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**India-Qatar decide to elevate ties to 'strategic partnership'**  
 5

**'INDIA, US COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER; CAN GIVE MUTUAL CONCESSIONS IN TRADE'**  
 8

**Shweta Basu Prasad recalls facing height bullying on set of TELUGU FILM**  
 P12

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
 The pioneer  
 After acquiring 1,000 acres of land in Kalwakurthy, Revanth is now planning a major road project just to inflate land values. He is more concerned about property rates and real estate. He took away the gates and doors for not paying loans, then they took away starters, tomorrow he will not give 10 gm gold or silver, but he will snatch your Mangalsutra  
 -KTRama Rao, BRS MLA P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**River linking must for progress: Min**

Andhra Pradesh Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu emphasised that river linking and the efficient use of water resources are crucial for the State's development. Speaking on the first day of the second All-India Irrigation Ministers' Conference, he referred to the concept of river linking proposed by renowned engineer KL Rao, highlighting the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in advancing this process in Andhra Pradesh. He pointed out that the bifurcated state of...

-PAGE: 3

**Mamata denies links with B'deshi terrorists**

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday rejected allegations by BJP MLAs that she has links with terrorists and fundamentalists in Bangladesh, stating that she would resign if they could prove such claims. Addressing the assembly, Banerjee criticised the saffron party legislators for making "baseless remarks" against her and said she would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to complain about such claims. "The BJP leaders and MLAs are making baseless allegations..."

-PAGE: 5

**Unemployment rate dips to 6.4 pc**

The unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas dipped to 6.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, according to the National Sample Survey Survey (NSSO). Joblessness, or unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people in the labour force. The unemployment rate in the December quarter of FY24 was 6.5 per cent. However, the rate stayed flat when compared sequentially. In the preceding July-September quarter of FY25, the rate of unemployment...

-PAGE: 8

**'India will feel Bumrah's absence'**

India will feel Jasprit Bumrah's absence "very strongly" in the Champions Trophy but they still have a great chance to win the tournament considering their recent form and a host of match-winners at their disposal, reckons former opener Shikhar Dhawan. While the event starts in Pakistan on Wednesday, India start their campaign a day later with a match against neighbours Bangladesh at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Pace spearhead Bumrah was ruled out of the tournament due to a lower back...

-SPORTS

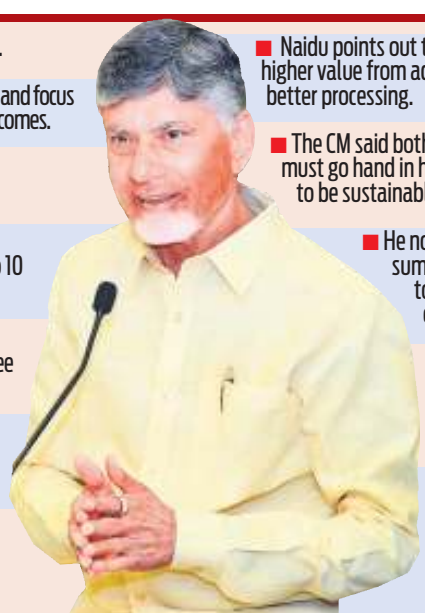
**CM for tech-driven aquaculture**

**SAYS AI CAN HELP SHRIMP FARMERS PREDICT DISEASE RISKS**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu emphasised the role of technology in advancing the aquaculture sector at the three-day Aqua Tech 2.0 Conclave. He said that the industry should be a key driver of Andhra Pradesh's economic growth. "With technology and innovative methods, we can achieve a steady growth rate of 30%," he said, adding that natural farming practices in aquaculture could increase global demand for the state's aqua products, as seen in agriculture. The Chief Minister stressed the need to improve aqua feed and urged producers to focus on value addition to maximise farmers' incomes. At present, aquaculture is practised on 4 lakh acres in the state, with plans to expand it to 10 lakh acres by 2029-30. However, he said that this growth must be environmentally sustainable and encouraged farmers to adopt pollution-free practices using available solutions. Naidu directed that all aqua farming activities be registered, warning of strict enforcement against unregulated practices. He reiterated the government's commitment to promoting aquaculture while ensuring compliance with pollution control norms. "I have a special focus on the aqua sector. Our state has ideal conditions for aquaculture," he said, noting that the industry contributed 8.8% to the

- Naidu attends Aqua Tech 2.0 Conclave.
- Highlights the need to improve aqua feed and focus on value addition to maximise farmers' incomes.
- Says aquaculture should be a key driver of AP's economic growth.
- Aquaculture is currently practised on 4 lakh acres, with plans to expand it to 10 lakh acres by 2029-30.
- CM insists that expansion be environmentally sustainable and pollution-free practices should be adopted.
- All aqua farming activities must be registered, Naidu says, warning against unregulated practices.
- Between 2014 and 2019, aquaculture contributed 8.8% to the state's Gross Value Added (GVA).



- Naidu points out that Vietnam generates higher value from aquaculture through better processing.
- The CM said both production and processing must go hand in hand for agro-based industries to be sustainable.
- He noted that changing food consumption habits require farmers to adopt and explore new opportunities.
- Food certification and traceability will soon be crucial as consumers demand transparency in sourcing.
- The Aqua Tech 2.0 Conclave focuses on industry trends, challenges, and opportunities in aquaculture.

state's Gross Value Added (GVA) between 2014 and 2019. He pointed out that while countries like Vietnam produce less, they generate higher value due to processing. To compete globally, he stressed the importance of value addition through processing and said that conferences like this help guide the industry in that direction. He also mentioned that waste-to-wealth initiatives could help address industry challenges. "In 1995, I focused on IT; today,

I am focusing on AI. Technology is key to reducing costs and improving quality," he said. Naidu noted that shrimp farmers often face losses due to viral infections, but AI can help predict disease risks and enable preventive measures. While AI adoption is still in its early stages, he said it would be crucial for improving productivity and profitability through data analysis and timely interventions. He also highlighted the need for both

production and processing to go hand in hand for the long-term sustainability of agro-based industries. The government, he said, would support initiatives that align with this vision. "Food consumption habits are changing, and farmers must adapt," Naidu said, citing aquaculture, horticulture, palm oil, and cocoa as promising crops. He also noted the growing importance of the dairy industry as a source of livelihood. **Continued on Page 2**



**Pawan: 'Sanatan Dharma' symbolises Indian unity**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan remarked, "History shows that the Kumbh Mela has been celebrated for thousands of years. While reading The Autobiography of a Yogi, I came across descriptions of the Kumbh Mela. For nearly three decades, I have been observing the Kumbh Mela. Though I wished to attend every time, it wasn't possible. Today, I feel immense joy in being part of the Maha Kumbh Mela." On Tuesday evening, Pawan Kalyan and Anna Konidela attended the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, where they took part in the sacred baths and later performed puja at the Triveni Sangam. Others, including Akira Nandan, Trivikram, and Anand Sai, also joined in the ritual. Speaking to the media, Pawan Kalyan stated, "Despite the vast

diversity of races, tribes, and traditions among Indians, there is unity in the practice of Sanatan Dharma. Just as unity in diversity strengthens the nation, a similar unity exists among Indians in their adherence to Dharma. 'Sanatan Dharma' has thrived for thousands of years, and it must continue to prosper in the future. It is extraordinary that nearly half the country's population has gathered for the Kumbh Mela. No other event of such magnitude has been seen globally. It is celebrated as a grand festival by everyone who practices Sanatan Dharma. It is truly remarkable to witness devotees from every corner of the country coming together for the sacred baths." Pawan Kalyan also expressed concern over the unfortunate incidents during the Maha Kumbh Mela, where over 50 million sacred baths were performed over 50 days. **Continued on Page 2**

**SC: States must consider remission plea of convicts**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said states and union territories had an obligation to consider the premature release of all convicts and it was not necessary for them to apply for permanent remission. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan directed states and union territories not having a remission policy under Section 432 of the CrPC or Section 473 of the BNSS to formulate a policy within two months. "Where there is a policy of the appropriate government laying down guidelines for consideration of the grant of premature release under Section 432 of the CrPC or Section 473 of the BNSS, it is the obligation of the appropriate government to consider cases of all convicts for grant of premature release as and when they become eligible for consideration in terms of the policy," it said. The court went on, "In such a case, it is not necessary for the con-

vict or his relatives to make a specific application for grant of permanent remission. When the jail manual or any other departmental instruction issued by the appropriate government contains such policy guidelines, the aforesaid direction will apply." The judgement came in a suo motu case over the grant of bail. The top court said the government concerned had the power to incorporate suitable conditions in an order granting permanent remission and consideration of various factors was necessary before finalising the riders. "The conditions must aim at ensuring that the criminal tendencies, if any, of the convict remain in check and that the convict rehabilitates himself in the society. The conditions should not be so oppressive or stringent that the convict is not able to take advantage of the order granting permanent remission. The conditions cannot be vague and should be capable of being performed," it said.



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**Swamy for CBI probe into Tirupati Dy Mayor poll**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Union minister Subramanian Swamy has written to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), requesting an inquiry into alleged irregularities during the Tirupati Deputy Mayor elections. He condemned the election process, stating that democracy was undermined. **Continued on Page 2**

**Tuni civic vice chief poll deferred again**

**Tension as police resort to a mild lathi-charge as activists of TDP & YSRCP breach barricades**

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Tension prevailed in Tuni town on Tuesday as the municipal vice-chairman election was postponed for the third time due to a lack of quorum. The election had been marred by political friction between the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the opposition YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), with both sides making intense efforts to secure the post. "Chaos erupted after the YSRCP called for a 'Chalo Tuni' march, mobilising a large number of party



activists near the municipal office. Police resorted to a mild lathi charge as activists from both parties breached barricades, leading to a tense situation. Officials stated that the election required the participation of 28 municipal councillors, including an

ex-officio member, but only 10 attended. Joint Collector Rahul Meena monitored the developments. YSRCP leaders claimed that all 28 councillors belonged to their party but accused the TDP of luring away 10 members. **Continued on Page 2**

**Jagan calls on Vamsi, says CM misusing power**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP president and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has termed the alleged fabricated case and illegal arrest of Vallabhaneni Vamsi as a reflection of the deteriorating law and order situation in the State. He cautioned the police against acting at the behest of political bosses, warning that they would have to face the consequences in the future. Speaking to the media after visiting Vamsi at the sub-jail here on Tuesday, YS Jagan accused the Chandrababu Naidu-led govern-

ment of misusing institutions to fabricate cases. He alleged that complainant Satyavardhan was coerced into reversing his earlier statement before the judiciary, leading to Vamsi's arrest on false charges. YS Jagan narrated the sequence of events, stating that on February 11, the police allegedly threatened Vamsi's family members. The next day, they took a statement from Vamsi's brother, claiming that he had kidnapped Satyavardhan. The following day, Vamsi was arrested, with the police securing Satyavardhan's statement only after the arrest. He alleged that



the entire process was manipulated through false testimonials, allowing the police to make arbitrary arrests. Referring to the case involving the attack on the Gannavaram TDP office, YS Jagan noted that in February 2023, Satyavardhan had

given a statement that Vamsi was not involved in the incident and was not present at the scene. He also stated that he had not been abused on caste grounds. YS Jagan pointed out that even after the TDP government reopened the case, Satyavardhan had maintained the same stance. However, he was later named as 'A-71' in the case. He alleged that, dissatisfied with the available legal provisions that could grant bail, the TDP government filed a fresh case against Vamsi, falsely accusing him of kidnapping a Dalit. **Continued on Page 2**

**DEFAMATION CASE Permanent court exemption for Rahul**

PNS ■ PUNE

A Pune court on Tuesday granted permanent exemption from appearance to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case filed over his alleged objectionable remarks on Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, citing his top-level security and the Leader of Opposition status. An application seeking permanent exemption from appearing before the special court for MP/MLA was moved by Advocate Milind Pawar, who is representing Gandhi (54) in the defamation case, last month. The case, in which the Congress leader obtained bail last month, was filed by a relative of Savarkar. Amol Shinde, Judicial Magistrate (First Class) presiding over the special court for MP/MLA, in his order, stated that accused is the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and has to attend several meetings. Considering that he is a "Z-plus"



protectee and taking into account expenses incurred on his security arrangements (during Pune visit) and also law and order issue if he attends the hearing, the court grants permanent exemption to Gandhi from appearing in the case, said the order. Last month, the court had given bail to Gandhi after he virtually appeared before it in the case filed on a complaint of a grandnephew of Savarkar.

**Govt focusing on creative education: Lokesh**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that the Andhra Pradesh government aims to make the education sector the best in the country, Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics Nara Lokesh on Tuesday said that radical changes would be introduced in the curriculum from KG to PG to foster creativity and achieve this goal. Lokesh emphasised that skill development is being aligned in such a way that students should secure employment immediately after completing their graduation. He was speaking after a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the State Government and the Sulochanadevi Singhania School Trust in his presence. The agreement is part of efforts to align with the objectives of the National Education Policy.



As the first step, the trust will initially focus on 14 schools in Tirupati district, assessing teachers' skills, their proficiency in spoken English, and integrating technology into the academic system. Over one lakh students are

expected to benefit from improved educational standards under this five-year initiative. The trust will later extend its services to Amaravati, Visakhapatnam, and Kakinada. **Continued on Page 2**

**Teacher transfers come in for review**

VIJAYAWADA: Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh has directed officials to prepare seniority lists for teachers in a way that avoids controversies over teacher transfers. He chaired a review meeting on Tuesday in Undavalli, discussing issues related to schools, colleges, and higher education. Minister Lokesh also called for a workshop with public representatives to gather suggestions on an alternative system to GO 117. He discussed preparations for the upcoming DSC examinations and addressed the demand to raise salaries for guest faculty in junior colleges. Officials also informed him about a new syllabus for first-year

intermediate students starting next academic year. Additionally, the Minister instructed officials to complete transfers for junior lecturers before the academic year begins. On February 20, he will review the conduct of the 10th grade and intermediate public examinations with the Chief Secretary via video conference with district collectors. Minister Lokesh also criticized the impact of GO 42, which led to the closure of 80 aided colleges, reducing their number from 137 to 57. He directed officials to create policies that compensate for the losses caused by GO 42 and address the concerns of aided teachers while keeping students' future in mind.

# System must act to end the politics of vengeance

Whatever the reason all politicians will have to face the consequences of whatever they did when they had power. If anyone is spared his adversaries may get branded as impotent.



Opponents is now at the receiving end. Among all politically motivated cases, the case filed against the former Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the AP Legislative Assembly, N. Chandrababu Naidu, in connection with his alleged involvement in the skill development scam involving crores is the most important. This incident created ripples across the country and abroad. Irrespective of the merits and demerits of this particular case, there was widespread condemnation of it across the globe. Telugus, particularly techies, working in almost 20 countries staged demos in protest against the allegedly false implication of Chandrababu. He spent 53 days at the Rajahmundry Central Prison as he was remanded to custody by court. His arrest strengthened the bond between the NDA alliance partners.

**Charging criminal cases against political opponents at an appropriate time appears to be 'justifiable' for these ruling parties. This is considered to be an appropriate reply to their opponents**

The NDA led by the TDP in AP had the last laugh in the electoral battle as it won with a thumping majority in both the Assembly and the Lok Sabha. YSRCP cadres somehow felt that it may not be wise to file criminal charges against CBN just six months before the elections. A YSRCP spokesperson who quit immediately after the party's debacle in the Assembly elections openly criticised the leadership for arresting CBN just six months before polls. The party had to face criticism from its own ranks as well as others. An MP, K. Raghunath Reddy (RRR), who was elected on a YSRCP ticket and later became a critic had to suffer custodial

torture. It must be noted that he had undergone bypass surgery. But he approached the court complaining about the torture he had suffered and said that it was a gross violation of the law. The government had engaged two senior IPS officers who were holding charge of the departments handling the cases of CBN and RRR. Both the officers happened to be Dalits and the YSRCP government utilised their 'services' to avoid possible public criticism by using their Dalit background. But instead of getting shielded from criticism they had to face strong action from the NDA government. Both officers had a good reputation ear-



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lier due to their competence, but had to face public criticism and also face disciplinary action. The two officers who came from the ranks of the underprivileged and had a promising future lost their credibility and career. The moral of the incident is that officials should not become tools in the hands of rulers who want to settle scores with

their political opponents. The invasion of CBN's house on the banks of the Krishna River in Amaravati by YSRCP Minister Jogi Ramesh and his accusation against CBN of insulting Ramesh's car driver citing his caste was shocking. A key figure in Jagan's cabinet, P. Ramachandra Reddy faced charges of misusing power for grabbing forest lands near his farmhouse. The 23 acres owned by Ramachandra Reddy suddenly increased to 75 acres.

Former Gannavaram MLA YSRCP leader V. Vamsi Mohan had to go to jail for allegedly kidnapping and intimidating a computer operator who was working at the local TDP office and for vandalising the TDP office using his men. Another former minister, P. Nani of Bandar, was charged with misusing rice supplied through the Public Distribution System.

The current AP Education & IT Minister, N. Lokesh, used to threaten his political

opponents when he was on his Yuva Galam Padayatra during the days when he was in the opposition saying that he was maintaining a 'red-book' listing the misdeeds of the ruling YSRCP leaders. Initially, YSRCP leaders ridiculed Lokesh and his red-book threats. But after assuming power, his opponents are now being charged one by one in different cases. Former minister V. Rajini was also charged as per provisions of the law.

The YSRCP government used Dalit police officers against opponents and the NDA admin is now slapping the Prevention of Atrocities against SC & STs Act which was passed after the infamous Karamchedu massacre in which five Dalits were brutally killed by upper caste landlords in the mid-1980s. There is now a general public impression that this Act which was intended to protect SCs & STs is being misused for political purpose.

Chandrababu was accused of abusing Jogi Ramesh's car driver citing his caste. How can the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) know the caste of a minister whom he never knew at all? Some legal provisions have become weapons in the hands of rulers to intimidate opponents. This is being continued and needs to be curbed by the intervention of higher authorities.

It has become common for the public to guess the names of opposition leaders who is likely to face the music soon. That's why the YSRCP leadership is warning the NDA that they will have to face the same music in case the YSRCP comes back to power.

Sadly, the politics of vengeance is now ruling the roost. Is it necessary for politicians to implicate opponents in criminal cases? If that is so then the system has to act properly to set things right in the larger interests of the nation.

## INTER-DEPARTMENTAL LAND ROWS

# Special plan in the offing for resolution

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A high-level review meeting was held at the State Disaster Management Authority office, where Special Chief Secretary (Revenue) R.P. Sisodia announced the implementation of a special action plan to resolve land disputes between government departments efficiently and without legal complications. The meeting, chaired by Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA) Jayalakshmi, primarily focused on disputes between the Forest and Revenue Departments.



Sisodia emphasised the need for senior officials to conduct field visits to assess ground realities and facilitate swift decision-making to address land conflicts that hinder government development projects. Key discussions included the transfer of 408.67 acres of government land in Rajapuram village, Mulapeta, Srikakulam district, to the AP Maritime Board for the construction of the Mulapeta

Greenfield Port. Since part of the land falls under forest classification, Sisodia directed the CCLA to resolve disputes between the Forest and Revenue Departments at the earliest. Another major dispute involved 502.12 acres of land in Survey No. 303/1 in Amancherla, Nellore Rural Mandal, between the Andhra

Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) and the Forest Department. Given the ongoing legal proceedings, it was decided that further legal consultations were necessary before taking any action. The meeting also addressed a long-pending border dispute over 365.66 acres in Brahmanapalli and Shakunala villages, Orvakal Mandal, Kurnool district. The unclear boundary between a mining reserve forest and a proposed Green Energy Project site led Sisodia to order a joint re-survey by the Revenue and Forest Departments. District collectors were instructed to examine records, conduct field surveys, and submit a comprehensive report to the CCLA.

## Swamy for CBI probe...

Continued from Page 1

Swamy claimed that a YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) MLC was kidnapped during the election, adding that the police had a passive role despite the apparent irregularities. He also referred to attacks on MP Gurrumurthy and others in his letter. In the elections held earlier this month, Swamy accused the coalition government of undermining democracy and unlawfully taking control of the Deputy Mayor position. He alleged that violence and intimidation were used to secure the post, including the kidnapping of YSRCP corporators. Swamy further claimed that threats were made, warning that houses would be demolished if votes were not cast for the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). Additionally, female corporators were reportedly attacked, and intimidation tactics were used.

Three years ago, during the local body elections, the YSRCP won 48 out of 49 divisions in the Tirupati Corporation. With Bhumana Abhinay Reddy contesting in the general elections, he resigned from both the Deputy Mayor and Corporator positions. After the coalition government took power, a notification was issued for a by-election for the Deputy Mayor position. Despite having only one corporator, the ruling coalition allegedly conspired to secure the position through its official influence.

# Anagani slams Jagan for alleged support to criminals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Revenue, Registration and Stamps Minister Anagani Satya Prasad has criticised former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for allegedly favouring criminals while neglecting the concerns of marginalised communities. Addressing a press conference at the TDP central office on Tuesday, he termed Jagan's recent visit to prison a mere facade, comparing it to his previous "fake" outreach programmes for political gain.

Satya Prasad took a jibe at Jagan, calling him a "former jailbird" who was now backing another individual recently incarcerated for alleged misconduct. He alleged that



while Jagan had not reached out to Dalit families affected by violence, he was quick to support those involved in criminal activities.

Referring to the situation in Gannavaram, the minister claimed that peace prevailed in

the region until local MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi joined the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP). He accused the YSRCP of fostering a culture of rowdiness, leading to increased violence and intimidation.

Satya Prasad further alleged

## Botsa demands implementation of 'Super Six'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader and Member of Legislative Council (MLC) Botsa Satyanarayana has urged the TDP-led NDA government in Andhra Pradesh to immediately implement the "Super Six" welfare schemes. In an exclusive conversation with The Pioneer on Tuesday, Satyanarayana stressed that the ruling party won the 2024 elections on the strength of these promises, making it their moral obligation to deliver on them.

Satyanarayana criticised the TDP for its past failures, accusing the party of neglecting key promises made during its previous terms in office.

# TN BJP chief Annamalai advocates temple autonomy

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The second day of the International Temples Convention & Expo (ITCX) 2025 saw an impassioned address by Tamil Nadu BJP chief K. Annamalai, who underscored the need for temple autonomy to boost Bharat's economic growth. He called for the abolition of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) Act and advocated for a governance model inspired by successful autonomous temples.

Annamalai lauded ITCX and Temple Connect for their efforts in strengthening Sanatana Dharma across generations. He expressed his delight at the gathering, stating, "The Temple Connect programme last year in Varanasi and this year in Tirupati has successfully brought together swamijis, 'adinams', and gurus with enthusiastic youth eager to revitalise the temple economy and our traditions."

Highlighting the economic significance of temples, he pointed out that the market valuation of the Tirumala temple alone is estimated at Rs 2.5 lakh crore, surpassing many national and international



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organisations. Criticising the HR & CE Act, Annamalai argued that it restricts temples' economic potential, which could otherwise benefit the national economy. "In our central manifesto, we promise to abolish the HR & CE Act if the NDA comes to power in Tamil Nadu," he asserted.

He envisioned a future where, with divine blessings, the NDA could repeal this "illegal act," freeing over 44,000 temples from government control. He emphasised that even underutilised temples could generate substantial revenue to support local schools,

civic infrastructure, engineering colleges, and centres of excellence in science.

Annamalai also invoked the historical concept of "Dharamanomics" referring to the advanced economic systems of the Chola kings. He stressed that temples should not only serve as spiritual hubs but also act as bridges between privileged and underprivileged communities, fostering social cohesion and strengthening Sanatana Dharma.

His address at ITCX 2025 outlined a vision of temples as engines of economic growth and cultural unity in India.

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	Shashthi: Feb 18 04:53 AM to Feb 19 07:32 AM
Saptami:	Feb 19 07:32 AM to Feb 20 09:58 AM
Nakshatram:	Swati: Feb 18 07:35 AM to Feb 19 10:39 AM
Vishaka:	Feb 19 10:39 AM to Feb 20 01:30 PM
Rahukalam:	12:30 PM to 1:56 PM
Yamagandam:	8:10 AM to 9:37 AM
Varjyam:	04:55 PM to 06:42 PM
Gulika:	11:03 AM to 12:30 PM
Ambritakalam:	03:39 AM to 05:27 AM
Ahijit Muhurtham:	NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER	
Forecast:	Sunny
Temp:	34°
Humidity:	55%
Sunrise:	6:31 AM
Sunset:	6:11 PM
Updated:	February 18, 2025 5:00 PM

## Pawan: 'Sanatan Dharma'...

Continued from Page 1

"It is irresponsible for some leaders to make careless remarks about those observing 'Sanatan Dharma' during such times. The Yogi Adityanath government has implemented a well-planned approach to organise the Maha Kumbh Mela. When large crowds gather, unfortunate incidents can occur. It is inappropriate to blame the sanctity of Sanatan Dharma for such events or make sweeping comments about its traditions. Would political leaders react the same way if similar incidents occurred at events for other religions?"

"When any unfortunate event happens, it's easy to comment. However, when incidents occur during Hindu traditions or Sanatan Dharma events, leaders are quick to react. Despite the police and officials coordinating efforts and ensuring adequate facilities, unexpected incidents can still happen, which is regretful. Even with thorough arrangements before the recent incidents, unforeseen circumstances led to stampedes. It would be better to understand the situation and respond appropriately, no matter where unfortunate incidents take place. It is inappropriate to make remarks that undermine the sentiments of those who follow Sanatan Dharma," he concluded.

## Jagan calls on Vamsi...

Continued from Page 1

The sequence of events, he said, was so swift that within three days, Vamsi was arrested, and a statement was taken from Satyavardhan only after the arrest—highlighting the breakdown of law and order. YS Jagan criticised the government, stating that the administration was being run through intimidation. He said false cases were being foisted on YSRCP leaders such as Nandigam Suresh, Vamsi, and Nani. He further alleged that the case related to the Gannavaram TDP office attack was triggered by provocative remarks made by K. Pattabhi, who abused Vamsi. He claimed that the next day, Pattabhi arrived in Gannavaram, escalated tensions, and even assaulted a Dalit sarpanch and an inspector.

YS Jagan accused the police of being misused to manipulate local body elections through kidnappings, coercion, and intimidation, even for minor posts like Vice Chairperson and Deputy Mayor. He said elections were

## CM for tech-driven...

Continued from Page 1

He cautioned that food certification and traceability would soon become critical, with consumers increasingly interested in the origin of their food. "This shift will drive demand for natural farming and organic produce. By preparing for these trends, farmers and industry players can secure sustainable success," he said. The Aqua Tech 2.0 Conclave features discussions on industry trends, opportunities, challenges, and technological advancements. Organised by GFST, the event has drawn participation from farmers, processing factory owners, traders, and experts. The focus is on making aquaculture a major revenue source for the state through innovation and policy support. Awareness programmes will also be conducted to educate farmers on technology adoption.

## Govt focusing on creative...

Continued from Page 1

Chairman of the Singhania Group, Gautam Hari Singhania, said that the trust's objective is to equip students with advanced technological skills. He also highlighted plans to enhance teachers' efficiency to ensure quality education. Training centres for teachers will be set up in Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and Amaravati, he added.

"We will not only upgrade teachers' skills in advanced technology but also train them in digital tools. With a special focus on English proficiency, students will graduate with the necessary skills to meet career requirements," Singhania said. Director of Singhania Group of Schools, Revathi Srinivasan, stressed that education is the foundation of progress and that the aim is to introduce global best practices in local schools. Independent Director of Raymond, K. Narasimha Murthy, Chief Financial Officer Naveen Sarma, and several heads of the Singhania Group were present at the event.

# Jagan's heartwarming moment of empathy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During his visit to Vijayawada, former Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party President, YS Jagan, demonstrated a truly touching moment of empathy. After visiting the former Gannavaram MLA, Vallabhaneni Vamsi, and returning from Gandhi Nagar District Jail en route to Tadepalli, an unforgettable incident took place.

An ardent supporter, accompanied by his young daughter, eagerly waited to meet YS Jagan amidst a large crowd of party workers and well-wishers. Overwhelmed by the sea of people,

the little girl began to cry, fearing she might miss the chance to meet her hero. Noticing her distress, YS Jagan immediately stopped his convoy. He approached the child, embraced her warmly, and spent a few moments interacting with her. To the girl's delight, he even posed for a selfie with her, making her day truly memorable. Filled with joy, the young admirer kissed him before heading home, carrying with her a heart full of happiness.

This heartwarming gesture once again highlighted YS Jagan's deep connection with the people and his compassionate nature.

## TUNI CIVIC VICE CHIEF POLL...

Continued from Page 1

Despite retaining a majority of 19 councillors, the party alleged that TDP leaders attempted to whisk away their members, forcing them to retreat and avoid participation in the election. Meanwhile, YSRCP former MLA Dadishetti Raja accused the ruling party of misusing the police force to obstruct their leaders. The police had prevented former minister K. Kannababu and ex-MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy from entering Tuni. Additionally, YSRCP leaders, including former MP Vanga Geeta and Mudragada Padmanabham, were stopped from proceeding towards the town in response to the 'Chalo Tuni' call. Authorities have enforced Section 163 (2) of the Municipal Act, prohibiting rallies and large gatherings in the Tuni municipal limits. A heavy police presence, led by ASP Patel, has been deployed to maintain law and order.

## Rajasekhar appointed as new V-C of AU

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Justice Abdul Nazeer, issued a notification on Tuesday appointing Vice-Chancellors for several universities across the state.

Professor GP Rajasekhar has been appointed Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University. He is currently a professor of Mathematics at IIT Kharagpur. Professor CSRK Prasad has been appointed Vice-Chancellor of JNTU Kakinada; he is presently a professor of Civil Engineering at NIT Warangal. Professor P Prakash Babu has been appointed Vice-Chancellor of Yogi Vemana University. He is a senior professor in Biotechnology at the School of Life Sciences, Hyderabad Central University.

All newly appointed Vice-Chancellors will serve for a term of three years. The other newly appointed Vice-Chancellors are Venkata Basavaraju for Rayalaseema University, H Sudarshan Rao for JNTU Ananthapur, Uma for Tirumala Padmavati Women's University, K Ranjith for Krishna University Machilipatnam, Prasanna Sri for Adikavi Nannaya University, and Allam Srinivas Rao for Vikrama Simhapuri University.

# River linking must for progress: Nimmala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Andhra Pradesh Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu emphasised that river linking and the efficient use of water resources are crucial for the State's development. Speaking on the first day of the second All-India Irrigation Ministers' Conference, he referred to the concept of river linking proposed by renowned engineer KL Rao, highlighting the strong leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in advancing this process in Andhra Pradesh.

He pointed out that the bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh covers four crore acres, with two crore acres suitable for agriculture. However, he noted that one crore acres still require irrigation. The minister expressed his commitment to providing water to every acre of land, intending to transform the state into a drought-free region.

During the conference, Ramanaidu presented a video showcasing the State's water resources, ongoing irrigation

projects, and water conservation plans under the Vision 2047 initiative. He also highlighted the introduction of AP Water Resource Management Technology (APWRM) in 2017, which uses real-time governance for effective water management, resulting in a 53% increase in water storage in reservoirs this year.

The minister described the Polavaram project on the Godavari River as particularly significant, capable of discharging up to five million cubic feet of water and stabilising the Krishna and Godavari deltas to ensure sustainable agriculture. He further mentioned that the state is working on 85 projects at various stages to meet the irrigation, drinking, and

industrial water needs. Minister Ramanaidu acknowledged Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's role in promoting modern technology for groundwater measurement, with 1,810 geo-meters and geo-tagged borewells installed across the state. He also outlined the state's initiatives for water conservation, including efforts to reduce waste and encourage water savings.

He reiterated Chief Minister Naidu's vision to make Andhra Pradesh drought-free by 2047 and mentioned plans to maximise the use of water from five major rivers and 35 minor rivers to support drought-prone areas like Rayalaseema.

The minister expressed his gratitude to Prime Minister Modi, Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil, and Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for their support in fast-tracking water conservation and efficiency projects. He urged Minister Patil and other senior officials to provide full financial assistance and necessary approvals for proposed irrigation projects, including the Polavaram-Banakacharla link project.

# Min Kollu slams Jagan for supporting violent elements

Current unrest in Krishna district is direct result of Jagan's administration

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Minister of Mines, Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra has condemned former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for allegedly supporting individuals involved in violence against Dalits and other communities. Speaking at a party office in Gannavaram, he said that Jagan should feel ashamed for extending sympathy to those arrested for kidnapping and torturing individuals who reported attacks on party offices.

Ravindra highlighted that such incidents of assault on political party offices have never been witnessed in India's history. He accused Jagan of fostering a culture of violence, stating that the attacks on Dalits, youth and women, along with the destruction of party properties, reflect a disgraceful chapter for the State.

He mentioned that the current unrest in Krishna district, which has a rich history of intellectuals and leaders, is a direct result of Jagan's administration. Ravindra called out the

administration for allegedly trying to instigate factionalism in the peaceful region of Pulivendula.

Referring to the ongoing violence, he recounted incidents where a Dalit party worker, Satyavardhan, was kidnapped and coerced into retracting his complaints after facing threats. He condemned the behaviour of ruling party members who intimidate law enforcement and misuse their power.

Ravindra asserted that the law will take its course against anyone involved in the attacks on the party office and its members. He warned that the government will take democratic action against those responsible for the kidnapping and threats against the Dalit youth.

# Raids to enforce ban on single-use plastic from March 1



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation officials have said that the government will conduct special raids to enforce the single-use plastic ban from March 1. Legal action, including hefty fines and the cancellation of trade licences, will be imposed on those found using or selling single-use plastics.

In an initiative to raise awareness on the ban on single-use plastics, the Municipal Corporation convened a meeting with bulk waste generators, managers from farmers' markets, hospitals, and hotels at

the VMC office on Tuesday.

The meeting, organised under the directives of VMC Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra, aimed to educate stakeholders about the harmful effects of single-use plastic waste on the environment. The Chief Medical Health Officer, Dr Suresh Babu, highlighted that single-use plastics can take over 200 years to decompose, posing a significant threat to our ecosystems. He urged everyone to adopt environmentally-friendly alternatives in markets, farmers' bazaars, hospitals, and other relevant areas,

emphasising the need to make the community aware of environmentally sustainable materials.

The officials announced that comprehensive awareness programmes will be rolled out by the end of the month, emphasising that from March 1, the government will conduct special raids to enforce the ban.

The estate officers from the Rythu bazaars, market managers, hospital managers, assistant medical health officers, sanitary supervisors, and inspectors participated in the meeting.

# AP Police Officers Assn criticises Jagan's remarks

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The president of the Andhra Pradesh Police Officers Association, Janakula Srinivasa Rao, has issued a strong condemnation of former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy over his comments regarding the police force. Srinivasa Rao said that the law-and-order situation in the State is already precarious, and such threatening remarks only serve to undermine the morale of police personnel.

Srinivasa Rao specifically took issue with Jagan's suggestions of reinstating retired officers and publicly humiliating them, labelling these comments as inappropriate and detrimental. He reminded the former Chief Minister that the officers currently serving are the same ones who worked under his administration and have consistently executed their duties impartially, irrespective of political or community affiliations.

"The police are dedicated to upholding the law and maintaining peace in the State without bias or animosity," Rao stated.

# Vizag CP warns against betting ahead of Champions Trophy & IPL

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



With the Champions Trophy set to begin on February 19 and the Indian Premier League (IPL) season scheduled to start next month, Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi has issued a strong warning to the public against engaging in cricket betting, both online and offline. Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, Commissioner Bagchi emphasized that special teams have been formed to tackle these illegal activities. He assured the public that the police are taking stringent measures to curb cricket betting and protect the community from its negative impact.

"The police department has given strict instructions to all officials, including Inspectors, to remain vigilant and take swift action in cases related to cricket betting," said Bagchi. He revealed that the City Task Force (CTF) would be collaborating with local police to dismantle betting rings and apprehend those involved in such illegal operations.

Bagchi also highlighted the recent success of law enforcement, noting that a cricket betting racket had been successfully raided, leading to the arrest of

12 individuals. "We are fully committed to cracking down on these illegal activities, and I urge the public to stay away from such practices. Betting is not only unlawful but can also lead to severe consequences for those who get involved," he added.

As cricket-related betting activities often see a rise during major sporting events, the Police Commissioner emphasized that the department is dedicated to ensuring a safe, crime-free environment for all sports fans. The police are urging citizens to report any suspicious betting activities to authorities and avoid falling prey to betting syndicates that exploit the excitement surrounding major cricket tournaments.



# 'Atom on Wheel' creates awareness on nuclear power

Mobile exhibition has covered 15 mandals of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

To make people aware, educate and sensitise about the various useful aspects of nuclear power, a special campaign under 'Atom on Wheel' mobile exhibition has been launched in Srikakulam district. As many as 64,755 people have been informed about nuclear energy through this innovative campaign. With the unique features and creative approach, the exhibition successfully covered the students, and general public of various fields by visiting schools, colleges, markets etc. in about 139 villages in more than 15 mandals of Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts.

In January and till February 12, as many as 12,904 people have been covered and informed about societal applications of nuclear energy in 71 villages in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Parvathipuram-Manyam districts. The campaign got huge support and good cooperation from the students, women, youth, gram panchayat members, and other people.

As part of this public awareness campaign, many educational films on the various aspects of nuclear energy and safety were also screened through in-house projection systems and LED TVs during the mobile exhibition. People were also made aware and briefed about the proposed nuclear power plants and various issues through creative leaflets and publications.

# 32L MT of paddy purchased, Rs 7,522 cr Disbursed: Nadendla

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has announced that 32 lakh metric tonnes of paddy have been purchased so far in the State. The Minister participated in a meeting organised by the rice millers here on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, he stated that the Government had procured over 32 lakh metric tonnes of paddy from more than 5.21 lakh farmers. A total of Rs 7,522 crore had been disbursed, with Rs 7,508 crore



credited to the bank accounts of farmers within 24 hours of the purchase.

The Minister mentioned that over 30,000 lorries and about 37,000 hamalis had

been involved in the paddy procurement process across the state. For the first time, the paddy purchase was carried out through WhatsApp, he noted.

Earlier, Minister Nadendla Manohar held a meeting with private godown operators to enhance the efficiency of storage, transportation, security, and management of agricultural produce in the state. It was decided to install Artificial Intelligence (AI) cameras at every godown to monitor storage and security through technology.

The Minister also reiterated the Government's commitment to promoting the use of green energy by installing solar panels on the roofs of each godown.

# Pending honorarium of Rs 45 Cr released for Imams and Mouzans

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Advisor to Government and senior Telugu Desam leader, Mohammad Shareef, has said that the TDP coalition government led by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu released six months' pending honorarium to the tune of ₹45 crore for Imams and Mouzans. He further said that TD has consistently supported the Muslim minorities whenever in power.

On the occasion of the release of the pending honorarium for Imams and Mouzans as promised during the elections, Shareef said, "We extend our gratitude to Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on behalf of the Muslim minorities. During the five years of YSR Congress government, Muslim minorities faced numerous hardships, including the suspension of the honorarium to Imams and Mouzans. Today, the NDA government has released ₹45 crore for the pending dues, which will be distributed to the Imams and Mouzans. Shareef claimed that as soon as Chandrababu returned to power, he allocated increased funds of ₹4,376 crore for minorities in the budget, delivering justice. He pointed out, "While Chandrababu Naidu is known for keeping his promises, Jagan Reddy is known for forgetting his commitments and betraying the minorities. Jagan Reddy has deceived the minorities for five years, failing to implement any of the promises made. Instead, he had scrapped numerous beneficial schemes that were introduced during Chandrababu's tenure, inflicting lasting harm on the Muslim minorities." Shareef stated that each Imam receives an honorarium of ₹10,000, while Mouzans receive ₹5,000 per month. He added that this initiative reaffirms the commitment of the Chandrababu Naidu government to standing by the Muslim minorities, contrasting sharply with the previous administration's neglect.

# AP GCC showcases tribal in New Delhi

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) is showcasing the state's vibrant tribal heritage at the Adimahotsav, a national tribal festival underway in New Delhi from February 16th to 24th. The festival provides a platform for tribal communities from across India to display their traditional products and unique art forms.

Sixteen Van Dhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) from Andhra Pradesh are participating in the festival, presenting locally-made products, handicrafts, and indigenous art. Visitors have shown considerable interest in the diverse offerings, which include tribal crafts, jute bags, Savara paintings, food products, and other unique creations. A key highlight of the GCC's exhibit is Araku Valley Coffee, a product significant to the region and a testament to the hard work and dedication of tribal farmers. The GCC is also showcasing its broader range of tribal products.

Kalpna Kumari, Vice Chairman and Managing Director of GCC, expressed her pride in bringing the voices and creations of the tribes together under one roof. "It is a proud

Sixteen Van Dhan Vikas Kendras participate, highlighting Araku Coffee and local tribal art at National Tribal Festival



VC and MD of GCC Kalpna Kumari with the participants

moment for us to bring the voices and creations of the tribes under one roof and showcase their incredible contributions to India's rich cultural diversity," Kumari stated. "We are deeply honoured to be part of this remarkable event."

The GCC is committed to empowering tribal communities through initiatives like the VDVVKs, which provide vital marketing opportunities for tribal artisans. Kumari emphasized

the positive economic impact of the festival, noting that the tribes receive fair prices for their products, contributing to their economic independence. She also presented Girijan products to Durgadas Uikey, Minister of State for Tribal Affairs (MoTA) during the event.

"GCC will continue to support the Van Dhan Vikas Kendras and remain dedicated to creating opportunities for the tribal communities to prosper," Kumari

affirmed, reiterating the organization's commitment to tribal upliftment. The Adimahotsav serves as a platform to preserve and celebrate the traditional craftsmanship of India's indigenous communities while simultaneously providing them with crucial economic opportunities. The festival, which runs until February 24th, features participation from tribes across India, making it a significant national event.

# Rising Guillain-Barré Syndrome cases spark public concern

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The recent death of a woman from Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) has sent shockwaves through Visakhapatnam, a coastal district already experiencing an alarming increase in cases of the rare neurological disorder. Five patients are currently receiving treatment for GBS at King George Hospital (KGH), prompting health officials to issue an urgent call for increased awareness and swift medical intervention.

The rising number of GBS diagnoses has left the local community shaken, with residents expressing concerns about the spread of the illness and the

adequacy of available resources. While KGH doctors report the patients' conditions as stable, the surge in cases has amplified public anxiety.

GBS, a condition where the immune system attacks the nervous system, is often triggered by an infection. Symptoms, which can appear one to two weeks after a fever, cold, cough, diarrhoea, or other viral or bacterial infections, may include numbness in the limbs, muscle cramps, breathing difficulties, or a sensation of a lump in the throat. Health officials emphasize that timely medical intervention is critical, as untreated GBS can lead to life-threatening respiratory

# Surge in diagnoses at King George Hospital, highlighting critical shortages in treatment and raising awareness on preventive measures

complications. Campylobacter jejuni, a bacterium commonly associated with diarrhoea and spread through contaminated food and water, has been identified as a significant contributor to GBS cases. While this bacterium can trigger severe diarrhoea, with some patients developing GBS symptoms shortly after recovery, GBS can also occur in individuals without a history of diarrhoea.

Public health officials are



urging residents to take preventive measures, including drinking boiled or filtered water, consuming freshly cooked food, avoiding street food, and maintaining proper hygiene. A healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, and sufficient rest, is also crucial for boosting immunity.

The standard treatment for GBS involves immunoglobulin injections, with plasmapheresis (a blood purification procedure) used in more severe cases.

However, both treatments carry risks, including potential complications like lowered blood pressure and increased susceptibility to infection. A critical challenge facing KGH is a shortage of immunoglobulin injections, which are essential for GBS patients. These injections, costing between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 15,000 per vial, are reportedly in short supply at the hospital.

A 50kg patient may require up to seven vials of immunoglobulin daily, costing upwards of Rs. 1 lakh. Allegations have surfaced regarding the case of the woman who died on Monday, with claims that she received only

two injections from the hospital, forcing her family to procure the remaining doses externally. Hospital authorities have yet to comment on these allegations. Adding to the controversy, the woman's official cause of death was reportedly changed from GBS, as initially diagnosed by doctors in the General Medicine Department, to a heart attack. This change has fueled rumours of external pressure influencing the reclassification.

As health officials continue to monitor the situation, the shortage of essential treatments and the growing fear surrounding GBS remain pressing concerns for the Visakhapatnam community.

# Centre's focus on 'Viksit Bharat': Union Minister



PNS ■ GUNTUR

Union Minister for Civil Aviation, K Ramamohan Naidu, has asserted that the Union Budget primarily focused on achieving a 'Viksit Bharat' and fostering industrial growth.

A 'Flight Training Organisation' in the country, a facility currently available only abroad. Furthermore, five Artificial Intelligence centres would be set up to advance the 'Deep Technology' and 'AI' sectors, with one of these centres to be located in Andhra Pradesh.

facilities. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi with enhancing India's international image, which has attracted significant investments. He also lauded the income tax exemption of up to Rs 12 lakh as a revolutionary decision, offering substantial relief to the middle class, particularly the over one crore salaried individuals.

Minister. However, he stated that following an appeal from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Centre had extended the scheme for another year, ensuring the state would benefit.

## Min expresses anger over absence of docs at ESI Hospital



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Labour Vasamsetty Subhash expressed his anger after noticing the absence of doctors during a surprise inspection at the ESIC hospital.

Following the Minister's directions, the Director of AP Insurance Medical Services issued orders on Tuesday to suspend five doctors and four office staff with immediate effect.



## YSRCP regime pushed AP into debt crisis: Energy Minister

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar has accused the previous YSRCP regime of plunging the state into debt due to its inefficiency.

Pradesh is now burdened with debt. The state has been left without capital," he lamented. The Minister also criticised the YSRCP regime for its mismanagement of the Polavaram project.

"Now, roads are being reconstructed with hundreds of crores being spent. The construction work for the Polavaram project has gained momentum," he added.

## 'Aim to transform AP into green and clean by Oct 2026'

Stress on establishing waste processing units in every mandal

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

K Pattabhiram, Chairman of the Swachh Andhra Corporation, has said that the Swachh Andhra (Clean Andhra) Mission, spearheaded by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, aims to transform the State into a completely green and clean environment while eliminating all dumping yards by October 2026.



Prakasam district saw participation from over 2.17 lakh government employees across 90 departments, with an increased public engagement compared to the previous month.

addition to the existing waste-to-energy plants, the State government has initiated tenders for two new plants, one in Nellore, capable of processing 620 tonnes of waste per day and generating 10 megawatts of power, and another in Rajahmundry, set to process 640 tonnes and generate 12 megawatts.

## Collector urges farmers to adopt natural farming

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi has urged farmers to adopt natural farming for healthier and sustainable agricultural practices.



On Tuesday, the Collector visited farms in Dommeru village of Kovvuru mandal, where she inspected crops cultivated using natural farming methods by farmer Neerukonda Satyanarayana. She observed sugarcane,

papaya, maize, ginger, plantain, cocoa, yam, guava, and dragon fruit grown without chemical fertilisers. Speaking on the occasion, she stressed the importance of promoting natural farming to produce healthy farm yields.

The Collector noted that farmers engaged in natural farming are using 12 drones to spray organic infusions to prevent pest attacks. She appreciated their efforts to replace chemical pesticides with eco-friendly alternatives, which also helped reduce cultivation costs.

## 27 red sanders logs seized, one smuggler arrested



PNS ■ KADAPA

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) seized 27 red sanders logs and arrested a smuggler in the Uddimadugu forest area of the district.

a group of red sander smugglers carrying logs in the 'Jamoil' plantation within the Bhakarapet forest section. Upon noticing the task force personnel, the smugglers attempted to flee. However, the team managed to chase and apprehend one of them.



## 'Hundi' collection brings Rs 2.18 cr to Srisaillam hill shrine

PNS ■ SRISAILLAM

The famous hill shrine of Srisaillam has earned a remarkable Rs 2.18 crore through the 'hundi' collection in just 17 days. The counting of the money collected in the temple's coffer was carried out on Tuesday, under heavy security and careful monitoring.

## 'Revanth will snatch your mangalsutra next'

Revanth focussed on real estate than state: KTR



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao (KTR) launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister Revanth Reddy and accused him of prioritizing real estate over governance.

"We told you not to trust Revanth, but you believed him. Yesterday he took away our gates and doors for not paying back loans. Then they lifted the starters. Tomorrow if he is not given 10 gm gold or silver, he will snatch your Mangalsutra," Ravi said.

## Steps apace to protect APTDC assets: Nukasani

PNS ■ GUNTUR

AP Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) Chairman Dr Nukasani Balaji has stated that measures are being taken to safeguard the properties under the tourism department's management.



During his visit, the Chairman noticed the area was overgrown with thorn bushes and directed the officials to clean it immediately. The machinery responded swiftly, removing the garbage and thorn bushes to restore cleanliness.

es, parking spaces, toilets, and drinking water facilities be provided for the convenience of visitors. It was also decided to carry out landscaping to beautify the site.

would be made to develop Pavitra Sangamam into a prominent tourist destination. He added that the development of the area would also help improve the livelihood of the local community.

## Strengthen Red Cross activities across State: Governor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh State branch of the Indian Red Cross Society should expand its service activities across the State, Andhra Pradesh State Governor Abdul Nazeer has urged the new chairman and his team.

ected treasurer, along with general secretary AK Parida, visited the Governor at Raj Bhavan. While congratulating them on the occasion, the Governor said that people are getting quality blood services in 20 Red Cross Blood Bank Centres in Andhra Pradesh.

The Governor has agreed to launch the prestigious 'War on Single-Use Plastic' pilot project, undertaken by the Guntur branch of the Red Cross, in March with the aim of creating a single-use plastic-free society for the first time in India.

## IT Policy: A promising vision for digital economy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's Information Technology and Global Capability Centres (GCC) Policy (4.0) for 2024-2029 aims to establish the State as a key player in India's digital economy.

firms and GCCs. However, its success largely depends on effective execution and the ability to compete with established IT hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai.

neighbourhood work hubs, in line with the global trend toward flexible employment. Despite these attractive incentives, their effectiveness will hinge on streamlined implementation.

ciently. A significant aspect of the policy is its emphasis on GCCs, a sector experiencing rapid growth in India. The state is positioning itself as a viable alternative to traditional IT centres, highlighting its lower cost of living, strong educational institutions, and supportive policies.

ecosystems over decades, attracting major IT firms with well-established talent networks and integration into global markets—advantages that Andhra Pradesh will find challenging to replicate quickly.

ACROSS THE STATES



No road connectivity in 8,300 villages in Odisha

In all, 8,300 villages in Odisha have no road connectivity, a minister told the Assembly on Tuesday. In a written reply to a question by BJP legislator Tankadhar Tripathy, the minister for panchayati raj and drinking water, Rabi Narayan Naik, said out of 59,971 villages in the state, road connectivity has been provided to 51,671 villages under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and other state-sponsored schemes in a phased manner. Naik said road connectivity has not been provided to 8,300 villages as those habitations are not eligible to be covered under the schemes. However, the cabinet has recently approved the PMGSY-IV scheme, and a survey to identify unconnected villages is going on in different states, he said. The minister said the exact data on the number of villages and hamlets which don't have all-weather roads can be provided after the survey. According to data provided by Naik, Koraput district topped the list of unconnected habitations with 1,374 followed by Rayagada (1099) and Nabarangpur (641).



UPSC extends last date to apply for prelims exam

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has extended the last date to apply for this year's civil services preliminary examination till February 21. This is the second extension in the deadline for applying to the examination, conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages - preliminary, mains and interview -- to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others. The last date for submission for Civil Services (Preliminary)-2025 and Indian Forest Service (Preliminary)-2025 has been further extended till 21.02.2025 (6 pm), said a notice put out by the Commission on its website. Further, a correction window will also be open for the applicants "from 22.02.2025 to 28.02.2025", read the notice, without mentioning any reasons behind the second extension. The Commission had recently also introduced certain changes in its online application system for the exam after aspirants complained of technical glitches while applying through it. Candidates are required to apply online by using the website <http://upsconline.gov.in>.



1 crore devotees visited Kashi temple from Feb 1-17

Amid the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, more than one crore devotees have visited the Kashi Vishwanath temple here during the first 17 days of this month, officials said on Tuesday. The number of pilgrims visiting the temple has broken all previous records, leading to overcrowded streets and transport hubs, they said. Due to the massive crowd, authorities have closed schools up to Class 8 since January 27 in Varanasi. The influx of devotees in Kashi is due to the Maha Kumbh, with lakhs of them arriving in the holy city after visiting Prayagraj. Heavy congestion has been reported at railway stations, bus depots, and key areas such as Maidaganj, Godowlia, and Dashashwamedh. The famous 'Ganga Aarti' is being symbolically conducted to manage the situation and will continue this way until February 26 when the 45-day Maha Kumbh Mela will conclude.

India-Qatar decide to elevate ties to 'strategic partnership'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday held wide-ranging talks with Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani as the two leaders decided to elevate India-Qatar relations to a "strategic partnership" with a focus on trade, investments, technology, energy and people-to-people ties, further cementing the "deep and traditional relationship" between the two countries. They also exchanged views on "regional and global issues" of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said.

The Amir of Qatar's two-day visit comes at the invitation of Modi. This is his second state visit to India. He earlier visited India in March 2015. His visit will provide "further momentum to our growing multifaceted partnership", the MEA had said ahead of the visit that began on Monday.

Earlier in the day, the Amir of Qatar was accorded a ceremonial guard of honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan as President Droupadi Murmu welcomed the visiting leader. Modi was also present on the occasion. Later, Modi and the Amir held talks at the Hyderabad

PM Modi, Amir of Qatar hold talks



House covering a range of bilateral issues.

India and Qatar on Tuesday also exchanged an agreement on establishment of strategic partnership between the two countries.

The documents were exchanged between Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin

Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in the presence of Prime Minister Modi and the Amir of Qatar here.

"India-Qatar, further cementing the deep & traditional relationship. PM @narendramodi & HH Sheikh @TamimbinHamad

Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar held wide-ranging talks at Hyderabad House today. Both leaders decided to elevate India-Qatar relations to a Strategic Partnership with focus on trade, energy, investments, innovation, technology, food security, culture & people-to-people ties. They also exchanged views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

India and Qatar have deep-rooted historical ties of friendship, trust and mutual respect. In recent years, the ties between the two countries, including in the areas of trade, investment, energy, technology, culture and people-to-people relations, have continued to strengthen, the MEA earlier said.

As the two leaders held talks at the Hyderabad House, the MEA in a post on X said, a "new milestone" was on the cards of this "special India-Qatar partnership".

A revised agreement for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, between India and Qatar, was also exchanged, it was announced during the exchange of agreements ceremony held at the Hyderabad House.

'Focused on integrating Northeast into devpt journey'

PNS ■ KOHIMA

Union Minister of State Kriti Vardhan Singh on Tuesday said that the Centre has been focused on integrating Northeast into the development journey of the country.

Addressing reporters during his maiden visit to the Northeast starting with Nagaland, Singh, who is MoS for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, asserted that the region plays a vital role in India's overall development and reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering growth and improving connectivity.

"Since the current government came to power, efforts to uplift the Northeast have gained momentum, with a focus on improving infrastructure and ensuring the region's alignment with the growth of the national economy," he said.

The minister lauded the Union budget, noting its significant provisions for boosting various sectors such as agriculture, small-scale industries, defence production and employment.

"The budget reflects the aspirations of the Indian people and the



vision of a developed and self-reliant India by 2047," Singh said, while also pointing out the emphasis on agricultural reforms, quality education, and women's empowerment, as well as efforts to raise productivity through improved infrastructure, particularly in roadways, railways, and air connectivity.

Addressing questions about the Northeast, the Union MoS acknowledged the historical challenges regarding infrastructure and connectivity in the region.

However, he highlighted recent efforts under the UDAN scheme,

which has significantly improved air connectivity, as well as new railway stations and expanded road networks. He promised continued development to address the region's infrastructural needs.

On the issue of services at Dimapur railway station, where the number of trains has been reduced, the minister said that the expansion of regional stations and highways had led to some adjustments in train routes.

He also assured of looking into issues of removing trains originating from Dimapur.

Regarding the long-delayed second airport project in Nagaland, at state capital Kohima, the minister acknowledged the difficulties in progressing with the airport development but assured that 50 new airports, with a focus on Northeast India, were planned in the current budget.

He said he would take up the matter with the authorities concerned to push for timely resolution.

Touching upon concerns about the re-imposition of Protected Area Regime (PAR), particularly affecting foreign tourists visiting the state, the

Mamata denies links with B'deshi terrorists

Challenges BJP to prove charge

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday rejected allegations by BJP MLAs that she has links with terrorists and fundamentalists in Bangladesh, stating that she would resign if they could prove such claims.

Addressing the assembly, Banerjee criticised the saffron party legislators for making "baseless remarks" against her and said she would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to complain about such claims. "The BJP leaders and MLAs are making baseless allegations that I have connections with terrorists in Kashmir and terrorists and fundamentalists of Bangladesh. If the BJP can prove I have connections with terrorists and fundamentalists, I would resign," the TMC supremo said.

Banerjee said she would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, complaining that his party's MLAs were accusing her of having ties with Bangladeshi fundamentalists despite a lack of evidence. "It is better to die than to be falsely



accused of terrorism," she added. "Freedom of speech does not mean inciting hatred or dividing the House. Freedom of speech is not hate speech. You (BJP MLAs) exploit religion for political gains, but we do not," Banerjee said, emphasising her belief in secularism and the peaceful coexistence of all communities.

She also charged the BJP with using religion for political gains.

Referring to the ongoing tension in Bangladesh, the chief minister highlighted that it was her government's efforts that had ensured peace and harmony in West Bengal amid unrest in the neighbouring country.

Will work to bring Cong back to power in Maha: Sapkal

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Newly-appointed Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal on Tuesday took charge of his post and said he would work to strengthen the party's organization in the state and bring it back to power. Speaking at the party meeting after taking over from former state unit chief Nana Patole, Sapkal sought cooperation from party workers as well as leaders to revive Congress in Maharashtra. "If we don't try, we will not succeed," he said. He attacked the Bharatiya



Janata Party over its drive to enroll one crore members in Maharashtra and its claim to be the biggest party, adding that it was actually weak in the state.

"If it is the biggest political party, what was the need for it to break the Shiv Sena and NCP, and take Congress leaders in its fold," he said. He wanted honest and committed workers for rebuilding Congress in Maharashtra, Sapkal said. "I want to tell AICC in-charge Ramesh Chennithala that I will not vie for any other post, including chief minister. I don't want to become CM, MP or MLA. I will work to ensure that Congress returns to power and a Congress leader becomes chief minister," he said.

'Still in shock about what happened to us'

Deportee shares experience at US detention centre

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

No proper food, articles of Sikh faith into the dustbin being thrown in to the dustbin and thin blankets to cope with the cold due to air conditioners being run at low temperatures; is how 21-year-old Davinder Singh describes his traumatic experience at the US detention centre after he was apprehended while crossing the US border illegally.

Hailing from the village of Nangal Jalalpur in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district, Singh was among the second batch of 116 illegal Indian immigrants brought back in a US in a military aircraft on Saturday night.

"The air conditioning was run at an extremely low temperature round the clock in the detention center in the US, and we were given only wafer-thin blankets, which could not provide any sort of protection," claimed Singh, adding that he saw US officials throwing turbans -- an article of Sikh faith -- of many Sikh illegal immigrants into the dustbin.

"It was very painful watching turbans being thrown into a dustbin," Davinder told

PTI. Compelled to migrate to the US for a better life, Davinder set off on a perilous journey on June 28 last year. He was taken to several countries, including Amsterdam, Suriname, Guatemala and even traversed through the Panama forest.

Davinder said he crossed the US border on January 27, after which he and others were apprehended by the US Border Patrol.

He said they were taken to a detention centre where he spent 18 of the worst days of his life.

Davinder said they were kept in a hall with 60 to 70 illegal immigrants from various countries under the constant watch of US officials. He said the air conditioners were run non-stop at a very low temperature, and they were given thin blankets, which were even thinner than silver foil paper and one could see through them.

Their pleas for shutting off the AC or increasing the temperature fell on deaf ears. "When we would tell them we were feeling cold, they wouldn't bother at all," he said.

K'taka CM prefers silence over 'power-sharing pact' in govt

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Amid a tussle between Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and Cooperative Minister K N Rajanna over the 'power-sharing agreement', Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said he would prefer not to speak.

It was rumoured that there was a secret power-sharing formula, according to which Siddaramaiah would be the chief minister for the first half of the Congress government's five-year term and then Shivakumar would replace him. A section of Congress MLAs and ministers has been backing Siddaramaiah and want him to complete the five-year term.

On the other hand, Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state president, has been trying to silence his opponents within the party, asking them to refrain from any such discussions as it causes damage to the party.

During an interaction with reporters on Tuesday, Siddaramaiah preferred not to speak on the issue. "I will not speak about the controversy now. Rajanna and Shivakumar have expressed their views," he said.

When asked whether the power-sharing agreement was for real, he said, "How many times should I tell you that the high command takes the final decision? Whatever they (high command) decide will be applicable to all". Rajanna on Monday hit out at Shivakumar, urging him not to "misuse" the name of the AICC and the party high command.

Researchers link gene to emergence of spoken language

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Why did humans start speaking? Scientists suggest genetics played a big role -- and they say the evolution of this singular ability was key to our survival.

A new study links a particular gene to the ancient origins of spoken language, proposing that a protein variant found only in humans may have helped us communicate in a novel way. Speech allowed us to share information, coordinate activities and pass down knowledge, giving us an edge over extinct cousins like Neanderthals and Denisovans.

The new study is "a good first step to start looking at the specific genes" that may affect speech and language development, said Liza Finestack at the University of Minnesota, who was not involved with the research.

What scientists learn may someday even help people with speech problems.

The genetic variant researchers were looking at was one of a variety of genes "that

contributed to the emergence of Homo sapiens as the dominant species, which we are today" said Dr Robert Darnell, an author of the study published Tuesday in the journal Nature Communications.

Darnell has been studying the protein -- called NOVA1 and known to be crucial to brain development -- since the early 1990s. For the latest research, scientists in his lab at New York's Rockefeller University used CRISPR gene editing to replace the NOVA1 protein found in mice with the exclusively human type to test the real-life effects of the genetic variant. To their surprise, it changed the way the animals vocalised when they called out to each other.

Baby mice with the human variant squeaked differently than normal littermates when their mom came around. Adult male mice with the variant chirped differently than their normal counterparts when they saw a female in heat.

Both are settings where mice are moti-



vated to speak, Darnell said, "and they spoke differently" with the human variant, illustrating its role in speech.

This isn't the first time a gene has been

linked to speech. In 2001, British scientists said they had discovered the first gene tied to a language and speech disorder.

Called FOXP2, it was referred to as the

human language gene. But though FOXP2 is involved in human language, it turned out that the variant in modern humans wasn't unique to us. Later research found it was shared with Neanderthals. The NOVA1 variant in modern humans, on the other hand, is found exclusively in our species, Darnell said.

The presence of a gene variant isn't the only reason people can speak. The ability also depends on things like anatomical features in the human throat and areas of the brain that work together to allow people to speak and understand language.

Darnell hopes the recent work not only helps people better understand their origins but also eventually leads to new ways to treat speech-related problems.

University of Minnesota's Finestack said it's more likely the genetic findings might someday allow scientists to detect, very early in life, who might need speech and language interventions.

"That's certainly a possibility," she said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## New CEC takes over

Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner by the PM-led selection committee amid criticism

The senior Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has been appointed as the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). The decision was made by the Prime Minister-led selection committee, which also named Haryana Chief Secretary Vivek Joshi as an Election Commissioner. However, the appointment has sparked controversy, with the Congress party questioning the process and alleging a lack of transparency. For decades, the Government held the power to appoint the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. However, in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled that appointments should be made by a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the Leader of the Opposition (LoP). Despite this ruling, the new CEC and Other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, replaced the CJI with a cabinet minister, a change that has been challenged in court. Gyanesh Kumar, is a seasoned bureaucrat and was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March 2023. He has a tenure extending until January 26, 2029, meaning he will oversee critical elections, including the 2029 general elections. His selection follows the convention of appointing the senior-most Election Commissioner to the role of CEC. Gyanesh Kumar replaces Rajiv Kumar, whose term concluded recently.



The Congress party, led by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, has strongly opposed the appointment process. Gandhi submitted a dissent note during the selection committee meeting, urging the Government to defer the decision until the Supreme Court rules on the validity of the selection panel's composition.

Congress leaders Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Ajay Maken have argued that proceeding with the appointment while the court is hearing a challenge to the new selection law undermines democratic principles. The government's decision to exclude the CJI from the selection panel and desperation to elect the CEC before the judgement indeed creates an impression that the Government wants to have its way in the election of Chief Election Commissioner. Ensuring transparency and balance in selecting election officials is crucial to maintaining a fair democratic process. Meanwhile, Vivek Joshi, a 1989 batch IAS officer, is set to serve as an Election Commissioner until February 2030. The Supreme Court has yet to issue a final verdict on the legality of the new selection process. The outcome of this legal battle could shape the future of India's electoral governance for years to come. To put things in perspective, the Election Commission plays a crucial role in the government machinery during elections and can significantly impact their outcomes. However, it is often influenced by the government through the appointment of favorable officials. It was, in fact, TN Seshan who, as Chief Election Commissioner, challenged government control and brought a sense of independence to the Commission.

## PICTALK



A squirrel enjoys palash flowers, in Nadia

## Bangladesh wipes out history, shuns India at its own peril



ASHOK K MEHTA

With opposition forces emboldened, Bangladesh appears to be at a turning point, grappling with a shifting political landscape and growing internal discord

As a Mukti Jodha (freedom fighter - that's what Bangladeshis call Indian Army personnel who fought the Liberation War), I'm appalled at the recent turn of events, the mayhem in Dhaka and many parts of Bangladesh following Sheikh Hasina's virtual address to her party supporters from somewhere near Delhi which provided the pretext for the students of the protest movement and parties opposed to Awami League to set ablaze 32 Dhanmondi residence of Mujibur Rehman and a museum in his name.

Perhaps nothing 'physical' remains of Mujib's legacy even as Hasina said: "History cannot be wiped out". Mahfuz Alam, one of the student advisors to Mohammad Yunus, noted that symbols of fascism were being dismantled. Surprisingly BNP Secretary General Faqurul Aslam Alamgir protested the disorder and violence at a meeting with Yunus where he sought early elections. Later, he asked India to hand over Hasina and her accomplices to the government in Dhaka for trial.

Army Chief, Gen Waqar uz Zaman also commented on the negative effect on internal stability by adverse law and order situation but significantly noting that India is a big country and important neighbour. It is important for good relations for the security interests of both countries, he added. India has called the violence as 'regrettable' attracting a summoning of its acting High Commissioner in Dhaka. India-Bangladesh relations will get a lot worse before they get any better despite Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka in November and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's meeting with Touheed Hasan, acting advisor to the interim government in Bangladesh last Sunday in Delhi. One thing is becoming clear: a new Bangladesh is evolving and this is the real one, unlike the new Nepal expected after the 10-year civil war. Last August in one week the face of Bangladesh changed and is changing by the day by design.

The Americans were being blamed for regime change. The US and India were never on the same page in the last many



decades here. In an interview with The Hindustan Times, Lisa Curtis, a Trump 1.0 White House NSC chief of South and Central Asia, has dismissed any US role in Hasina's ouster. Last week, PM Modi raised concerns about Bangladesh with President Trump who denied any role of US Deep State in it. But for India, there are lessons from events in Bangladesh that the establishment is silent about because there was non-partisan support for Hasina and Awami League with the country's liberation linked to Mujib and India.

After Mujib's assassination in 1975, Hasina and her sister Rehana were provided refuge in India; history repeated itself in 2024. I was invited in November 2023, two months before the elections, to speak at the Liberation War Museum on the role of Chancellor Willy Brandt of Germany.

One of the trustees of the museum, Dr Mofidul Hoque, took me around the museum. There was a section completely devoted to the political movement against Rawalpindi led by Sheikh Mujib called Story of Liberation Under a Genocide. The accent of the display depicted the liberation war fought by Bengali Mukti Jodhas with India in a support role. But it did have a gallery



AFTER MUJIB'S ASSASSINATION IN 1975, HASINA AND HER SISTER REHANA WERE PROVIDED REFUGE IN INDIA; HISTORY REPEATED ITSELF IN 2024

Bahini by the Indian Army. During my five-day visit, the BNP was out of the streets every other day coupling with garment factory workers and their unions demanding higher wages. A virtual war was being fought on the streets with the dominant Awami League counter-protestors unleashed.

Most people I spoke to said if there was a free and fair election BNP would win. This was one view I received even from our High Commission. While people were angry with India for supporting Hasina, the media was scared of the government. Despite the negative vibes of the Hasina regime, Delhi was reluctant to abandon her. I wonder what inputs Indian intelligence agencies had provided. They likely failed to read the mood of the people which led to a students' revolt.

One other truth and for me, the most significant was that the goodwill dividend of India's support to the liberation war and attainment of nationhood has dissipated - to put it crudely, the use-by date was long over. The 1970 military vintage soldier had disappeared nearly two decades ago from all three armed forces - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In any case, very few units from East Pakistan Rifles and still fewer Bengalis

in the Pakistan Army were deployed in East Pakistan. The war effort was predominantly India with Mukti Bahini in support; that was the ground reality. As far as the Liberation War is concerned, Bangladesh had changed the narrative (history) as was evident from the Liberation War Museum. For India though, it was an iconic, once-in-a-thousand-year victory (over arch-enemy Pakistan) which became a landmark event for the Indian political and military leadership to celebrate and commemorate.

Yunus's Law Advisor, Arif Nazrul has said: "India was only an ally in the 1971 war victory, nothing more", a sentiment that was endorsed by the office of the interim government. Hasina's second spell of refuge in India is a matter of immense resentment in Bangladesh, but Delhi will not let down a friend and ally. India has opened its doors to several leaders fleeing from Nepal, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Maldives. But for housing Hasina, there will be costs for India.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## KHELO INDIA WINTER GAMES POSTPONED

Madam — Climate change has finally made its presence felt by disrupting the 'Khelo India' to be held in Gulmarg. The second and final stage of the Khelo India Winter Games 2025, scheduled to be held in Gulmarg, Jammu and Kashmir from Saturday, has been postponed due to insufficient snowfall. The revised schedule will be announced when the weather conditions are favourable for the competitions. But now it does not seem that this will happen because now the spring season is going to enter the country. This is the second consecutive year that the event has been rescheduled due to insufficient snowfall. Last year, the Games had to be postponed till February after there was no rain in January.

The lack of snowfall in many areas is mainly due to climate change, as rising temperatures lead to more precipitation in the form of rain rather than snow, leading to a decrease in snow piles and snow cover, especially in mountainous areas. This phenomenon is often called "snow drought." It is not just India that is being affected by climate; it is a global problem. The whole world is grappling with it. I think the way temperatures are rising and the problem of forest fires, not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, are making people feel helpless. It is quite possible that after the next few years, it will be difficult to even host the Winter Olympic Games. In the future, sports like ice hockey and ice skating will disappear into the pages of history.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

## SC QUESTIONS GOVERNOR'S ACTIONS

Madam— The Supreme Court, while reserving its judgment on the writ petition filed by the Tamil Nadu Government, stated in unambiguous terms that Governor Ravindra Narayana Ravi's action of transferring the nine bills to the President of India after their re-enactment and re-submission was not in accordance with the provisions in the Constitution. The court noted that Governor Ravi had

## Earthquake jolts Delhi



Residents of Delhi and its adjoining areas woke up to strong tremors caused by an earthquake of magnitude 4.0 on Monday morning. According to the National Centre of Seismology, the quake hit at a depth of about 5 km. Videos showed the ground and buildings shaking, forcing people to rush out of their homes. There have been no reports of casualties or damage to properties, but many residents claimed

that the tremors were so strong that it felt like a bridge was collapsing. However, the quake itself was not of a high-intensity magnitude. The gravity of the situation soon gave way to humour as social media users began sharing their reactions to the unexpected jolt. Memes and jokes flooded various platforms, with many poking fun at the situation while still conveying their fear and disbelief. While the suddenness of the earthquake understandably caused concern among residents, the quick wit and resilience of the people of Delhi-NCR were on full display as they found ways to cope with the unexpected turn of events. Like Mumbai rains, the Delhi tremor gave a tough time to people there, but it was business as usual once the tremor settled.

Aarohi Gupta | Ujjain

## INDUSTRY STATUS FOR TOURISM

Madam — The Kerala government is planning to grant industry status to its tourism sector and cleared the way for the long-pending demand of the state tourism and hospitality sector of a specific area.

Granting industry status to that specific area will encourage investment and development in that sector. Although it has been estimated that the Kerala tourism sector is providing direct or indirect employment to 25 lakh people since 2018, rapid urbanisation, infrastructural development, and natural calamities and catastrophes could possibly lead to an all-time low. The step initiated by the government authority for turning Kerala tourism into an industry-specific area could benefit the mass audience and also help with better employment opportunities in the near future.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Cracking CUET: A step-by-step guide to smart preparation

By understanding the exam format, setting clear goals, and following an organised study schedule, students can cover the syllabus while boosting confidence

Preparing for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) can feel overwhelming, especially when juggling schoolwork and other responsibilities. However, CUET has transformed the university admissions process and a well-structured preparation plan can help you cover the syllabus effectively while boosting your confidence. By following a strategic approach over a few months, you can significantly enhance your chances of success.

**Step 1: Understand the CUET Exam Structure** Before diving into preparation, familiarise yourself with the exam format. CUET typically consists of Language, Domain-Specific Subjects, and a General Test. It is essential to obtain the official syllabus for each section and review it thoroughly. Understanding the types of questions, including multiple-choice and short-answer formats, is crucial. Be mindful of the marking scheme, particularly any negative marking.

**Step 2: Assess Your Readiness:** Start by evaluating your current knowledge and preparedness. Ask your-



self whether you have covered the syllabus for all sections, how confident you feel about scoring well on a scale of 1 to 5, and which section you find most challenging.

**Step 3: Set Clear Goals** Define your objectives based on your preferred university and course. Research the CUET score requirements for institutions like Delhi University, Banaras Hindu University and JNU. Having a clear goal will keep you motivated and focused throughout your preparation journey.

**Step 4: Allocate Study Time** Using insights from your self-assessment, create a balanced study plan. If you are strong in certain subjects, spend less time on them but focus on regular revision. Dedicate more time to weaker subjects to better understand concepts and solve practice ques-

tions. For example, if the General Test is particularly challenging, allocate 1.5-2 hours daily to this section while spending an hour on Language or Domain-Specific Subjects.

**Step 5: Weekly Study Schedule** A well-structured timetable ensures consistency. A practical approach is to focus on one major subject per day from Monday to Friday. Saturday can be dedicated to taking mock tests and analysing performance, while Sunday should be reserved for reviewing the week's progress, revising difficult topics, and taking time to relax and recharge. Using time-blocking techniques by dividing the day into study, practice, and relaxation slots can be highly effective.

**Step 6: Right Study Resources** Relying on quality study materials is essential. NCERT textbooks provide conceptual clarity, while CUET-specific guides and reference books offer targeted preparation. Online platforms that provide mock tests and video lectures can be valuable resources. Practising with previous years' question papers helps in identifying

important topics and understanding question trends.

**Step 7: Regular Mock Tests** Mock tests play a crucial role in CUET preparation. Aim to take at least one full-length test per week and gradually increase the frequency as the exam approaches.

**Step 8: Exam Logistics** Since CUET is a computer-based test, familiarising yourself with the technical requirements is necessary. Marking significant dates on a calendar will help in avoiding last-minute surprises.

**Step 9: Maintain a Balance** Avoiding burnout is vital for effective preparation. Incorporate short breaks into your study routine and engage in activities like exercise or meditation to stay refreshed. Ensuring you get seven to eight hours of sleep daily will help in maintaining focus and energy levels.

**Step 10: Stay Positive** Consistency is the key to achieving success in CUET. Sticking to your study plan while remaining adaptable to changes will be beneficial. (The writer is Managing Partner, FinTram Global LLP; views are personal)



PANKAJ DHINGRA



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE SELECTIVE NARRATIVES THAT SHAPE OUR LEGACY

History is often told from the perspective of the victors, shaping collective memory in ways that serve those in power



A P S MALHOTRA

It is a well-established fact that History, often, is written from the perspective of the victor, making it a one-dimensional testimony of what transpired. Thus, while for the British Imperial power, the tumultuous events of 1857 were an unsuccessful mutiny by sepoys from across the subcontinent, for us, it is the celebrated 1st War of Independence. Before being put down with unprecedented vengeance and ferocity, it ignited a spark of 'freedom' which continued to inspire generations to come, although, in the process, they sowed venomous seeds of communal discord, deftly using their devious policy of divide and rule, which continue to rile us to this day.

Not surprisingly, the events instilled such fear in the minds of our forefathers that it was several decades before any credible stirrings for a fight to overthrow the yoke of imperialism were felt. To take this forward, while Bhagat Singh & his young comrades might have been treated as terrorists/ militants/ extremists by the British, their cohorts and courts, we extol them as valiant freedom fighters and martyrs, so much so, that more than a century after Bhagat Singh sacrificed his life for the liberation of the motherland, we are witnessing a massive surge in his following, especially in the youth.

It is not difficult to gauge this- there is a proliferation of his photographs - on the rear of cabs and auto-rickshaws, trucks and buses, emblazoned on T-shirts, and so on. Given all this, what startled me, and raised my hackles was Rajmohan Gandhi's book, Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten. Otherwise, a well-researched and thoughtfully written book, his treat-



ment of the life and times of Bhagat Singh is rather disappointing- in a tome of more than 400 pages, there are just a few lines- a cursory mention of Bhagat Singh and his comrades. Sadly, even in these lines, they are not feted as freedom fighters, but rather disparagingly, as delinquent and misguided youth, militant in their approach, hellbent on derailing the course of the freedom struggle. Well, while all of us have the liberty or freedom to form our opinion, in a broader sense, it needs to be noted that sensitivities of a significant mass of our population don't get hurt. Because, if the Butcher of Amritsar became a celebrated hero among a section of his countrymen, hailed as "the man who saved India" and a beneficiary of a fund of over ₹26,000, then, we need serious introspection as to how we portray our martyrs for the generations to come, because, as I repeatedly quote the words of George Santayana- "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The way history is written shapes how future generations perceive their past. The events of 1857 and Bhagat Singh's sacrifices remain crucial in our national consciousness, inspiring countless individuals. Yet, the selective representation of these figures in historical narratives raises concerns. When colonial figures like Dyer are glorified, while our martyrs are downplayed or misrepresented, it calls for reflection. As a society, we must ensure that our heroes are remembered with the respect they deserve. After all, history is not just about the past—it is a guide for the future, reminding us never to forget our hard-fought struggles.

(The author is a freelance writer; views are personal)

## Balancing growth with fiscal discipline



UTTAM GUPTA

Key measures, including tax reliefs and incentives for private sector, reflect a balanced approach to making India a developed economy by 2047



A theme that reverberates in the Union Budget for FY 2025-26 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, 2025, is 'sustaining the momentum of high economic growth alongside sticking to fiscal consolidation'. During FY 2024-25, the GDP growth (gross domestic product) is estimated at 6.4 per cent which is more or less close to the 6.5 per cent - 7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey (ES) for 2023-24 presented by Sitharaman in the Parliament on February 1, 2024. For FY 2025-26, according to the Economic Survey presented by her on February 1, 2025, the GDP is projected to expand between 6.3 per cent - 6.8 per cent. On top of a growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years beginning FY 2021-22 and 6.4 per cent during FY 2024-25, this is a fairly impressive number in sync with the overarching goal of making India a 'developed economy' by 2047. As for fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts), in her interim budget presented on February 1, 2024, she had set a target of 5.1 per cent of the nominal GDP (NGDP). Subsequently, in the full budget for FY 2024-25 presented on July 23, 2024, she revised it downward to 4.9 per cent of the GDP taking into account the extra cushion of ₹130,000 crore in the dividend transferred by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 (the actual dividend transfer was ₹210,000 crore against a provision of ₹80,000 crore made in the interim budget).

Going by the revised estimate (RE) presented by the FM on February 1, 2025, the FD for FY 2024-25 has turned out to be even lower at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP. Even as the total revenue expenditure at ₹3698,000 crore is only marginally lower than the budget estimate (BE) of ₹3709,401 crore, the RE for capital expenditure is about ₹1018,000 crore - a significant ₹93,000 crore less than the BE of ₹1111,111 crore. Indeed, this is a major reason behind a reduction of one percentage point in the FD over the BE. In the budget for FY 2025-26, the FM has provided for a total expendi-



THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS NEED TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY THE OWNERS OF BUSINESSES. THEY SHOULD GO FOR BETTER DISTRIBUTION OF INCOME THROUGH MEASURES SUCH AS KEEPING PRICES LOW, INCREASING SALARIES AT THE LOWER RUNGS, REINVESTING PROFITS FOR GROWTH ETC

ture of ₹5065,000 crore which is a significant increase of 7.4 per cent over the RE for FY 2024-25 at ₹4716,000 crore.

This includes capital expenditure of ₹1121,000 crore, the remaining ₹3944,000 crore being the provision for revenue expenditure. Sitharaman has received flak for going slow on investment. This is unjustified and out of sync with the underlying facts. We need to compare the budget provision with RE for FY 2024-25. On this basis, the provision of ₹1121,000 crore is 10.1 per cent higher than the actual capital expenditure during 2024-25.

That apart, the position about the government's capital spending has to be viewed in totality. In her Budget for FY 2019-20, Sitharaman had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US \$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over ₹100,000 crore to build the infrastructure over five years. Of this, 39 per cent or ₹39,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was ₹22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's actual capital expenditure was for 2020-21: ₹439,000 crore; 2021-22: ₹554,000 crore; 2022-23: ₹750,000 crore; 2023-24: ₹1000,961 crore and ₹1018,000 crore for 2024-25.

Over five years, the total comes to ₹3761,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. Continuing with the above trend, a substantial allocation of ₹1121,000 crore for 2025-26 shows the determination of the government to maintain the momentum of investment in building roads, highways, expressways, waterways, ports, airports, railways, irrigation projects, hospitals, schools, technical and research institutions and

so on in symphony with strengthening the foundations of the economy for a VIKSIT BHARAT by 2047.

But, investment by the central government alone won't be enough to give the intended boost to the economy. The States and private sector also need to do their bit. The Centre has been helping the former to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year ₹100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were ₹130,000 crore. For FY 2024-25, the transfers were kept at ₹150,000 crore though the states didn't fully utilize the amount.

For FY 2025-26 also, the budget allocation is kept at ₹150,000 crore. To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has given a host of incentives to industries and businesses. Amongst others, these included a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises. In 2024-25, the tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 percent to 35 percent. But, the private sector has complained of 'demand constraint'. Team Modi has addressed this as well.

In the budget for FY 2024-25, Sitharaman altered tax slabs under the New Income Tax (IT) regime besides increasing the standard deduction by ₹25,000. This resulted in a relief of around ₹17,500 in personal income tax or PIT. In the budget for FY 2025-26, she has given a bonanza by announcing that a person earning ₹1200,000 per annum need not pay any tax (taking into account the standard deduction of ₹75,000/- now, the threshold comes to ₹1275,000). Besides, she has altered the tax slabs to give relief even to persons earning more. Thus, a person earning ₹2400,000 per annum will pay ₹

110,000 less. Consequent to these changes, the taxpayers will gain ₹100,000 crore annually.

These savings will be distributed amongst a total of 7 crore persons who won't have to pay any tax. This will give a big boost to demand. However, this by itself won't give the required fillip. The government's efforts need to be complemented by the owners of businesses. They should go for better distribution of income through measures such as keeping prices low, increasing salaries at the lower rungs, reinvesting profits for growth etc.

Coming to FD, apart from lower capital expenditure (than BE), the contribution of buoyant tax collections in containing it at 4.8 per cent of the NGDP during FY 2024-25, can't be brushed aside. The RE of gross tax revenue (GTR) during the year at ₹3850,000 crore is higher than the BE of ₹3840,000 crore which itself was 14.6 per cent higher than GTR of ₹3350,000 crore during 2023-24. For 2025-26, FM has kept the FD target at 4.4 per cent. To achieve it, she has set the GTR collections at still higher ₹4270,000 crore.

This despite lower tax rates shows that the government's efforts at broadening the tax base and ensuring tax compliance are working. In an interview, Sitharaman cited capital expenditure of 4.3 per cent as being more or less close to FD of 4.4 per cent. From a fiscal consolidation angle, this is a good sign as borrowings are used only for building assets. However, the government needs to go beyond by generating a 'revenue surplus' so that borrowings even for building capital assets can be cut. This is necessary as 'interest payments' alone account for over 25 per cent of total spending by the Centre.

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

## BJP sets its sights on West Bengal and Bihar after Delhi triumph

The Aam Aadmi Party's collapse in Delhi and the cracks within the INDIA bloc have emboldened the BJP to win Bengal and Bihar

Buoyed by its sweeping success in Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has now turned its focus towards the crucial state elections in West Bengal in 2026, where it aims to dethrone Mamata Banerjee. What once seemed like an uphill battle is now a tangible possibility for the party. Emboldened by the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) debacle in Delhi, BJP leaders are proclaiming, "Delhi ki jeet hamari ho gayi, ab 2026 main Bengal ki baari hai" (We have won Delhi; now it's Bengal's turn in 2026).

Bihar, too, is set to witness an intense electoral showdown. With recent victories boosting the party's confidence, BJP and its allies plan to enter the battle with renewed aggression to retain power. The frag-



K S TOMAR

mented INDIA alliance, which was evident in Haryana and Delhi, provides the BJP with an additional advantage. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which has maintained a strong presence in West Bengal for decades, is expected to play a pivotal role in BJP's bid to oust Mamata in the upcoming assembly elections. **Modi's Appeal:** BJP's Trump

Card Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains the BJP's strongest electoral force. His leadership, credibility, and mass appeal, especially among the middle and lower-income groups, were decisive in Delhi's outcome. Welfare schemes like free ration under the PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana directly strengthened BJP's voter base. Modi's ability to project governance stability ensured that BJP's campaign resonated powerfully across the capital. Modi's credibility as a vote magnet and his guarantee to implement manifesto promises worked like magic for the BJP, which continues to heavily rely on him even for state elections. In his characteristic style, Modi remarked, "Congress has achieved a dou-

ble hat-trick of defeats with zero seats," predicting its further decline. Meanwhile, he celebrated BJP's string of victories in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Delhi, reinforcing his status as the party's ultimate campaigner. **Decoding BJP's Triumph in Delhi:** The Modi Factor Several key factors contributed to BJP's victory in Delhi, with Modi playing a central role. His strong stance on national security, Hindutva, and governance stability shaped the electoral landscape, particularly among urban and middle-class voters. **Modi's National Security & Hindutva Image** As the national capital, Delhi is heavily influenced by nationalistic narratives. Modi's firm policies on Pakistan, terrorism,



and Hindutva solidified BJP's core voter base. By framing the election as Modi vs. Kejriwal rather than a contest over local governance, BJP ensured that Modi's persona resonated strongly with voters. **PM's Welfare Schemes vs. AAP's Freebies** While AAP is known for its populist freebies, the Modi

government strategically countered this with large-scale welfare initiatives such as PM Awas Yojana (housing for the poor), Ujjwala Yojana (free LPG connections), and Ayushman Bharat (health insurance). By shifting the narrative from Kejriwal's localized welfare model to Modi's broader national schemes, the BJP successfully attracted lower-income and migrant voters.

A masterstroke was Modi's assurance that AAP's welfare schemes would not be discontinued but rather enhanced, promising to elevate Delhi into a world-class city. This neutralized Kejriwal's traditional advantage and reassured voters. BJP also aggressively targeted AAP over corruption allegations, particu-

larly the liquor scam, altering voter perception. Modi's leadership was positioned as a guarantee of cleaner governance, contrasting sharply with AAP's tainted image. **Impact of BJP's Victories in Other States:** BJP's recent wins in Haryana, Maharashtra, and other key states created a momentum effect, reinforcing voter confidence in Delhi. Haryana's proximity made its results particularly influential, given the shared demographics. The party's national winning streak also boosted cadre morale, creating a perception of electoral invincibility, which further weakened AAP's positioning as an alternative force. **Why AAP Lost:** AAP's defeat was not solely due to BJP's strategic campaign

but also its political miscalculations. Kejriwal underestimated Congress's relevance, assuming it was a non-factor. This resulted in AAP's defeat in 14 assembly segments where the victory margin was lower than the votes secured by Congress candidates. AAP had previously employed a similar strategy in Haryana, splitting Congress's votes and aiding BJP's gains. However, this tactic backfired in Delhi, as the ignored Congress vote share ended up damaging AAP more than BJP. One of the biggest takeaways from AAP's crushing defeat is the blow to Arvind Kejriwal's national ambitions. (The writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)

## IN BRIEF



### Sebi cancels registration of 19 defunct firms

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Tuesday cancelled the registration of 19 defunct FVCI (Foreign Venture Capital Investors) after they failed to meet the eligibility criteria. The 19 entities include Axis Capital Mauritius, Axis India Infrastructure Holdings, Blackstone Capital Partners (Singapore) VI FVCI Pte Ltd, P6 Asia Holding Investments (Cyprus) Ltd, Pequot India Mauritius IV, Ltd and Omega FVCI Investments Pte Ltd. In its order, Sebi noted that these defunct FVCI companies are no longer in existence as incorporated entities in their respective jurisdictions and thereby no longer satisfy the condition of being an entity incorporated outside India as stipulated in the FVCI Regulations. The regulator observed from the website of the Business Registration Department of Mauritius, Cyprus and Singapore, that the status of 19 FVCIs in their parent jurisdictions was defunct. Additionally, the entities had not informed Sebi about the change in their regulatory status -- the entities becoming defunct in their home jurisdiction. Also, FVCIs had not submitted quarterly data on the Sebi Intermediaries(SI) portal for even 4 calendar quarters -- from the quarter ended March 31, 2023, to the quarter ended December 31, 2023.

## 'India, US complement each other; can give mutual concessions in trade'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India and the US preparing to start negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said the two countries can offer concessions and duty reductions, as their economies complement each other.

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

"We complement each other, we can give mutual concessions to each other, tariff reductions and make it easier to export and import between the two countries," he said, adding, "We have started working on different ideas, engaging with different stakeholders within and outside the government and preparing ourselves for discussions, (which) we hope we will start soon."



He added that the agreement will open opportunities for the domestic industry to expand trade with the US to USD 500 billion by 2030.

"We look at this opportunity as a way to make India more competitive, come out with quality products, look at mutual concessions and attractive trading conditions which will support growth both in America and in India," Goyal said at the NDTV Profit Conclave 2025.

On reciprocal tariffs, the minister said India's tariffs are there to protect domestic

industry from imports from non-market economies.

"What we are working on is for mutual benefit resolving these issues for both our countries... Our situation with the US is different from the situation of many other countries," he said.

Further, he said that there should be no cause of concern to the domestic industry from the trade negotiations with the US, and India should enter these negotiations from a position of strength.

"I do not see any cause of concern...this is a golden

opportunity for business and will open floodgates of new business opportunities. My sense is that those who are panicking today will regret tomorrow," he said.

Earlier in the day at a CII event, Goyal said that India and the US are committed to increasing bilateral trade to USD 500 billion and negotiating a "strong" trade agreement within the next 6-8 months.

Goyal said once his US counterpart takes charge, both countries will discuss the contours of the pact.

## Over 28 lakh companies registered, only 65 pc active: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 28 lakh companies are registered in the country and only 65 per cent of them or little over 18.1 lakh companies are active, according to official data.

Among those registered under the Companies Act, 2013, just 5,216 are foreign companies and out of those, 63 per cent or 3,281 entities were active at the end of January.

Latest data from the corporate affairs ministry also showed that a total of 16,781 companies were registered with a collective paid up capital of Rs 816.14 crore last month.

"A total number of 28,05,354 companies were registered in the country as on 31st January, 2025, of which 65 per cent (18,17,222) companies stand active. There is an increase of 0.14 per cent in the total proportion of active companies with respect to registered companies when compared to December 2024," the ministry

said in its latest monthly information bulletin.

As many as 9,49,934 companies have been shuttered.

In terms of sectors, the maximum number of active companies were in business services at 27 per cent, followed by manufacturing (20 per cent), trading and community, personal and social services (13 per cent).

The highest number of active companies were in Maharashtra, followed by Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

"An increase in the number of active companies is witnessed in the states of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi as compared to December 2024.

"Among the Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir showed a rise of 112 companies in contrast to December 2024," the ministry said.

As on January 31, there were 5,216 foreign companies registered in the country and out of them, 63 per cent or 3,281 entities were active.



### Rupee falls 8 paise to close at 86.96 against US dollar

Rupee depreciated 8 paise to close at 86.96 (provisional) against US dollar weighed down by sustained foreign fund outflows and an uptick in the US Dollar index. Forex traders said there is a negative bias for the USD/INR pair as foreign investors continue to sell domestic equities and the RBI support is tapering off slowly. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.94 and touched the high of 86.91 against the greenback during intraday. It also touched the low of 86.98 before ending the session at 86.96 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 8 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 17 paise to close at 86.88 against the US dollar. Traders said disappointing trade deficit data from the domestic markets too pressurised the rupee. India's exports declined for the third month in a row in January, falling by 2.38 per cent year-on-year to USD 36.43 billion, while the trade deficit widened to USD 22.99 billion in the month.

### Markets end slightly lower after a day's breather

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Tuesday as uninterrupted foreign fund outflows and lower-than-expected corporate earnings continued to hit investors' sentiment.

After a day's breather, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex ended 29.47 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 75,967.39. Intra-day, it dropped 465.85 points or 0.61 per cent to 75,531.01.

The NSE Nifty dipped 14.20 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 22,945.30.

"On Tuesday, the Indian blue-chip equity indices, Sensex and Nifty-50, closed with a slight decline, primarily due to a slowdown in earnings and concerns over ongoing foreign selling, which affected market sentiment," Ameya Ranadive, Chartered Market Technician, CFTe, Sr. Technical Analyst, StoxBox, said.

From the Sensex pack, IndusInd Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharma, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC and Asian Paints were among the biggest laggards.

NTPC, Zomato, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HCL Tech were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge dropped 1.71 per cent and midcap index declined 0.19 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, industrials dropped 1.51 per cent, consumer durables (1.19 per cent), telecommunication (1.06 per cent), capital goods (0.91 per



cent), auto (0.65 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.55 per cent).

BSE utilities climbed 1.03 per cent, BSE focused IT (0.86 per cent), oil & gas (0.70 per cent) and energy (0.38 per cent).

As many as 2,918 stocks declined while 1,032 advanced and 114 remained unchanged on the BSE.

### Rajasthan govt to present Budget today

PNS ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government will present its Budget for the 2025-26 financial year on Wednesday.

Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Diya Kumari will present the state's income-expenditure estimates 2025-26 in the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly at 11 am.

Kumari finalised the Budget on Tuesday, Sharing its photo with officials on social media platform X, she said, "Rajasthan Budget 2025-26 finalized."

Additional Chief Secretary (Finance) Akhil Arora, Principal Secretary (Budget) Debashish Prishti, Secretary (Expenditure) Naveen Jain, Secretary (Revenue) Kumarpal Gautam, Director (Budget) Brijesh Kishore Sharma were among those present.

According to an official statement, Diya Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister, will present the Budget for 2025-26 in the Assembly on February 19.

The Budget session of the Rajasthan Assembly began on January 31 with the address of Governor Haribhau Bagde.

## Gold rises Rs 300 to Rs 88,500 per 10 gm, silver climbs Rs 800

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 300 to Rs 88,500 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had ended at Rs 88,200 per 10 grams on Monday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced Rs 300 to Rs 88,100 per 10 grams.

Silver prices also jumped Rs 800 to Rs 99,000 per kg from the previous close of Rs 98,200 per kg.

In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery jumped Rs 435 to Rs 85,490 per 10 grams.

"Gold continued its positive trend, driven by persistent global uncertainty over tariffs. With banks and funds maintaining high allocations to the safe-haven asset, gold remains well-supported," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst -- Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

Key events like Trump's speech on Wednesday, along with the Federal Reserve and RBI meeting minutes, will add to the market's volatility in the coming sessions, Trivedi said.

Silver futures for March delivery also appreciated Rs



439 to Rs 96,019 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

In the international markets, Comex gold futures for April delivery climbed USD 24.94 per ounce, or 0.86 per cent, to USD 2,925.64 per ounce in the global markets.

"Comex is trading above USD 2,925 as investors continue to monitor tensions between the US and European Union, as well as developments in Ukraine peace talks," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

Meanwhile, spot gold in the overseas markets rose nearly USD 16 to USD 2,912.50 per ounce.

"Gold gained modestly on Tuesday, maintaining its position as the primary safe-haven asset and an appealing infla-

tion hedge.

"However, further gains were capped due to hawkish remarks from Fed member Patrick Harker, who advocated on Monday night for the central bank to keep interest rates unchanged," Samuil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Comex silver futures for March delivery in the Asian market hours quoted 0.47 per cent higher at USD 33 per ounce.

On Monday, the commerce ministry said its gold imports in January rose 40.79 per cent to USD 2.68 billion on account of increasing domestic demands.

Gold imports stood at USD 1.9 billion in January 2024, according to commerce ministry data.



### NTPC pays interim dividend of Rs 2,424 cr

State-owned NTPC on Tuesday said it has paid an additional Rs 2,424 crore of interim dividend to its shareholders in the financial year ending March 2025. This is in addition to the first interim dividend of Rs 2,424 crore paid in November 2024, NTPC said in a statement. The Rs 2,424 crore dividend paid on February 18 is 25 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of the company. The total dividend paid by the company during the ongoing fiscal has reached Rs 8,000 crore, which includes the final dividend of Rs 3,152 crore for the financial year 2023-24 paid in September 2024. This is the 32nd consecutive year that NTPC has paid dividend. Under the Ministry of Power, NTPC is India's largest integrated power utility, contributing one-fourth of the country's power requirements. The company has an installed capacity of over 77 GW, with an additional capacity of 29.5 GW under construction, including 9.6 GW of renewable energy capacity. The company is committed to achieving 60 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2032.

## Indian firms make presence felt as DIFC marks 20<sup>th</sup> year

PNS ■ DUBAI

As the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) continues to bolster Dubai's position in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region's financial services capital during its 20th year, a significant list of Indian names has been joining the bandwagon.

Significant Indian company names added this year include ASK Asset & Wealth Management Group (Wealth Management), AI/tech unicorn, Nagarao.

According to a statement released here on Tuesday,

Middle East & Asian countries contributed the highest (51 per cent) for DIFC's growth in 2024.

Indian companies under financial services include Bharat Re Global Ltd, El Dorado Capital Ltd, Beacon Insurance Brokers, Fort Capital, Mahindra Insurance Brokers, and Nuvama Wealth and Investment Ltd.

DIFC houses 6,920 companies, up from 5,523 in 2023, registering a 25 per cent increase. DIFC attracted 1,823 new registrations, the highest-ever number recorded in a year, showcasing historic growth of 25 per cent.



Combined revenues for 2024 have shown the greatest leap since inception of the Centre, reaching AED 1.78

billion (USD 484 million), 37 per cent higher than 2023's record-breaking performance; and operating profit grew to AED 1.33 billion (USD 363 million), up 55 per cent.

DIFC Governor Essa Kazim said, "Over the last 20 years, DIFC has played a leading role in transforming Dubai and the UAE's economic landscape, in line with the Dubai Economic Agenda (D33). DIFC's Strategy 2030 continues to position us as the top global financial centre in the region and as one of the world's leading financial centres."

## Unemployment rate dips to 6.4 pc in December quarter: Survey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas dipped to 6.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, according to the National Sample Survey Survey (NSSO).

Joblessness, or unemployment rate, is defined as the percentage of unemployed people in the labour force.

The unemployment rate in the December quarter of FY24 was 6.5 per cent. However, the rate stayed flat when compared sequentially. In the preceding July-

September quarter of FY25, the rate of unemployment for people aged 15 years and above in urban areas was at the same level of 6.4 per cent, the 25th Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) showed.

The unemployment rate among females (aged 15 years and above) in urban areas declined to 8.1 per cent in October-December 2024 from 8.6 per cent in the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 8.4 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Among males, the unemployment rate in urban areas remained flat at 5.8 per cent in



October-December 2024 as compared to the rate of the same quarter a year ago. The rate was 5.7 per cent in July-September, 2024.

Labour force participation

rate in Current Weekly Status (CWS) in urban areas for people aged 15 years and above increased to 50.4 per cent in October-December from 49.9 per cent in the

same quarter a year ago. The rate was 50.4 per cent in the July-September 2024.

Labour force refers to the part of the population, which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and, therefore, includes both employed and unemployed persons.

The NSSO had launched PLFS in April 2017.

On the basis of PLFS, a quarterly bulletin is brought out giving estimates of labour force indicators namely unemployment rate, worker popu-

lation ratio (WPR), labour force participation rate (LFPR), distribution of workers by broad status in employment and industry of work in CWS.

The estimates of unemployed persons in CWS give an average picture of unemployment in a short span of seven days during the survey period. In the CWS approach, a person is considered unemployed if he/she did not work even for one hour on any day during the week but sought or was available for work at least for one hour on any day during the period.

## IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumps 200 pc to Rs 4.7 lakh cr: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The IPO-bound NSE's valuation jumped 201 per cent in 2024 to Rs 4.7 lakh crore, a report said on Tuesday.

The largest India equity bourse, which is reported to have restarted its listing process by applying for a no-objection from markets regulator Sebi, is already the 10th-most valuable private company in the country, as per the 2024 Burgundy Private Hurun India 500 list of listed as well as unlisted companies.

The valuation was pegged at Rs 3.12 lakh crore, as per a September 2024 report. Another media report said the company, which also runs the world's largest derivatives exchange, aims to sell 10 per cent of holding in the IPO.

The overall revenues jumped 28 per cent to Rs 16,352 crore in FY24, and the post-tax profit surged 51 per cent to Rs 8,306 crore.

The stock bourse had moved on the listing plans after getting some clarity on allegations of not allowing equitable access to

its members.

Hurun said it has travelled across the country and spoken with industry experts, journalists, bankers and accessed publicly available data sources while arriving at the valuation for private or unlisted companies.

The list of companies is led by Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries with a Rs 17.5 lakh crore valuation, while Tata Consultancy Services came second at Rs 16.1 lakh crore with a 30 per cent growth.

Billionaire Gautam Adani's flagship Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone was valued at Rs 2,73,530 crore as on December 13, which was used as the cut-off date for the list.

The Adani Group, which includes nine listed companies, was valued at Rs 13,40 lakh crore, while the Ambani-led Reliance Group's overall valuation was pegged at Rs 19.71 lakh crore.

The salt-to-software Tata Sons led among the industrial groups in valuation, with a 37 per cent jump in valuation to Rs 32.27 lakh crore.







Richa Chadha & Ali Fazal keep fans guessing—Big news on the way?

Bollywood's beloved couple, Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal, have sent fans into a frenzy with their latest Instagram post, hinting at an exciting announcement set to be revealed today.

This announcement could entail. Some believe this might signal an on-screen reunion for Richa and Ali, who have previously shared screen space in films like Fukrey and Fukrey Returns.

Whatever the case, one thing is certain: Richa and Ali know how to keep their audience intrigued. This isn't the first time Richa and Ali have taken an unconventional route to engage their fans.

RAJKUMMAR RAO & WAMIQA GABBI CAUGHT IN A TIME LOOP IN BHOOL CHUK MAAF

Maddock Films has unveiled the official teaser of Bhool Chuk MAAF, a romantic comedy-drama starring Rajkummar Rao and Wamiqa Gabbi in lead roles.

the 29th—meaning the Haldi ceremony is happening again. As the cycle repeats itself, he is left puzzled, exhausted, and desperate to break free from the loop.



Netflix's Dabba Cartel promises a thrilling ride through crime and betrayal

Netflix is set to unveil its latest crime drama, Dabba Cartel, a gripping tale of five middle-class women whose humble lunchbox service takes an unexpected and dangerous turn.

greed, betrayal and survival. The show explores how ordinary women, driven by ambition and resilience, get pushed into unimaginable circumstances, forcing them to make life-altering decisions.

Sunny Deol begins shooting for Border 2 in Jhansi

The much-awaited war drama Border 2 has officially gone on floors, with Sunny Deol commencing the shoot in Jhansi, Madhya Pradesh.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



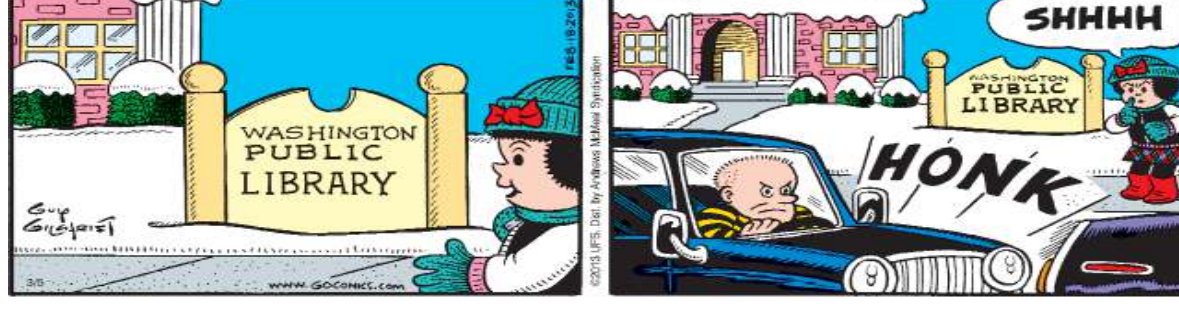
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution
1 6 7 3 4 5 9 8 2
9 3 4 6 2 8 1 7 5
8 5 2 9 7 1 6 3 4
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3 8 5 1 6 7 2 4 9
4 1 3 2 5 9 7 6 8
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GINGER MEGGS



ACROSS

- 1 Use these on envelopes
3 loy
7 A scented flower
8 Hot remains from a fire
10 Got away from
13 A month
16 A hole in a hill for a train
17 Birthday present
18 Scraps of material
19 A funny play or film

DOWN

- 1 Certain
2 Help
4 Finished
5 Plates



## Kirti Kulhari unleashing her 'new sides', What fans haven't seen is the next chapter: 'Action, horror, sinister — a lot to explore'

In an insightful conversation with *The Pioneer*, Kirti Kulhari opens up about her compelling performance in *Hisaab Barabar* on ZEE5, where she takes on the role of a layered police officer in a story that effortlessly combines humour with serious undertones. Known for her standout roles, she delves into her approach of bringing depth and nuance to every character, focusing on the smallest gestures to convey complex emotions

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**W**ith a filmography that spans bold, unconventional roles across genres, Kirti Kulhari has carved a niche for herself in the industry. Known for her nuanced performances in projects like *Pink*, *Four More Shots Please!* and *Criminal Justice*, the actress once again brings a layered character to life in *Hisaab Barabar*, now streaming on ZEE5. The Indo-Swedish co-production, directed by Ashwini Chaudhary, takes a lighthearted yet deeply insightful approach to a serious subject, using humour to lace its narrative. This unique tonality is what immediately intrigued Kirti. "They have used humour to sort of place such a serious subject and that really fascinated me. It's something I haven't done before and that's what drew me to the project," she shares.

In *Hisaab Barabar*, Kirti plays a police officer, a role that, on paper, could have been a straightforward one. However, she was determined to bring depth and complexity to her character. "It looks like a very simple character on paper and it could have been a one-dimensional thing. But with the way it was written and the way Ashwini sir and I explored it, I am so glad that it has come out so powerfully on screen," she says.

For the *Mission Mangal* actress, the challenge often lies in finding emotional subtleties that can be conveyed through the smallest of gestures. "That's what excites me—the idea of communicating emotions through just a look or a moment, rather than over-explaining them. When something looks easy on paper, I love

the challenge of making it deeply impactful."

Unlike some of her past roles, her research for *Hisaab Barabar* was not extensive. "I didn't feel the need to meet real-life police officers because my character is not just a cop—there's so much more to her as a person," she explains. Instead, she spent time with the director, dissecting every scene and understanding her character's motivations. "We developed a whole arc for her, sat down on individual scenes and really tried to find her emotional core. It was more about understanding her journey rather than focusing on the profession itself."

Her approach to playing this character also reflects a shift in the representation of women in cinema, particularly on streaming platforms. She believes OTT platforms have opened up avenues for more layered and complex female characters. "The writing is getting stronger, the representation is getting wider and the complexities of characters are being portrayed beautifully. That's what it should be about," she says. While filming *Hisaab Barabar*, one particular aspect of her character stayed with Kirti—the way she chooses not to carry the baggage of her past. "There's a moment in the film where you finally realise she has lost her husband. But until that point, you don't see her as someone burdened by grief. She is celebrating life in her own small ways," she shares.

This aspect of the character resonated deeply with her. "It made me realise how we all go through hardships, but we don't have to carry them with us forever. We can choose to accept things for what they are and still live a full life in the present moment," she reflects.

Unlike some of the intense roles she has played in the past, *Hisaab Barabar* didn't give the Kirti star any "real chills." The film, though dealing with a serious subject, maintains a lighthearted and engaging tone. "I understand the seriousness of the subject, but the fact that it's being told in such a fun way meant that I never really had those intense, dramatic moments. It's more about finding depth within that lightheartedness," she explains.

Reminiscing about her time on set, she recalls a particularly amusing incident involving director Ashwini Chaudhary. "One day, I reached the set, and we were about to shoot a cop scene. Ashwini sir was whispering, and I asked him what happened. He told me he had lost his voice. Now, if you know him, you know he's usually very loud! So, I joked, 'Finally, the unit will have some relief from your booming voice.'" She

laughs, adding that the entire crew, including her co-star Maddy (R. Madhavan), burst into laughter at her remark.

As for the road ahead, Kirti is excited to explore new genres and push her boundaries even further. "I'd love to do a love story, a sports film, action and even horror. There are so many sides of me that the audience hasn't seen yet—people haven't seen me do real action, horror, or even play a sinister character. There's a lot left to explore and I'm just getting started," she says. With her commitment to bringing depth to every role and her passion for storytelling, Kirti Kulhari continues to establish herself as one of the most versatile and fearless actors in the industry. And if *Hisaab Barabar* is any indication, she is only scratching the surface of her capabilities.

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## PAWS, CLAWS AND LOVE!

Love is deep, messy, and beautifully unpredictable. It crosses generations, traditions and relationships, showing up in the warmest, quirkiest ways. And as Indian pet parents, we know love isn't just for family, friends, or partners—it's for the furry family members who turn our houses into homes.

**Meet the Parents**  
Convincing Indian parents to accept a pet is almost always a journey. Most of us have heard them say, *Tum hi kaafi hoon sambhalne ke liye!* or *Ghar ko zoo mat banao!* But fast forward a few months and they're the ones sneaking treats, calling the vet before you even wake up, and saying things like, *Beta, tumhe uska khayal rakhna chahiye!*

**Meet the Baby**  
Indian homes are full of endless family bonds and there's nothing more heartwarming than watching a baby and a pet grow up together. If you've ever introduced a pet to a little one, you know how special it is. That gentle curiosity, tiny hands reaching out for fur, and that first tail wag—it's magic.

**Meet My Friends**  
Let's be honest—if you're a pet parent, you've probably forced your friends to FaceTime just to show off your dog's new trick or your cat's latest mischief. But the real test? How your friends react to your pet in person. Do they happily get covered in fur? Do they bribe your pet with treats? Do they join in when your dog zooms around the house at 2 AM? Sure, it's not a dealbreaker, but brownie points for those who earn your pet's approval without even trying!

**Meet My Partner**  
This one's a biggie. In a world of arranged, love, and situationship relationships, nothing is more revealing than how someone treats your pet. Your partner making an effort to bond with your pet? Green flag. Remembering your dog's favourite toy or your cat's weird food habit? Shaadi material! And if they have a pet too? Well, that's a pawfect match waiting to happen!

Jokes aside, introducing your pet to a partner is an emotional moment. It's not just about getting along—it's about trust, effort and love.

### STRUGGLING TO GET YOUR PET TO LIKE YOU? TRY THIS!

If your pet is still unsure about a new person in their life, don't worry. Just like us, they take their time to warm up! Here are a few simple ways to help:

- Don't rush it:** Give your pet time to sniff around and get comfortable before expecting instant bonding.
- Bribe them with food:** Keep your pet's favorite treats handy—nothing says "you're cool" like a tasty reward.
- Create shared experiences:** Whether it's playing fetch, a slow belly rub session, or just chilling together, these little moments matter.
- Respect their space:** Make sure your pet has a safe spot to retreat to when they feel overwhelmed.
- Be consistent & kind:** Training (and re-training) with patience goes a long way in helping your pet adjust to new people.

"There are many ways to celebrate the love you have for your pets. The best way is of course by being conscious of their nutritional needs and providing a well balanced diet through premium ingredients" says J.S. Ramakrishna, Business Head of Carnivel and a devoted pet parent for over 20 years.



## Singapore's iconic firework display revamped!

In a stunning demonstration of ingenuity and imagination, Mount Faber Leisure Group (MFLG) presents the revival of Wings of Time, Singapore's most popular night performance, which has been magnificently renamed as Wings of Time Fireworks Symphony.



Watch a kaleidoscope of almost 200 stunning fireworks displays that have been skillfully coordinated to create an engrossing and captivating experience. 3D projection mapping, lasers, water fountains and special effects all work together to create a memorable experience as the night sky turns into a brilliant canvas. Up to 2,500 guests are invited per show to indulge in the enchantment, so don't miss your chance to be a part of this amazing experience, which has two nightly performances at 7:40 PM and 8:40 PM. What's more is when she says, "With this show, we always attempt to keep a classic plot. You are sitting on the beach and gazing up at the water for this. Therefore, we are using the natural saltwater without any control over wind or tidal waves! The water fountain serves as our background! As a result, this background now travels in the direction of the wind. It looks extremely good artistically. Even though the children may not comprehend the story, they enjoy what they see; therefore, our job is done."

It is a visual spectacle with laser, fire and water effects and pyrotechnics, synchronised with symphonic music. "Everything is in English, including the commentary. The plot touches on issues



that are universally relatable. However, the food kiosk is what draws in our Indian tourists! It's usually your Coke and popcorn, right? It may surprise you to learn that our best-selling item is masala fries with an Indian flair! We also have momos and pav bhaji! Additionally, Indians are particularly interested in Mexican cuisine. There, the tacos are the star. We also provide an Indian buffet with thalis and masala chai after the show," Jennifer continues, referring to their efforts to accommodate Indian tourists.

Since Feb 1, the fireworks display has been four times longer than before, with nearly 200 shots lighting up the sky every show. What else? We also learn that many Indians are travelling to Singapore with tour groups since the outbreak! "Many of the regular visitors to our Sentosa, whom I know, would like to stay longer at Mount Faber. We also have multigenerational families coming to visit! Seeing that

travel trend is fantastic. We have Singapore Tourism on board and our hotel partners and well-followed digital creators really aid in establishing that foundation, which is how we receive feedback."

Wings of Time is now known as Wings of Time Fireworks Symphony with enhanced fireworks at Sentosa's Siloso Beach. It is the world's only multi-sensory night show blending advanced technology and stunning visual effects against the backdrop of the Sentosa waters! Additionally— "Use the beach as our natural backdrop and use seawater directly, while other fountain shows use a lot of electricity to pump out. Thus, there is actually reduced electrical use! It is not a closed chamber in which we operate. It has a track record of success! We are the only ones who have conquered the sky and the sea is our greatest draw. Even though it's difficult, the result is a sight that no one could have predicted."

PNS/HYDERABAD

**T**his legendary show at Sentosa's charming Siloso Beach has undergone a captivating transformation as the curtains open on its tenth anniversary celebration, taking the viewing experience to new heights. It promises to be a symphony of sensations, telling a captivating story that cuts across cultural divides and elicits a collective gasp of awe from viewers everywhere.

Prepare to be mesmerised, inspired and in wonder as this redefined entertainment marvel soars, redefining the craft of storytelling and solidifying its place as a must-see. To find out more about the experience, we spoke exclusively with Jennifer Wong, Deputy Director, Commercial, Mount

Faber Leisure Group (MFLG)! With a big smile on her face, Jennifer starts to tell us, "Oh, yes, we just finished celebrating our ten-year anniversary, and every time I look back at it, the only question that lingers in my mind is—how else can I bring innovation to it? 'Fireworks' is one method to make it more exciting! This time, it will feature extra special touches and be four times longer. We also have a new machine. To put it simply, it's like how we play with sparkles on Diwali, but this time, the machines are much larger. With the help of technology, viewers may experience an immersive fireworks spectacle that puts them up close and personal. And where was it all? For them, we have opened the waterways. It's not simply a spectacle; with the help of dance and lasers, a story will be conveyed! Our target audience is young adults and I have observed firsthand

their interest in what's going on, particularly with regard to the water fountains. At one point in the performance, we insert fireworks, which ends up being such an emotional high!" Thus, the night sky comes to life with a breathtaking display that will wow you as the sun sets! Audiences of all ages will be enthralled by the spectacular extravaganza that is the recently improved performance.



# India will feel Bumrah's absence very strongly: Dhawan

PTI ■ DUBAI

India will feel Jasprit Bumrah's absence "very strongly" in the Champions Trophy but they still have a great chance to win the tournament considering their recent form and a host of match-winners at their disposal, reckons former opener Shikhar Dhawan.

While the event starts in Pakistan on Wednesday, India start their campaign a day later with a match against neighbours Bangladesh at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium.

Pace spearhead Bumrah was ruled out of the tournament due to a lower back injury, having taken the maximum load during India's five-match Test series against Australia.

"My concern is they are going to miss Jasprit Bumrah, there is no doubt he will be a big absence and I think they will feel it very strongly," Dhawan wrote in an ICC column published on Tuesday.

"For me, he is the best bowler in the world, and his accuracy is hard to replicate. He is also a very calm character and that is crucial in a huge ICC event like this."

Dhawan is, however, backing Shubman Gill and Harshit Rana to sizzle in the tournament.

"At the same time, Harshit Rana has



come into the side and I think that is really exciting - keep an eye on him, I think he could have a breakout tournament.

"I like his attitude, he is a go-getter and he is not afraid of anything. He accepts challenges and we have seen in the England series that he is in

form. I am sure he will look to seize this opportunity and, if he does, he could provide a real X-factor for India."

Going by recent form and team strength, Dhawan found it hard to look beyond India when the discussion turned to title contenders.

"There are a lot of reasons to be optimistic for India. They have a very balanced side, especially with the bat - there is a nice blend of experience and youth. Shubman Gill, in particular, is so consistent and he has a big role to play. I think he will have a great tournament.

"Rohit Sharma has found form, Virat Kohli is there; they are a top side and will take some stopping."

Dhawan is also not ruling out teams such as South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and hosts Pakistan, to whom India lost in the title clash in the last edition in the UK.

"I really like South Africa in this tournament as well. They have played consistent cricket and have everything you need to win such a huge tournament - experience, strength-in-depth and X-factor players like Kagiso Rabada.

"I also like Pakistan, they will be hard to beat in home conditions, and also New Zealand - who are just always there or thereabouts.

"Australia have struggled in their series with Sri Lanka but they some great batters; Travis Head is in great form, and I'm really excited to see Steve Smith."

Dhawan is one of the most successful batters in the tournament's history having scored 701 runs in 10 innings at an average of 77.88. He hit three centuries in the tournament, with his best being 125 against Sri Lanka in 2017.

"The ICC Champions Trophy means a great deal to me. We won in 2013 and then reached the final in 2017, and both times I finished as leading run-scorer," he added.



## WPL: Delhi Capitals, UP Warriorz eye improved batting effort

PTI ■ VADODARA

Delhi Capitals and UP Warriorz will be aiming for an improved batting effort on Wednesday after floundering in their previous Women's Premier League matches.

Their clash is also the last match here at the Kotambi Stadium before the WPL action shifts to Bengaluru from February 21.

The Capitals are yet to match the pre-tournament favourite billing with performances. Their batting has failed to fire in two matches, even in their victory over the Mumbai Indians.

They made heavy weather of the chase of a 165-run target before winning by two wickets, and folded for 141 against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday during the eight-wicket defeat.

The trouble starts from the top as skipper Meg Lanning has not been able to produce a big knock yet. It has seemed that international retirement has taken a toll on the Australian.

There have been occasional fireworks by Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues or Sarah Bryce, but they have not been able to convert into a substantial innings.

Their bowling has been in much better shape with veteran Shikha Pandey leading from the front, but she needs some more support from others, particularly from fellow pacer Arundhati Reddy.

The UP outfit too is in a similar place. Grace Harris and Tahlia McGrath, their middle-order powerhouses, looked uneasy against spin

and the Capitals have a capable bunch in Minnu Mani, Jess Jonassen and Radha Yadav.

The Warriorz have invested heavily in skipper Deepti Sharma, young wicketkeeper batter Uma Chhetri and openers Virinda Dinesh and Kiran Navgire.

It's not often that a WPL team fills their top four with Indian players, and the quartet will have to repay the faith of the management sooner than later.

The absence of an injured Alyssa Healy has reduced the firepower in their top order.

They would also expect leg-spinner Alana King to make an impression against Delhi, as the Aussie spinner, who bowled that extraordinary Shane Warne-esque delivery in the Women's Ashes, was quite expensive against Gujarat.

**Teams (from):**  
**UP Warriorz:** Deepti Sharma (captain), Alana King, Gouher Sultana, Saima Thakor, Grace Harris, Shweta Sehrawat, Anjali Sarvani, Kiran Navgire, Sophie Ecclestone, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Tahlia McGrath, Chamari Athapaththu, Poonam Khemnar, Uma Chhetry, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Virinda Dinesh.

**Delhi Capitals:** Meg Lanning (captain), Harleen Deol, Prakashika Naik, Beth Mooney, Kashvee Gautam, Priya Mishra, Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Sayali Satghare, Danielle Gibson, Mannat Kashyap, Shabnam Shahik, Dayalan Hemalatha, Meghna Singh, Simran Shaikh, Deandra Dottin, Phoebe Litchfield, Tanuja Kanwar.



## Best leaders that I know have always empowered colleagues: Cummins

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leadership is all about having faith in the strengths of colleagues, believes Australia's talismanic captain Pat Cummins, who is busy promoting his new book after being forced out of the Champions Trophy due to an ankle injury.

At the age of 28, Cummins became Australia's 47th Test captain and since then he has led his country to the 50-over World Cup and the World Test Championship triumph apart from retaining the Ashes and regaining the coveted Border-Gavaskar Trophy just last month.

The 31-year-old, who has 503 international wickets across formats with 294 in Tests alone, donned the hat of an interviewer to speak to 11 achievers-cum-leaders from around the world for his new book 'Tested: The remarkable power of resolve' published by Harper Collins.

Asked about his idea of leadership and to what extent should the captain assert his authority, Cummins told PTI: "The best leaders I've played under always made me feel empowered, brought the best out of myself and made me feel a sense of freedom."

"I think it's important to lean into the individual strengths of each team member rather than trying to make everyone

assimilate," the pacer further stated.

While he has a handsome USD two million-plus contract with IPL franchise Sunrisers Hyderabad, whom he captained last year in the cash-rich league, the traditional format remains his No.1 priority.

"I love Test cricket so much so its always been an easy decision to keep that as my number one priority. Especially in Australia, we are lucky to have Test cricket so well-supported."

Cummins also spoke about the respect he has for his fellow speed merchants Indian talisman Jasprit Bumrah and Kagiso Rabada of South Africa.

"Those two guys (Bumrah and Rabada) are bowlers I enjoy watching and admire. They have been taking wickets consistently for many years and we've had some wonderful contests."

Talking about the book, Cummins also revealed the process he followed while deciding the list of interviewees for his new book.

"I started with a list of people I knew and admired and whose life stories exemplified resilience, leadership and the power of resolve," he said.

## Delighted to see ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan, says Wasim

PTI ■ KARACHI

Former captain Wasim Bari is glad to see the return of a global cricketing event to Pakistan through the ICC Champions Trophy, and hopes that the nightmarish days after the militant attack on Sri Lankan team in 2009 are forgotten forever.

Pakistan could not host international cricket for 10 years after that gruesome day, and were forced to play their home matches in the UAE.

Bari was serving as the Director in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) under the Chairmanship of late Ejaz Butt when the attack took place on March 3 near the Liberty roundabout close to the Gaddafi stadium.

"It was the worst day in my life when news came through of what had happened. Everyone was numb and most of us in our offices realised



immediately this was going to put Pakistan cricket back by a few years," Bari said. Bari said there was disbelief followed by sorrow the governments of both the nations and the ICC got involved, and later a chartered flight was arranged to send the Lankan team back home. Six policemen and two others were killed in the attack and several were injured including Pakistani umpire Ahsan Raza, who later had to undergo a life-saving operation.

Bari recalled that when pictures of the bullet-ridden bus and vans carrying the match officials and umpires in blood stained shirts went viral, it became obvious that Pakistan's hopes of staging the Champions Trophy or even the 2011 World Cup matches had vanished.

Without putting blame on anyone, Bari said: "It should never have happened and the result was Pakistan cricket couldn't properly grow for the next 10 years, as all teams

refused to play in Pakistan for security reasons."

Bari said he is delighted to see the ICC Champions Trophy being held in Pakistan now and multiple teams landing in the country.

"To see England, Australian, South African, New Zealand and Afghanistan teams in Karachi and Lahore means so much to all Pakistani cricketers, board officials and the fans," he said.

The 75-year-old said it was a tribute to the singleminded effort of all the stakeholders involved in Pakistan cricket. "I think it is also a time to pay tribute to the resilience of Pakistan cricket while hosting the Champions Trophy, after all that has happened in the last 10 years."

Bari said Pakistan have some very good players, who are capable of helping the team defend the Champions Trophy title.

## India's bowling coach Morkel returns home

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's bowling coach Morkel has left for his home in South Africa due to a family emergency.

Morkel, who was appointed for the job in September last year, had travelled to Dubai with the Indian team on Saturday, and also attended the side's first practice session ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy beginning on Wednesday.

The 40-year-old former South African pacer was, however, not around for the Indian team's second practice session on Monday, it has been learned.

The development comes just as India geared up to began their campaign with a match

against Bangladesh at Dubai International Cricket Stadium here on Thursday.

The Indian bowling attack for the ICC tournament comprises specialist pacers and one fast-bowling all-rounder in Hardik Pandya. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was ruled out of the event due to lower back injury, leaving the task of shouldering the fast-bowling responsibility on Arshdeep Singh, Harshit Rana and Mohammed Shami, with Pandya being the fourth option.

Pakistan is the host nation of the tournament, but India will be playing all their matches in Dubai as per the hybrid model agreed by the concerned stakeholders.

## Jaspal Rana will continue as my coach: Manu Bhaker

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eying glory in next World Championship, double Olympic medalist shooter Manu Bhaker said Jaspal Rana will continue to be her "coach" despite the Dronacharya awardee being roped in as the High Performance trainer for pistol discipline by the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

Rana, a four-time Asian Games gold medalist, had a very bitter and public fallout with Manu before the Tokyo Olympics but they reconciled before last year's Paris Games, where the latter made history by bagging two bronze medals.

"Honestly, I only have to say one thing that he (Rana) is my coach all I know and he is very good at what he does. He is very, very talented and



he has been a great coach for me.

"All I know and all I can say is that he is my coach. Of course, he can be anyone else's coach as well but for me he is my coach," Manu said after winning the BBC Sportswomen of the Year 2024 award at a glittering function here on Monday night.

Under Rana's personal guidance, Manu, who was

struggling after the Tokyo Games, made a remarkable comeback and became the first Indian to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics since Independence.

She won bronze medals in 10m air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team events in Paris to create history. Talking about her future plans, Manu said: "We will be going for World Cups in April, and then we have some domestic competitions in June."

"It will be followed by another World Cup in Munich. Then we will have the World Championships, probably in late October or November. My target is the World Championships. I want to peak at the right time for the World Championships," she added. The season-ending World Championships will be held in Cairo, Egypt, from November 6-16. Her unprecedented success in Paris wouldn't have been possible without Rana's guidance and Manu agrees to it. Manu, who turned 23 on Tuesday, considers Rana as her father figure, while the coach gives her the courage and confidence to seek and achieve great things in her sport.

# Champions Trophy set to start amid debate on relevance of 50-over cricket

PTI ■ DUBAI/KARACHI

Intrigue, uncertainty, backstage drama. The ICC Champions Trophy has seen it all even before the curtains go up on the tournament and it would only get more stirring over the next three weeks, starting with the opening clash between Pakistan and New Zealand in Karachi. Eight teams will vie for a trophy, often talked up as tougher to win than the World Cup, and also to script a new chapter in their own cricketing story. While India will fight it out in Dubai, others will be primarily based in Pakistan, which would get to host its first ICC event since the 1996 World Cup. Several barriers had to be hurdled over to cobble this tournament together after eight years. The tournament is also crucial amid the raging debate on the relevance of ODI cricket, which is struggling to find its place

amid the rage for T20 cricket and the devotion for Test format.

Perhaps, no other cricketing event in the recent past has been harried so much by long-standing geopolitical tensions, stubbornness by administrative boards of two important participants, and the nail-biting anxiety over the main hosting nation.

The chaos has been an endearing throwback to the 90s when cricket in the sub-continent resembled a hastily organised party.

But all these pre-tournament jitters will be forgotten once the teams enter the field, and the first of them will be Pakistan and New Zealand. If anyone needs a reminder, then Pakistan had won the last edition of the Champions Trophy in 2017.

The opening match in itself is a curious clash -- a talented-yet-volatile Pakistan unsure of its own destiny against a team

for which order is everything. But the blue riband match of the tournament will be on February 23 when India take on Pakistan, ushering in customary waves of nostalgia, emotions, political grandstanding, and the social media battle.

That marquee showdown will be in Dubai as India remained steadfast in its refusal to set foot on Pakistani soil owing to security concerns.

**Last dance of Kohli, Rohit?** But beyond such team equations, certain individual players would want this tournament to be a memorable one. On top of the list are India's batting talismans Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. They have been magnificent servants of the game over the last decade and half.

Few in modern era were able to match their achievements and aura. But now, these two titans have reached the last lap of a long race, and would



want to bow out in a blaze of glory. It's tough to imagine Kohli and Rohit being part of India's ODI set-up after the Champions Trophy irrespective of the outcome.

It might even impact their future in Test cricket, as a lukewarm outing here might force the selectors to mull over their role ahead of India's tour to England in June. Similarly, a failure to win the Champions Trophy will bring the role of head coach

Gautam Gambhir under scrutiny. Gambhir might have received a temporary relief after India's domination over England in the recent home series, but not it wouldn't be enough to brush under the carpet, India's recent travails against New Zealand and Australia.

But a global trophy will certainly give him a much better ground to stand. From a team perspective, India will be eager to wrest

their first ICC trophy in the 50-over format after their triumph in the 2013 Champions Trophy under the enigmatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni. It will be a perfect parting gift to Kohli and Rohit and a welcome carpet to some young names such as Shubman Gill who are set to take India into the future.

**The challengers** India are playing a brand of ODI cricket that makes them instant favourites to win the tournament. They have adopted an aggressive approach and have a varied line-up, brimming with talent. But such calculations can go wrong because of a bad moment or session, as it happened in the 2023 World Cup final when India succumbed to Australia after a middling batting effort. The Aussies themselves are without their premier pacers Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. But the

two-time champions still pack a punch as they have a batting unit to meet the demands of ODI format.

Once a feared white-ball team, England have slipped a few rungs as age and form have caught up with some of their leading performers. But do the likes of Jos Buttler, Joe Root and Liam Livingstone have one last roar left in them? Or will some of their new stars such as Harry Brook or Ben Duckett cut open a new path?

New Zealand are also travelling on fresh avenue following the retirement of Trent Boult and Tim Southee. Kane Williamson is their trump card and the Kiwis would hope that he fires for them to earn their maiden white ball ICC trophy.

South Africa too will have a similar goal. They had won ICC Knockouts Trophy in 1998, but not bagged anything in recent times and the Temba Bavuma-led side

will be hoping for a reversal of fortune. But for that to happen, the Proteas should coat their minds with steel in crunch situations.

It's applicable to Pakistan as well. If they can stop obsessing over the match against India and not treat it as the 'final frontier', then the home side is a dangerous opposition.

Their pace attack is top-notch and they have some batters like Fakhar Zaman and Salman Ali Agha who can turn on the heat on the rivals. Afghanistan, who have transformed into a formidable white-ball outfit, also can put other teams under immense pressure through a squad that has Rashid Khan and Rahmanullah Gurbaz. Bangladesh now has receded to the periphery of cricketing consciousness, but can they pull off a stunner as they had done in the 2007 50-over World Cup?

## Sundeep Kishan clears the air says, 'I'm not part of Rajinikanth's *Coolie*'

Ever since news broke that Superstar Rajinikanth is collaborating with director Lokesh Kanagaraj for his next film, *Coolie*, fans have been eagerly awaiting more details. Speculations were rife that Sundeep Kishan would also be part of the film alongside Varun. However, at the latest Dish TV Watcho Storytellers Conclave, Sundeep Kishan made a revelation that took everyone by surprise.

Revealing the details, Sundeep Kishan said, "Honestly, I'm not a part of *Coolie*. Lokesh is one of my best friends and anything big that happens to me, he's one of the first people to know. Likewise, he calls me first when something big happens to him. We don't talk about it much; we are just good friends."

He further added, "At one point, Rajni sir wanted to meet me, and I was asked to see him. When I finally did, it was amazing. We sat, talked about my work and I took his blessings. It was a memorable moment."

When asked if he has ever met his favourite stars, Sundeep shared an interesting perspective. He said, "I have this peculiar habit—I don't meet my favorite stars until they recognize me for who I am. For example, I didn't meet Aziz sir or Shafiq sir until they knew who I was. But meeting Rajni sir was something truly special!"

This confirms that Sundeep Kishan and Lokesh Kanagaraj are not collaborating on a project at the moment. Talking about his upcoming film, he shared, "My current film, *Mazaag*, is set to release on February 26. It's a crazy, fun entertainer. After doing three serious films—*Michael*, *Ryan* and *Captain Miller*—I felt I needed to do something lighter. I wanted to make the audience laugh and it's going to be a fun ride."

Sundeep was a guest speaker at the Watcho Storytellers Conclave, a step towards igniting impactful conversations within the film community while strengthening the Dish TV brand. He led a session titled 'A Young Star Who Seamlessly Gels into Any Role, Any Industry, and Platform'. After a successful launch in Kolkata, Watcho Storytellers Conclave arrived in Hyderabad, engaging creative community and empowering content creators nationwide.

With a focus on collaboration and innovation, the Hyderabad edition featured eminent filmmakers and creators, including Anil Ravipudi, Sundeep Kishan, Sunitha Tati, Baradwaj Rangan, Sai Rajesh and Nanda Kishore Emani, offering insightful sessions on the evolving content landscape.



## SHWETA BASU PRASAD RECALLS FACING HEIGHT BULLYING ON SET OF TELUGU FILM

Actress Shweta Basu Prasad, known for her work across multiple languages including Hindi, Telugu and Tamil, has opened up on a negative experience she faced on a film set. The actress stated that the one and only time in her career when she was bullied for her physical appearance—specifically her height.

According to Shweta, the incident occurred while working on a Telugu film where she was repeatedly mocked for being shorter than her co-star. The actress shared that her male co-actor, who was much taller or close to 6 feet, was constantly the source of the bullying. "The entire crew would remind me of my height every single day. It became an uncomfortable situation for me on that set," Shweta admitted.

Shweta highlighted the irony of the situation, revealing how the male lead, despite his shortcomings in another area, was never called out. "He would mess up every scene, give retakes and struggle with the Telugu language. Ironically, despite him being Telugu, he couldn't speak the language properly. But I was managing with my limited understanding of the language, yet no one ever criticised him for that. Instead, I was constantly ridiculed for something that was entirely out of my control—my height," she said. The actress further emphasised the unfairness of the situation, pointing out that her co-actor's language issues were overlooked, while she was criticized for something she couldn't change. "It was something that was genetically inherited and yet, I was being judged for it. It was the only set where I truly felt bullied, and it was very bad," she confessed.

While Shweta did not name the film in question, she has had a successful career in the Telugu film industry, debuting in 2008 with *Kotha Bangaru Lokam*. She went on to act in a variety of Telugu films, including *Ride*, *Kasko*, *Kalavar King*, *Priyudu* and *Genius*. Her most recent Telugu film was *Vijeta* in 2016.

Shweta's career also spans across the Hindi and Tamil film industries, where she has garnered praise for her performances. Shweta's candid revelation sheds light on the difficulties that many actors face in the industry, particularly regarding issues of appearance and body image. Her story serves as a reminder of the impact such on-set bullying can have on mental and emotional well-being and it underscores the importance of fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone in the industry.

## Mohanlal confirms Baiju Santhosh's role as Murukan in *L2: Empuraan*

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal on Tuesday introduced Murukan as the character played by actor Baiju Santhosh in director Prithviraj's eagerly awaited political action drama *L2: Empuraan* (*L2E*).

Taking to his X timeline, Mohanlal wrote, "Character No18 Baiju Santhosh as Murukan in #L2E #EMPURAAN." He also shared a link to a youtube video in which Baiju Santhosh spoke about his character in the film.

"I don't think anybody has forgotten the movie *Lucifer* and its characters, especially Stephachayan and Murukan. Murukan was a character I truly enjoyed portraying. And after a long gap of five years, we are reuniting once again through *Empuraan*. At this moment, I would like to thank Mohanlal, Antony Perumbavoor, Prithviraj, Murali Gopi, Sujith Vassudev and associate director Vava. As *Empuraan* arrives as Malayalam (cinema's) biggest film, Murukan is also making his return. And of course, with a touch of 'decency'," he said.

Mohanlal-starrer *L2: Empuraan* (*L2E*) is directed by actor Prithviraj and produced jointly by Antony Perumbavoor and

Subaskaran. The film's story has been penned by Murali Gopy and its music has been scored by Deepak Dev. The film has cinematography by Sujith Vaassudev and editing by Akhilesh Mohan.

It may be recalled that actor Prithviraj, during the initial stages of the film, had disclosed that the film would be a commercial entertainer starring Mohanlal. Murali Gopy, for his part, had said that this would be the second instalment in a three-film series.

*Lucifer*, the first part of the franchise which released in 2019 and which marked the directorial debut of actor Prithviraj Sukumaran, emerged a blockbuster in just eight days. It went on to make over Rs 200 crore, making it the highest grossing Malayalam film ever.

Needless to say expectations from the sequel, which is scheduled to hit screens on March 27 this year, have soared.



## Urvashi Rautela's absence from *Daaku Maharaaj* poster sparks hilarious reaction online

For fans eagerly awaiting the OTT release of the Telugu film *Daaku Maharaaj*, there was one glaring omission that has sent the internet into a frenzy: Urvashi Rautela's absence from the film's promotional poster. Despite her significant role in the movie, which features Nandamuri Balakrishna and Bobby Deol, the Bollywood actress was notably left off the promotional material shared by Netflix India South. This has led to widespread speculation and plenty of humorous reactions from fans online. The poster, which was revealed last week to announce the film's OTT release date, caught the attention of many, but what truly stood out was the absence of Rautela, who had been one of the film's most talked-about stars. The song *Dabidi Dabidi*, featuring Urvashi and Nandamuri, became a viral sensation thanks to its catchy hook step, further elevating the film's profile among a wider audience. Despite this, her omission from the poster has baffled fans and sparked a hilarious series of online comments.

Rautela, who has consistently been at the center of the film's promotional activities, including making headlines for her comments on the film's box office success (reportedly earning Rs 105 crore), has played an instrumental role in generating buzz for *Daaku Maharaaj*. From discussing gifts she received from her parents to dismissing controversies surrounding other celebrities, Urvashi has kept herself in the public eye, helping the film secure a pop culture moment. This only adds to the puzzlement about why her image was not featured on the official poster. Social media users were quick to react, with many chiming in with tongue-in-cheek remarks. One comment best encapsulated the sentiment, stating: "First ever Firstest ever lady to be removed from the poster of her film first time ever happened to lady who's always first." Other fans added: "First Indian actress to get dropped from the poster" and "She is Asia's first woman who is dropped from her own film." While the reasons behind her exclusion from the poster remain unclear, one thing is certain: Urvashi Rautela has become an internet sensation in her own right, with *Daaku Maharaaj* becoming much more than just a movie. Fans are clearly feeling the absence of her presence in the marketing and it will be interesting to see if the issue is addressed as the film's release date approaches. In the meantime, the internet continues to have a field day with the unexpected and humorous situation.

## PRODUCER SKN UNDER FIRE FOR CONTROVERSIAL COMMENTS ON TELUGU ACTRESSES—NOW CALLS IT 'FUN'

Producer SKN, known for his blockbuster *Baby*, sparked outrage with his comments on Telugu actresses. Speaking at the pre-release event of *Return of the Dragon*, he openly stated that he and his director friend Sai Rajesh do not want to encourage Telugu actresses. While welcoming Tamil actress Kayadu Lohar to the industry, SKN remarked that his previous experience with Telugu actresses had been disappointing, which led him to avoid working with them in the future. His remarks drew severe backlash from all corners of the film industry, with many questioning his stance. Following the outrage, SKN has now attempted to clarify his statement, claiming that his words were misunderstood. He insists that his comments were made in a "lighthearted" manner and were not meant to be taken seriously. However, this justification hasn't

convinced everyone. "What is there to joke about in such a statement?" questioned an anonymous producer, criticising SKN's attempt to downplay the controversy. The backlash intensified, with many industry professionals condemning the remarks as unnecessary and damaging to Telugu talent. Amidst growing criticism, SKN took to social media to defend himself, asserting that he has always been a strong supporter of Telugu actresses. "I am one of the few producers who have introduced many Telugu actresses to the industry. A lighthearted comment I made recently was misunderstood, leading to unnecessary headlines with incorrect meanings," he wrote. In an attempt to mend the situation, he further stated that he plans to introduce even more Telugu talent in various fields of cinema. "To clarify, I have introduced eight talented

individuals to the industry so far and am set to introduce 25 more talented Telugu girls across 4-5 different crafts in cinema through my upcoming films. Supporting and promoting Telugu talent has always been my priority," he added.

This incident follows a pattern of controversial remarks by industry figures, including actors Prudhvi and Chiranjeevi, which have often led to negative publicity rather than helping film promotions. Many believe such statements only serve to spotlight the individuals making them rather than contributing positively to the industry. Despite SKN's damage control efforts, the controversy has left a lasting impact, raising serious discussions about the treatment of Telugu actresses in the industry. Whether his promise to promote more Telugu talent will restore his credibility remains to be seen.



## Nagarjuna to collaborate with Tamil director Ra Karthik for a story-driven film

Akkineni Nagarjuna is currently juggling multiple projects, keeping himself busy with exciting ventures. The veteran actor is actively working on *Kubera*, directed by Sekhar Kammula, where Tamil star Dhanush plays the lead alongside Rashmika Mandanna. Additionally, Nagarjuna has a significant role in *Coolie*, starring Rajinikanth and directed by Lokesh Kanagaraj.

While these two films are in production, sources reveal that Nagarjuna is also keen on doing a content-driven film. According to an insider, Tamil director Ra Karthik recently pitched a story to the actor, which he found intriguing. However, Nagarjuna has requested a few changes before giving it the final nod.

Ra Karthik made his directorial debut with the Tamil film *Nitham Oru Vaanam* in 2022.

Now, he is in discussions with Nagarjuna for his next project. "Although several filmmakers have approached Nagarjuna with commercial, entertainment-heavy scripts, he is more interested in a narrative-driven film with strong content. That's why he has asked Karthik for a few modifications," the source shared.

If everything falls into place, the film is expected to go on floors in the coming months. Furthermore, Nagarjuna is reportedly planning to produce the project under his own banner, Annapurna Studios. The team is also looking to cast predominantly Telugu actors for the film.

With Nagarjuna's commitment to meaningful cinema and Ra Karthik's fresh storytelling approach, this collaboration could bring something unique to the audience. Stay tuned for further updates!