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Power to modify arbitral awards be left to legislature



'BUDGET'S GOAL IS TO PROPEL GROWTH, BOOST INVESTMENTS'

Piracy is like cancer, but we are doing our best to fight it: Damodara PRASAD



QUOTE OF THE DAY

"KTR is the leader of drugs, casinos, and international thieves. While going to trial in a formula race, KTR has been saying 'Jai Telangana'. The KCR family is insulting the 'Jai Telangana' slogan. KTR is the leader of all types of gambling in Telangana. All BRS leaders are involved in some kind of corruption and irregularities.. I request the government to investigate all of them and protect the youth of Telangana"

- B Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC Chief and MLC

CM's DIRECTIVE TO IRRIGATION DEPT

Complete projects on time

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has reiterated the importance of completing irrigation projects on schedule. During a review meeting with the Irrigation Department, he made it clear that delays would not be tolerated and stressed the need to expedite project work to ensure farmers receive timely irrigation.

Naidu focused particularly on major projects like Polavaram, instructing officials to closely monitor progress against pre-defined targets. "In major projects like Polavaram, we need to assess the completion of specific work, how much is expected to be done this week or month," he said. He warned that both officials and contractors would be held accountable for any deviations from the planned schedule. Officials provided an update on the Polavaram project, reporting that 35 meters of the 1379-metre diaphragm wall had been completed since work began last month, leaving 1344 metres remaining. They also acknowledged delays in the left canal connectivity work, which the CM instructed to expedite, demanding visible progress by the next review meeting.

Naidu emphasised that the Polavaram canals should be constructed to their original design capacity of 17,500 cusecs. He set a deadline of June 2027 for project

JUNE 2027 DEADLINE SET FOR POLAVARAM



- **Veligonda revival:** The CM has prioritised the long-delayed Veligonda project, emphasizing its regional importance
- **Drought-free Andhra:** The Polavaram-Banakacharla Corporation to be established to help make the state drought-free
- **Groundwater recharge:** The government is prioritising groundwater recharge, forming a committee to create a comprehensive plan
- **Accountability:** Officials and contractors warned that they will be held responsible for any delay in the execution and completion of the projects

completion, with December 2027 as the absolute latest. He stressed that the completion of the Polavaram Left Canal and its ability to transport water to Visakhapatnam must coincide with the availability of water through the Uttarandhra Sujala Sravanthi project, which will facilitate the diversion of Godavari water for projects in northern Andhra Pradesh.

Reviewing the Chintalapudi Lift Irrigation project, the CM instructed officials to promptly resolve any ongoing legal issues. He expressed concern over delays in the Veligonda project, highlighting its regional significance. He recalled laying the

foundation stone for the project during the united Andhra Pradesh government and its prioritisation between 2014 and 2019. He expressed disappointment that the subsequent government had only performed ceremonial launches without completing the project.

Naidu also called for the establishment of the Polavaram-Banakacharla Corporation, aimed at making the state drought-free. He instructed officials to begin preparations for the corporation's establishment and confirmed that discussions were underway with the central government regarding funding. Discussing the

need to enhance groundwater recharge, the CM stressed the importance of ensuring groundwater availability within the 3-to-9-metre depth range. He emphasised optimal water management in reservoirs while simultaneously working to increase groundwater levels. A special committee, comprising the Ministers for Panchayat Raj, Forests, Irrigation, Agriculture, and Municipal Administration, will be formed to develop a groundwater recharge plan. Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu and senior Irrigation Department officials attended the meeting.



PM Modi arrives in Washington

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi received a rousing welcome from members of the Indian-American diaspora when he reached Blair House, the President's Guest House.

Prime Minister Modi arrived in the US on Wednesday where he will meet President Donald Trump on Thursday for his bilateral meeting after last month's inauguration ceremony.

As he reached Blair House, the President's Guest House, where he will be staying he was accorded a rousing welcome by members of the Indian-American diaspora. Braving freezing temperatures and rain, the community members gathered at Blair House and welcomed him with 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', 'Vande Mataram' and 'Modi Modi' as they waved the Indian and American flags. *Continued on Page 2*

Modi meets US NSA Michael Waltz

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met US National Security Advisor Michael Waltz here on Thursday.

Modi arrived in the US capital Wednesday evening for a bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump. The meeting with Waltz was his first engagement of the day. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and NSA Ajit Doval were also present at the meeting. After arriving at Blair House, the President's Guest House, Modi met US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard on Wednesday. "Congratulations on her confirmation. Discussed various aspects of the India-USA friendship, of which she's always been a strong votary," Modi said on X.

DON'T MISS...

22 culling teams formed in WG

Authorities in West Godavari district have implemented several measures to combat the recent bird flu outbreak. These include the formation of specialised culling teams and a ban on selling chicken meat and eggs within a 10-kilometre radius of the affected area. Twenty-two Rapid Response (RR) teams, comprising veterinary doctors and technicians, have been deployed to conduct culling operations in Velpuru village, Tanuku mandal, the outbreak's epicentre. District Collector C. Nagarani, along with officials from various departments...

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Leopard gatecrashes Lucknow wedding

Wedding celebrations can often get wild. And this one in Lucknow did, quite literally, when a leopard strayed into the banquet hall. Unexpectedly, pandemonium broke out as panicked guests scammed here and there, the bride and groom locked themselves in a car and a forest officer who tried to take on the big cat was injured when it took a swipe at his rifle wielding arm. It all happened on Wednesday night in the city's Buddheshwar Road area. The leopard was caught and tranquillised after...

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White-collar hiring grows by 32 pc

Hiring for white-collar jobs witnessed a 32 per cent year-on-year surge in January, driven by industries such as semiconductors, energy, waste management and manufacturing in India, a report said on Thursday. The growth in hiring is attributed to surging consumer demand, strategic incentives outlined in the Union Budget 2025-26 and an increased focus on sustainability initiatives, according to foundit Insights Tracker. There was a 32 per cent year-on-year jump in hiring for January...

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RCB names Patidar as captain for IPL

IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Thursday named Rajat Patidar as its captain for the upcoming season starting March 21, replacing South African Faf du Plessis who was released from the squad last year. Patidar was among RCB's retained players before the mega auction in November, 2024 and has the experience of leading Madhya Pradesh in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy (T20) and the Vijay Hazare Trophy (ODI). The 31-year-old, who signed up with the franchise in 2022, guided...

-SPORTS

Vamsi arrested in Hyd

Ex-MLA produced in SC/ST Atrocities Court in V'wada



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leader and former MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi was arrested in Hyderabad and brought to the Krishna Lanka police station in connection with the burning of the TDP office in Gannavaram. He was interrogated for about eight hours before being taken, along with two other accused—Yelimineni Shivarama Krishna Prasad and Nimma Lakshmi Prasad—to the Government General Hospital for a medical examination.

Later, they were produced before the SC/ST Atrocities Court. Following Vamsi's arrest, police imposed Section 144 and enforced the Police Act 30 at sensitive locations to maintain law and order.

In a dramatic development, police intercepted Vamsi's wife at Nandigama on the Vijayawada-Hyderabad highway while she was travelling to see him. Her mobile phone was seized, and she was sent back to Hyderabad.

DGP dancing to tunes of Naidu, Lokesh: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Ambati Rambabu strongly condemned the arrest of former MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi and the filing of cases against former MLA Abbaiah Chowdary, calling them politically motivated. He accused the DGP of misusing the police force to serve the interests of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Minister Lokesh, alleging that the police were acting as political agents of the ruling coalition.

In the Gannavaram TDP office attack case, complainant Satyavardhan recently testified before a magistrate that he never lodged a complaint against Vamsi and that his signature had been misused.

Rambabu claimed this exposed a conspiracy by the TDP to falsely implicate Vamsi under the SC/ST Atrocities Act. He alleged that following this revelation, Chandrababu and Lokesh pressured Satyavardhan's brother to file a fresh complaint, leading to Vamsi's immediate arrest. *Continued on Page 2*



Kiran Royal booked

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A cheating case has been registered against Jana Sena Party's Tirupati in-charge, Kiran Royal, at the SV University Police Station. The case was filed based on a complaint by Lakshmi Reddy, who accused him of deceiving her with false promises. The FIR, registered under Crime Number 22/2025, includes charges under IPC Sections 420, 417, and 506, as well as provisions of the BNS Act. *Continued on Page 2*

Taiwan help to AP industries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT, RTGS, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, has sought Taiwan's support in developing the electronics, textiles, and footwear industries in Andhra Pradesh. He held discussions with Richard Chen, Director-General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in Chennai, at his residence in Undavalli on Thursday. The Taiwanese delegation reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the growth of these sectors in the state.

During the meeting, Nara Lokesh highlighted Taiwan's leadership in electronics, textiles, and footwear manufacturing and discussed the policies and initiatives that have driven its industrial success. He out-



lined the cooperative measures offered by the Andhra Pradesh government, including policy implementation, permits, and streamlined production processes under the "Speed of Doing" model. *Continued on Page 2*

Prez rule imposed in Manipur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President's rule was imposed in strife-torn Manipur on Thursday, and the state assembly put under suspended animation, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post that led to political uncertainty in the north-eastern state.

The Manipur assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

He resigned on February 9 and submitted his resignation to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla in Imphal, hours after his meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah here. The decision to impose the central rule was taken after the governor sent a report to President Droupadi Murmu.

"After considering the report and other information received by me, I am satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of that state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of India," the notification said.

It further said: "Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 356 of the Constitution, and of all other powers enabling me in that behalf, I hereby proclaim that I - assume to myself as President of India all functions of the government of the state of Manipur and all powers vested in or exercisable by the Governor of that state".

Dy CM Pawan visits Swaminatha temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, as part of his ongoing spiritual journey, visited the temple of Lord Swaminatha Swamy in Swaminimalai near Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, on Thursday. The sacred Swaminimalai temple, the fifth in the Shastha Shanmukha pilgrimage circuit, is renowned for its deep spiritual significance. It is also believed to be the place where the primordial sound 'Om' and the secret mantra of creation, 'Aadi Pranava Nada Omkara,' originated.

During his visit, Pawan Kalyan performed a special puja at the temple. Temple priest Kannan Gurukul tra-



ditionally conducted the rituals, offering Panchaharatham (five sacred offerings) and aarti. Pawan Kalyan also circumambulated the temple and paid his respects at the temple's flagstaff.

Furthermore, he participated in the sacred Kandha Sashthi Kavacham Parayanam, a spiritual recitation highly revered by devotees of Lord Swaminatha Swamy.

Accompanying Pawan Kalyan were his son, Akira Nandan, and TTD Board Member Anand Sai, who were present to witness the divine blessings at the temple.

After offering prayers at Lord Swaminatha Swamy's shrine, the DCM also visited and performed special puja at the shrines of Sri Sundareswaran Swamy and Meenakshi Amman, the principal deities worshipped at the temple.

Central teams despatched to AP: Atchan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Animal Husbandry Minister K Atchannaidu said on Thursday that the Central Government has dispatched teams to assess the Avian Influenza situation in the state following the outbreak of the viral disease in three districts.

Over the past 45 days, 5.4 lakh chickens have died in the southern state due to the disease, prompting the Animal Husbandry Department to begin culling birds and creating restricted zones in the affected areas.

Badampudi village in Eluru district reported the death of 2.2 lakh chickens, Velpuru in West Godavari district recorded 2.5 lakh deaths, Kanuru Agrapharam in East



Godavari district reported 65,000 deaths and Gampalagudem in NTR district saw 7,000 deaths.

"The Chief Minister spoke in detail with senior scientists in Bhopal and the Central Government secretary.

Following this, the Central Government secretary dispatched teams to Andhra Pradesh," Atchannaidu said at a press conference at the secretariat.

The minister also noted that a senior official from the Centre will visit Andhra Pradesh on

February 14. In addition to declaring the affected poultry farms as bio-secure zones, the senior TDP leader stated that officials have been deputed to these areas to ensure the strict implementation of containment measures.

Steps taken to check bird flu spread: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has initiated stringent measures to contain the spread of bird flu, which has affected poultry in a few districts. Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand has assured the public that there is no cause for panic.

During a video conference with district collectors and officials from the Animal Husbandry and Medical and Health departments on Thursday, Vijayanand reviewed the situation and issued clear instructions on preventive measures, including the proper disposal of dead poultry. He emphasised the importance of adhering to the Central government's guidelines, which have been circulated to the collectors.

These guidelines stipulate declaring a one-kilometre radius around infected areas as a "red zone," where

Asks officials to follow guidelines issued by Union govt

the movement and feeding of animals are restricted. Transportation in these zones is also strictly regulated. The Chief Secretary directed Animal Husbandry officials to implement precautionary measures within a

one-to-nine-kilometre radius and to maintain constant vigilance.

Vijayanand urged district collectors to disregard misinformation circulating in the media and to take appropriate action against those spreading

false news and rumours. He enquired about the measures taken at the five affected poultry farms in Badampudi (Eluru district), Velpur and Kanur (West Godavari district), and Gampalagudem (NTR district). He stressed the need for poultry farm owners to be fully informed about the situation and the necessary precautions.

B Rajasekhara, Special Chief Secretary for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, reiterated the importance of declaring the one-kilometre infected area a red zone and strictly controlling the movement of poultry and feed. He said that the surrounding 10-kilometre area should be designated as a surveillance zone and closely monitored. He also stressed the importance of educating poultry farm owners and ensuring the proper burial of dead birds.

Special Chief Secretary for Medical



Special Chief Secretary for Medical and Health, MT Krishna Babu, confirmed that no human cases of avian influenza have been reported in the State so far. He added that human infection is rare, citing only four cases reported in Maharashtra, Haryana, and West Bengal in the past five years.

Hard work key to success: Lokesh

CM sets 20% growth target for tourism sector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT, RTGS, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, stressed the importance of hard work in achieving success while congratulating Guttikonda Manogna for securing a perfect score in JEE (Mains) 2025.



Commending Manogna's achievement, the Minister said, "You have made the state proud, and I hope you scale even greater heights." He assured students of his support, sharing his contact details and offering assistance whenever needed. Recognising the role of parents in their children's success, Minister Lokesh honoured Manogna's mother and discussed the importance of industry-relevant skills with her father. He emphasised the need for an education system that prepares students for the job market.

Highlighting ongoing education reforms, he said efforts were being made to ensure students are job-ready upon graduation. "It's concerning that after four years of engineering, some struggle to find jobs, while others succeed with just four months of training in Ameerpet. We want to change this," he added.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed Tourism Department officials to take measures to ensure that visitors to Andhra Pradesh have a pleasant experience. Chairing a review meeting at the State Secretariat on Thursday, he emphasised the need to utilise all available resources to develop the tourism sector and attract global tourists.

Setting a 20% growth target for the tourism sector in 2025-26, Naidu noted that within six months of the TDP-led NDA government assuming office, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) had been signed with various companies for investments worth Rs 1,217 crore. The review meeting covered tourism and cultural events, hotel room construction, investments, land lease policies, and homestay initiatives.

Tourism resorts and hotels revived to enhance facilities



- Key religious and scenic sites selected for development
- A Tourism Events Calendar to feature international and mega events
- Major events will be organised on university campuses with cultural programmes
- Year-long programmes will be conducted at Shilparamams in key cities
- Gandikota Kadapa Dargah, Ontimitta Ramalayam and other sites to be developed
- Traditional village houses to be modernised and food quality to be improved

The Chief Minister informed that 11 tourism resorts and hotels have been revived with an investment of Rs 45 crore in the

past six months. Under the Centre's PRASAD scheme, Annaram temple has been selected for development, while

Gandikota and Akhanda Godavari have been included under the Special Assistance to States under Capital Investment

scenic rock formations, water resources, and lush greenery, Naidu stressed the need to promote it further as a prime tourist destination. He also directed officials to develop Kadapa Dargah, Ontimitta Ramalayam, Nagarjuna Sagar under the Challenge-Based Destination Development scheme.

Officials briefed Naidu about the preparation of a Tourism Events Calendar for 2025-26, which includes two key international events and 12 mega events as part of 37 tourism programmes. The Chief Minister suggested hosting major events on university campuses and incorporating musical and cultural performances into these programmes. He also proposed year-long activities at the Shilparamams in Visakhapatnam, Amaravati, and Tirupati. Highlighting Gandikota's

Vamsi created havoc at the behest of Jagan: Min Subhash

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Labour Minister Vasamshetti Subhash has strongly criticised former MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi, accusing him of causing chaos with the support of former Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy. He stated that Vamsi was arrested solely because of his own actions.



Speaking on Thursday, Subhash recalled that Vamsi won as a Telugu Desam Party candidate in the 2014 and 2019 Assembly elections but later abandoned the party for selfish gains and joined hands with Jagan. He alleged that Vamsi had illegally occupied thousands of acres of land, labelling him a political broker rather than a leader. The Minister further accused Vamsi of acquiring lands at low prices for Jagan's colonies and later selling them

to the government at ten times the rate, making an unjust profit of Rs 170 crore under the guise of land development. He questioned how someone involved in such unethical practices could be considered a righteous individual. Subhash also alleged that Vamsi forged signatures of the Tehsildar to seize lands illegally and had taken control of 1,000 acres in their constituency. He claimed that Vamsi was

involved in land settlements in Telangana as well, earning him the reputation of a "settlement king" in both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

He asserted that Vamsi had no real loyalty to the Telugu Desam Party or leaders like NT Rama Rao and Chandrababu Naidu. Calling him a selfish individual, Subhash said Vamsi deserved strict punishment for his actions and added that his arrest was a welcome development.

Vamsi arrested as per law: Kollu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Excise Minister Kollu Ravindra has asserted that no one can escape the law, citing the recent arrest of Vallabhaneni Vamsi as an example. Speaking at a press conference at the TDP central office on Thursday, he accused the YSRCP of engaging in corrupt activities, including the attack on the Gannavaram TDP office. He stated that YSRCP leaders, including Vamsi, have been involved in criminal activities and that their misdeeds would be thoroughly investigated.

Ravindra criticised Vamsi for allegedly setting fire to the TDP office, the very institution that helped him rise as an MLA. He stressed that those who misuse their power will be held accountable through legal and democratic means. The Minister also condemned YSRCP leaders for various illegal activities in Krishna district.

Botsa slams 'arbitrary' governance

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSR Congress Party MLC Botsa Satyanarayana launched a sharp attack on the ruling coalition government in Andhra Pradesh, accusing it of arbitrary governance and misuse of power. Addressing a press conference in Visakhapatnam, Satyanarayana alleged that the government was resorting to politically motivated cases to suppress opposition leaders, citing the recent arrest of former MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi as a prime example.

Aiming for the ruling alliance, Satyanarayana criticised its reliance on what he termed "yellow media" for favourable coverage while failing to deliver effective governance. "Beyond the media-generated accolades, there is little to commend about this government's performance," he remarked, asserting that the administration had failed to live up to its electoral promises.



YSR Congress MLC Criticises Ruling coalition over political cases, rising prices, and unfulfilled promises

Highlighting governance lapses, he accused the coalition of focusing on reviews rather than actual development. "The ground reality does not match the publicity," he said, pointing to rising prices of essential commodities, increased electricity tariffs, and administrative inefficiencies. He further claimed that the lack of coordination between officials and public representatives had led to hardships for students, parents, and farmers. The YSR Congress leader signalled a political showdown in the coming months, vowing to challenge the ruling alliance's



"Super Six" promises in the Legislative Council. "These commitments remain largely unfulfilled, and we will hold them accountable," he asserted. Drawing a comparison with the previous YSR Congress government, Satyanarayana stated that former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had prioritized action over rhetoric. "During our tenure, we implemented welfare schemes with sincerity, even amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic," he claimed. He also criticized the current government for blaming its failures on the YSRCP

while allegedly using law enforcement to harass opposition figures. "Even the High Court has expressed displeasure over the conduct of the police," he added. On the issue of land scams in Visakhapatnam, Satyanarayana demanded the release of the Special Investigation Team's report and strict action against those involved. "When will the coalition leaders disclose the irregularities in freehold lands?" he questioned. He also accused the government of misleading the public on liquor pricing policies, stating that despite promises to reduce rates, prices had only increased.

Satyanarayana's remarks highlight the intensifying political battle in Andhra Pradesh, with the opposition ramping up its scrutiny of the ruling coalition's performance. As governance issues continue to dominate political discourse, pressure is mounting on the administration to fulfill its electoral commitments.

JOURNALIST ASSAULT CASE

SC grants pre-arrest bail to actor Mohan Babu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday granted anticipatory bail to Telugu actor Mohan Babu in an alleged case of assault of a journalist.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Ahsanuddin Amanullah directed Babu to cooperate with the ongoing investigation. Babu had moved the top court against the December 23, 2024, Telangana High Court order which dismissed his anticipatory bail application. "Custodial interrogation of the petitioner is not required. Hence, the order dated January 9, 2025, granting interim protection to the petitioner should be made absolute," it said. The bench went on,

"Therefore, we grant anticipatory bail to the petitioner. Accordingly, in the event of the arrest of the petitioner, the petitioner is directed to be released on bail forthwith on the usual terms and conditions to be decided by the court concerned."

On January 9, the apex court granted interim protection to Babu.

On December 12, 2024, an attempt to murder charge was added to the case filed against the actor by the 35-year-old journalist.

The journalist has alleged Babu was aggressive towards him and other journalists during a visit to the actor's Jalpally home on December 10, 2024, to cover an ongoing dispute between the actor and his younger son Manoj.

YSRCP MP raises concern over migrant workers in Kuwait

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tirupati MP Maddila Gurumoorthy has expressed concern over the hardships faced by Indian migrant workers in Kuwait, particularly those from the Rayalaseema region, and sought their safety. Many workers reportedly endure severe difficulties, including employers seizing their passports, non-payment or underpayment of wages, overcrowded and inadequate accommodation, changes in assigned job roles, and even incidents of violence.

To address these issues, the MP has written to External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and the Ambassador of Kuwait to India, urging immediate intervention to safeguard the rights and welfare of Indian workers. He has also submitted a formal representation to the Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs, seeking prompt action.



As part of his efforts, MP Gurumoorthy met Mishal Mustafa Al-Shamali, the Ambassador of Kuwait to India, to discuss these concerns. The Ambassador assured that he would take up the matter with the Kuwaiti government to ensure necessary action.

Besides, considering the significant number of expatriates from Tirupati and surrounding areas, MP Gurumoorthy strongly advocated for a direct flight between Kuwait and Tirupati. The Kuwaiti authorities responded positively, confirming that two airlines currently

operate from Kuwait and that they would consider this request.

They also informed that the Kuwaiti government would formally communicate with India's Civil Aviation Minister, Ram Mohan Naidu, regarding the proposal.

To expedite the process, MP Gurumoorthy has also submitted a request to the Civil Aviation Minister, seeking direct flight connectivity between Kuwait and Tirupati under the Open Sky Policy with a seating capacity of 400.

If both governments reach an agreement, this initiative will significantly benefit migrant workers and enhance connectivity between the two regions.

This initiative is being carried out under the leadership and guidance of YSRCP leader YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, with MP Meda Raghunadha Reddy also playing an active role.

Modi arrives...

Continued from Page 1

"A warm reception in the winter chill! Despite the cold weather, the Indian diaspora in Washington DC has welcomed me with a very special welcome. My gratitude to them," Modi said on X.

Prime Minister Modi is the fourth foreign leader hosted by Trump in the weeks after his inauguration last month. Within less than a month of the start of Trump's second term in the White House, he has hosted Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and Jordan's King Abdullah II.

Modi arrived in the US capital on Wednesday evening after a visit to France where he had co-chaired the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Modi and Trump will hold bilateral discussions in the White House on Thursday. "Our nations will keep working closely for the benefit of our people and for a better future for our planet," Modi said on X.



Jagan unveils YSRTA Diary 2025

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy unveiled the YSRTA Diary 2025 at the party's central office in Tadepalli.

During the event, leaders briefed YS Jagan on key issues concerning teachers and employees, including pending IR, the 12th PRC Committee, the cancellation of GO 117, outstanding PF and APGLI

dues, and delays in surrender leave encashment.

MLC Parvata Reddy Chandrasekhar Reddy, AP YSRTA President Ashok Babu, State General Secretary Gaddam Sudheer, Honorary President Jali Reddy, and YSRTA district leaders from 26 districts, including Venkata Nath Reddy, Shekhar Reddy, PV Ramana Reddy, Pratap Reddy, S Nagireddy, and Sridhar Goud, attended the event.

KRISHNA WATER DISPUTE CASE

No relief to AP in SC

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Supreme Court on Thursday declined to grant any relief to Andhra Pradesh in its writ petition WP 1230/2023, which challenges the additional Terms of Reference (ToR) issued by the Government of India to the Brijesh Kumar Tribunal (Krishna Water Dispute Tribunal-II) for determining the allocation and sharing of Krishna river waters between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The court has posted the matter for the next hearing on February 27.

The Government of India issued the additional ToR in October 2023, following which Andhra Pradesh filed the writ petition in the Supreme Court, contesting the decision. The Supreme Court has heard the case multiple times but has so far not granted any relief to Andhra Pradesh.

Meanwhile, the Brijesh Kumar Tribunal has continued proceedings on the matter and, after hearing both states, ruled in favor of taking up the addition-



al ToR first. The next hearing of the tribunal is scheduled for February 19. Thursday's Supreme Court hearing saw the presence of Telangana Irrigation Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy, reinforcing Telangana's stance in the dispute. The court's decision to not intervene at this stage strengthens Telangana's position, as the tribunal continues to deliberate on the fresh ToR issued by the Centre.

With the next tribunal hearing approaching, the water-sharing dispute between the two states remains a contentious issue, as Andhra Pradesh continues to resist the additional ToR, while Telangana maintains that the revised terms are necessary for a fair reallocation of Krishna waters.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Feb 13 08:22 PM to Feb 14 09:52 PM

Dwitiya: Feb 14 09:52 PM to Feb 15 11:52 PM

Tritya: Feb 15 11:52 PM to Feb 16 01:39 AM

Nakshatram: Feb 13 09:07 PM to Feb 14 11:09 PM

Purva Phalguni: Feb 14 11:09 PM to Feb 16 01:39 AM

Uttara Phalguni: Feb 16 01:39 AM to Feb 16 01:39 AM

Rahukalam: 11:04 AM to 12:30 PM

Yamagandam: 3:22 PM to 4:48 PM

Variyam: 07:06 AM to 08:52 AM

Gulika: 8:12 AM to 9:38 AM

Amritakalam: 04:12 PM to 05:56 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:53 PM

Kiran Royal booked...

Continued from Page 1

Lakshmi Reddy also alleged that Kiran Royal had threatened to kill her, further escalating the seriousness of the case. The investigation is being led by CI Ramayya of the SV University Police Station.

Jana Sena chief and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan has instructed the party's Conflict Committee to probe the allegations against Kiran Royal. His directive came after a video went viral on social media platforms X, in which Lakshmi Reddy accused Kiran of fraud and extortion. She claimed that he had taken over Rs 1.20 crore and 25 tolas of gold from her under false pretences, pushing her into financial ruin. In the video, she also revealed that his actions had driven her to the verge of suicide.

In response to the controversy, Kiran Royal has been barred from participating in party activities. Pawan Kalyan urged Jana Sena members, including 'Jana Sainiks' and 'Veera Mahilas', to prioritise public service and steer clear of personal disputes. Meanwhile, tensions escalated outside Kiran's residence as women from various organisations staged protests, demanding his immediate arrest. The police intervened to disperse the demonstrators, warning them of potential arrests if they continued their agitation. However, the protesters remained resolute in their demand for justice. Women's groups also met Lakshmi Reddy, extended their support, and urged the Jana Sena Party to suspend Kiran Royal without delay.

DGP dancing to tunes of...

Continued from Page 1

He criticised the police for arresting Vamsi without updating the case details online and for preventing his wife and lawyers from meeting him.

In Abbaiah Chowdary's case, Rambabu alleged that TDP MLA Chintamaneni used

derogatory language against his driver, yet the police filed a false case against Abbaiah based on Chintamaneni's complaint. He questioned the police's impartiality in handling the matter.

He further stated that YSRCP leaders, including MLCs and senior members, sought a meeting with the

DGP regarding these issues. Despite securing an appointment, they were denied access, which he said demonstrated clear bias. Rambabu demanded that Vamsi be presented before a judge within 24 hours, warning that the misuse of police power for political purposes would not be tolerated.

Taiwan help...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister briefed the Taiwanese team on the infrastructure developed through the establishment of electronics clusters in Tirupati from 2014 to 2019, which created numerous job opportunities for local youth. He emphasised the vast potential for employment generation in these

industries and reiterated the state's commitment to their expansion.

Nara Lokesh urged Taiwanese companies to scale up their global operations and collaborate in setting up a presence in Andhra Pradesh. He assured full state government support for a smooth initiation of operations and sought their cooperation in establishing specialised parks for the

electronics, textiles, and footwear sectors.

In response, the Taiwanese delegation assured their full commitment to supporting the development of these industries in Andhra Pradesh. The meeting was attended by Richard Chen, Nexuindo Consultancy Managing Director Eric Chang, and Sai Kanta Varma, CEO of the Economic Development Board representing the Andhra Pradesh government.

Skill Development Centre in Autonagar in 3 months: MP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesinivi Sivanath (Chinni) has announced that a Skill Development Centre will be established in Autonagar of Vijayawada city within three months to help the 1,00,000 workers of the automobile sector adapt to changing technologies. The MP announced this during a meeting with leaders from 32 automobile associations held at the NTR Bhavan on Thursday.

MP Chinni enquired about the needs of the associations for their development. He also discussed the benefits of forming clusters within the associations and shared details about subsidies offered by the Central government. He said that alternative routes are being prepared to ease the congestion caused by ongoing construction, including a flyover from NTR Health University to Nidamanuru and metro works already initiated in Autonagar.

Sivanath emphasised the importance of transport in the upcoming Amaravati projects, stating that the automobile sector must be prepared for this demand. He assured that small issues faced by

Aims to help workers of automobile sector adapt to changing technologies



Autonagar will be resolved by the government shortly, and urged the association leaders to form clusters. He promised to work with those concerned to facilitate loans through these clusters, and offer support in terms of space for their estab-

lishment. Besides, MP Chinni highlighted that establishing silk development centres in Autonagar would enhance skills and create job opportunities for many. He stated that improving employment

prospects for the youth in NTR district is his primary goal, and he believes that the automobile sector has a bright future ahead. He urged all workers in Autonagar to technically upgrade themselves to meet these challenges.

Strictly implement poll code: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has directed officials to maintain strict vigilance ahead of the Krishna-Guntur Graduate MLC elections scheduled for February 27. Emphasising the need for impartial and effective enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), he urged officials to uphold election protocols diligently.

During a meeting held at the Pingali Venkaiah Meeting Hall in the collectorate on Thursday, key enforcement teams including the Flying Squad Teams (FST), Statistical Surveillance Teams (SST), Video Surveillance Teams (VST), and Video Viewing Teams (VVT) discussed strategies for implementing the poll code.

Officials were briefed on the application of election regulations across the district, with specific instructions on grievance redressal, reporting



protocols, and election-related seizures. Dr Lakshmisha stressed that personnel at 11 check-posts, 24 flying squads, and 11 static surveillance teams must remain alert to curb illegal activities, including the transportation of cash, liquor, and precious metals.

He called for seamless coordination among Police, Excise, IT, Forest, banking, and

enforcement departments. Additionally, he directed special teams to submit daily reports to the district-level nodal officer in prescribed formats and respond promptly to complaints received at the district call centre. While underscoring strict adherence to election regulations, the Collector also advised that public movement and daily

activities should not be disrupted unnecessarily.

NTR District Revenue Officer (DRO) and Assistant Returning Officer M Lakshmi Narasimham, MCC Nodal Officer K Srinivasa Rao, District Cooperation Officer S Srinivasa Reddy, Collectorate Election Cell Superintendent Chandramouli, and other key officials attended the meeting.

Drone Corp encourages students' ideas



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

K Dinesh Kumar, Chairman and Managing Director of the Andhra Pradesh Drone Corporation, encouraged students to explore innovative drone use cases that leverage cutting-edge technology. He emphasised that the corpora-

tion would fully support and collaborate with students who come forward with such ideas. At the recently held Amaravati Drone Summit, organised by the State government, a hackathon was conducted focused on drone use cases for aspiring students. The best-presented cases were awarded

prizes during the event. These student presentations, initially showcased virtually, will now be displayed in real-time for further development by the Drone Corporation. As part of this initiative, 10 students presented their innovative use cases at SRM University with the institu-

tion's collaboration. K. Dinesh Kumar, who attended as the chief guest, personally reviewed the students' drone designs. He interacted with the students, enquiring about their design methods and other relevant details.

In his address, he commended the creativity and effort behind the use cases, which were previously presented at the Amaravati Drone Summit. He reassured the students that the corporation would provide ongoing support. Besides, he mentioned that the corporation would review the students' use cases every 15 days. If these use cases are deemed practically feasible, user-friendly, and applicable in real-world scenarios, they will be implemented by government departments, with further assistance offered to the students.

Maxillofacial Surgeons Day observed in Guntur



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

International Maxillofacial Surgeons Day was observed at the Care Dental College Auditorium in Guntur on Thursday. Around 300 students participated in the event, which was chaired by Dr. Rasul, the college chairman. Dr. Mehboob Shaik, Head of the Maxillofacial Department, gave an informative presentation on throat

cancer, detailing its symptoms and causes. He explained that throat cancer develops in the throat or voice box, a muscular tube extending from behind the nose to the neck. The cancer typically originates in the flat cells lining the inside of the throat. Dr. Shaik stressed the importance of avoiding harmful habits to prevent throat cancer and raised awareness about its prevention.

Ramadan: State Govt expected to issue directives

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Waqf Board Chairman, Sheikh Abdul Azeez, has stated that the State government is expected to issue directives to district administrations and various departments to ensure adequate facilities for citizens during the holy month of Ramadan. He added that the Waqf Board wrote a letter to the government regarding Ramadan requirements. He further said that instructions were given to inspectors and auditors of Waqf properties and the administrators of various Waqf institutions across the State regarding Ramadan-related measures.

Abdul Azeez stressed the need for effective management of health precautions, sanitation, and security standards during Ramadan. He urged the authorities concerned to ensure that necessary water facilities are available at prayer congregations (Mosques), and that there are no interruptions in electricity supply.

In light of the fasting practices of the Muslim community, Azeez further requested that the Police Department be instructed to grant permissions for late-night operations for shops, vegetable markets, and hotels, as well as to open early in the morning to cater to the needs of fasting individuals.

APSCHE announces entrance exams schedule

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Council for Higher Education (APSCHE) has released the schedule for common entrance exams for admissions to various courses in the State for the 2025-26 academic year. Education Minister Nara Lokesh shared the schedule on 'X'.

THE SCHEDULE:
AP EAPCET (Engineering): May 21 to 27
AP EAPCET (Agriculture, Pharma): May 19 and 20
AP ICET: May 7
AP RCET: May 2 to 5
AP ECET: May 6
AP LAW CET: May 25
AP PGECET: June 5 to 7
AP EDCET: June 8
APP CET: June 9 to 13
AP PECET: June 25

NSLC Project Committee appeals for release of irrigation water

Minister's intervention sought to save standing crops

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vice-Chairman of the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal (NSLC) Project Committee, Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao, along with Distributory Committees (DC) Chairpersons Pamarthi Srinivasa Rao, Kommareddy Rajesh, Deveneni Satyanarayana, and Kathari Koteswara Rao, have appealed to the Minister for Water Resources, Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu, to authorise the release of irrigation water from the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam.

This appeal is intended to protect the standing crops in the Ayacut of Zone III of the Nagarjuna Sagar, located within the combined Krishna district. The committee members

submitted their request to the Minister at his camp office in Vijayawada on Thursday.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Alla Venkata Gopala Krishna Rao stated that the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) had instructed the Telangana State government to release 12 TMC of water to Andhra Pradesh via the Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal in December 2024. However, he pointed out that Telangana had released only seven TMC of water so far, with a mere 500-600 cusecs currently reaching NSP Zone III.

As a result, crops such as chilli, cotton, tobacco, maize, jowar, and mango are facing severe water stress across approximately 2.36 lakh acres

in the Gannavaram, Nuzvid, Tiruvuru, Mylavaram, and Nandigama Assembly constituencies of the combined Krishna district, he said.

The committee has demanded the release of 1,700 cusecs of water for 15 days. Besides, he has urged the government to clear pending dues of Rs. 30 crore related to the Neeru-Chettu Scheme, which were incurred during the TDP administration (2014-2019).

In response, Minister Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu assured that he would coordinate with Telangana Irrigation officials to expedite water release for NSP Zone III. He also promised to address the Rs. 30-crore pending bills, stating that necessary steps would be taken to resolve technical discrepancies.



Crackdown on encroachers at Purna Market in Vizag

Police and GVMC officials take firm action against illegal activities, traders urged to relocate

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Purna Market, a long-standing commercial hub in the city, witnessed a significant crackdown on Thursday as police and Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) officials launched a decisive operation against unauthorized activities and traffic congestion. The enforcement action targeted individuals responsible for traffic disruptions, illegal road occupations, and unauthorized collections, leaving traders and repeat offenders apprehensive.

Police Commissioner Dr. Shankabratu Bugchi issued a stern warning, stating that any further disturbances in Purna Market would be met with strict action. For years, the market has suffered from issues stemming from GVMC contractors and small traders allegedly engaging in disputes with permanent shopkeepers, conducting illegal financial collections, and charging parking fees beyond GVMC-prescribed rates. The misuse of shop rentals and the proliferation of small vendors and carts occupying road space have further exacerbated traffic congestion, leading to accidents, particularly at night.



Despite repeated media reports highlighting these issues, previous interventions by authorities had been sporadic. However, escalating public complaints prompted higher officials to take direct action. Just two days before the crackdown, GVMC Zone-4 Commissioner Mallam Naidu conducted a firsthand assessment of the situation at Purna Market. Following his visit, officials initiated efforts to clear roads and remove encroachments. However, public representatives raised concerns, alleging that the crackdown disproportionately affected small traders.

The market's long-standing irregularities are well-documented, with reports of indi-

viduals controlling multiple shops, engaging in benami transactions, and subcontractors operating without accountability. On Thursday, officials returned to the market, rejecting traders' pleas and firmly instructing them to relocate their businesses to alternative locations such as farmers' markets to ensure unobstructed traffic flow.

Despite appeals for reconsideration, authorities remained resolute. The swift action by the police and GVMC officials has garnered public support, with visibly clearer roads now a reality. However, the crucial question remains: will this newly established order be sustained in the long term?

Public back move to turn Rushikonda complex into US visa centre

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The debate over the future of the Rushikonda complex has taken a fresh turn, with increasing public support for its conversion into a US Visa application centre. Advocates argue that this move would significantly ease the logistical and financial burden faced by North Andhra Pradesh residents when applying for US visas. Currently, visa applicants from Visakhapatnam and nearby districts must travel to Hyderabad for interviews, incurring substantial expenses

for travel and accommodation. These costs often exceed the visa fee itself, prompting widespread calls for a local US Visa centre, especially from students, IT professionals, and entrepreneurs who frequently travel to the United States.

"Applying for a US visa is already stressful, and travelling to Hyderabad only adds to the difficulty," said Anirudh Reddy, an engineering graduate preparing for his Master's in the US. "A Visa centre in Visakhapatnam would save time, money, and effort for thousands like me." Parents of

Residents advocate for local facility to ease travel and financial burdens

aspiring students echo this sentiment. "We are already managing huge expenses for our children's education abroad. The travel cost to Hyderabad is an unnecessary burden," said Lakshmi Narayana, a resident whose son plans to study in the US. The city's growing IT sector also stands to benefit. "Visakhapatnam is emerging as an IT hub, and many professionals travel to the US for work assignments, client meet-



ings, and training. A local visa centre would streamline the process and enhance the city's appeal to IT companies," said Deepika Rao, a senior software engineer at a local MNC. Entrepreneurs have also voiced strong support. "As a business owner, I frequently visit the US for trade fairs and client meetings. Each trip to Hyderabad for visa processing is an added inconvenience and expense. A local centre would boost busi-

ness connectivity and attract more global investors," said Rajesh Kumar, a startup founder.

The general public views the proposal as a step toward Visakhapatnam's growth as a metropolitan city. "A US Visa centre would elevate the city's global standing, encouraging tourism, business, and international collaboration," said Pratibha Sharma, a retired government employee.

Civic organizations and local political leaders are lobbying for the initiative. "Visakhapatnam is the largest

city in Andhra Pradesh and deserves its own visa centre. We will soon submit a formal request to the US Consulate and the Indian government," stated a representative from a local business association. Experts believe establishing a US Visa centre in Visakhapatnam is both feasible and strategically beneficial. With a new international airport under development and aspirations to become a global business hub, stakeholders argue the time is right for the US Consulate to address this growing need.

22 teams deployed for bird flu culling in WG

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Authorities in West Godavari district have implemented several measures to combat the recent bird flu outbreak. These include the formation of specialised culling teams and a ban on the sale of chicken meat and eggs within a 10-kilometre radius of the affected area.

Twenty-two Rapid Response (RR) teams, comprising veterinary doctors and technicians, have been deployed to conduct culling operations in Velpuru village, Tanuku mandal, the outbreak's epicentre.

District Collector C. Nagarani, along with officials from various departments, inspected the G. Krishnanandam poultry farms in Velpuru village. She directed officials to carry out the culling of infected chickens following established scientific protocols. She also enquired about the culling process and the administration of antiviral drugs to the birds.

Officials confirmed the presence of the bird flu virus in five sheds at the G. Krishnanandam



poultry farms. The RR teams are currently overseeing the culling operations. They explained that the culled chickens are being buried after treatment with sodium chloride and potassium permanganate, ensuring a scientifically sound disposal process.

The Velpuru poultry farm houses approximately 20,000 chickens. Following the culling, the sheds will be thoroughly cleaned. Chicken feathers will be removed using flame guns, and the sheds will then be completely disinfected.

"Antiviral drugs have been provided to the RR teams, and the District Medical and Health Officer (DM&HO) has been instructed to conduct health checks on people in nearby urban and rural areas. The government is closely monitoring the situation and providing regular guidance," Collector Nagarani stated.

While a ban on the sale and consumption of chicken and eggs remains in place within a one-kilometre radius of

Velpuru village, officials clarified that there are no restrictions in other areas of the district.

Dismissing reports in some media outlets about human infections, officials confirmed that no human cases of bird flu have been reported in the district.

District Animal Husbandry Officer Dr. K. Murali Krishna, in-charge DMHO Dr. B. Bhanu Naik, and other officials accompanied the Collector during the inspection.



Steps for CM's visit inspected

PNS ■ NELLORE

District Collector O Anand and SP Krishnakanth inspected the arrangements for Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's visit near Kandukur on Thursday. The Chief Minister will visit the district on February 15 to participate in the Andhra Swachh Diwas programme at Kandukur.

Kandukur MLA Inturi Nageswara Rao, District Collector O Anand, and SP Krishnakanth reviewed the helpid, the foundation stone laying site for the waste processing unit, and Dubagunta, where the Swachh Andhra Swachh Diwas event will take place.

They also inspected the premises of the agricultural marketing office, where a stage is being set up for the public meeting. Nellore Municipal Corporation Commissioner Surya Tena and DSP Balasubramanyam were among those present.

Arrangements in place for MLC elections: Collector

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

All necessary arrangements are being made for the MLC Graduates' Constituency election scheduled for February 17 in East Godavari district, with training programmes underway for polling officers and staff.

Election Observer K Sunita held a video conference on Thursday with Collector P Prashanthi and SP D Narasimha Kishore to review the preparations. The Collector informed that training sessions for 510 polling staff will be conducted on February 14 and 19.

Election Observer Sunita instructed officials to ensure foolproof arrangements for the elections and strict enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct across the district. She emphasised the need for special focus on training polling staff, distributing election materials, and setting up reception centres. She also directed officials to strengthen security at sensitive polling stations and submit proposals for additional police personnel if required.

Collector Prashanthi reported that 92 polling stations,



including 10 auxiliary ones, have been set up in the district. A total of 102 presiding officers, 102 assistant presiding officers, 204 polling staff, and 102 micro-observers have been appointed. Additionally, eight zones have been formed, with eight sector officers, 20 flying squads, and six statistical surveillance teams deployed to oversee the election process.

She added that special teams have been formed to monitor the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct and media reports, particularly regarding favourable advertisements and door-to-door campaigns. A media point has

been set up at the Information Department office.

SP D Narasimha Kishore stated that 780 security personnel have been deployed for smooth conduct of polling. Seventeen striking force teams have been stationed along 58 routes, while 15 designated routes have been set up for transporting polling materials. He assured that there are no problematic polling stations in the district.

A total of 62,970 voters, including 36,361 men and 26,606 women, will cast their votes in the MLC Graduates' Constituency election in East Godavari district on February 17.

Rs 20 cr works underway in Nuzvid: Minister Kolusu



PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathi has reiterated that development works worth Rs 20 crore are being undertaken in the Nuzvid constituency and assured their completion at the earliest. At a programme held in Burugugudem village of Chatrai mandal on Thursday, 100 families from the YSRCP joined the Telugu Desam Party in the presence of the Minister.

Addressing the gathering, Parthasarathi praised Chief

Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, highlighting that he was working 14 hours a day for the state's development. He urged TDP activists and supporters to work diligently for the victory of TDP candidate A Rajendra Prasad in the upcoming MLC graduate constituency election. He also lauded Nara Lokesh for his efforts in generating employment for the youth.

The Minister assured that the Chintalapudi Lift Irrigation Scheme would be completed soon to provide water for both

irrigation and drinking purposes. He also stated that farmers were receiving payments for their paddy produce within 24 hours of procurement.

Reaffirming Chandrababu Naidu's commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of the people, Parthasarathi said that the government was working with dedication to create 20 lakh jobs over the next five years.

Earlier, the Minister was given a grand welcome by party activists, including a large number of women, in the village.

2,976 bird flu infected chickens culled in EG

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi has revealed that 2,976 bird flu infected chickens have been culled so far and the AVN Influenza infected areas have also been identified.

Chief Secretary Vijayanand held a video conference with the district Collector on Thursday in which officials of various departments including animal husbandry took part.

The Collector apprised the Chief Secretary that the areas

infected with the AVN influenza virus in poultry farms had been identified and appropriate measures had been taken as per the protocol.

"As many as 2976 chickens have been culled. The symptoms of this disease have been noted in the Kanuru Agraharam area and the poultry farm owners there have been alerted," she explained to the Chief Secretary.

The Collector told the CS that the staff working there is being provided medical protection. "As many as 18 samples



have been collected and sent to the laboratory and all of them

tested negative. The ASHA and ANM teams are being sent to every house to create awareness," she explained to the CS.

Collector Prashanthi said that 17 rapid response teams had been formed in the district, adding that tests will be conducted every 15 days in the coming days and these tests will continue for the next three months.

She highlighted that control measures were taken by focusing on the poultry transport system, adding that by taking

preventive measures, supply to Anganwadi centres and schools has been stopped, and necessary steps would be taken to identify other areas where there are no alternative symptoms and ensure supply.

"Antiviral drugs have been made available at all health centres. A door-to-door survey has been conducted near the affected poultry farms (within a radius of 1 km in urban areas and 3 km in rural areas) and adequate avian information has been provided," she observed.

Stict to EC norms: DC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector and Returning Officer MN Harendira Prasad has directed all contesting candidates to adhere strictly to the Election Commission's regulations to ensure a transparent and peaceful electoral process for the upcoming Uttarandhra Teachers' Constituency MLC elections. These directives were issued during a special meeting held on Thursday evening, immediately after the nomination deadline.

With ten independent candidates in the fray, the election will take place across six districts: Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Anakapalli, Alluri Seetharamaraju, and Parvathipuram Manyam. The nomination process, which lasted from February 3 to 10, received 20 submissions, of which four were rejected due to discrepancies. After scrutiny, 16 applications were deemed valid, but with no withdrawals, the final contesting candidates were confirmed at ten.

No person infected with bird flu in Eluru dist: Collector



PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi has clarified that no person has been infected with bird flu and dismissed reports that appeared in a section of the media that one person was infected with Bird Flu in the Eluru district.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, Collector Vetri Selvi regretted that false news was being spread that one person was infected with Bird Flu and it was confirmed. She appealed to all not to panic by spreading false news regarding bird flu. The Collector acknowledged that upon receiving a complaint that chickens were dying in poultry farms in Badampudi and Ungutur mandal the Animal Husbandry Department officials were alerted and samples of the perished chickens were sent for lab tests.

The swab samples were sent to the National Institute of High-

Security Animal Diseases in Bhopal for diagnosis and the reports were received on Wednesday evening and the reports confirmed to be bird flu positive, she noted. The Collector also made it clear that no person had been infected with the Bird Flu in the country so far.

"One one-kilometre radius from the poultry farm at Badampudi, where Bird Flu was diagnosed in chickens, has been declared an infected zone. A 10-kilometer radius has been declared a surveillance zone. Orders have been issued to completely cull and bury the chickens in the poultry farm in the infected zone," the Collector revealed.

"As part of the immediate implementation of the SOP, a coordination meeting was held with the district officials and an alert was issued. A 24/7 command control centre with a toll-free number of 9966779943 has

also been set up to immediately inform the officials of the Animal Husbandry Department if chickens are dying in poultry farms anywhere," Collector Vetri Selvi asserted.

She noted that 20 Rapid Response Teams had been formed and each team had 5 members to carry out culling operations at the affected villages. All medical kits were provided to the teams; she said and ordered the officials to create awareness among people on the measures to be taken to prevent the spread of Bird Flu.

She also instructed the officials to set up medical camps around 10 KM from the village to examine the suspected cases and provide anti-virus drugs. She made it clear that there is no harm in consuming boiled eggs and chicken meat. Animal Husbandry JD Dr Govinda Raju and DCHS Dr Pal Satish were present.

Parvathipuram chosen for national brain health initiative

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

Parvathipuram Manyam district has been selected as one of only 16 regions nationwide to participate in the prestigious Brain Health Initiative Program. This program, aimed at addressing neurological health concerns and improving mental and physical well-being, will bring specialised healthcare and increased awareness to the district.

The initiative will establish dedicated healthcare centres focused on early diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation for conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, stroke, and other cognitive impairments. In addition to clinical services, the program will conduct awareness campaigns, community outreach programs, and training sessions for healthcare professionals, ensuring they are equipped with the latest advancements in brain health management.

A video conference held Thursday, led by NITI Aayog, with Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) Additional Secretary and Mission Director Geetanjali Gupta and Director Professor Rajender K Damija, highlighted the global impact of neurological diseases, responsible for approximately nine million deaths annually. Officials emphasized the



critical role of prioritizing brain health in reducing the prevalence of these disorders.

Parvathipuram Manyam District Collector A Shyam Prasad expressed his pride in the district's selection and announced the establishment of a Brain Health Clinic at the District Hospital. The program is scheduled to begin in the first week of April, promising accessible neurological care and heightened awareness for the local community.

District Leprosy, AIDS, and TB Officer Dr Vinod Kumar and District Hospital Superintendent Dr Vagdevi also participated in the video conference, pledging their support for the successful implementation of the initiative and its potential to significantly improve public health outcomes in the district. Parvathipuram Manyam's participation in this national initiative positions it as a potential model for brain health interventions, paving the way for a healthier and more resilient community.

PURE launches first 'Youth Hub' in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

People for Urban and Rural Education (PURE), a global organisation focused on empowering children, youth, and women, has launched its first Youth Hub in Andhra Pradesh at Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala in Vijayawada.

Dr. Shyba Talluri, founder and CEO of PURE, explained that the Youth Hubs go beyond simply encouraging volunteering; they are designed to cultivate socially responsible leaders by integrating leadership, service, and innovation. "Our Youth Hubs are incubators for the next generation of leaders who will drive change in their communities and beyond," Dr. Talluri said.

The launch event was attended by K.G.V. Saritha, Superintendent of Police,

'Youth Hubs are designed to cultivate socially responsible leaders'



Women Protection Cell CID-AP; Dr. Vellanki Sree Devi, Obstetrician and Gynaecologist; and B.V.S. Kumar, State Coordinator, Red Cross Blood Centres and Projects, AP.

Saritha highlighted the crucial role of youth in building safer and more inclusive communities through proactive leadership and civic participation. Dr. Sree Devi, an advocate for women's health and education, emphasised the impor-

ance of youth-led initiatives in tackling community health and social welfare challenges. Kumar encouraged students to actively participate in civic initiatives and social impact projects, using their skills to create meaningful change.

PURE expressed its appreciation to the PURE Andhra Pradesh team - Santhisri, Ankaraju, Devisri, and Neha - for their dedication in making the launch event a success.

SEEKING SUPPORT FOR CASTE SURVEY

Govt plans all-party delegation to Delhi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC Chief and MLC B Mahesh Kumar Goud said that the government will take the all-party delegation to the Centre to discuss on caste census after introducing the 42 percent reservation bill in the Assembly for the sake of legality.

Mahesh Kumar Goud said after discussing with the BC Union leaders and professors on Thursday along with the BC Welfare Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar. Later, Ponnamp Prabhakar said that the government did not reveal the details of the caste-wise number. The

caste-wise details doing the rounds are wrong. The opposition parties are intentionally campaigning caste-wise numbers.

Ponnamp Prabhakar said, "Accordingly, 42 percent reservations will be made legal in local body elections, education and employment opportunities. A cabinet meeting will be held in the first week of March and then a special session of the Legislative Assembly will be held immediately and a bill will be introduced to make 42 percent reservations legal. Later, a team of cabinet ministers led by Chief Minister Revanth Reddy will go to Delhi and meet all

parties and central government leaders to support this. BC leaders, professors and intellectuals were advised to tour the districts and work to ensure that those who did not participate in the caste survey participate".

Minister Ponnamp told the BC leaders that the opposition parties are deliberately spreading false figures and that the current caste-wise figures are completely wrong. He said that a toll-free number will be available by the 16th of this month for those who did not participate in the caste survey, and if information is given to it, the enumerator will collect the information.

35 candidates in fray for WG, EG Graduate MLC polls

PNS ■ ELURU

A total of 35 candidates remain in the fray for the MLC Graduates' Constituency elections in West Godavari and East Godavari districts.

According to Election Returning Officer and District Collector K Vetri Selvi, eight candidates withdrew their nominations on Thursday. Of the 54 nominations filed, 11 were rejected due to technical reasons, leaving 35 candidates in the contest. The MLC Graduates' Constituency election is scheduled to be held on February 27. The candidates contesting in the election are Perabathula Rajasekharam from Telugu Desam, Katru Nagababu from Telugu Nagarjuna, and Sheikh Hussain from the Reform Party of India. The independent candi-

dates include Katta Venugopalakrishna, Kandregula Narasimham, Kalluri Krishnamohan, Kukkula Govindaraju, Kunuku Hemakumari, Kaila Lavanya, Gautham Babu Kollu, Chikka Durga Rao, Talluri Ramesh, Dattatreya Nori, Didla Veera Raghavulu also known as D.V. Raghavulu, Dorababu Yalla, Neetiipudi Satyanarayana, Pinipe Nagabhushan Varma, Pippalla Supraja, Papakavala Rajendra also known as Shubha, Boddur Srinivasa Rao, Bommanaboyina

VSR Murthy, Bommi Sanniraj, Bandaru Ramamohan Rao, Bhimeshwara Rao Chikka, Devi Prasad, Merla Sastru, Mokana Ambedkar, Rajapudi, JT Rama Rao, Revulagadda Mahesh Babu, Vanapalli Sivaganesha, M. Srinivasa Rao, Srinivas Vishnuvajjala, G.V. Sundar, and Hassan Sharif.

ACROSS THE STATES



Centre grants Z-category security to Dalai Lama

The Centre has provided a Z-category armed protection cover to Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama in view of potential security threats to him, official sources said on Thursday. The Union home ministry has directed the VIP security wing of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to take charge of the 89-year-old leader. The sources said the Dalai Lama would be secured by a Z-category protection cover of CRPF commandos in all parts of the country. He had a small protection cover of the Himachal Pradesh Police and was extended security when he travelled to Delhi or any other place by the local police. The government has now granted him a uniform security cover after a review by central intelligence agencies, a senior officer said. A team of about 30 CRPF commandos will work in shifts to secure the Dalai Lama, he said. In a similar move, the home ministry has provided a Z-category cover to BJP leader Sambit Patra in Manipur, the sources said.

Power to modify arbitral awards be left to legislature

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday informed the Supreme Court that the key legal question of whether courts could modify arbitral awards under the 1996 law on arbitration and conciliation should be left to the legislature keeping in mind evolving arbitration requirements of the nation. A five-judge Constitution bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices B R Gavi, Sanjay Kumar, K V Viswanathan and Augustine George Masih was deliberating upon the contentious issue of whether courts could modify arbitral awards under the provisions of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

"If we hold that setting aside (of arbitral awards does not include the modification (powers) then it is the end of the matter and if we hold the otherwise (modification powers) then guidelines have to be framed," it said. While posting the hearing on February 18, the bench said, "Please

CENTRE TELLS SUPREME COURT



"Practically, the absence of a modification power leads to wasted judicial resources, as courts often have to set aside entire awards even when a minor correction would suffice."

This contradicts the pro-arbitration approach of minimal judicial interference and speedy dispute resolution

"This again, ought to be appropriately dealt with by the legislature."

provide us with what courts of foreign jurisdictions say on modification powers." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, outlined the legal history on arbitration, foreign laws and the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on

International Commercial Arbitration and said the 1996 law was formulated in pursuance of the UNCITRAL model law.

"Practically, the absence of a modification power leads to wasted judicial resources, as courts often have to set aside entire

awards even when a minor correction would suffice," he said.

This contradicts the pro-arbitration approach of minimal judicial interference and speedy dispute resolution, added Mehta.

While it is accepted that courts should not rewrite awards or review merits, a narrowly tailored modification power — limited to curable defects — would align with the objectives of arbitration law while ensuring justice, he said. "This again, ought to be appropriately dealt with by the legislature," Mehta said.

According to the law officer, while inherent powers, procedural jurisprudence, and evolving arbitration requirements unique to India could justify reading into Section 34 the power of modification, leaving the matter to the wisdom of the legislature would be the "most appropriate measure" for the country's arbitration framework.

'INHUMAN' DEPORTATION OF INDIANS

Will PM convey India's collective outrage to Trump, asks Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with US President Donald Trump, the Congress on Thursday asked if he would "summon up the courage" to convey India's collective outrage at the "inhuman manner" in which Indian citizens were deported from that country.

Posing a series of questions to the prime minister, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh also asked if Modi would convey to the US president that India would send its own aircraft -- like Venezuela and Colombia did -- to bring back Indian deportees in the future.

The prime minister will be first hugging and then meeting his 'good friend' President Trump at 2:30 am IST on the morning of February 14. India has already appeared the US president by slashing import duties on some farm produce and on Mr Trump's favourite



Harley-Davidson motorcycles," Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress leader noted a commitment had also been made to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages Act, 2010, that US companies had been demanding.

"No doubt pacts will be signed and contracts for defence acquisitions firmed up. Even so, we have five questions for the prime minister -- Will Mr Modi summon up the courage to convey to the US president India's collective outrage at the inhuman manner in which Indian citizens were deported back a few days ago?" Ramesh asked.

SC ON AIR POLLUTION



Delhi, Centre may not fight, doesn't mean they will be proactive

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The tussle between the Centre and the Delhi government might have ended with the change in guard, but that does not mean they would be proactive in resolving the air pollution crisis, the Supreme Court on Thursday said.

A bench of Justice Abhay S Oka and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan was hearing the issue of air pollution in Delhi in the M C Mehta case.

Senior advocate Aparajita Singh, who is acting as amicus curiae, submitted she was relieved that Delhi and the Centre wouldn't be at loggerheads after the BJP was set to form government.

She said half of the time was wasted in fighting and the issues remain unresolved. The bench then said in a

lighter vein, "That's the practical aspect of it. They may not be fighting that does not mean they will be proactive."

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati said she was optimistic that there would be no confrontation.

Bhati sought permission to ease GRAP-IV measures that are currently enforced in Delhi.

The bench said it would consider the issue on February 17 and asked the law officer to give an AQI chart.

The bench asked Bhati to seek instructions on the aspect that the recommendations of the Commission for Air Quality Managements, constituted under the Environmental Protection Act, could be implemented in all cities grappling with air pollution and not just in Delhi.

India to conduct 2 crewed space flights under Gaganyaan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has broadened the scope of the Gaganyaan mission and plans to carry out two crewed space flights by 2028, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

According to the enhanced scope, the Gaganyaan programme will have eight missions -- two crewed and six uncrewed -- Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. Singh said the earlier Gaganyaan programme entailed one crewed mission and two uncrewed ones.

The total funding for the programme has been enhanced to Rs 20,193 crore to address the programmatic requirements, according to the revised scope that includes new developments for the Bharatiya Antariksh Station and precursor missions, he said.

The allocation also covers additional requirements to meet the ongoing Gaganyaan programme, he further said.

Modi meets Tulsi Gabbard, calls her 'strong votary' of India-US friendship

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Tulsi Gabbard, US Director of National Intelligence, and discussed various aspects of ties between the two countries with focused on enhancing intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism and emerging threats.

Modi also congratulated Hindu-American Gabbard on her confirmation as the nation's top intelligence official. She was confirmed on Wednesday.

"Met USA's Director of National Intelligence, @TulsiGabbard in Washington DC. Congratulated her on her confirmation. Discussed various aspects of the India-USA friendship, of which she's always been a strong votary," Modi posted on X.

Discussions also focused on enhancing intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and emerging threats, Ministry of External Affairs official



spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

"PM @narendramodi held a productive meeting with US Director of National Intelligence @TulsiGabbard in Washington DC today. Discussions focused on enhancing intelligence cooperation in counter-terrorism, cybersecurity & emerging threats," the post said.

Modi arrived in the US capital on Wednesday around

5.30 pm (Thursday, 4 am IST) after a visit to France where he had co-chaired the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit with French President Emmanuel Macron.

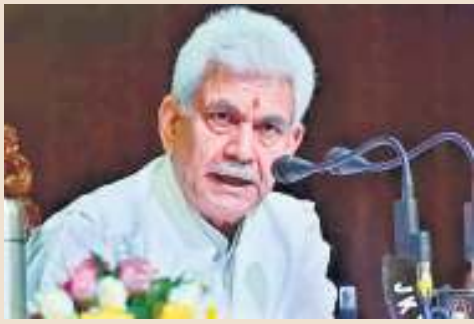
Modi and Trump will hold bilateral discussions in the White House on Thursday.

"Our nations will be working closely for the benefit of our people and for a better future for our planet," Modi said on X



Two tents gutted in fire at Maha Kumbh, no casualties

A fire broke out at the police line camp near Nagvasuki on Bindu Madhav Marg in Sector 6 of the Maha Kumbh on Thursday afternoon, gutting two tents, officials said. However, no casualties were reported. Chief Fire Officer (Kumbh) Pramod Sharma said that smoke was seen rising from the police line camp in Sector 6 under Nagvasuki police station limits around noon. "Four fire tenders were immediately dispatched to the spot, and they managed to control the blaze within minutes. However, two tents were completely destroyed in the fire," Sharma said, confirming that there were no casualties in the incident. The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained, officials said. On February 7, a fire broke out at the ISKCON camp and quickly spread to over a dozen nearby camps, leaving them gutted. No casualties were reported. A massive fire broke out in the Maha Kumbh Mela area's Sector 19 due to a cylinder blast on January 19.



LG calls for measures to protect borders in J&K

Directing for stronger measures to protect the borders amid a ceasefire violation and a major IED attack in the recent past, Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Thursday said all security agencies must work together to counter the cross-border threats. He also called for intensified efforts to wipe out terrorism from Jammu province and said every perpetrator and supporter of terrorism must pay the price. "We must strengthen border security against asymmetric threats due to porous border with riverines and difficult mountain range and all the security agencies must work together to provide necessary back-up support," the lieutenant governor said, chairing a high-level meeting to review the security scenario in Jammu division. This was the second security review meeting chaired by the lieutenant governor in as many days. On Wednesday, Sinha presided over a high-level security review meeting in Srinagar for Kashmir valley. The back-to-back security review meetings took place amid a series of incidents along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu division over the past couple of days.

Centre should resolve farmers' issues in Feb 14 meeting: Pandher

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Thursday said that the Centre should resolve the agitating farmers' issues, including legal guarantee for MSP, in Friday's meeting.

This comes after four rounds of meetings between the Centre and the agitating farmers that were held in February last year.

Pandher spoke to the reporters at the Shambhu border point, where a Kisan Mahapanchayat was held to mark the completion of one year of the ongoing agitation.

He said that they will make efforts to move the Centre towards resolving the farmers' issues in the meeting.

Farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar said that Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on an indefinite fast, will make his best efforts to participate in the meeting to put forth farmers' demands.

He said that Dallewal will try



to participate in the meeting but he is not keeping well.

"Dallewal wants to attend the meeting to put forth farmers' demands before the Centre," Kohar said. Dallewal, who is the convener of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political), has been on an indefinite hunger strike at the Khanauri border point since November 26 last year in support of various demands including a

legal guarantee to minimum support price for crops. On January 18, a delegation of senior officials from the Union Agriculture Ministry, led by joint secretary Priya Ranjan, invited the representatives of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha for a meeting to discuss their demands on February 14 in Chandigarh.

Chief priest of Ayodhya temple given 'Jal Samadhi'

PNS ■ AYODHYA

The late chief priest of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya, Mahant Satyendra Das, was given 'Jal Samadhi' on Thursday evening.

The mortal remains of Acharya Satyendra Das were taken from his residence in a palanquin to the banks of the Saryu river, where he was given water burial at the Tulsidas Ghat. In the afternoon, his body was taken around the city in a procession on a chariot. His successor Pradeep Das earlier told PTI that in accordance with the traditions of the Ramanandi sect, Das will be given a water burial.

As part of the 'jal samadhi', heavy stones are tied to the body before it is immersed into the middle of a river, explained Pradeep Das. The 85-year-old Satyendra Das died at a hospital in Lucknow on Wednesday.



Leopard gatecrashes Lucknow wedding

Bride and groom remain stuck in car for hours

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Wedding celebrations can often get wild. And this one in Lucknow did, quite literally, when a leopard strayed into the banquet hall.

Expectedly, pandemonium broke out as panicked guests scampered here and there, the bride and groom locked themselves in a car and a forest officer who tried to take on the big cat was injured when it took a swipe at his rifle wielding arm.

It all happened on Wednesday night in the city's Buddheshwar Road area. The leopard was caught and tranquillised after hours of efforts around 2 am.

An eyewitness described the scene when the leopard made its entry. The sight of the wild cat, he said, led to panic and screams with guests running frantically to save their lives. Police and forest department officials were called and quickly reached the spot to handle the crisis.

Videos showed the officials putting on protective gear and carefully climbing the stairs of the banquet hall. As they do, the leopard can be seen lunging at one official who leaves his weapon behind as the

men retreat. Forest department official Mukaddar Ali sustained injuries in his hand while trying to catch the leopard, police said.

"We have ordered an inquiry into the whole episode. The animal has been nabbed. But we want to get into the bottom of the whole thing," Uttar Pradesh Forest Minister Arun Kumar Saxena said.

The leopard population has increased... we want to guard against such incidents," he said.

Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Shitanshu Pandey added that the leopard was caught after two tranquilliser darts after which it was trapped using a net and kept in a cage.

"It will be relocated and released in the forest after due permissions," he said. It is a male weighing 80-90 kg.

While leopard sightings have become increasingly frequent in many urban centres across the country, it is rare in Lucknow.

The video was widely distributed across all social media platforms and the one question being asked was how it reached the heart of the city and went into the building.

40 YEARS POST-BHOPAL GAS TRAGEDY

Unloading of Union Carbide waste starts

PNS ■ DHAR

The process of unloading 337 tonnes of hazardous waste, transported from Bhopal-based defunct Union Carbide factory in container trucks, began at an incineration unit in Pithampur industrial area in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district on Thursday, an official said.

He said the exercise, which began at around 3 pm by adhering to all safety norms, was launched in the presence of local representatives and

administration, more than 40 years after the world's worst industrial disaster which occurred when a highly toxic gas leaked from Union Carbide's pesticide plant.

Only the containers packed with chemical waste are being unloaded, and no burning process is being carried out as of now, the official maintained.

In January, protests had rocked Pithampur, around 50 km from Dhar district headquarters, after the waste was brought to a private facility for incineration. Those objecting

to the move claimed it would harm the local residents' health and the environment.

Pithampur SDM Pramod

Singh Gujar, in an audio and visual clip, said, "We have brought local representatives to the Ramky plant, where con-



tainers are parked. The waste is being unloaded from the trucks following all safety regulations."

"The claims about the start of burning process are incorrect. No misinformation or false rumours should be spread. The waste is being unloaded from the trucks in the presence of all representatives, and no further activity is taking place at the unit," Gujar said.

On Wednesday, a group of people performed 'shavasana' (corpse pose) to protest against

the disposal of waste in Dhar district. According to the state government, the waste transported from the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, located around 250km from Dhar, comprises soil, reactor residues, sevin (pesticide) residues, naphthal and semi-processed remnants.

The Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board has said scientific evidence suggests the chemical effects of sevin and naphthal in the waste have now become "nought".



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Revamping the tax regime

Nirmala Sitharaman introduces the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Parliament, aiming to replace the 1961 Act with a more taxpayer-friendly framework

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the Income Tax Bill 2025 in Parliament on Thursday. This new bill aims to replace the Income Tax Act, 1961, which has become cumbersome due to numerous amendments over the last six decades. The bill focuses on simplification, clarity and ease of compliance for taxpayers while retaining the fundamental structure of the tax system. The bill consists of 536 sections, 23 chapters and 16 schedules within 622 pages, making it significantly more concise than the 880-page 1961 Act. One of the major changes is the replacement of the term 'previous year' and 'assessment year' with 'tax year,' eliminating confusion regarding tax filing timelines. To further enhance clarity, ambiguous terms such as 'notwithstanding' have been replaced with 'irrespective.' The new bill also introduces tables and formulae for key calculations, such as TDS, presumptive taxation, salary taxation and deductions for bad debts. Complex explanations and provisos have been omitted, making the law more comprehensible and user-friendly.



A formal Taxpayer's Charter has been included, outlining rights and responsibilities to promote transparency and fairness in tax administration. All TDS-related provisions have been consolidated under a single clause using simple tabular formats, reducing complexity and improving compliance. Additionally, the bill integrates key court rulings from the last 60 years, providing more legal certainty and reducing disputes. The tax treatment for employee stock options has been refined, offering a more transparent taxation structure to ensure fair and predictable tax treatment for employees receiving stock options. To make tax exemptions clearer,

income that does not form part of total income has now been moved to dedicated schedules instead of being scattered throughout the Act. These changes are expected to bring multiple benefits, such as simpler compliance, a clear taxation structure, reduced litigation, an easier TDS framework and greater predictability for employees with stock options. Despite these advantages, the bill faces certain challenges. Taxpayers and businesses will need time to adapt to the new terminologies and provisions. The removal of 'previous year' and 'assessment year' may cause temporary confusion during the transition. Additionally, the introduction of tables and streamlined TDS clauses will require updates in income tax return (ITR) forms, software utilities and reporting systems. The Income Tax Bill 2025 marks a significant step toward a more transparent, efficient and taxpayer-friendly system. While it does not introduce new taxes, its simplification of language, removal of redundancies, and integration of judicial precedents will reduce compliance costs and tax disputes. If successfully implemented, this bill could enhance tax administration efficiency and encourage better voluntary compliance among taxpayers. After deliberation by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, it is expected to come into effect from April 1, 2026. How it will actually work will only be clear then.

PICTALK



Farmer carries rose flowers during the Valentine's Week, in Agartala

Russia combines diplomatic strategy with military tactics



NISHAKANT OJHA

Russia's military philosophy extends beyond traditional warfare, incorporating hybrid tactics that blend Eastern endurance with Western innovation

Russia's military strategy has long been shaped by its geopolitical position, straddling both Europe and Asia. This dual identity has led to a warfare doctrine that merges Western technological advancement with Eastern strategic depth and endurance. The ongoing evolution of Russian military tactics provides valuable insight into its approach to global conflicts, shaped by a fusion of European and Asian influences. From the European side, Russia has historically adopted a professionalised military structure similar to Western armies, particularly during the Imperial era and through Soviet reforms. Its command structures have evolved to centralise authority while enabling flexibility on the battlefield. The modernisation of weaponry has also followed Western advancements, integrating precision-strike capabilities and network-centric warfare. Drawing lessons from NATO conflicts, Russia has enhanced its rapid manoeuvre warfare strategies, incorporating elements of German Blitzkrieg and modern NATO doctrines, which were evident in its campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine. On the other hand, Russia's Eastern influences are deeply rooted in its strategic patience and attritional warfare, a legacy of the Mongol conquests and Soviet-era endurance strategies. Rather than seeking swift victories, Russia often engages in prolonged, resource-draining conflicts that wear down its adversaries over time. Its embrace of asymmetric and hybrid tactics aligns with guerrilla warfare methods, employing unconventional approaches such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and proxy warfare.

This strategic approach mirrors the methods used by China and other Eastern powers, relying on destabilisation rather than direct confrontation. Furthermore, Russia's influence in regional conflicts extends beyond conventional military engagements, utilising mercenaries like the Wagner Group and supporting separatist movements, a strategy similar to



Iran's and China's use of regional proxy forces.

Russia's military doctrine extends its influence over neighboring states, shaping their security and geopolitical dynamics. Ukraine has been the epicenter of Russia's hybrid warfare, where cyberattacks, military incursions, and disinformation campaigns have been employed to destabilise the country. Belarus remains a critical ally, hosting Russian forces and acting as a logistical facilitator for military operations. The Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—are under constant Russian influence, facing frequent cyber intrusions and political destabilisation efforts, despite their NATO membership. In Central Asia, Russia maintains a military and economic presence in former Soviet republics like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, ensuring their alignment within its sphere of influence. Similarly, in the Caucasus, Russia has engaged in military conflicts, as seen in Georgia, and continues to exert influence in Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace-keeping operations and strategic alliances. Beyond its immediate borders, Russia balances relationships with China and India, maintaining military cooperation with the former while supplying arms to the latter, ensuring its strategic autonomy amid shifting glob-



DRAWING LESSONS FROM NATO CONFLICTS, RUSSIA HAS ENHANCED ITS RAPID MANOEUVRE WARFARE STRATEGIES, INCORPORATING ELEMENTS OF GERMAN BLITZKRIEG AND MODERN NATO DOCTRINES, WHICH WERE EVIDENT IN ITS CAMPAIGNS IN GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

al alliances.

The geopolitical strategy of the United States in the Russia-Ukraine war has been pivotal in countering Russian aggression through military, economic, and diplomatic means. One of the most significant aspects of US involvement has been its military support for Ukraine. The US has supplied Ukraine with advanced weaponry, including Javelin anti-tank missiles, HIMARS rocket systems, and Patriot air defence systems, significantly enhancing its defensive and offensive capabilities.

Another key aspect of the economic strategy has been reducing Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas. The US has increased its liquefied natural gas exports to Europe and supported alternative energy sources to mitigate Russia's ability to use energy as a political weapon. Additionally, billions of dollars in direct economic aid have been provided to Ukraine to stabilize its economy and sustain its military operations.

India, as a key global player, has maintained a delicate balancing act in the Russia-Ukraine war due to its historical ties with Russia and its growing partnerships with the West. Economically, India has continued its energy cooperation with Russia, increasing imports of Russian oil at discounted prices to mitigate global energy inflation. At the same time, India is expanding

its trade partnerships with Western nations to ensure diversification and avoid over-reliance on any single economic partner. In the geopolitical sphere, India has positioned itself as a neutral entity, abstaining from several UN votes condemning Russia and advocating diplomatic dialogue over sanctions.

India's military procurement strategy reflects this balance, as it continues to acquire Russian military hardware such as S-400 missile systems while simultaneously strengthening defense ties with the US and France to modernise its armed forces. The broader Indo-Pacific security landscape remains a key concern for India, as it remains wary of deepening Russia-China military ties. Given China's aggressive posturing in the region, India has increased its engagement with Western powers, particularly through the QUAD alliance with the US, Japan and Australia, to counterbalance Chinese influence. Russia's military philosophy extends beyond traditional warfare, incorporating hybrid tactics that blend Eastern endurance with Western innovation. Cyber and information warfare play a significant role in Russia's strategy, heavily influenced by China's cyber tactics.

(The writer is an expert on cyber security and counter terrorism; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COUNSELLING CENTRES FOR COUPLES

Madam — Recently, many cases of divorce rocked the nation. The case of Atul Subhash, who ended his life, giving up due to the mental agony faced by his wife during divorce and another incident where a Karnataka woman demanded Rs 6.16 lakh per month as alimony, raised doubts among youth on the institution of marriage. To curb the rising cases of divorce, the Odisha government has come up with a welcome initiative to open a pre-marriage counselling centre in the state. CM Mohan Charan Majhi, following a proposal from National Commission for Women (NCW) Chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar, took this thoughtful initiative. With the changing times, the mindset of the young couples is changing. The word 'divorce' is becoming very common in the country these days.

In case of any conflict, be it external or internal, without giving a second thought, the married couple is straightaway heading for a divorce, just like returning a defective product to a shop. Due to a lack of guidance and understanding, some couples don't even put effort into fixing their marriage, which later leads to affairs and family disputes. This practice needs to change; this is where the pre-marriage counselling centres will help the couples. There are some conflicts that can be resolved under proper guidance and advice that the pre-marriage counsellors will provide to couples. This initiative will pave the path for young couples to take the right call at the right time without falling prey to any misjudgments and misunderstandings. The initiative from the Odisha government is a commendable approach to curb divorce cases and to ensure the mental and emotional wellbeing of married couples.

Manoj Kumar Jena | Cuttack

IAF CHIEF CRITICISES HAL

Madam — Indian Air Force Chief Air Marshal Amar Pratap Singh has said his confidence in defence PSU Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) continues to

Supreme Court slams freebies



Recently, during the hearing of a PIL seeking shelter for the homeless in Delhi, the Supreme Court's bench deprecated the distribution of freebies ahead of elections and remarked that it would be better if the homeless were sought to be integrated into mainstream society so that they could contribute to the nation. The order has been passed in the backdrop of a chart handed over in the court by a petitioner in person, which showed the statewide position with regard to the number of homeless persons, the

number of shelters available, and the number of persons who could be accommodated in the said shelters. The Supreme Court expressed concern over political parties promising freebies and asking whether it was not 'creating a class of parasites' instead of bringing people into the mainstream workforce who could contribute towards the nation's development.

The bench has also remarked that people are not willing to work due to the lure of cash transfer schemes like 'Ladkhi Behin' and free rations. Shooting down his submission, Justice B R Gavai recounted his personal experience of how agriculturists in Maharashtra were not getting labourers as they were getting things free at home. SC's strong observation comes at a time when political parties go all out to woo voters by promising freebies like free electricity and water with little concern for state finance.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

INVEST IN AI

Madam — The Chinese DeepSeek has motivated the major countries including India seeking deep into the Artificial Intelligence pursuit. China surprised the world with its latest AI application but it is the hard work of their government, fund managers, institutions, regulatory authorities for two decades with the investment of billions of US Dollars. The global cooperation in developing the latest AI technology to excel ahead of DeepSeek is welcome. Our 23 IITs and 26 IIITs, IISC have thousands of students, researchers and the most competent faculty who can synergise their efforts, resources and infrastructure to develop our own advanced AI.

The Government should immediately thrust their concerted efforts with the regulatory framework, funding and infrastructural resources and pool our top and globally prestigious engineering institutions to develop our own AI at a fast pace.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The true cost of 5G: Why prices are high now—but will not stay that way

New technologies start costly but become more affordable as adoption grows. With economies of scale, 5G costs will drop, unlocking new opportunities for businesses

The 5G technology is widely recognised for its ability to deliver lower latency, faster speeds and improved connectivity, supporting a vast number of devices simultaneously. However, many consumers perceive 5G as an expensive innovation, primarily due to the high cost of chipsets, while overlooking broader cost factors. Although chipset expenses are a component, they do not represent the complete financial picture. **The Cost of 5G Hardware** When considering 5G, it is common to focus on the price of chips. While 4G chips are priced below \$10, 5G chips currently exceed \$100. However, focusing solely on chipset costs ignores the larger financial framework. The primary expense of 5G stems from the extensive infrastructure required to support the network. Telecom providers must invest in building new base stations, fibre-optic networks, and antennas to enable 5G connectivity. Historically, new technologies such as cloud computing and smartphones were expensive when first introduced.



However, as demand grew and adoption increased, prices gradually decreased. A similar trend is anticipated with 5G.

The Inevitable Drop in 5G Costs

Technological progress consistently follows a pattern: initial prices are high, but they decline over time. A case in point is the smartphone market, where the average cost dropped from \$443 in 2011 to \$372 in 2013. Similarly, cloud computing services have become significantly cheaper over the past decade. The same economic principles apply to 5G. As technology advances and adoption rates increase, costs will inevitably decrease.

Economies of Scale and Cost Reduction

One of the key drivers of cost reduction in 5G is economies

of scale. As more telecom providers, businesses and consumers adopt 5G, the cost of deployment will continue to decline. The larger the global 5G network, the more cost-effective its implementation becomes. Research by Juniper predicts that global 5G connections will surge from 5 million in 2019 to 1.5 billion by 2025. Mass production plays a crucial role in reducing costs. Increased production volumes lead to lower prices for 5G hardware, including chips, antennas, and base stations.

The 5G base station market is expected to grow from \$37.44 billion in 2025 to \$132.06 billion by 2030, at a CAGR of 28.67 per cent, according to Mordor Intelligence. These massive investments will drive economies of scale, further lowering the cost of private 5G network deployment for businesses.

Affordable 5G Handsets and Private Networks

The competition in chipset manufacturing is already pushing down 5G handset prices. As these prices drop, the overall cost of related hardware and services will follow, accelerating global 5G

adoption.

5G's Impact on Business

As 5G technology becomes more affordable, businesses will have greater opportunities to enhance their operations. While early adoption may come with higher costs, the long-term benefits will far outweigh these expenses. 5G's ultra-fast connectivity and real-time data transfer capabilities will drive productivity, streamline processes, and facilitate better decision-making. Furthermore, 5G can revolutionise industries by enabling advanced applications in customer service, video streaming, and mobile capabilities.

The Future of 5G Affordability

As adoption scales up, deployment costs will decline, making 5G a more democratised technology. This affordability will allow businesses of all sizes to embrace 5G, fostering innovation in artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and beyond. The widespread availability of 5G will enable businesses to stay competitive in the digital world.

(The writer is Founder & CEO, Echelon Edge Pvt Ltd; views are personal)



GAURAV GANDHI





FIRST COLUMN

INDIA'S AI DIPLOMACY

India's plan to host the fourth global AI summit in Delhi underscores its strategic push for leadership in AI innovation



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to Paris and Washington, where he engaged with two of the most influential leaders from the developed world, come at a crucial juncture of shifting geopolitical dynamics. The central theme of these high-level bilateral discussions revolved around advanced technology cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world. India played a significant role as the co-chair of the AI Action Summit in Paris, alongside host nation France. This marked the third global event dedicated to artificial intelligence, drawing comparisons to the Kumbh Mela of technology—bringing together policymakers, corporate leaders, experts, and world leaders.

The summit's primary focus was on leveraging the transformative potential of AI, a technology that has been likened to groundbreaking human advancements such as the invention of the wheel and the mastery of fire. Meanwhile, China introduced DeepSeek, a nimble generative AI tool, posing a serious challenge to the near-monopolistic dominance of US tech giants that have invested billions in AI research and development. Compounding the complexities of global AI governance, former US President Joe Biden, during his final week in office, passed an executive order known as the Interim Final Rule (IFR) on the Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion.

This order imposed export restrictions on critical software and hardware essential for AI development, targeting nations deemed adversarial to US interests—chiefly China—but also impacting close allies



such as India. Global technology stakeholders have since urged the new US administration to maintain consistency with the previously established Regulatory Freeze Order. They have called for the suspension of the AI Diffusion Rule until further review and stakeholder consultations ensure that the regulations align with both national security and international trade interests.

Despite industry appeals, President Donald Trump has yet to overturn the executive order signed by his predecessor. However, his administration issued a fresh executive order on January 23, signalling a possible shift in approach. Within days of assuming office, President Trump reaffirmed the United States' commitment to AI leadership, stating that the country has historically been at the forefront of AI innovation due to its robust free-market economy, world-class research institutions, and entrepreneurial drive. His directive emphasized eliminating barriers that could hinder American AI progress, revoking certain existing AI policies, and reinforcing the US's global leadership in AI. He further asserted that sustaining AI dominance was vital for human advancement, economic competitiveness, and national security. India, aiming for a prominent role in global AI governance, innovation and development, has set forth an ambitious AI mission of its own.

This vision, however, is heavily reliant on high-end semiconductor chips and Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) currently controlled by US technology firms. Any restrictions on access to these critical processors could pose significant challenges to India's AI aspirations. Modi's engagements in Paris, India's announcement to host the fourth global AI summit in Delhi, and his discussions with President Trump and other world leaders signal a strategic move toward securing India's place at the forefront of global AI advancements. These diplomatic efforts mark an essential step in navigating the rapidly evolving AI landscape and ensuring India's stake in shaping the future of this transformative technology.

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

Will 'Jan Vishwas 2.0' deliver real reform



A S MITTAL

While initiatives like upcoming Jan Vishwas 2.0 aim to ease regulatory burdens, deeper reforms are essential to cut red tape and curb the menace of bribery



Despite concerted efforts to combat corruption, red-tapism and bribery remain formidable barriers to business growth in India. The recent "India Business Corruption Survey 2024" presents a troubling picture: 66 per cent of business entities admit to paying bribes, with 54 per cent stating they were coerced to expedite government processes, obtain permits, ensure compliance, or acquire duplicate licenses. The problem is most acute in sectors governed by over-reaching officials in labour, GST, income tax, pollution, provident funds, property registration, drug and health departments. The economic impact is undeniable.

A survey by EY-FICCI reveals that four out of five respondents believe corruption is a significant deterrent to foreign direct investment (FDI). This underscores the urgent need to overhaul India's compliance framework to foster a transparent, fair, and predictable regulatory environment. While the government initiated compliance reforms two years ago, progress has been sluggish.

The Jan Vishwas Act of 2023 was a step forward, decriminalising 180 provisions related to imprisonment clauses that burden businesses and entrepreneurs. However, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's 2025 budget announcement about 'Jan Vishwas 2.0' aims to further decriminalise around 100 provisions. While this is a welcome step, it barely scratches the surface—over 20,000 provisions with imprisonment clauses remain untouched.

The Constant Flux of Compliance Rules

For Indian businesses, compliance is already a complex challenge, but its intersection with corruption makes it nearly insurmountable. Regulatory officials often wield compliance provisions as tools to extract bribes. Many businesses report that unofficial payments are still required to secure regulatory approvals, even when all necessary compliances are met. A significant flaw in the system is



FOR INDIAN BUSINESSES, COMPLIANCE IS ALREADY A COMPLEX CHALLENGE, BUT ITS INTERSECTION WITH CORRUPTION MAKES IT NEARLY INSURMOUNTABLE

the enormous subjectivity granted to inspectors, who can threaten imprisonment or factory shutdowns without accountability.

Another pressing issue is the overwhelming frequency of compliance updates, which fosters inefficiency and corruption. Over the past year alone, there have been 9,420 compliance updates—an average of 36 daily changes. This staggering rate of change indicates either regulatory incompetence or a deliberate design to create systemic corruption pipelines. A bureaucracy that needs to update rules at such an erratic pace is either incapable of foresight or complicit in fostering an environment where bribes become inevitable.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) recent directive is a promising initiative to curb this chaos. Effective this January, changes to food label regulations will be announced only once a year, offering a model for predictable regulatory changes. Similar measures should be extended across all regulatory bodies.

Labour Laws: The Elephant in the Room

A significant portion of compliance-related imprisonment clauses stem from labour laws, which fall under the Concurrent List of the Constitution. While India has replaced 29 colonial-era labour laws with four modern labour codes, they remain in limbo, awaiting implementation. Without this critical step, the long-touted "biggest labour reforms in independent India" remain mere rhetoric. State governments must act swiftly to operationalise these reforms.

Simplifying Business Permits: A Digital-First Approach
Establishing a factory in India

requires submitting hundreds of self-attested and notarised documents across more than 40 government departments.

This archaic system breeds corruption and inefficiency. A digital-first approach could transform the process. Imagine a scenario where entrepreneurs can apply for factory permissions using a single business identifier, granting regulators access to verified documents via an entity called Digi Locker. Such a tamper-proof, authenticated repository could cut approval times from months to days, mirroring the success of India's Digi Yatra in streamlining airport security.

One Nation, One Business Identity

India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised governance, but business compliance remains fragmented. Entrepreneurs must navigate at least 23 identity numbers issued by various Union and state authorities—from PAN, GSTIN, and CIN to professional tax numbers and factory licenses. Each identifier has its lifecycle, requiring periodic renewals and payments, leading to inefficiencies and corruption. A unified One Nation, One Business Identity system could dramatically simplify compliance, reducing bureaucratic friction and the opportunities for corrupt practices.

A small budgetary allocation toward this initiative could streamline regulatory interactions, enhancing India's appeal as a business destination.

A Global Perspective: The US Efficiency Threat

The global competition for investment and talent is intensifying. The United States is advancing governance reforms, including the proposed

Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), to make business operations seamless. If the world's largest economy (GDP: \$27 trillion) becomes even more business-friendly, why would investors choose India's \$4 trillion economy, where red tape and corruption persist? The answer is simple: they won't. As American efficiency attracts global capital, India risks losing out on both investment and entrepreneurial talent, a fundamental driver of its knowledge economy.

The Way Forward

The time for complacency is over. What was an opportunity yesterday is now an urgent necessity. To sustain its economic momentum, India must dismantle bureaucratic hurdles, create a predictable compliance environment, and eradicate corruption. A clear, well-structured compliance framework—ushered in through Jan Vishwas 2.0—is not just about ease of doing business; it's about safeguarding India's economic future.

The government must act decisively to attract global companies and empower Indian entrepreneurs to innovate, expand, and create jobs without fear or unnecessary regulatory friction. India stands at a crossroads. Whether the High-Level Committee for Regulatory Reforms embraces a bold compliance overhaul or hesitates, the stakes are high. The choice is clear: modernise or risk being left behind in the global economic race.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Making road safety a national priority: A targeted mission to save lives

To achieve meaningful change and save lives, India must move beyond symbolism and adopt a mission-driven approach, treating road safety as a national imperative

Every year, India observes Road Safety Month, during which various events and programmes are organised by the government and civil society organisations at national and regional levels. These initiatives focus on raising awareness and educating the public on ways to reduce road casualties. While this acknowledgment is a step forward, the critical question remains—has road safety truly become a national priority? Unfortunately, our approach is often reactive, addressing the issue only after tragic accidents occur, rather than proactively implementing global best practices to prevent them.

A Grim Reality: What the Data Reveals
Road accident statistics paint

a stark picture, suggesting that road safety is yet to be treated as a priority by Indian citizens. Road accidents are an everyday occurrence in India, and there is rarely a day when one does not hear about a fatal crash.

According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) report for 2022, India witnessed 461,312 road crashes, resulting in 168,491 deaths and 443,366 injuries. Alarming, nearly 70 per cent of these fatalities involved young individuals—many of whom were the primary earners of their families.

While the 2023 report is yet to be released, officials have already indicated a steep rise in casualties, making Indian roads even more hazardous. The United Nations Decade of



ASHIM SANYAL

Action for Road Safety aims to reduce road deaths by 50 per cent by 2030, and India is a signatory to this ambitious goal. However, despite past commitments, the recent MoRTH report shows an 11.9 per cent increase in accidents, with deaths rising by 9.4 per cent and injuries by 15.3 per cent compared to 2021. This translates to an average of 1,264 accidents and 462 deaths

per day, or 53 accidents and 19 deaths every hour. Achieving the 50 per cent reduction target by 2030 seems increasingly difficult unless immediate and sustained action is taken at both central and state levels.

Strengthening Laws and Enforcement

The introduction of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, was a significant step toward improving road safety, imposing stricter penalties and regulations. Initially, the law was taken seriously, but its impact faded over time due to inconsistent enforcement. Socio-cultural factors often override the fear of legal consequences, making road safety a neglected concern. The reality is that road crashes are preventable, and the



term "accident" itself is misleading.

The Urgent Need for Action

Adopting a structured and data-driven approach to road safety is imperative. Studies indicate that focusing on key risk factors—such as speeding, non-compliance with seatbelt and helmet laws, and unsafe road designs—can significantly reduce casualties. Speeding alone contributes to approximately 73 per cent

of all road accidents in India. Scientific speed limits should be enforced on expressways, highways, urban roads and even rural areas where mobility is increasing rapidly. Non-compliance with safety measures is another major concern. In 2022, over 16,715 people lost their lives due to not wearing seatbelts, and more than 50,000 two-wheeler riders died because they were not wearing helmets. These numbers highlight the urgent need to enforce safety regulations strictly and create widespread awareness about their importance.

Road Safety as a National Mission

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has successfully led multiple national missions, including Swachh Bharat

Abhiyan, Skill Development, Yoga for Fitness, Immunisation Programmes, and Child Health Initiatives. These programmes achieved remarkable success through targeted policies, funding and regular progress reviews. Given the scale of road safety concerns, India must adopt a similar mission-driven approach. Declaring road safety a National Mission would ensure the allocation of dedicated budgets, the establishment of clear targets, and continuous monitoring at both central and state levels. Regular progress reviews, monthly reports, and rigorous enforcement mechanisms would motivate authorities to take proactive steps toward improving road safety.

A Collective Commitment to

Saving Lives

Road safety is not just about reducing casualties; it is about safeguarding the wellbeing of every citizen, strengthening the economy, and securing the future of India's youth. The financial burden of post-crash medical care, loss of productivity and emotional distress on families is immense. As a global signatory committed to saving lives, India must take decisive steps to ensure road safety is not merely a campaign but an integral part of governance. The time to act is now—by adopting a mission-mode approach, enforcing existing laws and making road safety a top national priority, we can create safer roads for all.

(The author is COO consumer VOICE; views are personal)

MONEY MATTERS

'Budget's goal is to propel growth, boost investments'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the goals of the Union Budget 2025-26 is to accelerate growth, secure inclusive development, and invigorate private sector investments.

Replying to a discussion on the general Budget in Rajya Sabha, the minister also said the Budget was prepared during a challenging time, with serious external challenges beyond estimates or forecasts.

Despite this, the government has tried to keep the assessment as accurate as possible, keeping India's interests paramount, Sitharaman said.

"There are no models that you can build and understand how the trends will be because they are very dynamic... Despite that, we have tried keeping the assessments as close as possible, keeping India's interests as topmost... This immense uncertainty is still playing out and many Indian imports which are very critical for our economy to grow are also going to



"There are no models that you can build and understand how the trends will be because they are very dynamic... Despite that, we have tried keeping the assessments as close as possible, keeping India's interests as topmost... This immense uncertainty is still playing out and many Indian imports which are very critical for our economy to grow are also going to be left with uncertainty," she said

be left with uncertainty," she said.

The minister also stressed that the Budget has not reduced sectoral allocations and the effective capital expenditure during the next fiscal is estimated at Rs 19.08 lakh crore.

Sitharaman told the House that the first advance esti-

mates from National Statistics Office (NSO) has projected India's economy will grow by 6.4 per cent in real terms and 9.7 per cent in nominal terms.

So for the Budget, "we have kept our goals" such that we are able to accelerate growth, secure inclusive development, invigorate private sector investments, she said.

The minister also highlighted that the government steered the economy very well during the Covid crisis, and the country emerged as 5th largest major economy in the world.

She also recalled after the global financial crisis of 2008, India was termed as among the "fragile five" economies.

New IT Bill aims to achieve tax certainty: I-T dept

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The simplified Income Tax Bill, which is half the size of the 1961 Income Tax Act, seeks to achieve tax certainty by minimising the scope of litigation and fresh interpretation, the Income Tax department said on Thursday.

The new bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha, has a word count of 2.6 lakh, lower than 5.12 lakh in the I-T Act. The number of sections is 536, as against 819 effective sections in the existing law.

The number of chapters has also been halved to 23 from 47, according to the FAQ issued by the I-T department.

The Income Tax Bill 2025, has 57 tables, compared to 18 in the existing Act and removed 1,200 provisions and 900 explanations.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, had said that "substantial changes" have been made in the Bill. The number of words have been halved from 5.12



lakh, and sections reduced from 819 to 236. Following introduction, the Bill was referred to the select committee of the Lok Sabha and mandated to submit its report by March 10.

Provisions relating to exemptions, and TDS/TCS have been made crisper in the Bill by putting them in a tabular format, while the chapter for not-for-profit organisations has been made comprehensive with use of plain language. As a result of this, the word count has come down by 34,547.

"While undertaking simplification exercise, a conscious attempt has been made to minimise the scope of litigation and fresh interpretations," it said to a query on whether principles of Tax Certainty were followed in drafting of the new Bill.



Ather Energy ties up with Kerala-based ChargeMOD

Electric two-wheeler maker Ather Energy on Thursday said it has entered into a partnership with ChargeMOD, a charge point operator in Kerala. The collaboration gives EV owners with the LECCS (Light Electric Combined Charging System) connector access to 121 more charging locations across Kerala. As of December 31, 2024, Ather had 291 Ather Grid fast chargers in Kerala. "Since the very beginning, we have focused on establishing a nationwide charging network, and have believed that OEMs should collaborate with charging point operators to expand the charging network in the country," Ather Energy Chief Business Officer Ravneet Singh Phokela said in a statement. The standardisation of the LECCS connector as the type 7 connector, further supports this collaboration, he added. Ather Energy was the first two-wheeler OEM to establish a two-wheeler fast charging network in India in 2018. This collaboration will not only benefit Ather customers but also all electric two-wheeler users, making EV adoption more practical and convenient thereby aligning with Government of India's ambitious vision for a cleaner environment by 2030. ChargeMOD Founder Visakh Raj said.



boAt's invites French tech firms to invest in India

Calling for increased collaboration between France and India, consumer tech firm boAt's co-founder Aman Gupta said India is a powerhouse of innovation with hundreds of thousands of startups and over 100 unicorns. In a LinkedIn post, Gupta, who was present at the Indo-France CEO forum during the AI Action Summit in Paris, shared how he pitched India as a global hotspot for innovation and invited tech businesses to invest in the country. "With over 100,000 startups, 100+ unicorns, and being the 3rd largest ecosystem globally, India is a powerhouse of innovation. It's time to connect the dots globally. France should send its best minds to Startup Mahakumbh (April, Delhi), and India must show up at Viva Tech (June, Paris). We need more Founder-led partnerships in the future and France should also leverage programmes like Invest in India," he wrote. Gupta also highlighted India's shift "from importing to exporting tech," noting the country's evolution from reliance on global tech giants to making and exporting tech—from boAt headphones to Apple iPhones.



HMPL bags work order from NHAI

Infra-to-energy player Hazoor Multi Projects Limited (HMPL) on Thursday said it has bagged a new work order from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). It has received a letter of acceptance (LoA) from the NHAI for acting as a user fee collection agency at Bijora Toll Plaza in Maharashtra, HMPL said in a statement. The company did not share any further details. Earlier this month, the company announced bagging a similar project from NHAI for acting as a user fee collection agency and upkeep/maintenance of adjacent infrastructure in Karnataka valued at around Rs 70 crore. HMPL operates in building road projects on an engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) basis. The company recently forayed into the domestic renewable energy sector with the development of 1.2 GW of clean energy projects spread across 4,200 acres of land in Maharashtra.

Govt won't extend duty-free import of yellow peas beyond Feb: Joshi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will not extend duty-free import of yellow peas beyond February in order to protect the interest of farmers, Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Thursday.

To boost domestic supply and check price rise, the government had allowed the duty-free import of yellow peas in December 2023 and subse-

quently extended it thrice till February 28.

"We are stopping the duty-free import of yellow peas," Joshi told reporters on the sidelines of The Pulses Conclave 2025.

The matter will be discussed in a Group of Ministers (GoM) meeting headed by Union Minister Amit Shah scheduled on Thursday.

The food ministry has given its comments and a final deci-

sion on imposing customs duty on yellow peas will be taken by the GoM, he added.

Joshi, while addressing the event earlier, said the government will review the free import policy for tur, urad and masoor after assessing the domestic pulses production.

He also asserted that the country may not have to import even a single kilogram of pulses by 2027 as Home Minister Amit Shah has expressed con-



fidence that the country will become self-reliant in pulses production.

Joshi also appealed to the private sector and all stakeholders

to focus on strategies to reduce production fluctuations and raise crop yields besides introducing innovative post-harvest tech to minimise the loss and improve the pulses availability.

Meanwhile, India Pulses and Grain Association (IPGA) Chairman Bimal Kothari said the government may impose restrictions on yellow peas import in the interest of farmers.

"We expect that this (duty-

free import of yellow peas) may not be extended or there might be some restrictions on import," he said at a press conference organised on the sidelines of The Pulses Conclave.

India's yellow peas import stood at over 30 lakh tonnes out of 67 lakh tonnes of overall pulses import during the 2024 calendar year, he added.

More than 30 lakh tonnes of yellow peas were imported at zero duty.

Govt working on augmenting coal production: Reddy

PNS ■ NAGPUR

Union minister G Kishan Reddy on Thursday said that since India's energy demand was growing rapidly, the government was working on augmenting the coal production to achieve the dream of 'Viksit Bharat'.

The Coal and Mines Minister also said the government has set the target of producing one billion tonnes of coal this year in a bid to ensure that people do not have to face power shortage, especially in the summer season.

Noting that there was a huge demand for critical minerals like lithium and copper, he said India was acquiring critical mineral blocks in Argentina.

Reddy addressed the coal industry workers at the National convention of Akhil Bharatiya Khadan Mazdoor Sangh affiliated to Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh here, and later also interacted with reporters.

"Energy demand is increas-



ing rapidly in India and coal is an important pillar of our energy security. The government is moving forward with the target of one billion tonnes of coal production for this financial year. Coal production is very important for the next 50 years to achieve the aim of Viksit Bharat," he said.

All the subsidiaries of Coal India Limited play an important role in ensuring energy security, he said.

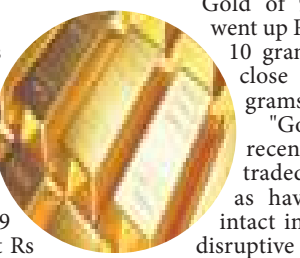
Replying to a query on the coal supply in view of the approaching summer season, the minister said India is the second largest consumer of coal after China and also largest coal producer after the neighbouring country.

Gold rises Rs 140 to reclaim Rs 88,000-mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 140 to Rs 88,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid strong trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 87,960 per 10 grams on Wednesday.



Gold of 99.5 per cent purity went up Rs 140 to Rs 87,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 87,560 per 10 grams.

"Gold recovered from a recent swing bottom and traded higher on Thursday, as haven demand remains intact in response to multiple disruptive tariff announcements by President Trump that are scheduled

to be implemented shortly," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Silver prices also jumped Rs 800 to Rs 98,000 per kg on Thursday. The white metal had settled at Rs 97,200 per kg in the previous trading session.

Investors remain worried that US President's trade tariffs might trigger a global trade war, which continues to act as a tailwind for safe-haven metals like gold, Gandhi said.

Sensex. Nifty close lower for 7th straight session

IT, banking shares major drag

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty pared early gains to close lower for the seventh straight day on Thursday, dragged by fag-end selling in select IT and banking shares and foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dipped 32.11 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 76,138.97. The

index stayed in the positive zone for the most part of the session. The benchmark gyrated 751.1 points between the day's high of 76,764.53 and low of 76,013.43.

The NSE Nifty slipped 13.85 points or 0.06 per cent to 23,031.40.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services,



State Bank of India, Nestle and Titan were among the laggers.

Sun Pharma, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Zomato were the biggest gainers. Foreign Institutional

Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,969.30 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

"Despite initial market optimism driven by easing domestic inflation data, the rally lost momentum amid uncertain global cues and subdued corporate earnings.

Furthermore, a surge in Chinese technology stocks, fuelled by heightened interest in artificial intelligence, redirected FIIs in pursuit of more attractive returns.



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Corporate India is likely to witness annual salary hikes in the range of 6-15 per cent this year,

Salary hikes to hit 30-40 pc for emerging skills : Report

depending on the industry, role criticality, and niche skills and this figure may touch as high as 40 per cent for emerging skills and critical leadership roles, according to Michael Page 2025 Salary Guide.

The leading global recruitment consultancy noted that India's job market has shown

resilience in recent months, offering increased opportunities across sectors compared to early 2024.

"Annual salary hikes in India generally vary from 6-15 per cent, and salary increments for promotions typically range from 20-30 per cent, with critical leadership and emerging skill

roles seeing hikes of 30 to 40 per cent," it said.

Over a dozen new global private equity, sovereign, venture capital, real estate, and infrastructure funds have expanded their operations into India, marking the country's growing significance in the global investment landscape, it added.



ty priorities," foundit Chief Revenue and Growth Officer Pranay Kale said.

Government policies, including key budget provisions, are accelerating this shift - especially in renewable energy, EVs, and sustainability-focused industries.

"As hiring expands beyond metro cities, Tier II hubs are also emerging as key employment centres, reinforcing India's transition to a future-ready, greener economy," Kale said.

'Conditions ripe for India to be at forefront of AI'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid buzz around Artificial Intelligence and its profound impact on society, Google's global head of government affairs and public policy, Karan Bhatia on Thursday said

conditions are ripe for India to be at the forefront of AI, and that the tech firm is deeply aligned to the country's vision of having indigenous foundational models.

He also expressed optimism that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing visit to Washington DC will further cement an already-strong bilateral relationship, and lead to greater collaboration between India and the US, on AI.

Bhatia asserted that the Mountain View, California-headquartered company is

already deeply invested and engaged in India's vision of having indigenous foundational models, and is excited to be an important partner in the country's tech journey.

"... On what makes us optimistic about India, is not just a matter of localised talent... not just things like the language diversity that makes us so excited... it is also the evidence that we've got that India, the Indian people, are very excited about AI," Bhatia said. His comments assume significance coming as they do in the backdrop of an interesting turn of events in the world of AI, which has been buzzing ever since Hangzhou-based startup DeepSeek stunned the industry watchers with its low-cost AI model.



PNS ■ MUMBAI

Hiring for white-collar jobs witnessed a 32 per cent year-on-year surge in January, driven by industries such as semiconductors, energy, waste management and manufacturing in India, a report said on Thursday.

The growth in hiring is attributed to surging consumer demand, strategic incentives outlined in the Union Budget 2025-26 and an increased focus on sustainability initiatives, according to foundit Insights Tracker.

There was a 32 per cent year-on-year jump in hiring for January 2025, signalling renewed

White-collar hiring grows by 32 pc: Report

confidence in the market, it said. The report revealed that green jobs stood out in January, witnessing a 41 per cent increase over the last two years led by expanding clean energy initiatives.

Sectors like semiconductors, energy, and waste management are leading this growth, fuelled by global net-zero emission targets, the report said.

Bengaluru, Delhi and Pune are emerging as key hubs for these roles, which demand specialised

skills in areas like energy auditing and sustainability strategy, it added.

Demand for green jobs is projected to rise another 11 per cent in 2025, driven by renewable energy, EVs, and green hydrogen initiatives.

"India's job market continues to grow at a strong pace, with hiring surging across key industries. Sectors like travel, retail, and green jobs are seeing sustained momentum, reflecting business confidence and evolving indus-



PINTU KI PAPPI HEATS UP WITH TAAKA TAAKI

Following the success of *Beautiful Sajna*, the makers of *Pintu Ki Pappi* have now released the film's second song, *Taaka Taaki*, further fueling anticipation for this much-awaited romantic comedy. The film, featuring young and promising talent Shushant Thamke alongside Vidhi and Jaanya Joshi, has been generating buzz ever since the release of its trailer and first song. *Taaka Taaki* is composed by DR NITZ, also known as Niti 'Nitz' Arora, with lyrics penned by Raman Raghuvanshi. The song is brought to life by the powerhouse vocals of Sunidhi Chauhan, promising to be yet another chart-topping number from the

film's soundtrack. The music video features lead stars Shushant Thamke and Vidhi, adding to the film's vibrant and entertaining appeal. Backed by Mythri Movie Makers and Vidhi Acharya's V2S Production, *Pintu Ki Pappi* is directed by Shiv Hare and is set for a global theatrical release on March 21, 2025. The film boasts an impressive ensemble cast, including Vijay Raaz, Murali Sharma, Sunil Pal, Ali Asgar, Puja Banerjee, Aditi Sanwal, Ria S Soni, Urvashi Chauhan, Pymori Mehta Das, Mukteshwar Ojha and renowned choreographer-actor Ganesh Acharya.

From Rumi Darwaza to Varanasi Ghats – Panther's Uttar Pradesh is a visual & musical masterpiece

Anubhav Shukla aka Panther, the unstoppable force in the Indian hip hop industry, has dropped his latest track, *Uttar Pradesh* and it's already taking the scene by storm. This sonic gem pays homage to the cultural heartbeat of India's heartland, blending electrifying beats with pure, unapologetic Hip Hop energy. With a sound that's both bold and authentic, *Uttar Pradesh* is a high-energy ride that captures the raw spirit of the region while delivering an irresistibly catchy vibe that'll have you hooked from the first beat. Now exclusively signed with Sony Music, Panther cements his position as a trailblazer in the Indian hip-hop scene. Panther is turning up the heat once more, solidifying his dominance in the Indian Hip-Hop scene with his razor-sharp bars and unstoppable flow. *Uttar Pradesh* is a high-energy track packed with infectious beats and seamless rap, all wrapped in the authentic vibe of his homeland. This song is a love letter to the heart and soul of Uttar Pradesh. The music video brings the state's grandeur to life, from the towering Rumi Darwaza in Lucknow to the soulful ghats of Varanasi. Every



frame is a cinematic tribute to the rich culture, history, and pride of this legendary land. While sharing his inspiration behind *Uttar Pradesh*, Panther shares "It's a song that speaks to the raw energy, pride and swagger of being from Uttar

Pradesh. This track captures the attitude of its people, the confidence that flows through every street and every soul. It's my way of honouring the spirit of Uttar Pradesh and I hope everyone feels the power and passion behind it"



Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri criticises 'selective outrage' over comedy amid Samay Raina controversy

Filmmaker Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, known for his bold storytelling and socially charged narratives, has weighed in on the controversy surrounding comedian Samay Raina and his dark comedy. In response to a recent social media post by Raina, Agnihotri addressed what he calls "selective outrage" over vulgarity in comedy, highlighting the evolving cultural divide in the digital age. Sharing his views in a tweet, Agnihotri pointed out that comedians like Samay Raina are a product of the digital era, an era that many with an analogue mindset struggle to comprehend. He noted that traditional forces—political, religious and moral policing—have long dictated societal norms, but the younger digital generation no longer seeks validation from these conventional structures. Agnihotri called out what he sees as hypocrisy in how comedy is perceived, arguing that India has always had space for irreverent humor. According to him, as political and religious control tightens, older forms of artistic expression are being replaced by digital-first entertainers like Raina, making comedy a social issue rather than just a form of entertainment. While emphasising the importance of artistic freedom, Agnihotri condemned the reckless attacks on young creators, warning that excessive censorship and outrage could stifle creative minds. He stressed that instead of silencing new-age comedians, society should encourage and nurture creativity for a thriving cultural landscape.

Taapsee Pannu performs her own stunts in action thriller *Gandhari*

Taapsee Pannu is all set to showcase a new side of herself in *Gandhari*, an action-packed thriller written and produced by Kanika Dhillon. The film, which also stars Ishwak Singh, redefines the limits of maternal love through intense action sequences. Recently, Kanika Dhillon shared behind-the-scenes glimpses from the film's set, revealing that Taapsee has performed all her own stunts without the use of a body double. Praising Taapsee's dedication and agility, Kanika recounted a particularly challenging scene that involved a risky wall climb. "They were shooting a tense sequence that required Taapsee's character to scale a wall. Without any rehearsals or a body double—while ensuring all safety precautions were in place—Taapsee climbed up like a panther in just one take! I was on set that day, and as soon as the shot was completed, the entire crew erupted into applause," Kanika shared. Kanika further expressed her admiration for Taapsee's commitment, saying, "Her agility and athleticism make her the perfect choice for *Gandhari*. She's going to surprise audiences with a character unlike anything she's played before. With Ishwak Singh also on board, he brings a fresh energy and depth to the story and I can't wait for everyone to witness the magic they've created under Devashish Makhija's direction." Produced under Kanika's banner, Kathna Pictures, *Gandhari* will be available for streaming exclusively on Netflix.



Housefull 5 trailer to premiere with Salman Khan's *Sikandar*

Bollywood fans have a double treat in store as the highly anticipated trailer of *Housefull 5* will be attached to Salman Khan's Eid release, *Sikandar*. The upcoming action thriller featuring Salman as an assassin, is set to hit cinemas during the festive season. The film also stars Rashmika Mandanna, who is currently basking in the success of *Pushpa 2: The Rule*. Slated for release on June 6, 2025, *Housefull 5* marks the latest installment in one of India's biggest comedy franchises. The film is helmed by Tarun Mansukhani and boasts a star-studded ensemble cast, including Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh, Abhishek Bachchan, Fardeen Khan, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Chitrangada Singh, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma, and Nikitin Dheer. Both *Housefull 5* and *Sikandar* are backed by Sajid Nadiadwala, adding to a blockbuster year for his production house, Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment (NGE). With 2025 marking 75 years of NGE, the production house is set to dominate the box office with four major releases. The lineup kicks off with *Sikandar*, followed by *Housefull 5*, Tiger Shroff's *Baaghi 4* and an untitled Vishal Bhardwaj directorial starring Shahid Kapoor. Actor Dino Morea, known for films like *Raaz*, *Aksar*, *Jism 2* and series like *Rana Naidu* and *The Empire*, celebrated his birthday on the sets of *Housefull 5*. Speaking about the experience, he shared, "There is no better way to celebrate a birthday than doing what you love. For me, it's acting and I am immensely blessed to spend my day doing just that." Apart from *Housefull 5*, Morea is gearing up for Netflix's *The Royals*, where he shares screen space with Zeenat Aman, Ishaan Khatter, Bhumi Pednekar, Nora Fatehi and Milind Soman. He also has *Mere Husband Ki Biwi* in the pipeline.



In a grand and one of its kind musical celebration, Academy Award-winning composer A.R. Rahman took center stage, unveiling the highly anticipated *Chhaava* album, delivering a musical spectacle that reverberated with power, emotion and historical grandeur. The album launch was attended by the stellar cast of the film, including Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna, Director Laxman Utekar, Producer Dinesh Vijan and the creative team behind the project. The evening was a musical treat, where A.R. Rahman brought his signature blend of soulful melodies and epic arrangements to the forefront, creating a musical experience that resonated deeply with all present.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



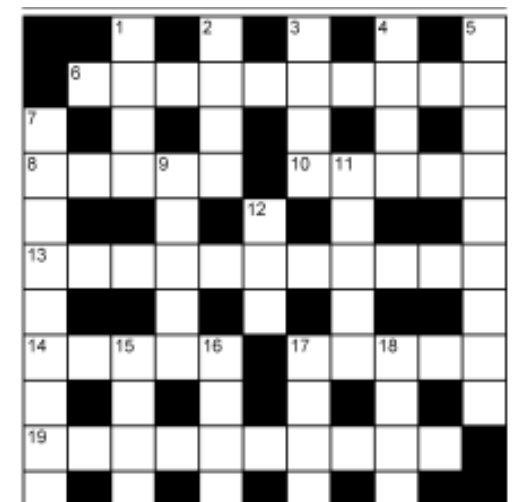
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2	1	3	9	8	5	6	4	7
5	8	9	6	7	4	2	1	3
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9	2	8	7	5	1	3	6	4
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7	5	4	8	3	6	1	9	2
8	7	5	1	9	2	4	3	6
4	3	2	5	6	7	9	8	1
1	9	6	3	4	8	7	2	5

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.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

ACROSS

- A team game
- Foe
- A bamboo-eating animal
- Measure temperatures with this
- Player of bagpipes
- Stairs
- Book of word meanings
- A radio code that uses dots and dashes
- Wide awake and ready for anything
- An animal kept for milk
- Choose
- Spoil completely
- Gritty stuff on a beach
- Your hearing organs

DOWN

- Not in danger
- All right, but not especially good
- Halt
- A sign of tiredness
- A big sea bird
- A many-legged creature



GINGER MEGGS



Vijayawada



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Friday
 February 14, 2025

Failure: Beyond just being the opposite of success

TEJAL SINHA

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Failure is often seen as a setback, but what if it's the key to deeper learning and innovation? Manu Kapur, Professor of Learning Sciences and Higher Education at ETH Zurich, has spent the past two decades reshaping how we understand and design learning. His pioneering theory of Productive Failure challenges conventional teaching methods, demonstrating how struggle - when intentionally structured - can lead to stronger understanding and long-term success.

From his early days as a mechanical engineer to becoming a global leader in learning sciences, Kapur's research has transformed classrooms, corporate training and education policy worldwide. In this conversation, he shares his journey, the far-reaching impact of his work and why embracing failure might be the smartest way to learn.

Kapur's academic journey began in mechanical

engineering, but by the time he completed his degree, he realised it wasn't for him. "I went into the industry for a bit, but I didn't enjoy it. I even had a couple of startups, but they didn't work out," he recalls. As a last resort, he turned to teaching - and unexpectedly found his calling.

"I started teaching math and became fascinated by how students understand abstract ideas. That led me to pursue a master's, then a PhD and eventually an academic career in learning sciences."

Teaching mathematics and mentoring the International Mathematical Olympiad team were transformative experiences. "In my early years, I taught in a mainstream school with average and below-average students. I quickly realised that even if you explain something well, students might not understand it. That got me thinking - what is the real problem of learning?"

At the Olympiad level, he encountered a stark contrast. "There, you're working with the best minds. Solving complex problems involves a lot of failure - trying different approaches, most of

which don't work. But this process is essential for learning." This realisation became the foundation of Productive Failure.

The idea of learning from failure isn't new, but Kapur took it further. "People often say, 'We can learn from our mistakes.' My insight was: If failure is such a powerful teacher, why wait for it to happen? Why not design for failure deliberately?"

Productive Failure creates structured learning experiences where students struggle initially before receiving direct instruction. This struggle, Kapur explains, helps them engage more deeply with concepts, leading to better retention and understanding.

His research has shown that students exposed to this method perform significantly better in the long run than those taught through traditional direct instruction. "Failure, when used early and in a safe environment, helps students develop deeper learning. And because they've built this strong foundation, they perform better when the stakes are high."

Despite its success, implementing Productive Failure in classrooms hasn't been easy. "The biggest challenge is that failure has a negative connotation. In schools, failure is seen as a bug, not a feature. Teachers and parents fear it. But when they see the evidence-how deeply students learn through this approach-they begin to trust the process."

Training educators to design lessons using Productive Failure is another hurdle. "Giving a lecture is easy. But designing classroom activities where students struggle productively? That takes skill and practice."

Time constraints in packed school curriculums also make it difficult. "For large-scale implementation, school leadership and education policies need to align with this approach." Kapur's work has influenced national education policies, particularly in Singapore. "It took nearly ten years to go from one school to a nationwide initiative. We started with a single classroom, built evidence, got more schools on board, and eventually engaged policymakers. It was a slow, organic process."

Other countries can learn from Singapore's

experience. "For meaningful change, you need alignment across stakeholders-teachers, school leaders, policymakers, and researchers. It's not about imposing a new method but demonstrating its value through real results." India, with its deeply ingrained culture of academic success and competitive exams, poses a unique challenge. "Failure is not an option for many students and parents. But that's exactly why Productive Failure makes sense here. If we can help students fail early in a structured way, they will develop the deep understanding needed to succeed when it truly matters."

He acknowledges the growing role of technology in education but warns against using tools without a strong pedagogical foundation. "AI can support learning, but its effectiveness depends on how it is designed and used. We must ground it in solid scientific principles about how people learn."

When asked about the legacy he hopes to leave behind, Kapur's answer is clear: impact. "I want to be remembered for a breakthrough idea-one that changed how we think about learning. If Productive Failure becomes a mainstream approach in classrooms and beyond, that would be a legacy worth leaving." His father's advice has stayed with him throughout his journey: "Your ambition should always exceed your talent." It means never getting too comfortable. Keep pushing yourself into new challenges-that's where real learning happens."



Manu Kapur, Professor of Learning Sciences and Higher Education at ETH Zurich, unpacks the power of failure in learning as he chats with The Pioneer. Known for his groundbreaking theory of Productive Failure, he explains how struggle, when designed intentionally, can drive deeper understanding and lasting success - reshaping classrooms, corporate training and education policy worldwide

LEGAL GAME-CHANGER

THE ENTREPRENEUR WHO IS REVOLUTIONISING INDIA'S LEGAL LANDSCAPE!

PNS|HYDERABAD

Meet Shreya Sharma, the ultimate game-changer! This rockstar entrepreneur, lawyer and TEDx speaker is on a mission to revolutionise the way we think about law. With a brain that's always buzzing with ideas, she pursued International Relations at Harvard (yeah, that Harvard!) and later graduated with an LLB Hons from Cardiff University. But here's the thing—she didn't let her fancy degrees define her. Instead, she used them as a launchpad to create something truly amazing. At just 21, she founded "Rest The Case," a legal aggregator platform that's making waves in the industry. This award-winning platform is like a superhero sidekick for anyone navigating the complex world of law. With its user-friendly interface and verified lawyers, it is the ultimate solution for all your legal worries.



have the resources, they have also teamed up with non-governmental organisations and legal aid organisations. For her, success has more to do with knowing she is genuinely assisting those who might otherwise feel lost in the legal system than it does with making money.

"My experience studying overseas made me realise how approachable and user-friendly legal systems can be when they prioritise information simplification and facilitate assistance access. Because the system is made to be easily navigable, individuals are less frightened by it and legal resources are frequently only a click away in countries like the U.S. and the U.K. In India, where legal procedures might seem intimidating and convoluted, I aimed to provide the same clarity. Our goal has been to simplify legalese, provide unambiguous advice and lessen the intimidating nature of the process. Making the law seem like it belongs to the people and not something to be feared is the goal," she added.

However, she also tells us, "AI is really fascinating and we are already looking at ways to integrate it into Rest The Case—whether it's for things like making legal research easier or automating contract drafting. The human element of law, however, will never be completely replaced by technology, in my opinion. AI cannot reproduce the personal tales, feelings and complexity that are often associated with legal matters; these things call for empathy and understanding. The human element will therefore always be at the center of my work, even as we leverage technology to make procedures quicker and more effective."

According to her attempt to wrap it up, "Legal jargon is such a huge barrier—it makes people feel like they need a law degree just to understand their basic rights," she said. "That was what I sought to change with Rest The Case. Through my knowledge library, blogs and videos, we have concentrated on making legal material understandable to anyone. Creating a culture where individuals feel empowered to effectively navigate the legal system rather than being scared by it is my long-term goal. Rest The Case, in my opinion, is crucial to bringing about the idea that everyone, not just attorneys, should be literate in the law."

There were undoubtedly difficulties for a young woman working in both the legal and startup industries. In meetings, when pitching to investors, or even while networking in largely male circles, she sometimes felt that she had to put in twice as much effort to be taken seriously. But rather than deterring me, it encouraged her to demonstrate her suitability for those spaces. However, she believes that things are gradually changing. In legal technology, more women are taking on leadership positions and the need for diversity is becoming more widely recognised. She is happy to be a part of the change and hopes that the next generation of women entrepreneurs will encounter fewer obstacles! So, what's next for this trailblazing entrepreneur? The sky's the limit and we can't wait to see what Shreya has in store for us!

In an exclusive interview, she divulges with us, "I certainly encountered my fair share of eyebrow-raising when I launched Rest The Case at the age of 21. In India, the legal profession has a long history and many people, including clients and attorneys, were apprehensive about transferring something as important as legal services online. I've heard statements like 'Law is too personal to be handled digitally' and 'People won't trust legal advice from a website.' Although it was challenging initially, I concentrated on demonstrating that technology might increase access to legal assistance without sacrificing the human element. People gradually started to realise that online legal services may be dependable—and even better—after we established solid partnerships with reputable attorneys and made sure that all procedures were clear. Although it wasn't simple, perseverance and demonstrating outcomes were more persuasive than doubt."

Her story is one of passion, grit and determination. Let's continue reading where she states, "From the beginning, trust was my top goal. I was aware that my platform wouldn't endure long if users didn't feel secure utilising it. Therefore, we implemented stringent verification procedures to guarantee that all attorneys on our site were legitimate—no shortcuts. We ensured that users felt supported at every stage and that their data was secure. But it was more about personal connection than technology. In order to cut through the jargon and give consumers the impression that they were speaking with actual, reliable professionals, we simplified legal material. It took some time to establish that trust, but being open and consistent was crucial."

Oh! She's a true inspiration to anyone who's ever dreamed of making a difference. And with her infectious energy and optimism, she's proving that even the toughest challenges can be overcome with the right mindset. There were definitely moments of self-doubt during the interview, particularly when she stated, "Oh, there were plenty of moments! I believe that emotion is familiar to everybody who has ever begun something from the beginning. Things weren't going as quickly as I had hoped at one point in the beginning. Since I was young and fresh to the industry, I questioned whether I had taken on more than I could manage or if anyone would even consider me seriously. Nevertheless, I learned from those experiences that resilience is about knowing when to change course, adapt and follow your gut. It also demonstrated to me what it takes to be a leader—to be content with not knowing everything but to keep going."

Making a genuine difference while juggling business objectives has always been at the core of Rest The Case. In addition to creating a successful business, the founder aimed to provide legal assistance to those who typically cannot afford it. In order to achieve this, she provides a range of free resources, reasonably priced consultations and adjustable pricing alternatives. To support those who truly need assistance but do not



Which zodiac signs will find true love in 2025?

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Transformation is the word for 2025 for Taurus, especially in personal relationships. Being ruled by Venus, the love planet, Taurus will be attracted to deeper, more meaningful connections this year. The influence of Jupiter, the expansion planet, will bring growth and positivity to Taurus' romantic endeavours. Whether they are single or in a relationship, this is a time when they will feel more open to vulnerability and emotional intimacy.

The harmonious alignment of Venus and Saturn will also help Taurus to ground a relationship in the long-term. Singles are likely to get to know somebody who shares your values and has long-term objectives, making the year stable and committed. People already in a relationship will see the opportunity of deepening this bond and might even take the next step during 2025.

Libra (September 23 - October 22)

Venus-ruled Libra is familiar with love and relationships. During 2025, the cosmic energies will fall in favour of Libra in the months that Venus transits through their sign. This would be a year of balance, harmony and love for Libra. Though they are well known for their charm and social grace, during 2025, they would attract potential partners who truly resonate with their soul.

Jupiter's transit through Libra's seventh house will enhance their romantic potential. For singles, this alignment may bring the arrival of someone who shares their intellectual and emotional depth. For those in relationships, the year promises a chance to restore balance and rekindle the spark that may have dimmed in recent times. The planets support deeper understanding and commitment, bringing Libra closer to finding true love.

Leo (July 23 - August 22)

Leo natives can expect a thrilling and love-filled year in 2025. With their natural charisma and fiery nature, they are already well-equipped to attract love. However, this year, the alignment of Venus and Mars in their fifth house of romance and creativity will make Leo irresistible. They will experience an inflow of positive energy that boosts their self-confidence and makes them more open to love.

This is the year when many Leos will experience a surge in passion, maybe meeting new people or again rekindling romance that seemed to lose its spark. If Leo has been looking for someone to complement his powerful personality, 2025 will give him the

At the threshold of 2025, many are waiting for true love, companionship and association. For love, we generally go through quite a number of ups and downs, but through astrology, the zodiac sign is found which will witness massive changes in this year related to love. Based on planetary transits, nakshatras and the unique qualities of each zodiac sign, 2025 promises to be a transformative year for many in matters of the heart.

"While love can always surprise us, the stars are aligning in ways that will favour the following zodiac signs in their pursuit of true love in 2025," shares ShivaAmit Khanna - celebrity Vedic Astrologer & Life Strategist.

opportunity to find a partner who shares the same passion and enthusiasm for life.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

2025 will be a highly emotional and transformative year for Cancer. As a sign deeply connected to emotions and the home, Cancer's love life will be touched by the deep influences of the Moon. The year will bring opportunities for Cancer to heal past emotional wounds and enter into relationships based on mutual understanding and nurturing. With Neptune and Pluto affecting Cancer's relationship sector, many will get a strong urge toward a soulmate bond. For those who have been holding onto old hurts, this year promises healing and the possibility of meeting someone who provides a sense of security and emotional fulfillment. For Cancer couples, 2025 is the time to build a firm foundation for the future, perhaps involving discussions about commitment or even marriage.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

Capricorn natives are disciplined and goal-oriented, but in 2025, things can change totally for them concerning love. From their ruling planet, Saturn, they would be attracted to more realistic and mature connections. The true love for Capricorns in 2025 will not come from the gossamer attraction or superficial connections but rather a better perception of compatibility and shared values. The transit of Uranus will challenge Capricorn to step out of their comfort zone and find a more

love. Single Capricorns may find love in the most unexpected places, while those in relationships will feel a renewed sense of excitement and passion. This year will encourage Capricorn to let go of their traditional approach to love and find a new way of relating to their partner.

Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

2025 will be one of the most favourable years for love for Aquarius. Aquarians are known to be independent and unconventional, and true love is not about fitting into a mold but finding someone who accepts and celebrates their uniqueness. With Jupiter's influence in their fifth house of creativity and romance, love for Aquarius will come through a sense of freedom and mutual respect.

In 2025, many Aquarians will find a partner who shares their vision for the future and appreciates their individuality. For single Aquarians, this is a year of meeting someone who challenges them intellectually and emotionally, creating a bond that transcends the ordinary. For those already in relationships, Aquarius will feel a renewed sense of partnership and companionship, possibly entering into a more committed and lasting phase.

It's going to be a great astrological year, 2025, as all the good signs will be around for many people to find true love. Since each sign's journey is so different, according to the planets, Taurus, Libra, Leo, Cancer, Capricorn and Aquarius will have special transits. So, for 2025, it might be a very deep connection or romantic growth that could lead people to their soulmates. Whether single or in a

relationship, these signs will find that true love is within their reach, offering a year filled with the potential for emotional fulfillment and lifelong commitment.

As always, love is not only about what the stars predict, but also about our openness to the connections we make and the effort we put into nurturing them. Keep your heart open, trust the process, and the universe will surely bring you the love you deserve.



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CELEBRATING LOVE

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PIRACY IS LIKE CANCER, BUT WE ARE DOING OUR BEST TO FIGHT IT, SAYS DAMODARA PRASAD

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Piracy remains one of the biggest challenges for filmmakers, especially in Telugu cinema. The latest films like *Game Changer*, *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* and *Thandel* suffered heavy losses due to piracy. Despite a dedicated team working around the clock to take down pirated copies from various websites, new uploads keep emerging.

"It's not possible to eradicate piracy completely because it is like cancer," said Damodara Prasad, Secretary of the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce (TFCC). He explained that TFCC has been relentlessly working to combat piracy. "Earlier, piracy was physical, where films were copied onto CDs. Now, it has become a global issue with digital piracy. There are legal provisions to tackle it, but implementing them takes time. In that period, the damage is already done," he said.

Damodara Prasad acknowledged the government's cooperation in fighting piracy but emphasized the challenges posed by the digital landscape. "We have tied up with Google and our authenticity is such that if a pirated film is uploaded online, we can have it

removed immediately. Many Hindi filmmakers also approach us for help in removing pirated copies of their films," he said.

He further revealed that TFCC's expertise has even attracted the attention of Hollywood. "We have worked with

major Hollywood production houses like Walt Disney and Sony. Even the FBI contacts us annually regarding piracy-related matters," he added, highlighting the international reach of their work.

To protect films from piracy, TFCC charges a nominal fee from production houses before their movie's release. "For small films, we charge Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000, for medium-budget films Rs 1 lakh and for big-budget films Rs 2 lakh. Considering that filmmakers invest crores in their projects, this is a very small amount. This fee helps pay for software experts who work continuously to track and remove pirated content," he explained. However, he noted that not all filmmakers pay regularly. "Some production houses, like Geetha Arts, have always made their payments before release," he added.

The TFCC piracy cell has removed nearly 36,000 pirated copies of *Pushpa 2*. However, despite these efforts, the movie is still available online. "Some websites, like iBomma and Movierulz, operate from different countries, making it impossible to track their IP addresses.

Moreover, if India does not have a treaty with those countries, we cannot take legal action against them," he said.

Damodara Prasad, Secretary of the Telugu Film Chamber of Commerce (TFCC), speaks up on the issue of piracy and how TFCC is combatting it



Damodara Prasad also pointed out that most pirated versions of films originate from northern India. "Since most films are now released pan-India, an HD print of the Hindi version is often recorded in a remote village, while Telugu dialogues are separately recorded in theaters in Telugu states. These are then merged to create high-quality pirated copies," he

explained. Despite all efforts, piracy remains a persistent problem. Damodara Prasad believes that the real solution lies with the people. "Whatever we do, we are doing our best. But ultimately, awareness has to come from the audience. If people make a conscious decision not to watch pirated movies, then the problem can be solved," he concluded.

Urvashi Rautela calls Chiranjeevi her 'Guardian Angel' for helping her ailing mother



Bollywood actress Urvashi Rautela, who has made a mark in Telugu cinema, recently opened up about the invaluable support she received from Megastar Chiranjeevi during a difficult time. The actress, known for her performances in *Daaku Maharaj* alongside Balakrishna and her special dance number in *Waltair Veerayya* with Chiranjeevi, revealed how the veteran actor stepped in to help her mother during a medical emergency.

Urvashi's mother, Meenu Rautela, was hospitalized after suffering an intra-articular fracture in her left leg. The condition was deemed serious by doctors, leaving Urvashi in distress as she struggled to find the best course of treatment. In a moment of uncertainty, she reached out to Chiranjeevi for help.

The Megastar responded promptly and took it upon himself to ensure that Urvashi's mother received the best medical attention. He personally coordinated with the medical team at Apollo Hospital in Kolkata, facilitating the necessary treatment. Thanks to his intervention, the doctors successfully performed surgery, leading to her recovery.

Expressing her deep gratitude, Urvashi shared her experience in an interview with a Telugu news outlet. "I had always heard about Chiranjeevi sir's generosity, but I witnessed it firsthand during the shoot of *Waltair Veerayya*. When my mother faced a major health crisis, I was desperate to find the right treatment. That's when I turned to Chiranjeevi sir for help," she said.

Describing his unwavering support, she added, "He told us not to worry and, like a guardian angel, took the time to understand the entire



situation. He spoke to the Apollo Hospital staff in Kolkata and ensured that she received the best treatment available. Even with his packed schedule, he constantly checked in on us, offering reassurance and support."

Moved by his kindness, Urvashi further stated, "I cannot put into words the gratitude I feel. He proved that humanity and goodwill still exist. He reminded us time and again not to hesitate if we needed anything. My family and I will always be indebted to him for his generosity."

'SAAREE IS BASED ON REAL-LIFE INCIDENTS'

After a long time the controversial director Ram Gopal Varma is coming up with a film titled *Saaree*. Well, he is not the director this time and has given the chance to Giri Krishnakamal to direct this film. Prominent businessman Ravi Shankar Varma is the director and it is released on February 28, in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam languages. The film is a psychological thriller based on real-life events, starring Sathya Yada and Aaradhya Devi as the lead actors. The trailer of this film was also released. "In social media, many people connect with strangers whose faces and background or foreground they don't know, and without knowing

anything about their past or present, they end up trusting them, and face risks, horrifying incidents. We've heard and seen these stories many times! This movie 'Saaree' is based on such real-life incidents," said Ram Gopal Varma while narrating the background voice of the film. The censor formalities are also completed about this film. Generally when an RGV film came to the censor certificate, it is not easy to pass as there were many controversies and it happened many times. But this film completed the formalities without any buzz. This makes it clear that RGV has come up with a film that sticks to only story without any political or any other agenda.



Nagarjuna comes in support of Rajasekhar's *Thala*



Actor Nagarjuna is supporting an upcoming small film *Thala*, which is directed by Amma Rajasekhar. His son Ragin Raj is making his debut as the lead actor. On Thursday, the director and the team met Nagarjuna and showed the trailer of the film. Nagarjuna in the pictures is seen keenly watching the promotional videos. He has wished the team a great success. The senior actor appreciated it after watching the trailer, and also bought the first ticket online. "Nagarjuna bought the first ticket for this movie on Book My Show. On this occasion, he watched the trailer of this movie and appreciated the team. Nagarjuna blessed Ragin Raj that he would become a big actor," said Nagarjuna according to the team. He also said about Rajasekhar's direction and wished him that he is excited to see. The team and the director expressed their happiness, saying that Nagarjuna purchasing the first ticket of the film is a sign of the enormous success that this film will achieve. Srinivas Goud is the producer.



Anupam Kher joins Prabhas' military drama with Hanu Raghavapudi

Bollywood veteran Anupam Kher has become a familiar face in Telugu cinema. Having previously appeared in films like *Karthikeya 2* and *Tiger Nageswara Rao*, he is now playing a key role in *The India House*, starring Nikhil. Adding to his impressive lineup, Kher has now joined the upcoming film directed by Hanu Raghavapudi, featuring Prabhas in the lead.

The actor shared the news on his social media, posting pictures with Prabhas and other team members. The film, produced by Mythri Movie Makers, is set against a military backdrop. While the official title has not been announced, sources suggest that the makers are

considering *Fauji* as the title. Anupam Kher also revealed that this project marks his 544th film, further cementing his status as one of India's most prolific actors. The National Award-winning actor will be seen in a significant role, alongside debutante Imanvi, who is making her Telugu cinema debut as the female lead.

Adding to the film's star power, veteran actors Mithun Chakraborty and Jaya Prada will also play pivotal roles. Set in the 1940s, the story revolves around a man's struggle for his motherland and his people against British rule. Although the film is historically inspired, it is a work of fiction.

Baapu is a unique film that showcases our culture: Rana Daggubati

Versatile actor Brahmapati takes the lead in the upcoming film *Baapu*, directed by debutant Daya. The film also features Amani, Avasara Srinivas, Dhanya Balakrishna, Balagam Sudhakar Reddy and several other talented actors. Following the release of its trailer, the film has received widespread appreciation.

Speaking about *Baapu*, actor Rana Daggubati expressed his excitement, stating that while audiences often see mainstream films, this one stands out due to its unique genre. "Films that reflect our culture are always worth watching, and as a viewer, I'm truly excited and looking forward to it," said Rana.

Producer and director Madhura Sreedhar shared that he has already watched the film twice. "I loved it. The film portrays real people from our surroundings, making it a very relatable experience. Brahmapati's support for the film has been incredible, and I'll do my best to help it reach audiences," he said. He also praised director Daya for crafting a natural and beautifully narrated story.

Actor Brahmapati expressed his gratitude to Rana Daggubati for attending the event and supporting the film. "Rana has always been a strong supporter of small films, and despite being a big star with a packed schedule, he immediately accepted our request to be here," said Brahmapati.

