



**'Punjab's deportees share largest'**

**STPIs TO HELP KEEP PACE WITH CHANGING TECH: MIN**




**I Never Saw Myself as an Unsuccessful ACTOR**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

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

**— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home**



P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**'New era in higher education sector'**

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has announced that the State's higher education sector is entering a new chapter as vice-chancellors to nine universities have been appointed based entirely on merit. The Chief Minister pointed out that higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the future citizens of the State. Andhra Pradesh Governor S. Abdul Nazeer issued notifications appointing vice-chancellors for nine universities in the State on Tuesday. Criticising the previous administration, Chandrababu stated that the...

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**India already exceeding climate**

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

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**Layoffs: Infosys denies using force**

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

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**Gill becomes No 1 ODI batsman**

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

-SPORTS

**RINL's 'Operation Turnaround' struggles amid debt, workforce cuts**

**A major impediment to revival is RINL's inability to secure captive iron ore mines**

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The ambitious 'Operation Turnaround' launched by Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP), is encountering significant hurdles. Struggling under a colossal debt burden of Rs 35,000 crore and a recent reduction of 1,600 employees, the remaining workforce of 12,300 executives and non-executives faces immense pressure to achieve peak production and deliver tangible results. One of the major impediments to RINL's revival has been its inability to secure captive iron ore mines.

**CM's Davos efforts bearing fruit**

**AMERICAN FIRMS READY TO COLLABORATE ON ORGANIC FARMING INITIATIVES GOVT AIMS TO TRANSITION FOUR MILLION FARMERS TO ORGANIC FARMING BY 2028-29**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During the recent visit to Davos, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu detailed the State government's plans to several organisations, inviting them to collaborate on organic farming initiatives in Andhra Pradesh.

The Andhra Pradesh government is actively promoting organic farming across the State, currently farming in 5,00,000 hectares. The government aims to transition four million farmers to organic farming by 2028-29, ultimately cultivating organic crops on five million acres. To achieve this goal, the government is taking up various initiatives, including educating farmers on the benefits of organic agriculture through the Farmers Empowerment Organisation and extensively promoting opportunities in this sector.

Among those who met the CM were representatives from Pegasus Capital Advisors Chairman Craig Cogut, Operating Advisor Gina McCarthy, and Producers Trust CEO Keith Agoda, where they discussed potential areas of cooperation.

The collaboration will focus on providing assistance in areas such as agriculture, production, sustainability, and marketing. The firms will help establish an end-to-end connect-



- Among those who met the CM were representatives from Pegasus Capital Advisors Chairman Craig Cogut, Operating Advisor Gina McCarthy, and Producers Trust CEO Keith Agoda, where they discussed potential areas of cooperation.
- They will also facilitate financial support from both public and private sectors and promote Andhra Pradesh as a Global Centre of Excellence for organic farming.
- The partnership between the Andhra Pradesh government and Pegasus Capital Advisors, along with Producers Trust, will be formalised through a memorandum of understanding (MoU), paving the way for a robust organic farming ecosystem in the State.

tion system from farmers to consumers, develop markets, finance initiatives, manage data, and set up infrastructure.

They will also facilitate financial support from both public and private sectors and promote Andhra Pradesh as a Global Centre of Excellence for organic farming.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister elaborated on the State's

opportunities, goals, and current circumstances to the representatives. He noted the changing food habits of the public and increasing awareness about health. The Chief Minister emphasised the growing importance of food product certification and traceability, encouraging farmers and producers to embrace these trends. Expressing his vision for organic farming, he said he

believes it can awaken a consciousness among farmers, leading to the achievement of their shared goals. The partnership between the Andhra Pradesh government and Pegasus Capital Advisors, along with Producers Trust, will be formalised through a memorandum of understanding (MoU), paving the way for a robust organic farming ecosystem in the State.

**CM thanks Modi, Shah for allotting Rs 608.08 cr**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, on behalf of the people of Andhra Pradesh, expressed heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for sanctioning ₹608.08 crore for the State out of the ₹1554.99 crore allocated to all States under disaster and flood relief.

In a press release, the Central government stated that the High-Level Committee (HLC), under the Chairmanship of the Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Amit Shah, has approved Rs.1554.99 crore of additional Central assistance under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to five States, affected by flood, flash flood, landslides, cyclonic storm during year 2024.

The HLC approved Central assistance of Rs.1554.99 crore to five States from NDRF, subject to an adjustment of 50 per cent of the opening balance for the year available in the SDRE. Out of the total amount of Rs.1554.99 crore, Rs 608.08 crore has been approved for Andhra Pradesh, Rs 170.99 crore for Nagaland, Rs 255.24 crore for Odisha, Rs. 231.75 crore for Telangana, and Rs. 288.93 crore for Tripura.

This additional assistance is over and above the funds released by the Centre to the States in the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), already placed at the disposal of the

**Naidu to meet Union Ministers, seek funds for Andhra**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who left for New Delhi late in the evening on Wednesday, will attend the swearing-in ceremony of the Delhi Chief Minister to be held on Thursday.

On his arrival in the national capital, Chandrababu Naidu, however, in all likelihood will be calling on Union Home Minister Amith Shah, Union Minister for Water Resources CR Patil, and Union Minister for Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Chandrababu is expected to discuss with Amith Shah various projects and other matters pertaining to the State. **Continued on Page 2**

States. During the financial year 2024-25, the Central government has released Rs. 18,322.80 crore to 27 States in SDRF and Rs. 4,808.30 crore from NDRF to 18 States, Rs. 2208.55 crore from the State Disaster Mitigation Fund (SDMF) to 14 States, and Rs. 719.72 crore from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) to eight States.



**AP invites investments in tourism sector**

**Targets ₹25,000 cr over the next 5 years**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/DELHI

The Andhra Pradesh Tourism Minister, Kandukur Durgesh, has extended an invitation to national and international investors to participate in the State's tourism development, at the South Asia Leading Travel and Tourism Exhibition 2025 (SATTE) held in New Delhi. The Minister stressed the government's commitment to sustainable and comprehensive tourism development, targeting an investment of ₹25,000 crore over the next five years.

During his address, Minister Durgesh outlined the initiatives being taken up under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model to enhance the tourism sector. He assured investors that the government would provide attractive

incentives and full support to facilitate their investments. The Minister detailed plans to promote various tourism sectors, including temple, adventure, eco, wellness, heritage, religious, agricultural, medical, cruise, beach, coastal, seaplane, rural and film tourism. He stated that Andhra Pradesh aims to be a prime destination for both national and international tourists. Highlighting the State's natural beauty, Durgesh encouraged investors to explore the vast opportunities available for tourism development in Andhra Pradesh. He noted that the State government has granted industry status to the tourism sector, allowing it to benefit from incentives typically available to other industries. **Continued on Page 2**

**Naidu trying to enter TG thru NDA KCR reportedly warns BRS cadre**



NAVEENA GHANATE naveena.ghanate@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

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

During a BRS Executive Meeting on Wednesday, sources said KCR said that Chandrababu is trying to come to Telangana through the NDA and it needs to be stopped. He recalled how he had fought against him in the past, even resigning from his post for the cause of Telangana. He reportedly pointed out that after securing just 16 seats, Naidu is managing to call the shots inside the NDA. Sources said KCR is disappointed that the BRS was not present in the Lok Sabha, which he felt was affecting Telangana's voice at the national level. **Continued on Page 2**

**Lokesh to meet cadre first while visiting Assembly segments In Tirupati, meets cluster, unit and booth in-charges of party**

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Proving once again that party activist is supreme in the TDP, the party national general secretary and Minister for Education, IT and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, on Wednesday held a meeting with the cadre and the local leaders on his arrival to this world-famous temple town, before attending other official programmes.

Lokesh later made it amply clear that he has now taken a firm decision to first hold meetings with the cadre during his visits to any Assembly segment in the State. The statement made by Lokesh here acquires significance at a time when the party membership



has touched a record one crore. Hereafter, Lokesh will devote most of his time to monitor the progress of the programmes like Babu Surety-

Bhavishyathuku Guarantee, party membership drive, voter verification and Mana TDP app. **Continued on Page 2**

**Farmers are in distress: Jagan**

**Ever since coalition government came to power, farmers not getting MSP, no buyers for produce**



PNS ■ GUNTUR

Reiterating that farmers in the State are in distress as they are unable to sell their produce, YSRCP president

and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has demanded that the Chief Minister come to the mirchi yard and rescue them. YS Jagan, who visited the mirchi yard here and interacted with farmers, said ever since the coalition government came to power, farmers are not only deprived of MSP, but there are no buyers for their produce. The mirchi rate has drastically fallen from Rs 27,000 to Rs 8,000 per quintal and yield per acre has also fallen down drastically when compared to the previous year. **Continued on Page 2**



**Fisrt-time MLA Rekha to be new Delhi CM**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Gupta and her Cabinet ministers will take the oath of office at the Ramliha Ground on Thursday. She will be Delhi's fourth woman chief minister after Sushma Swaraj, Sheila Dikshit and Atishi. She will be the only woman chief minister among the states being ruled by the BJP at present. The 50-year-old leader won from Shalimar Bagh, defeating AAP candidate Bandana Kumari by over 29,000 votes in the February 5 Assembly polls. All 48 newly-elected BJP MLAs attended the legislature party meeting in the presence of Central observers Ravi Shankar Prasad and O P Dhankar. Gupta's name was proposed by senior party leaders Parvesh Verma, Vijender Gupta and Satish Upadhyay.

# Draft UGC regulations make V-Cs very vulnerable

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

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

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A Vice-Chancellor is generally controlled by the Governor through his capacity as the Chairman for all Vice-Chancellors in all states. Instead of functioning as a 'ceremonial' head, now the Governor is trying to exercise executive power on behalf of the Centre to control the elected provincial governments, thereby disturbing the equal authority guaranteed by the Constitution.

Usually, the Chancellor of a Central university is the Governor of the state where it is located. However, there are many exceptions to this. In Delhi University it is the Vice-President of India, whereas in the JNU and in many others, it is a distinguished academician appointed by the Visitor of the University (President) as per the recommendation of the University's Executive Council. The only exception is the Vishwa Bharati University, the only Central University with the PM as its Chancellor. Another exception is that the Chief Justice of the state will officiate at the National Law University. Interestingly, the judicial institution does not have any



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

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

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

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

## Minister takes steps to enhance ESI medical services in Andhra

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Labour, Factories and Medical Insurance Services Minister, Vasanshetti Subhash, has announced that all necessary measures are being implemented to provide better medical services to the workers in the State. During a surprise visit to the ESI Hospital in Tirupati on Wednesday afternoon, the Minister inspected various departments including the outpatient block, emergency section and OP registration.

### Pays surprise visit to ESI Hospital in Tirupati



During his previous visit in November, the Minister had noted that outpatient registrations had increased from 150 to 350 and inpatient admissions from 30 to 53, expressing satisfaction with the progress. He also acknowledged the efforts of Medical Superintendent Dr M Shyambabu for enhancing hospital services by personally

funding the procurement of lab kits, reagents and other equipment worth approximately Rs 5 lakh, which had been lacking for five years.

Minister Subhash congratulated the Superintendent for his dedication and urged other hospitals across the State to

take Tirupati Hospital as a model in providing improved services to workers.

Subhash also addressed the long-awaited availability of secondary and tertiary referral medical services at Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences in Tirupati,

which had not been accessible to ESI workers in districts like Rayalaseema and Nellore for over six years. He announced that these services would soon be available, crediting the efforts of the State Insurance Medical Department Director V Anjaneyulu and the Regional Director of the ESI Corporation in Vijayawada.

Furthermore, he assured that all ESI hospitals across the State will implement better lab services and inpatient care for workers. Subhash confirmed that steps are being taken to fill nursing and paramedical positions that have been vacant for the past 15 years.

Emphasising the need for diligence in the ESI system, the Minister stated that any negligence would not be tolerated.

## Awareness conference for MLAs postponed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP State Legislative Assembly Secretary General Prasanna Kumar Suryadevara has said that the scheduled MLA awareness programme to be held at the Amaravati Legislative Assembly building on February 22 and 23 has been postponed due to unavoidable reasons. He said that the new date will be announced later.

As a majority of legislators are first-time MLAs, Assembly Speaker Ch Ayyannapratru decided to conduct an awareness programme for these MLAs. Parliament Speaker Om Birla was invited to launch the programme on the first day, and former Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu on the second day.

## Speed up works in Tirupati urban area: Minister

### Seeks revenue and expenditure details pertaining to TUDA at review meeting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, P Narayana, has instructed officials to expedite development works in the Tirupati Urban Development area. The review meeting, held under the directives of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, included officials from the Tirupati Urban Development Authority (TUDA).

The Minister enquired about the revenue and expenditure details pertaining to TUDA. He provided guidance on measures to enhance revenue generation and emphasised focusing on land development within the TUDA jurisdiction to

increase income. He suggested exploring Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models for developing and selling land, which would reduce the burden on the authority.

Minister Narayana also recommended launching housing projects in layouts through public-private partnerships. Additionally, he directed the release of necessary funds from TUDA for providing essential infrastructure in village panchayats across eight Assembly constituencies within TUDA.

Furthermore, the Minister sought updates on the TUDA Towers, which are being constructed over 3.61 acres with G+13 floors. He emphasised the importance of ensuring that

the towers serve as a landmark for the city of Tirupati. Minister Narayana also highlighted the need to prioritise cleanliness and beautification in the temple city. At the meeting, the Minister unveiled the brochure for the TUDA Towers, marking a significant step in the ongoing urban development efforts in Tirupati.

The review meeting took place at the CRDA office in Vijayawada, in the presence of Municipal Administration Commissioner and Director Sampath Kumar, Tirupati Municipal Corporation Commissioner and TUDA Vice-Chairman Maurya, and Town Planning Department Director Vidyalatha, along with TUDA officials.

## Union Minister promises support to complete Polavaram project in time

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/UDAIPUR

During a meeting with AP's Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu, Union Water Resources Minister CR Patil assured complete support for the timely completion of the Polavaram project. The meeting took place at the national conference of State Water Resources Ministers in Udaipur on Wednesday.

Minister Nimmala provided a detailed report to Minister Patil regarding the State's water resources, ongoing projects and necessary assistance. Patil responded positively to the issues raised in the report, noting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also paying special attention to the Polavaram project and promised to visit the site soon.

Initially, Nimmala expressed gratitude to Minister Patil for the support extended to the State's irrigation projects. He explained that since the coalition government came to power, the Chief Minister has visited the Polavaram project three times, setting a completion deadline of December 27.

## New era in higher education sector: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has announced that the State's higher education sector is entering a new chapter as vice-chancellors to nine universities have been appointed based entirely on merit. The Chief Minister pointed out that higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the future citizens of the State. Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer issued notifications appointing

vice-chancellors for nine universities in the State on Tuesday. Criticising the previous administration, Chandrababu stated that the appointment process for VCs had been weakened due to political influence and lobbying. He asserted that his government's newly-implemented merit-based system will ensure that only qualified individuals are appointed to these positions.

Chief Minister Chandrababu highlighted that this system not only promotes

social justice, but is already yielding positive results. He proudly announced the historic appointment of the first Scheduled Tribe woman, Prasanna Sri, as Vice-Chancellor, calling it a significant milestone for education and social justice in the State.

The CM congratulated all the newly appointed VCs and expressed his hopes for a successful tenure for them in advancing education and knowledge in Andhra Pradesh.

## Naidu trying to enter...

Continued from Page 1

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

Sources said, KCR also announced that 53 seats would be reserved for women within the party and that delimitation would increase the number of Assembly seats to 160. He hinted at the appointment of a new woman's wing president soon as part of the party's internal restructuring.

Sources indicated that KCR believes the future belongs to BRS. He reportedly said that while people had voted for the Congress due to its welfare schemes, the party had completely failed in governance. In the context of BRS's 25th anniversary, sources said grand celebrations were being planned with Harish overseeing a meeting on April 27 to prepare for the occasion.

Training sessions for party leaders would be held soon, with major changes expected within the party. KCR said that Telangana Jagruthi,

would continue its activities as decided by its members.

On the party's stance on minority issues, sources said KCR reiterated BRS's commitment to its secular ideology. He reportedly outlined plans for year-long protest agitations, with one major protest per month focusing on key issues concerning Telangana.

KCR also announced the formation of three committees in each district, dedicated to farmers, workers, women, and students, as part of efforts to strengthen the party's grassroots presence.

## Naidu to meet Union...

Continued from Page 1

With CR Patil, Chandrababu will discuss the release of funds for the Polavaram project, particularly the Central assistance for building the left and right canals to supply water with a capacity of 17,500 cusecs. The Chief Minister is expected to talk to Shivraj Singh Chouhan about the issues being faced by chilli farmers.

The Chief Minister, who has written several letters to the Centre mentioning the problems being faced by the chilli farmers, will directly take these issues to the notice of the Union Minister now, and make a request for Central assistance. Chandrababu will be returning to Amaravati by Thursday night.

## RINL's 'Operation...

Continued from Page 1

In an effort to revitalise the steel giant, the Central government has sanctioned a financial assistance package of Rs 11,440 crore. This includes a substantial Rs 10,300 crore equity infusion aimed at stabilising operations and supporting strategic growth. Union Minister for Steel and Heavy Industries H D Kumaraswamy and Minister of State Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma have called upon employees to remain committed to restoring RINL's former prominence.

Key immediate priorities include improving RINL's credit rating, optimising production levels by restarting the third blast fur-

## Three States agree to resolve water disputes

### AP, Telangana, Karnataka Irrigation ministers discuss critical water resources

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/UDAIPUR

In a significant meeting of Irrigation ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, a collective agreement was reached to address water disputes amicably. The conference was part of an all-India Irrigation ministers' meeting organised by the Centre.

Irrigation ministers Nimmala Ramanaidu (Andhra Pradesh), DK Shivakumar (Karnataka) and Uttam Kumar Reddy (Telangana) met to discuss the critical water resources shared among the three States. The meeting underscored



the importance of cooperation, given the geographical proximity of Andhra Pradesh to both Karnataka and Telangana.

During the discussions, the ministers stressed the need for collective decision-making and consultations to ensure that farmers from all three States could benefit without anyone facing losses. Key issues such as the Tungabhadra water reservoir and silt management were also on the agenda. Ramanaidu highlighted

the need to assess not just this year's water supply, but also the inflows to River Krishna over the past decade. He noted that consistent water flow to Krishna would only be achievable if projects like Almatti, Narayanpur and Jurala were fully operational.

He explained that the delivery of water to the Krishna Delta and Nagarjuna Sagar irrigation projects has become challenging under the current circumstances. Furthermore, the ministers

discussed the need for better coordination between officials from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regarding the water levels in the Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar reservoirs. This coordination aims to prevent crop losses and drinking water shortages for farmers in both States until June, through a mutually agreed and planned approach.

Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar expressed his intention to visit Andhra Pradesh to meet with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu regarding alternative measures to manage the silt in the Tungabhadra reservoir. He suggested that discussions at the official level should occur beforehand to prepare appropriate proposals for the Chief Ministers' meeting.

## AP invites investments...

Continued from Page 1

The new tourism policy for 2024-29 aims to enhance tourism circuits, and improve international infrastructure. The Minister reiterated the importance of attracting tourists by providing diverse and unique experiences.

Focusing on youth employment and environmental protection, Durgesh emphasised

the government's responsibility to ensure tourist safety and increase job opportunities through tourism. He highlighted the goal of creating 15 per cent of new jobs in the sector and improving services and infrastructure in tourist areas.

Durgesh also acknowledged the visionary leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan

Kalyan who are committed to economic growth and sustainable development.

Looking ahead, the Minister expressed the intention to position Andhra Pradesh as a leading tourist destination over the next five years, urging for international cooperation and coordination in achieving this vision. He invited investors to seize the current opportunities in the State's tourism sector and encouraged visitors to experience the breathtaking beauty of Andhra Pradesh.

## Lokesh to meet cadre first while...

Continued from Page 1

Lokesh, who was on a visit to Tirupati on Wednesday as part of this exercise, first held a meeting with cluster, unit, and booth in-charges of the party at the local TDP office and those who performed well in party membership enrolment.

He asked them about the problems that they are facing, and assured them that all their issues will be resolved on a

war-footing and that the party will always stand by them. Lokesh recalled the directions issued by the party national president and Chief Minister, Nara Chandrababu Naidu, that whenever any leader makes a visit to any Assembly segment they should first interact with cluster, unit and booth committee members.

"As part of this exercise, I am spending half of the day with all of you. There is every need

that both the party and the government should move forward in close coordination," Lokesh said, and added that the TDP is the first party in the country to introduce the cluster, unit and booth system.

Stating that some party activists had complained to him during his Padayatra that they were not getting any kind of recognition despite working hard for the progress of the TDP, Lokesh made it clear that he always respects juniors and seniors in an equal manner.

## Farmers are...

Continued from Page 1

"In addition, the input costs have gone up and the tenant farmers are bearing the brunt. The situation is the same in Krishna, NTR, Guntur, Bapatla, Prakasam, Kurnool and Anantapur as well," he said.

"Despite such a grave situation, there is no action from the government's part. The Chief Minister and the Agriculture Minister have no concern about leaving farmers in the lurch. Chandrababu Naidu and his coalition government did nothing for the farmers. On the other hand, they stopped all the revolutionary reforms brought in by the YSRCP government."

"In our term, we gave MSP not just for chillis, turmeric and onions, but for 24 crops. If the farmers did not get MSP, the government provided it and RBKs were used as an anchor point for farmers. While chilli farmers are facing hardships, Chandrababu

# Minister Narayana urges acceleration of development works in Tirupati urban area

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister of Municipal Administration and Urban Development P Narayana has instructed officials to expedite development works in the Tirupati Urban Development area. The review meeting, held under the directives of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, included officials from the Tirupati Urban Development Authority (TUDA).

During the meeting, the minister inquired about the revenue and expenditure details pertaining to TUDA. He provided guidance on measures to enhance revenue generation and emphasized focusing on land development within the TUDA jurisdiction to increase income. He suggested exploring Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models for developing and selling land, which would reduce the burden on the authority.

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release of necessary funds from TUDA for providing essential infrastructure in village panchayats across eight assembly constituencies within TUDA.

Furthermore, the minister sought updates on the TUDA Towers, which are being constructed over 3.61 acres with G+13 floors. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that the towers serve as a landmark for the city of Tirupati. Minister Narayana also highlighted the need to prioritize cleanliness and beautification in the temple city.

At the meeting, the Minister unveiled the brochure for the TUDA Towers, marking a significant step in the ongoing urban development efforts in Tirupati. The review took place at the CRDA office in Vijayawada, with the presence of Municipal Administration Commissioner and Director Sampath Kumar, Tirupati Municipal Corporation Commissioner and TUDA Vice Chairman Maurya and Town Planning Department Director Vidulatha, along with TUDA officials.

# Minister Savitha slams Jagan over chilli farmers' issues

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC, EWS, handlooms and textiles S Savitha has strongly criticised former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, accusing him of betraying farmers. In a statement released on Wednesday, she declared that the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has consistently ignored the plight of farmers during its five years in power.

Savitha labelled Jagan a "farmer traitor," asserting that his administration has failed to address the concerns of agricultural workers. She claimed that many farmers have resorted to suicide due to the ineffective governance of Jagan. The Minister specifically pointed out the outstanding payments owed to farmers for their paddy crops, stating, "Jagan is known for turning a blind eye to the dues owed to farmers."

Highlighting the contrasting actions of the previous government, Savitha noted that the

NDA government came to power, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu ensured that farmers received their overdue payments. She also referenced the decision made during the YSRCP's tenure to set a minimum price of ₹7,000 for green chillies, which led to widespread protests among farmers when prices fell, yet the government failed to purchase their crops.

In a pointed criticism, she accused Jagan of putting on a facade of concern for farmers while merely staging new dramas, such as visiting chili farmers under the pretence of showing empathy. She asserted that neither farmers nor YSRCP leaders trust Jagan anymore. Despite warnings from election officials regarding the election code, she accused Jagan of visiting the Guntur chili yard as if he were a dictator, undermining democratic norms and showing a lack of respect for the law and public welfare.

## One more woman dies of GBS in GGH

PNS ■ GUNTUR

One more woman died of Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS) in the Government General Hospital on Wednesday. Health and medical department officials said that woman Sheik Gouhar John, who had been undergoing treatment for GB Syndrome for the last few days, died today. The doctor of the GGH confirmed her death due to the GBS. It may be mentioned here that a few days ago, one woman Kamalamma died of GBS while undergoing treatment in the GGH.

Meanwhile, Eluru district Collector K Vetri Selvi directed the medical officers to be vigilant following the outbreak of GBS. The Collector reviewed medical issues such as GBS, immunization, prevention of maternal and child mortality, along with DCHS Dr. Paul Satish, DMHO Dr. R. Malini and Deputy DMHO Dr. Nageswara Rao here on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that medical officers should be vigilant in dealing with GBS disease, adding that there should be no room for any misconceptions about this disease and that people should be made aware of it. She directed the officials that suspicious cases should be brought to his attention along with DMHO and DCHS as soon as they are identified.

If necessary, the related cases should be referred for better treatment, she told the officials. The Collector also reviewed with the medical officers the measures to be taken to prevent the spread and causes of GBS syndrome. She emphasized that the public should be made aware of the availability of necessary facilities, medicines and treatment to diagnose and control the disease.

## 'Provide accurate data in comprehensive resurvey'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshimisha has instructed field-level officers and staff to ensure that comprehensive resurvey data is accurate and that survey activities are conducted with precision, avoiding any errors. He emphasised the need for vigilance at every stage of the process.

On Wednesday, Collector Lakshimisha conducted a surprise inspection of the Ketanakonda Village Secretariat in the Ibrahimpatnam mandal. He reviewed the current status of the resurvey related to the village online. The surveyors stated that ground truthing had taken place for 608 acres within the village boundaries, and the Collector examined the relevant records.

Afterwards, the Collector provided guidance to the on-ground staff regarding the upcoming village meetings and the ground val-



idation process. He directed the officers and staff to work diligently to provide accurate records to the farmers. The Collector enquired whether each farmer in the village had been informed about the resurvey of their fields via notices or if relevant information had been posted on the notice board.

Lakshimisha urged the staff to clarify any doubts that farmers may have regarding the land resurvey by engaging in discussions with them. Additionally, the Collector instructed that information about the resurvey activities taking place in the village should be communicated to farmers regularly.



# Buriga village struggles for clean water, road connectivity

● Kondadora tribal families suffering amid official apathy

PNS ■ PADERU

The tribal residents of Buriga, a remote hilltop hamlet in Rompelli panchayat of Ananthagiri mandal, staged a protest here on Wednesday, voicing their frustration over the severe shortage of clean drinking water and the worsening condition of their roads. Home to 40 Konda Dora tribal families, comprising 180 residents, the village has been struggling with these essential needs for months, despite multiple appeals to local authorities.

Hopes were raised in 2023 when a borehole was drilled under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Following the provision of an electricity connection, Rural Water Supply (RWS) officials assured villagers that a motor would soon pump water to their community. However, due to improper handling, soil accumulated within the borehole after installation, rendering it useless. Officials departed, promising a swift resolution, yet two months later, no action has been taken. "We are tired of the empty promises," said a resident. "Officials keep telling us they will fix the problem, but nothing changes."

With the borehole defunct, vil-



lagers are forced to rely on a nearby well, which has not been chlorinated in two years and is now contaminated with garbage. The unsafe drinking water has led to a surge in illnesses, including colds and fevers. ASHA worker Buriga Suramma and

her two children, Buriga Ravi (6) and Buriga Kavitha (4), are currently receiving treatment at S. Kota Area Hospital. Other residents, including Somula Rama Rao (55), Buruga Mallamma (54), Somulu Kothamma (56), and Galipathi Anushka (1), have

also required medical attention.

A medical camp conducted by Gummakota PHC officers 10 days ago provided temporary relief, but fever cases persist. The lack of local medical facilities forces villagers to travel long distances to S. Kota Area Hospital, often relying on doli (makeshift stretcher) transportation via Boddavalasa.

Adding to their woes, the road from Boddamalai to Buriga, constructed in 2023, has become virtually impassable. Improper construction and the absence of side canals have led to its rapid deterioration, leaving the road washed away. Despite official records indicating a functional road, the reality is far different. The poor road conditions prevent ambulances, ration supply vehicles, and even carts from reaching the village, further isolating the community.

"We are cut off from the world," lamented Somila Chandramma, Somula Sannamma, Buruga Kothamma, and Buruga Appalaraju, Tenth Ward members of Rompelli panchayat. "The road is so bad that even walking is a struggle, let alone getting essential supplies or medical help."

# Understanding Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia: Insights from experts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) is a common condition affecting aging men, characterised by the enlargement of the prostate gland. Situated just below the urinary bladder, the prostate plays a crucial role in urine flow and ejaculation by secreting seminal fluids. As men age, particularly around 45-50 years, the prostate nat-

urally begins to enlarge, leading to this non-cancerous condition, says Dr Ravi Shankar Ganji, consultant urologist, Manipal Hospital Vijayawada.

As the prostate grows, it can compress the urethra, resulting in a variety of urinary symptoms. Men with BPH often report difficulties with urination, including straining, increased frequen-

cy especially at night, and urgency. Some may experience pain, blood in the urine, or recurrent urinary tract infections due to incomplete bladder emptying.

Diagnosing BPH involves a thorough clinical assessment, often starting with a digital rectal examination (DRE) to evaluate the size and consistency of the prostate. Additional diagnostic tests

may include an ultrasound to visualise the prostate, a serum Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) blood test to rule out prostate cancer, and sometimes cystoscopy, which allows direct visualisation of the urinary tract.

Treatment options for BPH depend on the severity of symptoms, the size of the prostate, and the patient's overall health.

# Rural crafts, textiles on display at Grameen Bharat Mahotsav

● EXPO HAS ALREADY GENERATED A REVENUE OF Rs 3.5 MILLION



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Murari Mohan Behera, Deputy General Manager of NABARD, has said that the Grameen Bharat Mahotsav - Andhra Pradesh 2025 aims to promote rural Indian products, and has attracted around 10,000 visitors, generating an impressive revenue of Rs

3.5 million. The expo that was inaugurated on February 14 at the Maris Stella Indoor Stadium has seen significant participation, particularly from women.

The exhibition features various artistic displays and textiles from different States, captivating urban audiences and visitors from various regions of the



State. It showcases items crafted by skilled artisans and members of self-help groups from across the country, highlighting NABARD's comprehensive efforts for rural development.

The DGM urged city residents to support the ongoing initiatives for rural growth, noting that the State-level exhibition will conclude on Sunday, and encouraged people to take advantage of this opportunity.

The showcase includes traditional handicrafts from the State, such as Mangalgi cotton, Uppada sarees, and Ponderu khadi, alongside Telangana's unique Narayanpet silk and cotton sarees. The exhibition also features prominent cotton sarees from Srikakulam, along with Balaji handicrafts from Tirupati, Dharmavaram silk sarees and cotton silk from Sri Balaji. Besides, specially sourced Navsari OFPO sarees from Tamil Nadu have gained particular prominence at the event.

### FORMAT C-1

**Declaration about criminal cases** (As per the judgment dated 25th September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) No. 536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors. Vs. Union of India & Anr.)

Name and address of Candidate : **Alapati Rajendra Prasad, H. No. 17-3-305 (New), 4-5-29/85 (Old), 4th Lane, Vidya Nagar, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, Pin Code-522 007.**

Name of Political Party : **Telugu Desam**  
Name of Election : **Biennial Elections to Legislative Council of Andhra Pradesh 2025.**

Name of the Constituency : **Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Constituency**

**I, Alapati Rajendra Prasad (name of candidate), a candidate for the above mentioned election, declare for public information the following details about my criminal antecedents:**

#### (A) Pending criminal cases

Sl. No.	Name of Court	Case No. and dated	Status of case(s)	Section(s) of Acts concerned and brief description of offence(s)
1	Not Applicable	FIR No.9/2020 Dt: 9/1/2020	Under Investigation	Charge sheet yet to be filed Section 143,188,341 r/w 149 IPC. Member of unlawful assembly, disobedience to a public servant's order, wrongful restraint /obstruction
2	Not Applicable	FIR No.924/2021 Dt: 17/9/2021	Under Investigation	Charge sheet yet to be filed Section 143,341,188,269,270 r/w 149 IPC. Member of unlawful assembly, wrongful restraint / obstruction, disobedience to a public servant's order, spread a disease that is dangerous to life, spread the infection of any disease dangerous to life

#### (B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences:

Sl. No.	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment Imposed
1	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
2	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Sd/- Alapati Rajendra Prasad

# Officials asked to prepare plans for tourism development in EG district

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari district Collector P Prashanthi directed the officials to prepare plans for tourism development in the district and identify the agency to take up tourism projects.

The Collector held a district tourism committee meeting here on Wednesday with the officials. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prashanthi said that various agencies need to be identified for the development of tourism projects in the district and action needs to be taken with special proposals.

She said that those who are interested in developing nursery stalls on National Highway 216-A as a tourist area should be identified. The Collector emphasized that Kadiyam nurseries, flower market groups, self-help groups and handloom families should be identified and shops should be set up on lease basis.

She ordered the officials to allocate stalls from Potti Lanka to Kadiyavala Lanka in a specific manner. At the same time, she suggested that water, electricity and CCTV camera facilities should be provided keeping in mind the develop-



ment of infrastructure in the area.

Collector Prashanthi said that the committee will have to hold another meeting regarding the lease price and decide on the lease price and clarified that the bidding time requested by the nursery association for receiving applications from interested parties should be given sufficient time for inviting applications.

"The boating facility in the Kadiyapulanka area will be taken up with one kilometre and the length will have to be increased in stages. 10-seater deluxe boats from Vemagiri to Kadiyapulanka Canal should be established. Suitable land should be

identified in Kadiyapulanka to develop the Shilparamam Society," she told officials.

"The transfer process for the Havelock Bridge should be started, land should be identified for the development of a tourism budget hotel, construction of a 5-star hotel, tourism adventure activities on the Bridge Lanka Island, floating restaurant management activities, tree huts, glass houses and other tourist areas should be developed," the Collector made it clear to the officials.

Prashanthi ordered the preparation of DPRs for tourism develop-

ment in places of worship and other places and suggested that development, recreation and adventure sports should be established in tourist places such as Nagarvanam.

She asked DFO Ravindra Dama to convene a meeting with the Municipal Commissioner and submit a comprehensive project report to the Rampachodavaram area to discuss various development works including eco-tourism-based projects suitable for this area. DRO T Sitarama Murthy, District Tourism Officer P Venkatachalam and other officials were among those who attended the meeting.



**THE BOATING FACILITY IN THE KADIYAPULANKA AREA WILL BE TAKEN UP WITH ONE KILOMETER AND THE LENGTH WILL HAVE TO BE INCREASED IN STAGES. 10-SEATER DELUXE BOATS FROM VEMAGIRI TO KADIYAPULANKA CANAL SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED. SUITABLE LAND SHOULD BE IDENTIFIED IN KADIYAPULANKA TO DEVELOP THE SHILPARAMAM SOCIETY**

— P Prashanthi  
East Godavari district Collector



## 'Govt. committed to make State illicit-liquor free'

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Excise and Minor Kollu Ravindra has asserted the Government's commitment to make Andhra Pradesh as illicit-liquor-free State.

Addressing a programme held in the police parade ground here on Wednesday, Minister Kollu Ravindra said that the government has taken up 'Navodayam-2.0' programme especially to eradicate the brewing of country-made liquor and its consumption in the state.

"In 2016, the country-made liquor menace was eliminated in 10 districts under the 'Navodayam' programme. The Navodayam programme is being implemented once again now with the aim of ensuring that the poor do not suffer financially and also health-wise by being addicted to the illicit-liquor," the Minister observed.

Minister Kollu Ravindra called on the youth to be vigilant about ganja, drugs and illicit-liquor. He made it clear that old brands have been revived and steps are being taken to ensure that liquor is transported to shops only after conducting 12 types of tests by keeping a special eye on the manufacturing of liquor.

The Minister highlighted that 'Eagle Teams' have been formed to check the illegal transportation of illicit-liquor and the teams would also sensitize people about ill-effects of ganja and drugs.

The Excise Minister appealed to the people to call 14405 and 1972 to provide information wherever cannabis or drugs are found or being sold.

"The Government is working sincerely to make Andhra Pradesh

as 'Ganja-free State', in six months. A programme will be taken up to create awareness among people in the rural areas about the ill-effects of illicit-liquor," the Minister observed.

He claimed that the State is progressing under the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu and with the financial support of Central government. He acknowledged that the Centre had allocated huge funds for the Polavaram project construction. The Government has also taken steps to utilize water resources properly.

"Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is striving hard to bring investments to the State in a big way," he noted.

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Balaveeranjanya Swamy maintained that the Chief Minister and the Excise Minister are working with the aim of making Andhra Pradesh a state free from drugs and narcotics.

"As much as Rs 100 crore was allocated to the 'Eagle System' in the budget which will check the brewing of country-made liquor, its transportation and sale," the Minister added, stating that the government has taken all these steps with an objective to discourage youth from addicting to drugs.

Bala Veeranjanya Swamy suggested that the excise officials should also work at the field level to curb the illicit-liquor menace. He lamented that during the last five years, there have been cases where drugs have been found even in colleges in remote areas.

MLAs Damacharla Janardhan Rao, Kandula Narayana Reddy and Collector A Thameem Ansariya also spoke.

## Shivaji birth anniversary celebrated with patriotic fervour

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The 395 birth anniversary of Chatrapathi Shivaji was celebrated with patriotic fervor here on Wednesday.

The leaders and a large number of activists of RSS, VHP and the Maratha Sangh paid tributes to Shivaji by garlanding the statue of Chatrapathi Shivaji located at Marathi Palam. They held saffron flags and the areas resonated with the slogans of jai Shivaji, Har Har Mahadev and Jai Bhavani Veera Shivaji.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, Nellore and Prakasam districts RSS Vibhag Pracharak Naveen highlighted the valiant character of Chatrapathi Shivaji.

He explained how Shivaji fought the Moghal emperors valiantly and the patriotism of Chatrapathi Shivaji. He also narrated how Shivaji's



mother Jijiyabai infused patriotism in Shivaji. He called upon all to draw inspiration from Chatrapathi Shivaji and pursue the patriotic path. Maratha Sangh honorary president D Prabhakar, president K Venkateswarulu, Secretary Somasi

Shiva Prasad, vice president J Tirumala Rao, RSS pracharak Mahendra, Mala Kondaiah and V Nagasreenu and VHP prant pramukh Sama Subba Rao were among who were took part in the programme.

## 'MSP is not announced to chilli produce to save farmers from incurring losses'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Agriculture K Atchannaidu has made it clear that the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for chilli produce has not been announced so far in order to protect farmers from incurring losses.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, the Minister said that since the prices of chilli are going up in the open market, the government has not announced MSP to protect the interests of farmers.

The Minister maintained that chillies produced in AP used to be exported to Sri Lanka, China, Malaysia and other countries. But due to the fact that those countries are cultivating their own chilli crops, chilli exports have decreased



significantly, resulting in crumbling prices of chillies in the Indian market.

However, the chilli crop in China has failed this year, forcing the country to depend on Indian Chillies. Following the chilli crop failure in China, the chilli prices are likely to rise steeply in the open market here, Atchannaidu hoped.

"If the MSP is announced to chilli produce in this situation, the farmers may incur huge losses. That is why, the Government has not announced MSP for chillis so far," the Agriculture Minister clarified. The chilli produce has decreased in the State as the farmers preferred to raise alternative crops like cotton, maize and red gram instead of chillies, he acknowledged.

## 'Take stringent steps to check cricket betting, gambling'

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI

Annamayya district Superintendent of police V Vidhya Sagar Naidu directed the police officials to take stringent steps to check cricket betting and gambling in the district.

The SP, here on Wednesday, held a crime review meeting with the police officials. Speaking on this occasion, the SP ordered the police officers and staff to behave politely with the public. The SP conducted a detailed review of the

pending cases and made several suggestions to the police officers. The SP directed the police officials to conduct criminal investigations using advanced technology, following scientific methods to prove crimes, sheets should be opened for habitual criminals and all the pending cases should be resolved expeditiously. Vidhya Sagar Naidu instructed the police officials to conduct checking of vehicles to prevent the illegal transportation of ganja. He also ordered the officials



to take measures to prevent cricket betting and gambling from happening anywhere in the district and appropriate

measures should also be taken. The SP said that the movements of those who had carried out anti-social activities in the past should be kept under surveillance. He suggested that they be warned not to engage in anti-social activities again.

"Appropriate measures should be taken to prevent chain snatchings and that criminals who have committed chain snatchings in the past should be kept under surveillance. The youth should be sensitized on the ill-effects of consuming cannabis and

drugs. The public should also be sensitized on the dangers of cybercrime and illicit drugs.

The SP emphasized that the visible policing should be followed and the police officials should visit villages and colonies in town and interact with the people to know their problems. Priority should be given to resolve the missing cases, he told the police officials. SP (Admin.) M Venkatadri, DSP D Kondaiah Naidu, other police officials and Public Prosecutors were present.

## Brain dead woman gives new lease of life to a few people

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A brain dead woman gave a new lease of life to a few people as her relatives agreed for organ donations. M Saraswati, a 54-year-old resident of Bhavanipuram, Vijayawada, who was admitted to

AIIMS Mangalagiri following a road traffic accident on February 14, 2025. She was declared brain dead by the Brain Stem Death Declaration Committee on February 18, 2025.

In a profound gesture of generosity, her family consented to organ donation. In coordination with Jeevandhan, Govt of Andhra Pradesh liver, kidneys, and corneas were retrieved from the deceased to offer a new lease of life to multiple patients. Their kindness and courage in a moment of grief stand as a beacon of hope and humanity.

To honor this noble act, a guard of honour and salute by the Faculty, Staff and Students of AIIMS Mangalagiri in collaboration with the District Administration was organized to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the deceased and her family members. Their decision reaffirms the importance of organ donation in saving lives and inspiring society.

## 'If by-elections come, BJP sure to win 7 seats'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

He said that no section of the society, including employees, is happy with the Congress government. He said that there has been a lot of infighting in the government and that MLAs from his own party are holding secret meetings in the name of dissent. He said that the days of trouble for the Revanth Reddy government are near.

Sanjay addressed the teachers at a gathering organised by the Teachers' Association Tapas in Sitarampur, Karimnagar.

He said, "You all must watch the movie 'Chava'. In order to save the society from the false secularists and to inform the people about the real history, there is a great need to promote such movies. While the Modi government wants to shape students into warriors like Chhatrapati Shivaji,



Ambedkar, Phule, Savarkar, the Congress government is trying to shape the education system to make them hold guns and become Naxals. The responsibility to stop this lies with all of us."

"A record has been set in the pages of history for the employees and teachers of Telangana. Do you know what it is? Any employee, any teacher, any employees' union in the world fights for their rights... But you fought for the 'achievement of self-rule' by risking your jobs, salaries and lives. You achieved Telangana State by going on a 42-day general strike. What is the role of political parties in achieving Telangana. The role of employees and teachers is even greater."

## Man gets 20 years jail in minor-girl rape case

PNS ■ ELURU

An accused in minor girl rape case was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by POCSO court here on Wednesday.

According to the police, the Eluru district POCSO Sessions Court Judge Uma Sunanda sentenced Donga Chinnu Brahmaiah (24) to 20 years rigorous imprisonment for sexual assault of a minor girl. The court also imposed a Rs 5000 fine on him. The Judge ordered to the Government to pay Rs 5 lakh compensation to the rape victim.

According to the police, the convict Donga Chinnu Brahmaiah introduced into the house a minor girl on May 5, 2014, when the victim was alone in her house and sexually assaulted her. A case under crime number 110/2020 Under Sections 417, 420, 448, 376 IPC & Sec 5 (1) & 6 of POCSO Act 2012 by the Ganapavaram police.

When the victim complained of stomach pain, her parents took her to the doctor who confirmed that she conceived.

The accused Chinnu Brahmaiah fled to Dubai. The then DSPs KGV Saritha and G Venkateswara Rao investigated the case and the then DSP K Eshwara Rao arrested the accused and filed the charge sheet.

Additional Public Prosecutor V Amara Srinivas succeeded in probing the case in the court.

FORMAT C-2 (for political party to publish website, newspapers, TV)						
Declaration about criminal antecedents of candidates set up by the party (As per the judgment dated 25th September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) No. 536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors. Vs. Union of India & Anr.)						
Name of Political Party : Telugu Desam Party						
Name of Election : Biennial Elections to Legislative Council						
Name of State/ UT : Andhra Pradesh						
1	2	3	4		5	
Sl. No.	Name of consti tuency	Name of candi date	(A) Pending criminal cases		(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences	
			Name of Court, case No. & status of the case(s)	Section of the Acts concerned & brief description of offence(s)	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence (s) & punishment imposed
						Maximum Punish ment Imposed.
1	Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Consti tuency	Alapati Rajendra Prasad	1. 9/2020 Tenali Rural PS 2. 924/2021 Tadepalli PS	U/s 143, 188, 341 r/w 149 IPC  Unlawful assembly, disobedience to a public servant's order, wrongful restraint.  U/s 143, 341, 188, 269, 270 r/w 149 IPC  Unlawful assembly, wrongful restraint / obstruction, disobedience to a public servant's order, spread a disease that is dangerous to life.	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

ACROSS THE STATES



Utkhand Vidhan Sabha goes paperless

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



Man sells infant son for Rs 1 lakh, booked

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



CBI arrests 5 railway officials for graft in exam

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

'Punjab's deportees share largest'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

GOVT SOURCES DEFEND FLIGHTS LANDING IN AMRITSAR



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MUDA CASE



Lokayukta says no evidence against Siddaramaiah, wife

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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

Besides Siddaramaiah and his wife, his brother-in-law Mallikarjuna Swamy and the land owner Devaraju are the accused.

The Lokayukta police said that further investigation will be conducted into the allegations of Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) providing compensatory plots in the ratio of 50:50 from 2016 to 2024 and an additional final report will be submitted to the High Court under Section 173 (8) CrPC.

4 Naxalites killed in encounter

PNS ■ BALAGHAT

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

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

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

India, Malaysia to address maritime security threats

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



'You will be accountable for election results'

KHARGE TO CONGRESS TOP BRASS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ensure child care, feeding rooms in public buildings:SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

India-Egypt joint special forces exercise Cyclone-III underway

PNS ■ JAIPUR

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

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



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

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

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

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

YAMUNA REJUVENATION

Delhi panel presents action plan to PMO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

India already exceeding key climate targets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Can grow faster using clean energy: UN climate chief



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

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

number of people vulnerable to climate impacts.

"And the need to invest in ensuring people, communities, infrastructure, and businesses

are resilient is clear. But that population and geographic diversity is also what makes India so strong. This is a growing population being educated with the skills needed to prosper in the clean and climate-resilient industries of this and future decades," he said.

Stiell, who visited India last week, called the country a "solar superpower" and urged it to develop an ambitious climate plan covering its entire economy. He said that fully embracing the global clean energy boom would accelerate India's economic rise. He praised India's efforts to

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

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

'Throw away personal ego'

Panneer's veiled message to Palani



PNS ■ COIMBATORE (TN)

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

Panneerselvam, when asked about chances of him speaking to senior leader KA Sengottaiyan or meeting him here, said he has been talking over the phone to those in the AIADMK who are supportive of "joining hands." Apparently, he referred to the readmission of expelled leaders, including him, into the party, and those in the AIADMK who supported it.

Asked about AIADMK general secretary Palaniswami's comment that the party would win the 2026 Assembly election, he said all the parties had the same claim.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Towards strategic partnership

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

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



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

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

### PICTALK



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

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



ASHA IYER KUMAR

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

In the predawn darkness, millions of pilgrims converge at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, their faith burning brighter than the stars above. The Mahakumbh, humanity's largest gathering of spiritual seekers, presents a profound paradox of our times – the sublime beauty of collective devotion juxtaposed against the perils of unquestioning faith. What compels ordinary men and women to undertake arduous journeys, risking life and limb in pursuit of divine grace? The answer lies perhaps in our eternal quest for transformation – that deep-seated belief that a single moment of sacred communion can wash away the accumulated weight of our transgressions. The Mahakumbh's promise is alluring in its simplicity: A holy dip in the Ganges during this auspicious period can cleanse one's soul of sin. Yet, as tragedy strikes in the form of stampedes and accidents, we must pause to examine whether blind faith has led us astray from spirituality's true essence. These incidents are not merely statistical casualties; they



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

The question that haunts me is not whether faith has value – it undoubtedly does – but whether we have reduced the profound journey of spiritual evolution to mere ritual. True transformation, I believe, lies not in momentary acts of devotion but in the sustained practice of compassion, integrity and mindful living. The real pilgrimage is not to a geographical location but to the depths of our consciousness, where we confront our shadows and choose, day after day, to act with kindness and purpose. What if the purest form of spiritual practice is simply this: to live each day with such awareness and empathy that we leave every person and place better than we found them? To cultivate a heart so clear that no wily thought finds root there, to build relationships so genuine that they become temples of mutual growth? Perhaps this daily practice of goodness is the true holy dip our souls need. None of this is to diminish the power of faith or the beauty of religious tradition. The Mahakumbh remains a remarkable proof of human spirituality, a mirror reflecting our deepest yearnings

for connection with the divine. But perhaps its greatest lesson lies not in the promise of instant release but in showing us how collective faith can move millions to action. Imagine if this same power could be channelled into sustained ethical living, into creating communities of care and consciousness. As the sun sets over the Mahakumbh, casting long shadows over the devoted masses, I am reminded that faith, like the Ganges itself, must flow between the banks of reason and compassion. When it overflows these boundaries, it risks becoming a force of destruction rather than salvation. The challenge before us is not to abandon faith but to evolve it – to transform it from a series of external rituals into an internal compass that guides us toward genuine goodness. The true miracle, perhaps, is not in the holy dip but in the daily choice to live with such purity that our very existence becomes a prayer, our actions a continuous act of worship. (The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. Views are personal)

## Confronting the escalating migration and refugee crises



SUDHIR HINDWAN

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

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

A few years ago, the discovery of fifty refugees dead near eastern Austria, along the Slovakia-Hungarian border, prompted widespread discussion on the issue of illegal migration and related crimes. This tragic event highlighted a larger issue facing European countries-illegal migration and the security risks that come with it. Many individuals from underdeveloped regions, in their search for survival and opportunities, attempt to migrate to European countries, often taking illegal routes. The tragic drowning of more than 80 illegal migrants in a boat off the coast of Libya is just one example of the deadly risks faced by those desperate for a better life. In light of these challenges, it is imperative that European nations develop more sophisticated mechanisms to address this issue, one that has already caused significant tension between countries. The broader problem of migration and refugees, particularly in regions such as Afghanistan and Central Asia, has created a complicated and often violent dynamic. As refugees flee war and persecution, they find themselves subject to not only economic exploitation but also social discrimination. According to reports, over 70 per cent of the 26 million refugees worldwide are women and children. These individuals are uprooted and displaced due to wars, ethnic conflicts, political instability and religious persecution. Since the mid-20th century, the number of



refugees has dramatically increased, driven by factors such as civil wars, regional conflicts, and natural disasters. The refugee crises have been particularly severe in regions like Africa, Southeast Asia and the West Asia, with countries such as Afghanistan, Rwanda, Vietnam, Bosnia and Iraq seeing millions displaced. These refugees often seek shelter in neighbouring countries, adding pressure to already fragile systems. While refugees are often subjected to exploitation and abuse, the refugee crisis has also attracted the attention of illegal and anti-social actors who exploit the vulnerability of displaced populations. The rise of global connectivity and the post-modernisation phase calls for new frameworks and models of governance to address these challenges. The world is increasingly interconnected, and young generations must be equipped with the tools and understanding to overcome divisive and biased perceptions that arise from ignorance. It is essential that global societies shift their focus to new models that emphasise reforms in democracy, the environment, globalisation, and governance. These reforms should prioritise finding solutions that reduce manipulation and nepotism, addressing the core needs of vulnerable populations. The refugee problem is a com-



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

plex and multifaceted issue, and efforts have been made to create legal definitions and frameworks for addressing the crisis. The United Nations has provided a general consensus on defining refugees as individuals who are forced to leave their country due to war, foreign invasion, or other forms of aggression. However, individual nations often adapt this definition to suit their national interests, leading to inconsistencies in refugee treatment. For instance, Uganda's President Idi Amin's expulsion of foreign nationals in 1972 resulted in the displacement of over 38,000 people, highlighting the role of political instability in driving refugee crises. Several key factors contribute to the refugee crisis, including atrocities, civil wars, and regional conflicts. Over time, efforts have been made to improve the situation, with various organisations and countries attempting to address the economic and social needs of refugees. To address the refugee crisis, it is crucial to develop local infrastructure that promotes refugees' self-sufficiency and to involve NGOs more extensively in the solution. Comprehensive training for staff involved in rescue operations and coordination between local governments and the UNHCR will enhance effectiveness. Increased financial support is needed to

implement new programmes for refugees. Challenges persist in addressing the refugee crisis, particularly due to inadequate infrastructure and logistical support in host countries. A global burden-sharing approach is needed to prevent undue strain on any single nation. Refugees often face detention based on illegal immigration suspicions, and camps are sometimes attacked, increasing their vulnerability. Governments, NGOs, and international bodies must ensure refugee protection, especially for women and children, while fostering long-term solutions like job creation and education. Though eliminating illegal migration entirely may not be possible, nations must manage migration while safeguarding refugees' rights. The rise in human trafficking and exploitation adds complexity, requiring swift action from governments. In regions like South Asia, the Rohingya refugee crisis has intensified security and humanitarian concerns, with policies often facing international criticism. A coordinated, inclusive approach is vital to meeting the needs of displaced populations without compromising national interests. (The author, a recipient of Bharat Gaurav award is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### SAM PITRODA SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The latest controversial statement of Indian Overseas President Sam Pitroda negating Chinese threats to India has stoked a fierce controversy. Though Congress has distanced himself, very obviously his statement is in tune with the Congress line on China and statements of Rahul Gandhi praising and advocating China. His statement may be seen in the light of the recent successful visit of PM Modi to the US, causing heartburn and discomfort in Congress leadership. His timing of the pro-China statement is very conspicuous and contradicts the foreign policy of India. The security threats from China need no elaboration. Sam Pitroda is no stranger to controversies. Sam Pitroda had ignited a firestorm while speaking on the diversity of India, referring to how people in the South "look like Africans and those in the East look like Chinese and those in the East look like Arabs." In June 2023, amid anticipation for the grand opening of the Ram Mandir, Sam Pitroda sparked controversy by asserting that temples wouldn't address India's pressing issues such as unemployment, inflation, education, and health. In May 2019, Sam Pitroda drew ire by dismissively remarking, 'hua to hua, so what', when questioned about the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. During the aftermath of the Pulwama attack in February 2019, Sam Pitroda ignited controversy by questioning the efficacy of retaliatory airstrikes conducted by the Indian Air Force on Balakot. His remarks stirred debate on India's response to terrorist incidents and the appropriate diplomatic approach to such crises. Despite all controversies, he continued to be Indian Overseas President. Congress is experimenting through Sam Pitroda but his controversies are maligning the country. Vinod Johri | Delhi

#### Gyanesh Kumar is new CEC



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

Rahul Gandhi. The reason behind Gandhi's dissent was that the matter is still pending before the court, raising the question of why the appointment was rushed. Previously, the Chief Justice of India was part of the selection panel; however, this changed after the NDA government passed the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Keeping this in mind, the Vice President recently voiced his support for excluding the CJI from the selection process. It appears that the power to choose the next CEC and other election commissioners is now tilted entirely in favour of the central government. Aarohi Gupta | Ujjain

#### MAMATA SLAMS KUMBH MANAGEMENT

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

#### INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY FAILS

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

great failure as Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka slipped out of India's hand and responding favourably to China's overtures. Pakistan is already deadly against India. It was only Bangladesh under Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that maintained good neighbourly and friendly relations with India. Since August 2024, after the overthrow of her government, Bangladesh has turned a worst neighbour of India. The caretaker government is unable to control atrocities and violence against Hindus. In some matters, Bangladesh is proving worse than Pakistan. As a big brother, India should take strong measures against errant Bangladesh. It should stop all help to it, increase tariffs on imports from it, complete fencing of the Indo-Bangladesh border, and deport all illegal Bangladeshis living in different Indian cities. If Trump administration can quickly deport illegal immigrants, why not Modi's government? As a regional power, India must show its muscles to the estranged government of Mohammad Yunus. Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR **NIKUNJ JI**

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



things that we have said or done in the past. It's a fact that we all have acted wrongly, either because of not knowing what is right, or out of fear or misunderstanding. However, with time and knowledge, we realize what is right and begin to make amends. Just by having this desire to change ourselves, we begin the process of forgiving ourselves, which in turn helps us to forgive others. If this process is to progress, we have to forgive others. We just cannot condemn others and excuse ourselves. This is cheating, and the universally applicable Law of Karma will not allow it. Remember! If we do not learn to forgive, resentment will poison us, and we will end up carrying a double burden: both the resentful thoughts of others' injustice and the hidden reality of our injustice. The power to forgive comes from compassion, which means we should compassionately and peacefully move forward with what is good, towards what is better. Forgiveness dissolves the compulsive need to prove ourselves right. It removes the indignation we feel at imagined injustice. It melts the hardness of another's heart. Our forgiveness, at first, may puzzle them. To forgive and forget is love in action. But we must first learn to forgive ourselves, as well as others, otherwise, the process of releasing this burden neither begins nor progresses.

Forgiving ourselves means letting go of the past. But it also means not making the same mistakes again and again; not inventing convenient ways to excuse ourselves. Remember! A person who has hardened his own heart against others cannot feel even God's forgiveness and compassion. Hence, if we want to be forgiven, then we must be willing to forgive first because the one who forgives first not only proves his justice but especially proves his love. That is why it is said that 'A life well lived is your best revenge.' So, instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain the power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. This will make the world a better place to live in.

#### A tribute to my Guru Dr Nalini Didi

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

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

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



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The truth is this: the Chagos Islands are not just a stretch of land — they symbolise everything that is corrupt in the global order. A system where power eclipses justice, and human lives are sacrificed for the sake of geopolitical dominance. The silence that surrounds this injustice is as damning as the apathy that sustains it. The Chagossians have been denied their homeland for over half a century. It is high time that the world demands the return of their land, not just out of legal obligation, but out of a moral imperative to right the wrongs of the past and give these forgotten people the future they have been denied for so long.

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

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

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

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

**Investing in Skill Development** Continuous learning is essential for the blue-collar workforce, where technological advancements and changing industry standards require a skilled and adaptable labour



DHIRAJ SINGH

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

development programmes tailored specifically for their blue-collar employees. These programs encompass technical training, crisis management, digital security and leadership development, equipping workers with the expertise necessary for career advancement. In recent years, many companies have implemented structured upskilling initiatives that have led to significant improvements in service quality, efficiency and employee satisfaction. **Empowering the Grassroots Workforce** Blue-collar workers, who make up over 80 per cent of India's non-agricultural workforce, are essential to the country's economic growth across various sectors. According to McKinsey and Company, by 2030, 70 per cent of the 90 mil-

lion new jobs expected in India will be blue-collar positions. These roles account for about 80 per cent of jobs in both the organised and unorganised sectors, acting as the primary engine of the economy. Their fulfilment is crucial for the growth of key sectors such as manufacturing and logistics. Recognising the unique challenges faced by grassroots workers, many organisations have developed targeted skilling initiatives that address the specific needs of this demographic. These programs are designed to empower individuals at the community level, providing them with the tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in their roles. Through hands-on training and mentorship, companies are fostering a cul-

ture of skill enhancement that encourages employees to take ownership of their career paths. **Success Stories:** Behind every blue-collar worker is a story of ambition and determination. Many individuals have experienced transformative career journeys through upskilling initiatives. For instance, frontline workers have advanced to supervisory

roles after completing leadership training, while others have gained expertise in emerging technologies, securing higher-paying positions. However, a report by WorkIndia reveals that more than 40 per cent of blue-collar workers are employed but actively seeking new job opportunities. The drive for better salaries, career growth, and personal motivations are leading factors. Concerns over layoffs and financial instability also prompt job searches. **Expanding Opportunities: Inclusive Hiring Practices** Organisations are not merely filling positions; they are creating futures. With a commitment to inclusive hiring, particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities where job opportunities can be limited, companies are



working to ensure that more individuals, regardless of gender or background, can build stable and rewarding careers. With an increasing focus on safety and a surge in residential and commercial complexes, the private security industry has become one of the biggest generators of jobs. **Women in the Workforce: Breaking Barriers** Empowering women in the workforce is a crucial aspect of inclusive hiring. More women are stepping into roles as individual contributors, frontline managers, and even executive leadership positions, demonstrating that gender is no barrier to success. These initiatives foster a workplace culture where women can not only succeed but thrive.

**The Road Ahead:** Looking ahead, organisations are set to expand their upskilling programs to cater to India's growing middle class and evolving job market needs. By integrating technology-driven training and fostering a culture of continuous learning, companies aim to set new standards in workforce development. With strategic hiring approaches and robust skill enhancement initiatives, organisations are not just providing jobs; they are building careers and transforming lives. Investing in upskilling and creating employment opportunities at the grassroots level is not just a matter of social responsibility; it is also a key economic imperative. (The writer is CEO SIS Ltd; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Hyundai aims to be production hub for exports

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Stating that the power sector accounts for around 37 per cent of carbon emissions in the country, the rating agency said the investments required by the power sector during fiscal 2026-51 to be of the order of 1.5 per cent to 2 per cent of GDP (around 2 per cent for the next 10 years), which is manageable for India. The sector, which currently is highly dependent on coal-fired generation, has to make significant decarbonization investments for the country to meet its emission cut goals.

"Our expectation of strong economic growth over the next 10 years implies an expansion of India's coal-based power generation capacity in that period, hindering carbon transition," it said. In a note, Moody's pegged power sector's annual investment requirement between Rs 4.5 lakh crore to Rs 6.4 lakh crore (USD 53 billion to USD 76 billion) of investment until fiscal 2034-35 (fiscal year ending March 2035), and around Rs 6 lakh crore to Rs 9 lakh crore annually over fiscal 2026-51.

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



The Union minister of state for commerce, industry, electronics and information technology said. Inaugurating an STPI incubation facility centre at Salt Lake Electronics Complex in the metropolis, Prasada said the government will provide opportunities by giving access to cheaper space, handholding and financial help to start-ups. "The new STPI incubation centre shows the government's commitment in making India the tech hub in the world," the Union minister of state for commerce, industry, electronics and information technology said.

STPIs to help keep pace with changing tech: Min

PNS ■ KOLKATA

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

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

Prasada said, "We hope to make more of these STPIs across the country." Total IT and ITeS exports from STPIs till date stood at Rs 9.43 lakh crore. Prasada also said India is also gearing up towards making India as a leader in artificial intelligence (AI) using large language models. Aided by Aadhaar, mobile and internet connections, there is no dearth of data availability in the country. For this, Rs 10,000 crore has also been allocated under the IndiaAI scheme, he said, adding Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is monitoring the progress in this regard.



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



EAM to visit South Africa for G20 Meeting

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

According to experts, gold extended its gain on Wednesday, buoyed by safe haven demand and persistent buying amid President Trump's new tariff threats, combined with rising geopolitical uncertainty.

Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower amid volatile trade

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BSE Industrials jumped 2.59 per cent, capital goods (2.19

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

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

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

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

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

ICAI awarded punishments to CAs in 241 cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chartered accountants' apex body ICAI awarded punishments to individuals in 241 cases in the last one year.

In the last three years -- 2022-23 to 2024-25 period -- the institute has awarded punishments in a total of 241 cases, as per latest data.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has more than four lakh members.

The punishment varies from removal of the name of the chartered accountant concerned from the rolls for 15 days to 5 years, and fine varying from Rs 5,000 to Rs 5 lakh. In 2024-25, the institute's disciplinary committee held 118 meetings, and concluded 270 hearings and awarded punishments in 241 cases. This includes certain tax audit cases that were closed following a Supreme Court judgement.

The period of 2024-25 refers to the council year, which is from February 12, 2024 to February 11, 2025.

In 2023-24, punishments were awarded in 119 cases and in 2022-23, the count stood at 91. At a briefing in the national capital on Wednesday, ICAI's newly elected President Charanjot Singh Nanda said it will be ensured that the institute's disciplinary mechanism is robust, fast and delivers justice.



India Yamaha Motor expands retail footprint in TN

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

Rajasthan Budget focuses on jobs, water supply Commits to make state \$350-bn economy

PNS ■ JAIPUR

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

While presenting the Rs 5.37-lakh crore Budget, Kumari, who is also the Deputy Chief Minister of the state, announced that 20 lakh new houses will be provided with drinking water connections and Rs 400 crore will be spent for this purpose.

"We are committed to creating a USD 350 billion economy by 2030... We have increased capital expenditure by more than 40 per cent in a short period and have constructed more than 9,600 km of new roads and upgraded more than 13,000 km of roads," Kumari said.

Calling this the state's first "green Budget", Kumari said

able agriculture, water harvesting, recycling and waste disposal, circular economy, and capacity building.

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

Kumari announced recruitment for 1.25 lakh posts in government departments and state undertakings and 1.50 lakh private sector jobs in the coming year.



special focus will be given on climate change adoption, forest and environment, sustain-

will get one of the best corporate training.

Responding to allegations that testing parameters, assessment criteria and syllabus were altered and intimidation tactics were resorted leading to the 300 plus terminations at Mysuru campus recently, Mathew said that given that the company invests money and effort to select and put trainees through the training program "it is in the interest of Infosys to see that

all these people are successful, and that is when we are able to put them into our projects."

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

ful there (India and Japan)," Rana said at the S&P Asia-Pacific Credit Focus webinar.

He also said that reciprocal tariffs may fuel inflationary expectations, thus leading to higher interest rates globally.

S&P Global Ratings, Director, Sovereigns (Asia-Pacific)



US President Donald Trump has announced he will impose reciprocal tariffs on its trading partners, including India.

S&P Global Ratings, Economist Asia-Pacific, Vishrut Rana said the reciprocal tariff will hurt countries like Vietnam, South Korea, Taiwan more as they have high trade surplus with the US.

The Indian economy has two mitigating factors -- greater reliance on domestic economy and larger services trade with the US, which is not likely to be tariffed.

In Japan also, there are similar mitigating factors -- greater reliance on services trade, and domestically-driven economy. "... which means (US) trade measures might be less impact-

YeeFarn Phua also said India's economy is largely still domestic-oriented and the nature of the exports to the US is more on the services side, which is less prone to tariffs.

"India's dependence on exports for growth is not that great. So, therefore, I think the impact (of US tariffs) will be more or less limited," he said, adding on the goods side the sectors which could be exposed to higher tariffs are jewellery, pharmaceutical, textiles and chemicals.

Irdai: Provide ASBA facility for premium payments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

"Under this facility called the 'Bima Applications Supported by Blocked Amount (Bima-ASBA), transfer of money from the prospect to the insurer happens only when insurance policy is issued," it said.



Irdai said that insurers are allowed to use Bima-ASBA mechanism for blocking of premium up to the limit specified by NPCI from time to time. "Insurers are mandated to offer Bima-ASBA facility to its prospects for life and

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

Under this facility called the Bima Applications Supported by Blocked Amount (Bima-ASBA), transfer of money from the prospect to the insurer happens only when insurance policy is issued

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

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

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

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



# what's brewing?

## RICHA CHADHA & ALI FAZAL CHAMPION QUEER LOVE WITH TAPS

In a world where love still faces barriers, Bollywood power couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal are breaking them down with their latest endeavour—presenting the LGBTQ+ relationship drama *TAPS* on YouTube. Directed by Arvind Cautlari and produced by National Award-winning filmmaker Sudhanshu Saria, along with KASHISH Film Festival and Lotus Visual Productions, this poignant short film first made waves at prestigious film festivals. Now, it is set to reach a wider audience, carrying with it a powerful message of love, identity, and acceptance.



Starring debutant Ullas Samrat and Rohit Mehra, *TAPS* offers an intimate look at a couple navigating their way back to each other. The film, which won the KASHISH QDrishti Film Grant, has been lauded for its delicate yet impactful portrayal of LGBTQ+ relationships. For Richa and Ali, both vocal advocates for inclusivity and meaningful storytelling, bringing *TAPS* to a global platform is a step toward amplifying voices that deserve to be heard.

For Richa Chadha, cinema holds the power to change mindsets and *TAPS* does just that. "Cinema is powerful because it can shift perspectives. *TAPS* is one of those stories that gently yet

powerfully peels back the layers of identity, love, and self-acceptance. We've had so many conversations about representation in media, and to be able to support a film that does it right is a privilege. We want people to open their hearts a little more," she says.

Ali Fazal echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that love is more than just grand gestures—it's about honesty, courage, and resilience. "Love has always been painted in broad

strokes—roses, candlelight, grand gestures. But love is so much more than that. *TAPS* captures something intimate, raw, and real. It reminds us that love isn't just about who we love but how we love—with honesty, courage and resilience. Richa and I felt strongly that a film like this deserved to be seen by as many people as possible. The fact that we can bring this story to the world—it feels just right."

The KASHISH Arts Foundation, which has played a key role in LGBTQ+ representation in Indian cinema, highlights the deeper meaning behind *TAPS*. "We live in a world where love is still policed, where identity is still debated, and where so many individuals are still searching for acceptance. *TAPS* subtly makes us think about why we still struggle to embrace love in all its diversity. Through this film, we hope to spark more dialogue, encourage empathy and remind people that queer stories are not separate from human stories. They are woven into the same fabric of longing, joy, heartbreak and triumph that defines all love stories. The more we normalise these narratives, the closer we get to a future where love is truly free."

## Shweta Tripathi's next big move: Producing stories that spark change



Actress Shweta Tripathi is stepping into the world of production with a new vision.

The actress expressed her desire to create stories that not only entertain but also spark meaningful conversations. In a statement, she shared, "As an actor, I've been fortunate to receive immense love, support, and respect from the industry, critics, and audiences. I've always been drawn to stories that challenge conventions and offer fresh perspectives. Over the years, I've worked on projects that resonate deeply and break stereotypes, and now, with all the support I've received, I feel inspired to tell my own stories. Filmmaking is such a collaborative process and I want to immerse myself in every aspect of it. Especially now, as women are gaining more agency and

opportunities, it feels like the ideal time to embrace and celebrate this positive change to its fullest."

Tripathi added, "This new chapter excites me as it allows me to collaborate with talented storytellers and bring unique, impactful narratives to life. I want to create a space for stories that spark meaningful conversations, challenge norms and inspire change. While acting will always be my passion, producing offers me the chance to contribute to the industry in a new and fulfilling way. I'm currently working on my first project and I look forward to sharing more details very soon."

Shweta is known for her work in critically acclaimed films and series such as *Masaan*, *Cargo*, *Mirzapur* franchise, *Yeh Kaali Kaali Aankhein* franchise, *Haraamkhor*, *Gone Kesh* and *Kaalkoot*, amongst others.

## Shanaya Kapoor gears up for a romantic film with Munjya star Abhay Verma



Shanaya Kapoor, daughter of Sanjay Kapoor and Maheep Kapoor, is gearing up for an exciting start to her acting career. With multiple projects in the pipeline, she is now set to collaborate with Munjya star Abhay Verma for an upcoming romantic film directed by Shujaat Saudagar, *Rock On 2*. According to reports, the film's shoot is scheduled to begin in March in Goa.

As per Filmfare, the new on-screen duo has already begun preparations for the film, engaging in pre-shoot workshops to fine-tune their performances. A source close to the project revealed, "Their shooting schedule will begin in the first week of March. The film is going to be shot in Goa." The source also hinted that the film will present a refreshing take on romance, offering audiences something unique. Apart from this project, Shanaya Kapoor has two major films lined up. She will make her Bollywood debut with *Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan*, where she stars alongside Vikrant Massey. Directed by Santosh Singh, the film explores a love story between two visually impaired characters. Reports confirm that the India schedule of the film wrapped up in January 2025.

Shanaya will also be seen in the pan-India film *Vrushabha*, co-starring legendary actor Mohanlal. After receiving critical acclaim for his performance in the 2024 horror-comedy *Munjya*, Abhay has joined the cast of Shah Rukh Khan's action thriller, *King*. Directed by Siddharth Anand (*Pathaan*), the film also stars Suhana Khan and Abhishek Bachchan in key roles.



## Lee Dong-wook as divorcee-turned-insurance expert in *The Divorce Insurance*

Prime Video announced today that the Korean series *The Divorce Insurance* will be coming to the service.

Popular stars Lee Dong-wook, Lee Joo-been, Lee Kwang-soo and Lee Da-hee will be leading the rom-com series. The unique story centres on insurance expert Noh Ki-jun (Lee Dong-wook) who seeks to create a divorce insurance product. Through the process of putting a price on the cost of divorce with his insurance team, they learn more about themselves and love. The weekly episodes of *The Divorce Insurance* will begin from March 31.

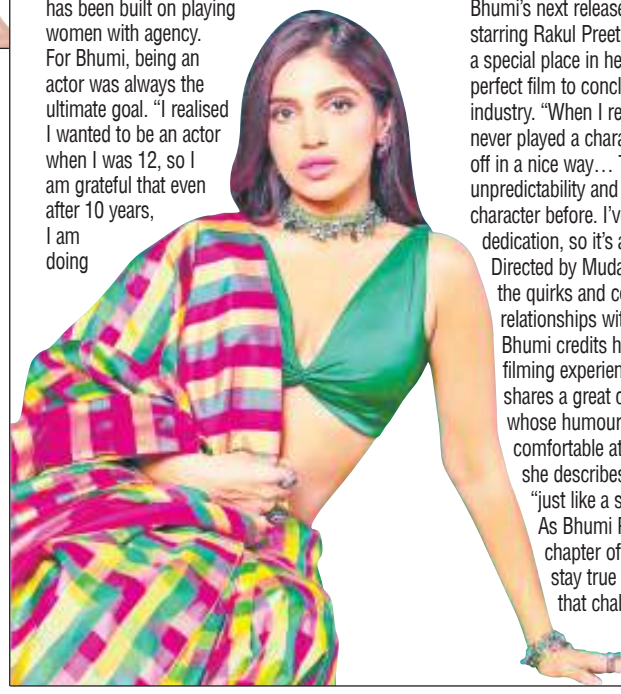


Noh Ki-jun is a seemingly perfect man who has it all: a prestigious academic background and a highly successful career with his insurance expertise. Unfortunately, he's a broken man and quite literally broke from his 3 divorces. Left penniless after his divorces, Ki-jun is determined to create a divorce insurance product that would protect people like him. Kang Han-deul (Lee Joo-been) is a quiet woman and never freely spoke her mind. Her insufferable in-laws treated her poorly during 5 years of marriage; Han-deul finally has enough and gets a divorce. Now she is determined to be a completely different type of woman and begins a new job at the same company as Ki-jun. An Jeon-man (Lee Kwang-soo) is a timid man who values safety over all else. Jeon-man has known Ki-jun since their elementary school days and while they are opposites, their friendship has lasted throughout the years and they work at the same company. Jeon-man also has his own divorce experience, and he doesn't want to admit it, but he finds himself drawn to Ki-jun's idea of developing a divorce insurance. Jeon Na-rae (Lee Da-hee) is a woman who values freedom and doesn't want to be restricted. Unable to reconcile differing marriage values, Na-rae got divorced in the past and hasn't considered getting married again. However, she crosses paths with Ki-jun and becomes intrigued about his past divorces and his plans to create a divorce insurance.

*The Divorce Insurance* is directed by Lee Won-seok who is known for his films *Killing Romance* and *The Royal Tailor*. The series is written by Lee Tae-yoon who wrote *Secret Royal Inspector & Joy*.

## Bhumi Pednekar wraps up a decade in films with *Mere Husband Ki Biwi*

As she marks ten years in the film industry, actor Bhumi Pednekar looks back on her journey with a deep sense of gratitude. Since making her debut in 2015's *Dum Laga Ke Haisha*, Bhumi has carved a niche for herself by portraying strong, independent women on screen. Known for her performances in films like *Toilet: Ek Prem Katha*, *Bala*, *Bheed* and *Bhakshak*, she takes pride in the fact that her career has been built on playing women with agency. For Bhumi, being an actor was always the ultimate goal. "I realised I wanted to be an actor when I was 12, so I am grateful that even after 10 years, I am doing



what I love so deeply," she said in a recent interview. One of the defining aspects of her career has been her commitment to portraying women with strength and individuality. "I constantly seek agency in my characters. If they don't have agency, I wouldn't do them because I just wouldn't enjoy being a part of that process. I am lucky that I had the opportunity to play such diverse women."

Bhumi's next release, *Mere Husband Ki Biwi*, starring Rakul Preet Singh and Arjun Kapoor, holds a special place in her heart. She believes it is the perfect film to conclude her first decade in the industry. "When I read the script, I felt that I have never played a character like Prableen. She is a little off in a nice way... There is so much comedy in her unpredictability and I have never played such a character before. I've played this part with a lot of dedication, so it's a very special film for me."

Directed by Mudassar Aziz, the film delves into the quirks and complexities of romantic relationships with a comedic twist. Bhumi credits her co-stars for making the filming experience even more enjoyable. She shares a great camaraderie with Arjun Kapoor, whose humour and friendship created a comfortable atmosphere on set. Meanwhile, she describes Rakul Preet Singh as being "just like a sister."

As Bhumi Pednekar steps into the next chapter of her career, she continues to stay true to her values—choosing stories that challenge norms, inspire conversations and celebrate women with agency.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



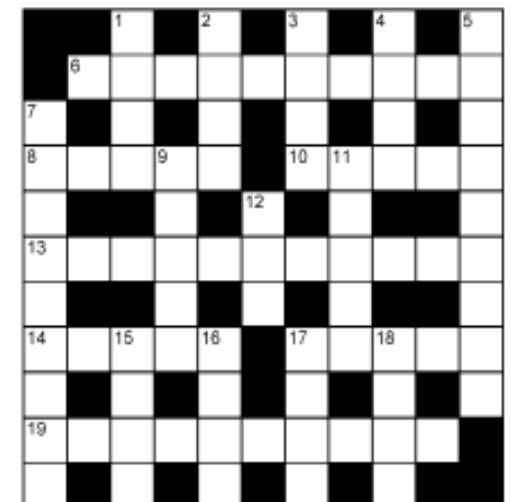
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

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

#### ACROSS

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

#### DOWN

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



#### GINGER MEGGS



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

# Vijayawada

## NOURISHING FUTURES & CHANGING LIVES!



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

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

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

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



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

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



### POWERING INDIA'S TRANSPORT HUBS

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



## Decoding India's personal loan growth story

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

### Market growth and fintech impact

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

### Top 3 key drivers behind surge in demand of personal loan

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

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

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

consolidation and emergency expenses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Solutions for future

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### Impact on non-performing assets (NPAs)

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

### Road ahead

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

In this evolving landscape, Mobicule, a full-stack debt collection company, is leading the transformation by bridging the gap between traditional collection practices and modern consumer expectations. Their comprehensive digital platforms and data-driven strategies are helping financial institutions transition from conventional recovery methods to more sophisticated, consumer-centric approaches.

The success of India's personal loan market will increasingly depend on such technological partnerships that can effectively address the dual challenges of scale and complexity. As lending institutions continue to expand their reach, the adoption of comprehensive digital collection solutions becomes not just an advantage but a necessity for sustainable growth in this dynamic market.

Siddharth is a computer engineering graduate from a premier institute of Mumbai University. After working with organizations like Zycus & Mindcraft Siddharth founded Mobicule in the year 2008, with a vision to help organisations leverage the power of mobility and wireless, thereby offering a competitive edge to these organizations by solving business problems. With his passion for technology and entrepreneurial spirit, Siddharth has created Mobicule as a preferred mobility partner for India's blue-chip organisation with products across 8 industry verticals.

Mobicule is a pioneer in products focussed on mobile field force and has successfully deployed and managed some of the largest mobile field force implementations across sales & distribution, telecom, and BFSI. With its experience and domain knowledge now spanning 2 decades, it has established its niche in debt collection & gamification, digital KYC integrated end-to-end with internal (core banking, rep, CRM) and external systems (credit bureaus, government portals). Backed by strong R&D and adopting the latest and upcoming technologies, it has managed to establish a niche market position.

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

# Shubman Gill becomes No 1 ODI batsman

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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



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

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

spot midway through the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup in 2023. "Gill has been in excellent form of late, with his century against England in Ahmedabad during the third ODI of the recently concluded series enough to

catapult the 25-year-old to the top of the rankings," the global governing body added. Sri Lanka's Maheesh Theekshana, meanwhile, has taken the first position in the ODI rankings for bowlers as he replaced Afghanistan

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

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

"Meanwhile, Afghan spin wizard Rashid drops to second and will be keen to regain the No.1 spot as he trails his Sri Lankan counterpart by just 11 rating points," the ICC said. "While a trio of spinners in India's squad Kuldeep Yadav (up one place to fourth), South Africa's Keshav Maharaj (re-enters the rankings in sixth) and New Zealand's Mitchell Santner (up four rungs to seventh) are all inside the top 10 after making ground this week."

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



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

The all-rounder had suffered a heart attack at the age of 26 but returned to the cricket field and even captained Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy. He played 52 First-Class matches between 1966-67 and 1977-78, taking 126 wickets with his right-arm off-break bowling. He also contributed with the bat, scoring 1,532 runs at an average of 23.56. Legendary batter Sachin Tendulkar recalled Rege's contribution in the early days of his career. "Sad to hear about Milind Rege Sir's passing. He was a true Mumbai cricketer with immense contributions to the city's cricket. He and other CCI members saw potential in me and asked me to play for CCI, which, as I look back now, was a landmark moment in my career," Tendulkar wrote on 'X' in a tribute.

"He could pick out a talented player from a sea of hardworking hopefuls. He had a special sixth sense to pick talent at all levels, but especially at junior levels. "He leaves behind a void, one that's tough to fill. He may not be around, but his imprint on people's lives will always live on. He made a difference to so many lives and definitely made a difference to mine. Thank

you, Sir, for everything. Heartfelt condolences to his friends and family," Tendulkar added. The Indian cricket board also conveyed its condolence message. "The BCCI mourns the passing of Milind Rege, former Mumbai captain and selector. A pillar of Mumbai cricket, he played a key role in its growth and legacy. His keen eye for talent and contributions as a commentator earned admiration across the cricketing fraternity," it said. "The Board extends its heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and the @MumbaiCricAssoc," the BCCI added.

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

A childhood friend of former India captain Sunil Gavaskar, Rege attended the same school and college as Gavaskar and played alongside him at the Dadar Union Sporting Club. As one of the most revered figures in Mumbai as well as domestic cricket, Rege held several roles through his career and was also associated with with the Mumbai Cricket Association as a cricket advisor.

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



## Raducanu loses to Muchova in Dubai Championships

PTI ■ DUBAI

Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships. The 2021 US Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2.

After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and court-side screening before Muchova moved over to console her. Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match. The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tiebreaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova.

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

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

support." A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022. Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property. Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the US Open as a qualifier, one of the most unlikely achievements in tennis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries.

The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5. Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023. Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot into the quarterfinals.

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

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

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

## Ranji Trophy semifinal: Vidarbha lead by 260 runs against Mumbai

PTI ■ NAGPUR

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

After Vidarbha dismissed Mumbai for 270 to take a first-innings lead of 113 runs, the hosts found themselves in trouble after being reduced to 56 for four, thanks to Shams Mulani's (2/50) two-wicket burst. However, Rathod (59) and Wadkar (31) steadied the ship, guiding Vidarbha to 147 for four in 53 overs.

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

two full days of play remaining. With a 113-run first innings lead in hand, the hosts had a solid foundation, but Mumbai all-rounder Shardul Thakur (1/14) gave them a glimmer of hope with an early breakthrough in the second over. Thakur, who is set to join Essex for the County Championship, removed Atharva Taide for a duck, trapping him in front with an inswinger. Danish Malewar (29), who

scored a vital 79 in the first innings, looked in good touch, hitting five boundaries before Mulani dismissed him off his own bowling with a sharp caught-and-bowl effort, leaving Vidarbha at 40 for two. Karun Nair (6), in scintillating form, joined opener Dhruv Shorey (13) at the crease, but Tanush Kotian (1/33) made an impact, dismissing Shorey LBW after he missed a classic off-break delivery. Much was expected of Nair,



but he too fell, sent back by Mulani, as Vidarbha slumped to 56 for four. Nair was rapped on the pads while trying to defend and although he challenged the on-field umpire's decision, he lost the appeal. Wadkar and Rathod then regrouped, building a steady partnership to bring Vidarbha back on track. Earlier, Akash Anand completed his second first-class century and shared a 69-run stand with Tanush Kotian (33) to lead Mumbai's recovery after they ended the second day at 188 for seven. Anand, who resumed his innings on 67, played a gritty knock, facing 256 balls and hitting 11 fours. His partnership with Kotian took Mumbai close to the 250-mark before left-arm spinner Parth Rekhade broke the stand, removing Kotian with a delivery that drifted in from around the stumps to bowl him out.

## Djokovic loses to Berrettini in Doha

PTI ■ DOHA

Novak Djokovic was upset by Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (4), 6-2 on Tuesday at the Qatar Open in the Serb's first match since exiting the Australian Open with a hamstring injury. Djokovic said he didn't have "any pain or discomfort." "I was outplayed by just a better player today," he said. "I wasn't at my desired level, and it could be that I'm still not moving the way I want to move, but ... I played without pain, so there is no excuse in that."

Berrettini won for the 10th time in his career against a top-10 player and will face Tallon Griekspoor in the second round.

Australian Open semifinals but retired from the last-four match against Alexander Zverev because of a hamstring injury. Djokovic said he didn't have "any pain or discomfort." "I was outplayed by just a better player today," he said. "I wasn't at my desired level, and it could be that I'm still not moving the way I want to move, but ... I played without pain, so there is no excuse in that."

Berrettini won for the 10th time in his career against a top-10 player and will face Tallon Griekspoor in the second round.

## Always liked Champions Trophy as tournament: Virat

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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



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

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

# Bangladesh can beat any team in Champions Trophy: Shanto

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

team is quite balanced and we believe we can beat any team in this tournament. All teams are capable of winning this trophy but I am someone who is not thinking about the opponents much. If we execute our plan properly we can beat any team in any day," Shanto said. After years of struggle, Bangladesh are now in a position to boast a good pace-bowling attack, feels Shanto. "Yes, obviously, I think we always struggle with our seam attack, but last couple of years we have got some quality fast bowlers. Now we have got Nahid Rana, Taskin the way they are bowling, I think it helps a lot. "As a captain, we love to see them bowling fast. So, I'm really happy that we have got a good fast bowling unit and under lights the ball might swing. So, if they bowl in the good areas, it will help our team."

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

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

India, Pakistan, New Zealand, we have good memories. We won a couple of matches in recent times. "Last year, when we played India in Bangladesh, we have some good memories from then. But that is past, I think if

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

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

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



changed in first class cricket. We play with the Duke ball, so the fast bowlers wanted to bowl a lot of overs and we get a little bit charged. "And obviously there is a lot of local coaches and obviously overseas coaches there, so they helped and they motivated the fast bowlers, how they can compete in the international arena."

"So that is one thing... The ball has changed and the wicket, and thanks to BCB the way they think about our fast bowlers," he said. Shanto is also expecting a lot of crowd support for his team in Dubai. The Bangladesh skipper added that he is not solely relying on his pacers to power their bowling attack, but they also have experienced spinners in their ranks. "I am not just depending on our pace bowling attack, to be very honest. What I mentioned is that we did not have a lot of pace bowlers now unlike earlier times. We have always had spinners, so we now have good balance of pace, and spin."

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## RITU VARMA

# I NEVER SAW MYSELF AS AN UNSUCCESSFUL ACTOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ritu believes in bringing variation to her performances. "This phase is definitely different for me because, for the first time,

I am doing a full-fledged commercial film. It's a new space and I am excited about it," she said.

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

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

Ritu admitted that earlier, she

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



## VN Aditya's tribute to Sirivennela

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

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

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



## Manchu Manoj speaks out on police custody reports, denies wrongdoing

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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