in Telugu but also in Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam.

In addition to the South Indian stars, Sekhar Kammula has cast Hindi actor Jim Sarbh in a key role. Sarbh, acclaimed for his theater work and performances in Hindi films, brings a fresh dimension to the film. Sekhar Kammula, known for his deep, character-driven narratives, is venturing into new creative territory with *Kuberaa*, making it one of the most anticipated films of the year.

The film is being produced on a grand scale with high production values.

Bhumika Chawla returns to Telugu cinema with *Euphoria* after three-year hiatus

Actress Bhumika Chawla, who made her Telugu debut with *Yuvakudu* alongside Sumanth nearly 25 years ago, has worked across multiple industries, including Telugu, Hindi and Tamil films. However, she has always been selective about her roles. Now, after a three-year gap, she is making a comeback with the Telugu film *Euphoria*, directed by Gunasekhar. The actress was drawn to the project because of its compelling storyline.

Gunasekhar, known for his technical brilliance in filmmaking, is bringing *Euphoria*, a youthful social drama, to the big screen. The film is an edgy and fast-

paced take on contemporary societal issues, raising curiosity since its announcement.

The film's shooting has recently been completed and the makers have confirmed that post-production is progressing at a rapid pace.

Vignesh Gavireddy is making his Tollywood debut with this project, while senior actress Bhumika Chawla plays a crucial role. The film boasts an ensemble cast, including Sara Arjun, Nassar, Rohith and Likhita Yalamanchili.

Produced by Neelima Guna, *Euphoria* also features music by young sensation Kaala Bhairava, adding to the anticipation surrounding the film.



Rohit knows how to work under pressure: Dhawan

PTI ■ DUBAI

Former opener Shikhar Dhawan believes Rohit Sharma has matured as a leader over the years and shares a close bond with his teammates, which augurs well for the Indian team. Dhawan, who was Rohit's opening partner for a considerable period of time, said the Mumbai batter is experienced enough to handle the team.

"From 2013 to 2025, 12 years of experience is a lot. Rohit has been through a lot. He knows how to work in a pressure situation, how to gather the boys."

"As a leader, he has become mature, he knows when to be lenient and when to pull back. It's a fine balance and Rohit's bond with the boys is amazing. We are in a great situation," Dhawan said in a special series titled 'The Shikhar Dhawan Experience' on Star Sports and JioHotstar.

Dhawan also spoke about his 2013 ICC Champions Trophy journey, and recollected his nine-year long opening partnership with Rohit,



which also began at the same tournament. The 39-year-old former left-hander said it was Mahendra Singh Dhoni's idea to promote Rohit as an opener alongside him.

"This opening pair decision was made half a day prior to that match. At that time, I was also new, and I was in my own world. I had made a comeback and needed to perform well. But MS Dhoni

took this decision and instructed Rohit to open," Dhawan said. "So I didn't think much about it. I thought if Rohit opens, we'll enjoy batting together. We got such a great start in

the first match. We were at 100 without losing a wicket.

"We didn't score 30-35 runs up to the 10th over because the wicket was seaming. But I never thought that our pair would be so massive and we would play together for 10 years," he added.

Dhawan also talked about his camaraderie with Rohit and said their friendship dates back to junior days.

"We trust each other and our understanding and level of communication was very high. On the field and off the field our bond is same. We played together, we have partied together after winning so many series. We have played as a team," he said.

"That whole journey and even before playing in India, when Rohit was 16-17 years old, I played in the Under-19 World Cup. So, we have been together and have been friends since then."

With two wins from as many matches, India have already qualified for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy and will play New Zealand in an inconsequential final group game on Sunday in Dubai.

Prague Masters: Praggnanandhaa splits points with David Navara

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa split points with Czech hero David Navara while compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram escaped with a draw with another local star Nguyen Thai Dai Van in the first round of the Prague Masters.

German Vincent Keymer, who was famously part of team D Gukesh's team during the World Championships, scored the first big upset of the tournament taking down top seed Wei Yi of China.

American Sam Shankland was the other winner of the day as he defeated Gurel Ediz of Turkey while the game between Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Anish Giri of Holland ended in a draw.

Keymer and Shankland emerged as early leaders after round one with Shankland stealing the limelight in his first outing against Ediz.

Praggnanandhaa, Aravindh, Giri, Le, Dai Van and Navara share the third spot on a half point each and they are followed by Wei Yi and Ediz



who will look forward to opening their account in the next round.

Praggnanandhaa faced the Ragozine out of a Queen's gambit declined as white and did not get much to have a go in the ensuing middle game.

It was a timely pawn sacrifice by Navara that equalised the position and after the trade of queens the players reached a theoretically drawn rook and pawns endgame.

Despite having an extra pawn, Praggnanandhaa tried on till the last nail but the outcome of the game was never in doubt.

Aravindh also played white and Dai Van showed that his victory at the Tata Steel Challengers earlier this month

was no flash in the pan.

The Neo-Grunfeld by the Czech Grandmaster faced no problems by the Indian. A few pieces changed hands and it looked as though the game would end soon.

Dai Van ran lower on time when Aravindh blundered and landed himself in a lost position.

Left with just a few seconds on the 70th move, Dai Van decided to play it safe and steered the game to a draw through perpetual checks.

Meanwhile in the Challengers section Divya Deshmukh, the lone girl and the only Indian, ended on the losing side against Ivan Salgado Lopez of Spain.



We have planned for Australia, says Shahidi

PTI ■ LAHORE

The Afghanistan team has chalked out plans for the entire Australian side and is not just focussed on its bete noir Glenn Maxwell, skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi said on the eve of their must-win Champions Trophy match.

Having knocked England out of the tournament with a memorable eight-run win here on Wednesday, Afghanistan are now seeking to get the better of Australia at the same venue on Friday and book a semifinal berth.

"You think we will come only to play with Maxwell? Do you think it will be like that? We have planned for entire Australian team, and I know that he (Maxwell) played really well in the 2023 World Cup, but that's part of the history," Shahidi said at the pre-match press conference on Thursday.

Chasing 292, Australia were staring at a certain defeat after losing seven wickets with less than 100 on the board, but then, Maxwell played one of the greatest knocks in history of one-day cricket to steer his side into an unbelievable win, and days later, the Aussies won a record-extending sixth World Cup.

However, the Afghans exacted revenge for that painful defeat with victory against Australia in the T20 World Cup a year later after Maxwell again threatened to take the game away from them.

"After that, we beat them in T20 World Cup, and we think about all opposition team. We are not coming to the ground to play on individual players. We will

try our best to come with the planning, and we are not playing only Maxwell - we are playing Australia," Shahidi said. Wednesday's win was their second in ODIs against England after their stunning victory in the 2023 World Cup in India.

The victory against England sparked wild celebrations in the Afghan capital of Kabul where fireworks were lit and streets were filled with jubilant fans.

Should Afghanistan get past Australia, it will pave the way for their second successive entry into the semifinals of an ICC event in less than a year, following their inspiring run in the T20 World Cup in the Americas in 2024.

Shahidi, however, is not reading much into the prospects of semifinal appearance.

"I think it will be a good game for cricket, and our focus will be to keep things simple and don't worry much about playing semifinal. We will try to do our basics well, and we will try to come to the ground with good planning," Shahidi said.

"Afghan people always cheer for us, as you saw (against England) in the ground. There were a lot of our Afghan people. So, their support is always with us, and wherever we go, they support us. They are coming to the stadiums."

"And whenever we play games like this, all Afghanistan, back home watching from TV. When we wake up, we will analyse the opposition team and we will come with good planning."

WPL: MI eye revenge against DC

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Former champions Mumbai Indians will look to avenge their first-leg loss and continue the recent winning streak when they take on Delhi Capitals in a top-of-the-table Women's Premier League clash here on Friday.

Only DC managed to upstage MI in the four matches at Vadodara earlier this month, and revenge will be high on the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side's mind when it takes the field on Friday.

Since that loss, MI have been on a three-match winning streak, beating Gujarat Giants by five wickets, Royal Challengers Bengaluru by four wickets and UP Warriorz by eight wickets respectively.

And come Friday, MI would want to continue the run to keep their place at the top of the league standings. MI are currently leading the WPL table with six points from four games, but are closely followed by DC on six points from five matches.



MI's strength lies in its power-packed batting line. English batter Nat-Sciver Brunt has been in terrific form for the inaugural season, leading the run-getters' chart with 254 from four matches, including three half-centuries.

Skipper Harmanpreet too is in good touch and has a fifty to her name in four games. Hayley Matthews's return to form augurs well for MI. The West Indies opener hit a 50-ball 59 in MI's comfortable eight-wicket win over UP Warriorz in their last match here on

Wednesday. But wicketkeeper-batter Yastika Bhatia hasn't come good at the top of the order which remains a cause of concern for MI. Besides New Zealand's Amelia Kerr too will be desperate for runs in the middle-order. Sciver-Brunt is not just contributing with the bat. With the ball in hand, she returned with impressive figures of 3 for 18 in MI's last match.

Shabnim Ismail has also been impressive for MI with the new ball, while they will depend on Amanjot Kaur,

Mathews and Kerr's all-round abilities in the middle overs.

DC, on the other hand, have not been particularly consistent in their three wins out of five games.

The team is one of the pre-tournament favourites, and it will take confidence from the six-wicket win over Gujarat Giants in its last game on Tuesday.

DC's batting lineup has finally fired with Shafali Verma (44) and Jess Jonassen (61 not out) striking form.

But skipper Meg Lanning, who had just one good outing, continues to struggle at the top. Jemimah Rodrigues, and Annabel Sutherland have provided occasional fireworks in the middle-order but DC would look for more consistent performances from the batting department.

In Shikha Pandey, Marizanne Kapp, young Titas Sadhu, Sutherland and Minnu Mami, DC also boast of a formidable bowling attack.



Pakistan vs Bangladesh match called off due to rain

PTI ■ RAWALPINDI

Pakistan's winless campaign in the Champions Trophy (CT) continued with their match against Bangladesh being called off without a ball being bowled due to incessant rain on Thursday.

The match was effectively a dead-rubber, with both teams already out of contention after failing to secure a win in their two previous matches. Pakistan, hosting an ICC tournament for the first time in 29 years, had hoped for a strong finish but ended their disastrous campaign without a victory.

Persistent downpour left the ground soaked, with covers in place and puddles forming around the field. With weather not improving, match officials called off the game nearly two hours after the scheduled start time. The gloomy weather prevented even the toss from taking place.

As a result, the two teams shared one point each, though both Pakistan and Bangladesh finished the tournament winless. This is the second match in Rawalpindi to be called off without a ball being bowled, following the washout between South Africa and Australia earlier this week.

The rain-induced abandonment left the home fans frustrated, as they hoped for play at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Pakistan have faced criticism for their poor showing in the tournament, having suffered defeats to New Zealand (by 60 runs) and India (by six wickets).

"We wanted to do well and

perform well in front of our nation. The expectations are very high. We didn't perform well and it is disappointing for us," Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan said.

Reflecting on the road ahead, Rizwan said: "You can learn from your mistakes. We have made mistakes in the last few games. Hopefully, we can learn from these."

"We are next going to New Zealand and, hopefully, we can perform there and the mistakes that we did against New Zealand here in Pakistan, we can learn from that. And we will do better in New Zealand."

"We put a lot of pressure on ourselves playing against India"

Pakistan's assistant coach, Azhar Mahmood, who hails from the city, attributed his team's poor show in the tournament to injuries to key players, and the fact that the team took too much pressure against India.

"We have not played well in this tournament. We have played good cricket in this format, but in the tournament it has not gone well because of injuries. Against India, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves," he said.

"We know where we need to improve. It is all about adapting and taking responsibility. The results have also been a surprise for us," he added.

The former Test all-rounder said that the people need to keep faith in the players.

"We have to stick with the talent we identify for it to come good over the months," said Mahmood.

Australia wil not take Afghanistan lightly: Jonathan Trott

PTI ■ LAHORE

Afghanistan is "never going to be taken lightly" by any team after his "resilient" side knocked England out of the Champions Trophy (CT) with a memorable win, head coach Jonathan Trott has asserted.

Ibrahim Zadran's majestic 177 and pacer Azmatullah Omarzai's fifer trumped Joe Root's masterful hundred, as the Afghanistan registered a thrilling eight-run win against England.

Looking ahead to their next must-win game against Australia, Trott also said that Afghanistan team will take confidence from their fine showings against the Aussies in recent World Cup outings.

"Since I've been coach we've played against Australia three times and we've been in the game each of those

games. So, we should take a lot of confidence from that. "And I think certainly what happened in the World Cup, T20 World Cup, and I say this to the players as well, that Afghanistan's never going to be taken lightly ever again," Trott said at the post-match press conference.

"I see every game that we play is going to be competitive and every game we go into I expect to win," the Englishman added.

Wins by Afghanistan against established Test nations are no longer seen as upsets and recent performances on the world stage mean they cannot afford to fly under the radar.

"Australia aren't going to take us lightly," Trott said.

"So, we've got to be prepared. In the past, perhaps people would have seen the fixture and thought it was a little bit easier than playing a historic



Test nation. But in this format, in these conditions, I don't see that." With two points from two games, Afghanistan are still

in the semifinal race. A win against Australia will take them to four points, which will elevate them to the top two. Australia have three

points from two games after their washout against South Africa. A loss for Afghanistan will mean they are out of the competition.

"I'm going to make sure when they wake up tomorrow, they enjoy tonight, (but) wake up tomorrow ready for

Australia," Trott had told the media after their nail-biting victory over England.

"As soon as they wake up tomorrow, the focus is on Australia."

Having seen first-hand Afghanistan's rise to cricketing prominence, Trott attributed it to the battle-hardened side's self-belief and resilience.

"There's a resilience to them. I think if you add to some cricketing experience and cricketing match awareness with regards to batting in particular, with regards to how you pace the innings ... it's not always down to one person."

"We saw Ibrahim, the way that he's done today, we've seen Gurbaz do it in the past ... we have Gulbadin at eight at the moment, who can come in and change games," he said.

"So that self-belief is

important and it starts within, but it's also quite infectious and it spreads within the squad."

Their clash with Australia has turned into a virtual knockout with the winner entering the semifinals and loser exiting the tournament. Trott is hoping for strong support for his team on Friday.

"Hopefully Friday will be a massive sell out and people will turn up or take the day off work and come and watch us from two o'clock onwards. I think it's great for the guys."

"I think it's a huge experience and these players will never forget nights like this. We've had a few other nights along the way in ICC events and series' and that will just add to the confidence that we should hopefully take in on Friday," he concluded.