

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

- Kavitha, BRS MLC

P4

Amit Shah asks Northeast insurgents to surrender

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



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DON'T MISS...

Veligonda to take 2 more years: Min

Alleging that former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy dedicated the P.S. Veligonda project to the nation without completing the works, Minister for Water Resources Development N. Ramanaidu has clarified that it will take another two years to complete the project. Addressing a press conference at the Secretariat on Thursday, Ramanaidu announced that Rs 4,000 crore would be required to complete the construction works of the Veligonda project. "The main canal, which is meant to provide drinking water to..."

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Mayawati calls Congress casteist'

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

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Finmin to meet heads of PSBs

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

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'Having smile solves half the problem'

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

-SPORTS

CM assures aid to chilli growers

REVIEW OF PRICE DROP BY UNION MINISTER SHIVRAJ SINGH TODAY

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has assured chilli farmers of necessary assistance, urging them not to panic over the recent fall in prices. Speaking to the media in New Delhi, he said he had discussed the issue with the Centre, highlighting that while global demand had earlier ensured good prices, the rates have now declined.

Naidu stated that he had brought the matter to the notice of Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan through a video conference, as the minister is currently on a tour. He said Chouhan would review the issue with officials on Friday.

During his visit to New Delhi, Naidu attended the swearing-in ceremony of Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta before meeting Union Ministers Chouhan and CR Patil. The Chief Minister said that 12 lakh metric tonnes of chilli were to be procured this year, of which four lakh metric tonnes had already been procured. He added that all concerns had been conveyed to the Centre, and the Union Minister would provide clarity after Friday's meeting.

Naidu also discussed the Jal Jeevan Mission and Polavaram project with Water Resources Minister CR Patil, informing him that the State Government aims to complete the Polavaram works by 2027.

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- Naidu attends the swearing-in ceremony of Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta before meeting Union Ministers
- CM says that 12L metric tonnes of chilli are to be procured this year, with four lakh metric tonnes already procured
- Jal Jeevan Mission and Polavaram project discussed with Union Minister CR Patil
- State govt seeks the Centre's support to divert water from Polavaram to Banakacherla
- Naidu stresses the importance of efficient water management and harnessing water that currently flows into the sea

Naidu urges Centre to reimburse Polavaram canal expenses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday urged Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil to reimburse the expenditure incurred in constructing the left and right canals of the Polavaram project.



The Chief Minister also requested the Union Minister to extend full

support for the timely completion of the mega irrigation project.

"Requested reimbursement for the expenditure incurred on constructing Polavaram left and right canals and all necessary support to complete the project on a war footing," Naidu said in a post on 'X'.

Continued on Page 2



Setback to Vamsi in AP High Court

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party leader and former MLA Vallabhaneni Vamshi faced a setback as the Andhra Pradesh High Court rejected his anticipatory bail petition in connection with the attack on the Gannavaram TDP office.

The High Court, which had earlier reserved its verdict, delivered its ruling on Thursday. During the hearings, the government's counsel argued that the attack was carried out under Vamshi's direction, resulting in damage to vehicles and threats to individuals.

The court was informed that despite victims lodging complaints, the police did not register cases or arrest the accused at that time. It was also pointed out that the investigation had been hindered while the YSR Congress was in power. The prosecution contended that granting anticipatory bail could affect the ongoing probe.

Continued on Page 2



AP team studies Mumbai's development strategies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is exploring the implementation of development strategies adopted in Mumbai, the country's financial capital, to boost urban growth in the state. A delegation led by Minister Narayana visited Mumbai to study the planning initiatives undertaken by local authorities.

On Thursday morning, Minister Narayana, CRDA Commissioner Kanna Babu, and other officials met representatives of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA). MMRDA's Planning Director, Shankar Deshpande, warmly welcomed the minister and his team.

MMRDA plays a key role in the planned development of the Greater Mumbai region, overseeing road construction, metro rail projects,

and housing initiatives. During the meeting, Mumbai officials explained how they are addressing infrastructure needs amid rising population pressures through well-coordinated road and metro rail planning, transportation strategies, and housing projects.

Through a PowerPoint presentation, officials detailed their approach to infrastructure development with the support of foreign investments. They also discussed methods for raising funds through land development and securing financing for government projects.

The Andhra Pradesh government is considering adopting similar planning methodologies for the development of Amaravati and other cities across the state.

A final decision on the matter will be taken after discussions with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Tight security for APPSC Group-2 exam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand held a review meeting with Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) Chairman A. Anuradha and officials at the AP Secretariat to ensure the smooth conduct of the Group-2 Main Written Examination on February 23. Stringent security arrangements have been put in place.

Vijayanand emphasised the need for tight security at all 175 examination centres across the 13 district headquarters. He directed District Collectors and Superintendents of Police (SPs) to remain vigilant and ensure that no untoward incidents occur. With around 92,250 candi-



dates expected to appear for the exam, he stated that detailed guidelines have been issued to all districts.

Amid concerns over misinformation, Vijayanand instructed officials to take swift action against those spreading rumours or fake news on social media. He reassured candidates and their families that robust measures are in place for a

smooth examination process.

APPSC Chairman Anuradha outlined the exam schedule, stating that Paper 1 will be held from 10 AM to 12:30 PM, with candidates required to arrive by 9:30 AM. The examination gates will close at 9:45 AM sharp, and latecomers will not be allowed.

Continued on Page 2

Rain likely in north coastal AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Rain is likely to occur at one or two places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next five days. The maximum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 2-3 degrees Celsius in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next five days.

In a daily weather report here, it said that lower tropospheric South Easterly and Southwesterly winds prevail over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema.

Continued on Page 2

Inter exams from March 1: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has announced that the intermediate examinations will be conducted from March 1 to 20. First-year exams will take place from March 1 to 19, while second-year exams will be held from March 3 to 20. The exams will be conducted daily from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM across 1,535 centres in 26 districts, with approximately 10,58,892 students expected to appear. Additionally, the Andhra Pradesh Open School Society's Intermediate exams will be held from March 3 to 15 at 325 centres, accommodating around 67,952 students.

During a review meeting on the arrangements, Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand emphasised the need for meticulous planning to ensure the smooth conduct of the exams, particularly given the busy examination schedule in March and April. He instructed District Collectors and Superintendents of Police to ensure effective arrangements at all centres, noting that 68 centres have been classified as sensitive and 36 as vulnerable based on previous incidents.

In view of the warm weather, CS Vijayanand stressed the importance of providing essential amenities such as drinking water, first aid, electricity, and adequate seating at all examination centres.

Continued on Page 2

Student suffers burns as boiling milk spills in school kitchen

PNS ■ ONGOLE

In a distressing incident, an eight-year-old student suffered burn injuries after boiling milk accidentally spilt on him at the Jyotiba Phule Gurukul School in Tangutur on Thursday. He is currently undergoing treatment at KIMS Hospital. According to officials, the student, Madhu Mohan, a Class 5 pupil, had been assigned kitchen duties by the school principal. While he was working in the kitchen, a pot of boiling milk on the stove spilled over, scalding his chest and hands.



spoke to the attending doctors and assured that the best possible treatment would be provided through CMR funds. The Minister further warned that strict action would be taken against those responsible for the incident.

The incident has raised concerns over the safety of students in school kitchens and the responsibilities assigned to them.

LAMBASINGI'S SWEET SUCCESS

Andhra's strawberry haven blossoms

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Lambasingi, often referred to as the 'Kashmir of Andhra Pradesh,' is emerging as a hub for strawberry cultivation, adding a new dimension to its mist-laden charm. Nestled at an altitude of 1,000 metres in the Eastern Ghats, this quaint hamlet in Alluri Sitharama Raju district has been witnessing a boom in strawberry farming over the past six years, boosting both the local economy and tourism.

The journey to Lambasingi is an experience in itself, with winding ghat roads flanked by lush greenery offering a picturesque view. As travellers approach, they are greeted by crisp mountain air and the soothing sound of cascading streams. A short detour from Lothugedda Junction



Acclaimed as the 'Kashmir of Andhra Pradesh,' Lambasingi is emerging as a major strawberry farming hub, blending agriculture with tourism while overcoming challenges in infrastructure and sustainability



leads to Andhra Strawberry Farm, one of the pioneering farms in the region, where rows of ripe strawberries present a striking contrast against the verdant landscape.

Andhra Strawberry Farm, founded by agricultural science graduate N Naga Satyanarayana, has expanded to five acres this season, cultivating 1.10 lakh strawberry plants with

an investment of Rs 40 lakh. Despite suffering an estimated loss of Rs 20 lakh due to cyclonic rains in December, the farm remains optimistic, projecting revenues of Rs 70

lakh this season. Since January, tourists have been visiting the farm to hand-pick fresh strawberries while enjoying the serene winter atmosphere. A two-acre flower garden with dahlias, begonias, and chrysanthemums adds to the experience.

Strawberry farming in Lambasingi follows a natural cycle. The plants are sown between September and early October, bloom within 45-60 days, and start bearing fruit by mid-December. The peak harvest occurs in January and February, extending into early March. The region supports four key strawberry varieties—Winter Dawn, Sweet Charlie, M2, and Florida Felicity—each with distinct characteristics catering to different consumer preferences.

Continued on Page 2

MoU signed for 'Mee Doctor Mee Intiki' project

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between AP Red Cross and REC Foundation, New Delhi, to launch the 'Mee Doctor Mee Intiki' project, an initiative involving Mobile Medical Units in seven districts of Andhra Pradesh as part of a nationwide programme covering 33 districts.

The MoU was signed by A.K. Parida, IAS (Retd.), General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of AP Red Cross, and Sanjay Kumar Roy, Chief Programme Manager, REC, in Vijayawada. Governor and AP Red Cross President S. Abdul Nazeer will launch the project in April 2025.

The project aims to provide healthcare services to the poor and tribal communities in inaccessible areas of Parvathipuram Manyam, Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR), Paderu, Palnadu, Tirupati, and Nandyal districts, which lie along the Eastern Ghats and Nallamala Range. Additionally, it will cater to



women and the elderly in the poor fishermen community of Konaseema and West Godavari (Bhimavaram) districts. This is the largest CSR project undertaken by AP Red Cross since the state's bifurcation in June 2014. The project, with a total cost of Rs 8.40 crore, will be implemented over three years from April 2025, fully funded by the REC Foundation.

Under the initiative, a team comprising a doctor, a staff nurse, and a pharmacist will visit beneficiaries at their doorsteps in vehicles provided by the REC Foundation. They will offer free healthcare services, including essential medicines.

The project aims to provide primary healthcare services to vulnerable and underserved areas, focusing on reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), and overall mortality. It will also work towards reducing communicable diseases and achieving 100% immunisation. Additionally, a Family Health Profile (FHP) will be created for beneficiary families, and AP Red Cross will assist them in availing financial aid from government schemes for major medical treatments.

AP launches BESS tender

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a landmark move to bolster its energy infrastructure, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has announced its inaugural standalone Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) tender with a capacity of 500 MW/1000 MWh, facilitated under the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme. This initiative is part of India's broader strategy to integrate renewable energy sources and enhance grid stability.

The launch of this BESS tender highlights Andhra Pradesh's commitment to adopting advanced energy storage technologies to tackle challenges related to grid reliability and energy efficiency.

AP FiberNet chairman suspends 3 officials for 'non-cooperation'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP FiberNet Chairman GV Reddy has accused senior officials of non-cooperation and financial irregularities, announcing the suspension of three key personnel with immediate effect. The suspended officials include Chief Technology Officer Pappu Bharadwaj, Business and Operations Head Gandhamsheela Suresh, and Procurement Assistant Manager Shashank Haider Khan. Addressing the media on Thursday, Reddy expressed dissatisfaction over the failure of officials to implement his directives.

He stated that despite orders to terminate 400 employees, neither the Managing Director nor the Executive Director signed the dismissal orders. Instead, salaries were disbursed, leading to alleged misuse of company funds.

Reddy also revealed that FiberNet had been slapped with a Rs 377-crore penalty by GST authorities last month, but he was not informed about it. He lamented the lack of progress in the organisation since the new coalition government assumed office, alleging that no new connections had been generated in the past eight months.

Criticising Managing Director Dinesh Kumar, who took charge in August, Reddy questioned his leadership, claiming that Kumar had not conducted a single review since assuming office. He alleged that illegal salary payments were made for three months and demanded that the amount be recovered from Kumar and other senior officials.

The Chairman further pointed to a lack of cooperation from FiberNet officials during a vigilance probe into irregularities from 2019 to 2024. He described the actions of senior officials as a betrayal, calling for strict action against them.

AP team shines at 68th All India Police Duty Meet

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Director General of Police (DGP) Harish Kumar Gupta congratulated the Andhra Pradesh Police team for their stellar performance at the 68th All India Police Duty Meet held in Ranchi, Jharkhand. The team showcased exceptional skills, securing multiple medals and finishing second in the overall medal tally.

The 62-member contingent won four gold medals, one silver medal, and two bronze medals, marking the first time Andhra Pradesh Police has won medals across all categories in the competition.



Sub-Inspector K. Krishnamurthy created history by bagging three gold medals in Forensic Science, Criminal Law, and Medicolegal categories. DGP Gupta

lauded Krishnamurthy and the entire team for their dedication and excellence.

The event saw participation from 24 teams representing central and state police forces

across the country. The Andhra Pradesh team was led by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) K.K.N. Amburajan.

In individual events, B. Sudheer (RSI) won a gold medal in Room Search, N.N. Surya Narayana (Constable) secured silver in Police Photography, N. Ramarao (Head Constable) bagged bronze in Vehicle Search, and V. Ramesh (Circle Inspector) clinched bronze in Forensic Science.

The Andhra Pradesh Police's commendable performance at the national level underscores their commitment to excellence in law enforcement.

GITAM hosts natl meet on bioactive compounds

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed to be University, in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology, recently convened a national conference focused on "Research Trends in Therapeutic Applications of Bioactive Compounds". The event brought together leading scientists, including researchers from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), to discuss pioneering advancements in medical science.

Among the keynote speakers was Dr P Sriyutha Murthy, a scientist at BARC Facilities, who addressed the escalating crisis of antibiotic resistance in microbial pathogens. His presentation underscored the alarming rise of multidrug-resistant infections and examined the potential of nanotechnology-based treatments in combating this global health challenge. Dr. KC Barick, a scientist at BARC Trombay, presented research on "Development of Surface Functionalized Nanostructure Materials for Cancer Theranostics". His discussion highlighted the integration of diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, offering a more targeted and minimally invasive approach to cancer treatment.

The conference convener, Dr G Ravikumar, emphasized the significance of the event in fostering collaboration among researchers, academicians, and students.

He noted that such discussions play a crucial role in advancing the frontiers of medicine and healthcare technologies. Adding to the momentum of scientific development, Prof. BVR Tata, Head of GITAM MURTI Labs, announced a landmark Rs. 100 crore investment in the MURTI research facility. This investment aims to accelerate innovation in biotechnology and medical research, reinforcing GITAM's commitment to scientific excellence.

Jagan demands immediate support to chilli farmers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy slammed Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for neglecting the crisis being faced by chilli farmers in the state and demanded immediate action to support the farmers and start procurement to provide relief.

Taking to X, YS Jagan pointed out that chilli yields have dropped to just 10 quintals per acre, while production costs have risen to Rs 1.5 lakh per acre. With no buyers, farmers are being forced to sell their produce at a loss of Rs 10,000 per acre.

Despite such a severe crisis, the state government has not responded, and instead of addressing the

issue, Naidu is attending political events in Delhi, giving it a misleading political spin.

YS Jagan also questioned Naidu's move to write a letter to the Central Government seeking intervention, knowing fully well that NAFED has never procured chillies in any state. He accused Naidu of misleading farmers instead of using state resources like Marketed to procure chillies and stabilize prices.

Highlighting the measures taken during his tenure, YS Jagan reminded that in 2021, when production costs were Rs 1 lakh per acre, his government had already set a minimum support price of Rs 7,000 per quintal.

His administration not only ensured MSP for 24 crops but also spent Rs

65,000 crore on paddy procurement and Rs 7,800 crore on other crops.

He asked why Naidu has not announced new support prices or started procurement to help chilli farmers.

YS Jagan further exposed the failures of Naidu's government, listing how crucial agricultural support systems like Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs), e-crop verification, free crop insurance, and price stabilization funds were rendered ineffective under his leadership.

YS Jagan declared that he will not stop fighting for farmers despite cases being filed against him. He urged Naidu to stop playing politics and take immediate steps to help chilli farmers by launching government procurement without delay.

Naidu urges...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, the CM sought Patil's support for the Polavaram-Banakacherla link project, which aims to divert 200 TMC of floodwaters from the Godavari River at Polavaram to Banakacherla through a link canal.

According to Naidu, the Polavaram-Banakacherla project will make the state drought-proof by providing drinking water to 80 lakh people and irrigating 3 lakh hectares while supplementing 9.14 lakh hectares. Furthermore, he noted that the project would also facilitate the supply of 20 TMC of water to industries.

In the Assembly last November, Naidu called the Polavaram project the state's lifeline and backbone, vowing to complete it by 2027 "at any cost" despite financial challenges. Describing it as a "game changer," he said that successfully building the project and inter-linking rivers would end famines.



Jagan consoles family of Late Rajasekharam

PNS ■ PALAKONDA

YSRCP president and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy consoled the family members of party leader Palavalasa Rajasekharam, who passed away recently.

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who received a rousing welcome upon his arrival, visited the residence of MLC Palavalasa Vikrant and extended his condolences to him and other family members over Rajasekharam's demise.

Andhra's strawberry...

Continued from Page 1

To mitigate the impact of unpredictable weather, several farmers are diversifying their crops, growing brinjal, tomatoes, chillies, and carrots in the off-season. Others are exploring value-added products like jams, milkshakes, and strawberry cream. Just seven kilometres away, Janani Farm, run by K Satyanarayana and his wife Sandhya, is a model of sustainable agriculture. Spanning 10 acres, the farm follows natural farming practices, using bio-fertilisers while avoiding chemical inputs. Their dedication has earned them the Andhra Pradesh government's Best Farmer Award in 2019, 2021, and 2025.

Beyond strawberries, Janani Farm cultivates high-value crops such as zucchini, broccoli, lettuce, and papaya, ensuring year-round productivity while maintaining soil health. Their eco-friendly approach is setting a

benchmark for sustainable farming in the region. Despite its rising popularity, Lambasingi faces several infrastructure challenges.

Poor road conditions, limited accommodation options, and inadequate waste management threaten its potential. While homestays, tented camps, and an APTDC-run resort provide some lodging, the growing tourist influx calls for improved facilities and better management of key viewpoints.

As Lambasingi's strawberry farms attract visitors from across Andhra Pradesh and beyond, its future hinges on striking a balance between tourism and environmental sustainability. With enhanced infrastructure and responsible development, this hidden gem can continue to flourish as Andhra's strawberry paradise, offering both agricultural prosperity and an enchanting winter retreat.

YSRCP complains to Guv over security to Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) delegation, led by Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council Botsa Satyanarayana, met Governor Justice Abdul Nazeer at Raj Bhavan and lodged a complaint regarding lapses in the security of former Chief Minister and YSRCP President Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Botsa Satyanarayana expressed serious concerns over the state government's alleged negligence in providing security to Jagan Mohan Reddy during his visit to Guntur Mirchi Yard. He accused the government of acting

with political vendetta and deliberately creating a security risk. He also claimed that the Governor was surprised by the police inaction and assured them of an inquiry into the matter.

Botsa questioned how the police could cite the election code as an excuse for withdrawing security while providing full protection for the Sangeeta Vibhahari event in the city a few days ago. He alleged that this reflected the government's biased approach. He warned that if anything were to happen to Jagan Mohan Reddy, the government and senior police officials, including the IG and SP, would be held responsible.

He also criticised the govern-

ment for failing to support farmers, stating that chilli farmers were incurring heavy losses due to falling prices. He added that while the previous YSRCP government provided regular financial assistance to farmers, the current coalition government had abandoned them.

The YSRCP delegation included former ministers Ambati Rambabu, Merugu Nagarjuna, Velampalli Srinivas, Karumuru Nageswara Rao, and MLCs Lella Appireddy and M. Arun Kumar. They demanded immediate action to restore Jagan Mohan Reddy's security and ensure that the law is upheld without political bias.

Rain likely in north coastal...

Continued from Page 1

Shallow to moderate fog is likely to occur at isolated places in the morning in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next three days and in

North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 24 hours. Dry weather is likely to prevail in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema during the next seven days and in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh on

February 25 and 26. The lowest minimum temperature of 18 degrees Celsius was recorded at Arogyavaram in Rayalaseema on the intervening night of Wednesday and Thursday, the report added.

CM assures aid to chilli growers...

Continued from Page 1

"We have sought the Centre's cooperation to divert water from Polavaram to Banakacherla, and Central representatives will visit Andhra Pradesh to assess the proposal," he said.

On the Jal Jeevan Mission, Naidu criticised the previous government for failing to utilise even 1% of the scheme. "The Centre allocated Rs 27,000 crore to Andhra Pradesh, but instead of laying pipelines, the previous government proposed borewells. States like Uttar Pradesh have used Rs 50,000 crore effectively, and Gujarat has ensured continuous water supply to every home. The Centre has extended the project deadline to 2028, but Andhra Pradesh

will require an additional Rs 54,000 crore to supply tap water across all regions. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) for Rs 27,000 crore is being prepared, and we will seek central funding," he said.

Emphasising the need for efficient water resource management, Naidu noted that Andhra Pradesh is at the tail end of river flows. "During my tenure in united Andhra Pradesh, I completed several projects to ensure Telangana received adequate water.

Now, we must harness the water that is currently flowing into the sea. True politics is about working for the people, and the NDA in Andhra Pradesh is committed to integrity and dedication," he said.

Tight security for...

Continued from Page 1

Paper 2 is scheduled from 3 PM to 5:30 PM, with candidates expected to arrive by 2:30 PM, and gates closing at 2:45 PM. She reiterated the strict protocols in place, including a ban on mobile phones and electronic devices inside examination halls. She also directed that all Xerox and internet centres near exam venues remain closed during the exams and that Section 144 restrictions be enforced within a 100-metre radius of the centres. Principal Secretary Mukesh Kumar Meena added that strict legal action would be taken against those spreading fake news.

The meeting was attended by key officials from various departments, while District Collectors, SPs, and other personnel participated virtually. The focus remains on ensuring the integrity and security of the examination as candidates prepare for this crucial test.

Inter exams...

Continued from Page 1

He cautioned against rumours of paper leaks and directed officials to enforce Section 144 within a 100-metre radius of exam centres. He also ordered the closure of Xerox and internet centres during exam hours.

Education Secretary K. Shashidhar assured that extensive preparations are underway to facilitate the smooth conduct of both the Intermediate and AP Open School Intermediate exams. The Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) will run additional bus services to ensure students reach their centres on time. A toll-free control room number, 1800 425 1531,

has been set up for complaints, with similar control rooms to be established at the district level.

Intermediate Education Director Kritika Shukla outlined additional measures, including a ban on mobile phones and electronic devices inside examination centres. She confirmed that all centres would have adequate lighting, uninterrupted power supply, and CCTV surveillance monitored in real-time by the Chief Superintendent. Security protocols will be strictly followed to safeguard question papers, and answer sheets will be sealed and sent by speed post after the examinations.

I&PR Director Himanshu Shukla, along with District Collectors, SPs, CPs, DEOs, and other officials, participated in the meeting virtually.

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Minister warns of stern action against negligent ESI docs, staff



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour and Medical Insurance Services, Vasamsetti Subhash, has warned of strict action against negligent doctors and staff at ESI hospitals. He emphasised that ESI hospitals are meant to provide quality medical services free of cost to workers, and any negligence in this regard will not be tolerated. The minister stated that during his visit to the Rajahmundry ESI hospital, he personally observed lapses in service, leading to the suspension of five doctors and four outsourcing staff members.

Addressing a press conference at the Secretariat on Thursday, Subhash pointed out that due to negligence, the outpatient count at

the Rajahmundry hospital had dropped below 50. However, following the suspensions, the number surged to 170. In contrast, he praised the Tirupati ESI hospital for its efficient medical services, attributing its success to the dedication of the doctors, which has resulted in an outpatient count of around 350.

The minister criticised the previous government's neglect of ESI hospitals, particularly the transfer of the Kakinada ESI hospital to the central government. He assured that the coalition government prioritises the safety, welfare, and health of workers. Plans are underway to add 18 more dispensaries to the existing 78 across the state, with proposals to set up ESI dispensaries

in every district headquarters. Subhash stated that the government aims to increase the number of insured persons to 30 lakh within a year. In just nine months, the government has proposed to the Director General of ESI to establish a 500-bed secondary care hospital in Amaravati, along with an ESI medical college and a 150-bed super-specialty hospital. Additionally, steps are being taken to upgrade the Tirupati ESI hospital from 50 to 100 beds, with approvals for 97 regular posts and 94 outsourcing posts. He also announced plans to set up a mobile ICU unit in Visakhapatnam Pharma City using CSR funds to enhance worker safety. ESIC officials, including Anjaneyulu, were present.



Lokesh stresses alumni participation in school development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, has directed officials to involve alumni associations and community members as school mentors to support the development of government schools. He issued these instructions during a review meeting on school education and comprehensive education at his residence in Undavalli on Thursday.

Lokesh emphasised the need for a unified dashboard to streamline information on the development of government schools and colleges. He instructed officials to provide detailed data on infrastructure requirements to potential donors, enabling direct contributions.

Ahead of the upcoming academic year, the minister called for the swift distribution of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan Vidyarthi Mitra Kits. He reviewed the implementation of centrally sponsored schemes, fund utilisation, and the budget for the next financial year.

Lokesh stressed the importance of ensuring basic facilities in all government schools,

including computer labs, STEM labs, and libraries. He proposed replacing the 45 different applications currently used by teachers with a single app to enhance efficiency, allowing educators to focus more on teaching, attendance, and student learning.

To improve school management, he suggested introducing an estate manager system in larger schools and deploying cluster-level Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs). He also called for integrating all aspects of school education into a single dashboard for better coordination.

The minister highlighted the need for a structured login system for grassroots-level data collection, ensuring systematic information gathering while maximising teachers' time for student engagement. Following the withdrawal of GO 117, he proposed setting up model primary schools with a dedicated teacher for each class, gradually reducing single-teacher schools.

School Education Secretary Kona Sasidhar, Director V Vijay Ramraj, Intermediate Education Director Kritika Shukla, and SPD of Samagra Shiksha B Srinivasa Rao were present.

GVMC work inspectors accused of moonlighting as contractors

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A growing number of work inspectors in the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) engineering department are facing serious allegations of exploiting their positions by operating as contractors, raising concerns about transparency and accountability within the civic body.

Sources claim that these inspectors are circumventing regulations by submitting tenders under the names of unregistered individuals, family members, or associates. This practice appears to be on the rise, allegedly due to a lack of oversight from higher authorities.

The GVMC engineering department comprises 325 work inspectors, including 110 permanent employees and 215 outsourced staff. Responsible for overseeing development and maintenance projects in their respective wards, these inspectors are meant to ensure quality and support the ward Assistant Engineers (AEs). However, instead of fulfilling their designated roles, some are reportedly manipulating the system for personal gain.

The alleged modus operandi involves inspectors submitting tenders for projects under proxy names, then personally supervising the work by hiring laborers.

Staff should ensure student safety: BC Welfare Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State BC Welfare Minister S Savitha has expressed anger over the incident in which hot milk spilled over a student at Kondapi MJP Boys School. She urged immediate action to prevent such incidents in the future and instructed the Gurukula Secretary, Madhavilatha, to ensure that staff remain vigilant and take responsibility for student safety. The incident occurred on Thursday morning when fifth-grade student Madhumohan went to the kitchen to drink milk. As he was returning, a container of hot milk slipped from the table and fell on him, causing serious injuries to his chest and abdomen. He was immediately taken to KIMS Hospital in Ongole.

Minister Savitha contacted Madhavilatha

to enquire about the student's health. She was informed that Madhumohan's condition was stable, however he will remain under medical supervision for three days due to the severity of his injuries. The Minister directed that better medical care be provided to the student and requested regular updates on his health status. Savitha expressed anger over the lack of staff presence in areas where hot milk was being served, and warned that strict action will be taken against hostel staff if such incidents repeat. Additionally, Savitha spoke with local MLA and State Social Welfare Minister Dola Bala Veeranjanyulu, who visited the student at KIMS Hospital immediately after learning of the accident. Veeranjanyulu also spoke with medical personnel to ensure that the student received the best possible care.



Efforts on to increase blackgram production in AP



Agriculture Director stresses need to design new varieties that are profitable for farmers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

S Dilli Rao, Director, Agriculture, has stated that the Andhra Pradesh State Agricultural University must work towards increasing the area and production of blackgram crops across the State. He stressed the need to design new varieties of blackgram crops that are profitable for farmers and provide them at the field-level.

On Thursday, under the aegis of the State Agriculture

Department, a State-level workshop was held in Vijayawada focusing on the National Food and Nutrition Security Mission 2024-25. The workshop brought together agricultural officials from seven districts with blackgram farmers, producer organisations, mill owners, MARK-FED representatives, AP Seeds and scientists from NG Ranga Agricultural University.

In his address, Dilli Rao stated that blackgram cultivation plays a vital role in sustainable

agriculture and highlighted that they are high in protein and low in cholesterol, advocating for an increase in both the area and production of blackgram in the State. He urged the agricultural university to develop high-yielding varieties and introduce them to farmers.

Agricultural Joint Director Balu Nayak gave a PowerPoint presentation on average area, production and yield statistics at the international, national and State levels. Scientists from NG

Ranga Agricultural University shared best management practices for improving yields, including weed control, irrigation, pest management and post-harvest techniques.

The workshop also included insights from Research Director Dr P Satyanarayana, Principal Scientist Dr Mohan Reddy and officials from the Commission's Office of Agriculture, including Krupadas and Vijaya Bharathi, along with representatives from AP Seeds and MARKFED.

RINL-VSP retired employees protest proposed medical insurance changes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Around 300 retired employees of Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited, the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant held a protest at the plant premises on Thursday, demanding the withdrawal of a proposed amendment to their medical insurance scheme. The retirees, represented by the RINL-VSP Retired Steel Executives Association (RSEA), argue the changes would impose a significant financial burden on them.

Protesters carried placards and voiced their concerns about the proposed changes, which would replace the existing Group Medical Insurance Policy (GMIP). RSEA President Maturi Sreenivasa Rao submitted a letter to the RINL-VSP Chairman and Managing Director



(CMD) outlining the retirees' grievances. Rao explained that the current policy requires an annual payment of Rs 1,300 per person or Rs 2,600 per couple. The proposed amendment, however, would drastically increase these premiums to Rs 10,000 per member and Rs 20,000 per couple annually. "There are around 6,000 retired employees of this plant who have been active since 2014. They usually receive a maximum pension of Rs 3,000 per month, while some get as little as Rs 1,500 per month. With such

meager pensions, how can they afford Rs 20,000 annually for a medical insurance premium? Is this justifiable?" Rao questioned the gathering.

He emphasized that many retirees dedicated 35 to 40 years of service to the company and are now facing financial hardship due to issues like the proposed disinvestment and downsizing of the plant. He stressed the importance of affordable healthcare for retirees, particularly in the current economic climate.

Rao urged the RINL-VSP management to reconsider the proposed amendments and engage in discussions with RSEA representatives to find alternative solutions that protect the interests of retired employees without placing undue financial strain on them.

Anakapalli women to drive change with Rapido partnership

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

In a move aimed at boosting self-employment and addressing transportation woes, the Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA) has partnered with Rapido to empower women in DWCRAs (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) communities. The initiative will provide eligible women with driving licenses the opportunity to become Rapido drivers, offering a sustainable livelihood and improving public transport access in the town.

Anakapalli is currently facing a shortage of reliable public transportation, with city buses lacking connectivity between various areas. This gap will be filled by the new partnership, allowing residents to conveniently book rides through the Rapido app. Women drivers will earn income based on distance travelled, addressing both the town's transportation needs and creating employment opportunities.



Under the scheme, eligible women and their families from DWCRAs communities can apply to receive either an electric scooter worth Rs 1.30

lakh or an electric auto worth Rs 3.70 lakh. MEPMA will assist with the down payment, and Rapido will provide a monthly rental subsidy of Rs 500 for one year. This support is also extended to interested women and their spouses from savings societies.

"Applications are now open for women and eligible family members from DWCRAs communities," announced Santosh Kumar, Assistant Project Director of Urban Community Development (UCD). Both men and women with valid driving licenses can apply, with male applicants required to be direct family members of DWCRAs beneficiaries. Priority will be given to candidates from Backward Classes (BC), Scheduled Castes (SC), and Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities.

This initiative represents a significant stride towards women's empowerment and improved urban mobility in Anakapalle, offering a dual solution to employment and transportation challenges in the region.

Pregnant tribal woman carried in Doli to PHC

PNS ■ PADERU

Nineteen-year-old Korra Santhi, a pregnant woman from the remote hilltop village of Jajula Banda in G. Madugula mandal, was carried on a doli (makeshift stretcher) for several kilometers before reaching an ambulance that transported her to the Daunur Primary Medical Centre in Koyyuru Mandal. This incident underscores the persistent challenges faced by tribal communities in the region, 78 years after India's independence.

Jajula Banda, home to approximately 160 residents, lacks basic road infrastructure and adequate access to medical facilities. Despite an allocation of Rs 1 crore in 2023 under the Employment Guarantee Scheme for infrastructure development, only Rs 28 lakh was reportedly spent on four houses

before the project stalled. Repeated appeals to the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) for road construction have gone unanswered.

This is not an isolated incident. A similar situation occurred last year in Pitri Gadda village, where a pregnant woman from the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) Konda community was also carried in a doli. Following media attention, the Chief Minister's Office intervened, resulting in the approval of Rs 4.6 crore for road construction, which is currently underway.

Residents of Jajula Banda, including elders Korra Kamesh and Konadamala Venkat Rao, have expressed serious concerns about alleged negligence and misuse of Employment Guarantee Scheme funds by ITDA officials.

They allege that projects are frequently awarded to contractors with political connections, lacking proper oversight. They are demanding an independent review of road projects and an end to the undignified practice of transporting patients on dolis.

Recent heavy rains have further exacerbated the situation, damaging already precarious roads and isolating communities. Residents are imploring the Alluri Sitarama Raju District Collector to intervene, ensuring the timely completion of road projects and addressing the alleged negligence of engineering officials. Without swift action, more tribal families will face medical emergencies without access to appropriate care, highlighting the critical need for infrastructure development in these neglected areas.



SRM University launches BCom specialisations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant move to enhance its academic portfolio, SRM University-AP's Paari School of Business has introduced two new specialisations under its Bachelor of Commerce (BCom) programme: BCom (CA Integrated) and BCom (Fintech and Banking). This initiative aims to equip students with the essential skills for navigating the evolving business landscape.

The launch event was attended by Vice-Chancellor Prof Manoj K Arora, Registrar Dr R Premkumar, and Dean of the Paari School of Business, Prof Bharadhwaj Sivakumar. Rubhir Singh, CEO of Tattvic, was the chief guest, while Bala Iyer, Managing Director

of Barclays Bank, and CA Ravi Kishore, president of the ICAI Vijayawada Branch, were the guest of honour and keynote speaker, respectively.

In his address, Prof Manoj K Arora commended the Paari School for its commitment to advancing management education. Dean Prof. Bharadhwaj emphasised the curriculum's alignment with current market demands, stating, "The two new specialisations are designed to integrate closely with the fields of Fintech and Chartered Accountancy, delivered by industry experts and seasoned professionals." Rubhir Singh highlighted the importance of critical thinking and technological awareness in achieving success in the business realm.

US team explores natural farming innovations

PNS ■ ELURU

A high-level delegation from Pegasus Capital Advisors, comprising global experts in climate, sustainability, and agriculture, visited A. Gokavaram in Unguturu Mandal and Vadlapatla and Kodurupadu villages in Bhimadole Mandal, Eluru district, on Thursday. The visit aimed at advancing environmental and economic sustainability projects.

The delegation focused on strengthening the Andhra Pradesh Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) initiative, a flagship programme of the State government. The team included Gina McCarthy, former White House National Climate Advisor and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator; Craig Cogut, Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Pegasus Capital; and Keith Agoada, Founder and CEO of Producers' Trust. Sri T. Vijay Kumar, Executive Vice-Chairman of Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS), led the field visit.

At Surabhi Goshala in A. Gokavaram, the delegation observed a live demonstration of APCNF's nine principles, facilitated by RySS officials. They witnessed method demonstrations of seed pelletisation, 'Ghana Jeevamrutham', and 'Agni Astram', followed by the ATM (Any Time Money) Model and a water experiment by I. T.



Mallesha, assessing paddy productivity across different farming systems. In Kodurupadu village, the delegation interacted with APCNF cadres and examined a comparative study on coconut farming. They analysed the A-grade natural farming model of mentor-intern Kalyan Kumar versus chemical farming by farmer Rambabu.

The team also visited an eight-acre coconut farm of Rama Chandra Rao, which has inter-crops of arecanut, banana, and

vegetables, and compared it with Rambabu's chemical-based farm. They later visited the Krishna Raghava Non-Pesticide Management (NPM) shop, which provides multi-crop seed kits for pre-monsoon dry sowing and other essential inputs. The team explored a paddy A-grade model field and interacted with members of the Srinivasa Self-Help Group (SHG) of Vadlapatla Village Organisation (VO) and local farmers.

A key highlight of the visit was

the demonstration of drone-assisted spraying of botanical extracts in natural farming fields. The visit concluded with a vote of thanks and closing remarks, marking a significant step towards strengthening sustainable farming practices.

Senior RySS officials Aruna, B. Prabhakar, and Vishy, along with APCNF District Project Manager Tata Rao, Additional DPMs Venkatesh and Praveen Kumar, and the Mandal Agricultural Officer, accompanied the delegation.

'Veligonda Project to take 2 more years for completion'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Alleging that former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy dedicated the P.S. Veligonda project to the nation without completing the works, Minister for Water Resources Development N. Ramanaidu has clarified that it will take another two years to complete the project. Addressing a press conference at the Secretariat on Thursday, Ramanaidu announced that Rs 4,000 crore would be required to complete the construction works of the Veligonda project.



"The main canal, which is meant to provide drinking water to 25 lakh people and irrigation water to 4.5 lakh acres, remains incomplete. However, the previous YSRCP government dedicated the project to the people while disregarding the concerns of farmers who opposed the move," he alleged.

He criticised the YSRCP regime for inaugurating the project without completing key components, including the head regulatory sys-

tem, retaining wall, first and second tunnel works, feeder canal, and the construction of colonies for displaced families at Srisailam.

Ramanaidu further explained that 1.20 lakh cubic metres of rock needs to be removed from Tunnel-1, while 2.00 lakh cubic metres of soil must be excavated from Tunnel-2, a process that will take around nine months. Additionally, he stated that drilling and blasting

work in Tunnel-2 is still pending and will require another eight months. The tunnel lining for 6.8 km is yet to be completed, and a massive tunnel boring machine remains inside the tunnel, which will take considerable time to remove. Meanwhile, 21.8 km of feeder canal work is also pending. "It is strange to dedicate the Veligonda project to the nation when so much work remains unfinished. Moreover, YSRCP leaders are now trying to shift blame onto the current government to divert attention from their failure to complete the project," he said.

The Minister recalled that in 1996, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu performed the bhoomi pooja for the Veligonda project. In 2014, the TDP-led government allocated Rs 1,373 crore for the project, of which Rs 1,319 crore was spent. However, during the YSRCP tenure, only Rs 647 crore was allocated for the project, he alleged.

2 killed as tipper lorry hits bike

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Two persons were killed after a tipper lorry hit their bike at Oman Stay Home in Puthalappattu on the Naidupet-Puthalappattu highway on Thursday. According to the police, Sheik Phakir Basha (21) was riding towards RC Puram village when the accident

occurred. A woman, who was travelling as a pillion rider, also died on the spot. Her identity is yet to be established. Both the deceased belonged to Pulikunta village in Kadapa district. The tipper lorry was reportedly on the wrong route when it hit the bike. Circle Inspector Chinnu Govind visited the spot, registered a case, and shifted the bodies to Ruia Hospital.

Naidu's lack of commitment to farmers exposed: Kakani

PNS ■ NELLORE

YSRCP Nellore district president and former minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy lashed out at Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for misleading 'mirchi' farmers by writing a letter to the Central government.

Addressing a press conference in Nellore, he said Naidu's letter to NAFED was merely a ploy to deceive farmers, as there had never been a practice of procuring 'mirchi' through NAFED in the past. He asserted that if the Chief Minister was genuinely concerned about farmers, he would have provided support through the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS).

Govardhan Reddy alleged that the government ignored a report from the horticulture department, which recommended Rs 3,480 crore as working capital for 'mirchi' procure-

ment. He also criticised the lack of security during Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's recent visit to Guntur's 'mirchi' yard, claiming that the government deliberately failed to ensure his safety as they could not tolerate him questioning their failures.

The former minister challenged Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Minister K. Atchannaaidu to visit the 'mirchi' yard and face the farmers directly. He accused the government of diverting attention from real issues instead of addressing farmers' concerns.

He further alleged that the ruling alliance had failed to ensure a fair price for any crop. Key schemes such as RBKs, e-crop registration, input subsidies, and free crop insurance had been weakened under the current government. He stated that farmers had suffered immensely under Naidu's leadership due to the lack of effective policies.

Officials directed to ensure smooth conduct of Group-2 exams

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K. Vetri Selvi has instructed officials to make elaborate arrangements for the smooth conduct of the Group-2 examinations scheduled for February 23.

Chairing a review meeting with officials, including Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy, the Collector said the examination would be conducted in two sessions. The first paper will be held from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm, and the second paper from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm. Candidates will be allowed entry into the examination centres from 8:30 am to 9:30 am for the morning session, with gates closing at 9:45 am. Similarly, for the afternoon session, entry will be permitted from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm. Latecomers will not be allowed.



The Collector informed that six examination centres have been designated for the exam, with 4,415 candidates set to appear. Officials have been asked to work in coordination to ensure a hassle-free process. A help desk will be set up at the Eluru Collectorate from February 21 for the convenience of candidates. Joint

Collector P. Dhatri Reddy will serve as the coordinating officer for the examination. The OMR sheets and question papers received from the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) will be kept in a strong room under strict security. On the day of the exam, these materials will be transported under escort

by liaison officers and handed over to the respective centre superintendents.

The Collector directed officials to ensure uninterrupted power supply, adequate lighting, drinking water, functional toilets, and medical camps at all examination centres. Preventive measures should be taken to avoid power disruptions. The APPSC has instructed Chief Superintendents and candidates to strictly adhere to examination guidelines. The use of mobile phones and electronic devices is prohibited. Section 163 of the BCR PC will be enforced at the centres, security measures will be in place, and nearby Xerox centres will remain closed on the exam day.

Additional SP N. Suryachandra Rao and DRO V. Visweswar Rao were among those present at the meeting.

Women employees urged to take part in competitions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the run-up to International Women's Day on March 8, Nirmala Kumari, chairperson of the Women's Wing of the Andhra Pradesh NGO Association, has called upon women employees to participate in various competitions organised by the association. The events will include games, elocution, and essay writing. As part of the celebrations, the Women's Wing will conduct competitions on March 4 and 5 at Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium and AP NGO Home. Nirmala Kumari announced these plans during her visit to various government department offices in the city on Thursday to promote the initiative. She stated that these annual events aim to empower women employees by enhancing their physical and mental well-being.

Statehood Day of Arunachal, Mizoram celebrated at Raj Bhavan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Formation Day of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram was celebrated at Durbar Hall in Raj Bhavan here on Thursday, under the 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' programme. Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer was the chief guest.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Abdul Nazeer said that Arunachal Pradesh, the 'land of the rising sun' is famous for its misty mountains, monasteries, lakes and



culture and it is acknowledged to be one of the most splendid, and multilingual tribal areas of the world. He said that Mizoram became a full-fledged State of Indian Union in 1986 and attained statehood on February 20, 1987, and the Mizo people take

pride in their cultural diversity and take utmost care in maintaining their traditional values and customs to be followed, and kept alive by the upcoming generations.

The programme commenced with video messages from Lt.

General Kaiwalya Trivikrama Parnaik, (Retd.), Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, and General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh (Retd.), Governor of Mizoram, followed by rendering of melodious songs, and performance of folk dances of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram by students of these two States studying in educational institutions in and around Vijayawada.

Dr M Hari Jawaharlal, Secretary to Governor, and officers and staff members of Raj Bhavan also attended the programme.

290 bags of PDS rice seized, 3 held

PNS ■ ELURU

The police seized 290 bags of rice meant for public distribution and arrested three persons at Badampudi Housing colony near National Highway 16 on Thursday. DSP Srevaan Kumar told the media that the police on a tip off conducted a raid and seized the lorry which contained 290 bags of PDS rice, worth Rs 4 lakh.

On a tip-off, a police team led by CI Satyanarayana and SI CH K Durga Prasad conducted a raid and seized the lorry and the rice. Cases under Cr. No 39/2025U/s 303 (2) (b), 3 (5), 317 (2) BNS were registered against the accused.

The arrested accused J Sudhakar, D Dhanaraju and K Manikanta had stolen the rice-laden lorry and they were unloading the rice from the lorry to sell when the police conducted a raid and arrested them.



27 bus passengers have a miraculous escape

PNS ■ NELLORE

As many as 27 passengers travelling in a private bus had a miraculous escape when the vehicle rammied into a petrol filling station at Kovoor on the national highway on Thursday.

Sub-Inspector Ranganath told the media that the private bus was heading to Bengaluru from Visakhapatnam when the driver

lost control. The bus ploughed through the petrol station and crashed into a fuel pump, which was completely damaged.

Fortunately, no flames erupted despite the impact, and no one was present near the pump at the time of the accident. According to the police, the driver was drowsy at the wheel, leading to the mishap. All 27 passengers escaped unhurt, the SI said.



8 kg ganja seized, 1 peddler arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI



The police seized 8 kg of ganja while being taken by a peddler at Satyavedu town on Thursday. Police said that the peddler Bala Murugan purchased 8 KGs of ganja in the Visakhapatnam district. He was taking the ganja to Chennai via Satyavedu. On a tip-off, the police conducted checking of vehicles.

On suspicion, the police checked the bag and found 8 kg of ganja. The police seized the ganja and mobile phone from him. The police registered a case and produced him before the court which sent him to judicial remand.

9-member matka gang nabbed

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The police arrested a nine-member gang involved in organising matka gambling in Rayadurg and seized Rs 1.82 lakh from them. Rayadurg CI Satyanarayana informed the media that, acting on a tip-off, the police raided a house where matka gambling was being conducted on a large scale. During the operation, the police arrested the gamblers and seized Rs 1,82,345 in cash along with gadgets used for organising the gambling. The arrested individuals were produced before the court. The CI warned of stringent action against any form of online betting or gambling.



CM has no role in SC categorisation: Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

She criticised both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Revanth Reddy, alleging that neither had taken any concrete steps on the matter. She reminded that during BRS rule, KCR had passed a resolution in the Assembly and sent it to the Centre for approval. She warned the government against creating divisions among Dalits and insisted that categorisation should be implemented in a fair manner ensuring justice for all sections.

Speaking at a meeting held at her residence under the leadership of Dalit Bandhu Sadhana Samithi President Mahesh Kogila, Kavitha demanded that the government make the Shamim Akhtar Commission report public and start the categorisation process immediately.

She accused Revanth Reddy of

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

Kavitha slammed the Congress government for failing to act even six months after the Supreme Court verdict, alleging that there had been no progress on the issue. She criticised the Congress for bringing Priyanka Gandhi to Telangana to make promises to Dalits, including increasing Dalit Bandhu aid from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 12 lakh, only to deceive them later.

She alleged that Revanth Reddy lacked administrative capability and accused him of pushing the state into a financial crisis. She demanded the immediate release of Dalit Bandhu funds sanctioned by KCR, stating that if the government was sincere, it should release the pending amount to 18,000 Dalit families before presenting the budget.

Kavitha accused the Congress of allocating Rs 33,000 crore in the SC budget but spending only Rs 9,800 crore.

ACROSS THE STATES



Haryana CM pushes for policy reforms

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



Jammu to host 'national startup festival' on Feb 22

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



Harbouring terrorists endangers safety: Delhi HC

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

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

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



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

Amit Shah asks Northeast insurgents to surrender

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Says the region wants peace, development

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Haryana launches witness protection scheme'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

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

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

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

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Previous central govts neglected Northeast: Shobha Karandlaje

PNS ■ AIZAWL

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Naxals killed in MP collectively carried Rs 62L bounty

PNS ■ BALAGHAT

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

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

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

Mayawati calls Congress casteist' and 'two-faced'

Rejects Rahul's alliance offer



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

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

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

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



SC stays Lokpal order on hearing complaints against HC judges

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

"Our allegation is made with great responsibility and is



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

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

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

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

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

WHO identifies encephalitis as increasing global threat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"Encephalitis is an increasing global threat. Without urgent

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

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

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

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



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

disability associated with encephalitis. "WHO's recognition of encephalitis as a growing global threat marks a pivotal moment. We must act decisively to improve prevention, diagnosis, and care for those affected. Encephalitis disproportionately affects individuals in low-to-middle-income countries, where healthcare resources are often limited," Dr Easton said.

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

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Delhi gets a woman CM

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

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



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

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PICTALK



Tourists ride a hot air balloon in Kullu

A perilous challenge for India's soft diplomacy



SANTHOSH MATHEW

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SINS CANNOT BE WASHED

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

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

SC CRITICISES OFFENSIVE SPEECH

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

R K Jain | Barwani

Protest over Nepalese student suicide



Nepalese student Prakriti Lamsal's death by suicide at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology in Bhubaneswar is tragic and a wake-up call for the central government. KIIT seemingly disregarded Prakriti's complaints of harassment against an Indian student. Later, without investigation, it labelled her suicide a result of heartbreak. When hun-

dreds of other Nepalese students protested, they were bundled out to Cuttack railway station and told to stay away. In one viral video, two KIIT staff are reportedly heard shouting at them that the institute's expenditure on tuition and board exceeds Nepal's budget. Such arrogance! By this logic, Indians in the US should shop at Walmart with a sense of gratitude because the retail giant's revenue exceeds the central government's budget. Many had scoffed when a global survey claimed India was among the most racist countries. Our record on people from our own Northeast isn't great either. Surveys showed how they were stigmatised as 'Chinese' during the pandemic. India wants 500,000 foreign students a year by 2047 but is stuck at the 50,000 mark. Accepting what's wrong might be a good place to start.

R K Jain | Barwani

REKHA GUPTA BECOMES DELHI CM

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

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Budget powers India's green transition with clean tech push

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

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



transition strategy and achieving long-term economic and environmental goals.

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

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

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

(The writer is Director, Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd; views are personal)



N VAMSI REDDY



FIRST COLUMN

OVERCOMING GRIEF

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



RAVI VALLURI

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

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

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



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

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

We need to pursue passions, hobbies, indulge in sports, participate in extracurricular activities, avoid negative company, take up initiatives, practice meditation, keep the mind occupied, footslog on the treadmill, go for long walks, go for treks, and read autobiographies of entrepreneurs and achievers. Others adopt the spiritual path by practising pranayama, learning yoga, undertaking the Art of Living course or observing the breath through the Vipassana technique.

These holistic techniques metamorphose the mind to be in the present moment and overcome fear. To conquer fear, we need to log out of our comfort zone so that the virus of fear does not enter our operating system. And if nothing works out, one should surrender to the Divine and feel grateful.

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

A year of cinematic innovation, AI controversies and global synergy



CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leaders who understand global challenges and can approach them with a holistic mindset are better equipped to create meaningful change. **Collaboration and Networks** Studying abroad offers

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

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



DALJEET SANDHU

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

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

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

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

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



contexts enhances interpersonal skills. Students learn to collaborate, resolve conflicts, and inspire those around them, qualities that define great leaders. **Building Resilience and Independence** Moving to a new country requires immense courage. From finding accommodation to dealing with administrative paperwork, students often have to manage tasks

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

Embracing Cultural Diversity

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

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

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

By embracing cultural diversity, building resilience, and

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

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

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

IN BRIEF



Govt extends tenure of CEA till March 2027

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

'An opportunity to boost bilateral trade, investments'

Comm min on India, US trade pact

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The talks between the two countries on trade-related



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

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

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

The idea to reach out to all

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Finmin to meet heads of PSBs to review performance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

According to sources, the meeting would also discuss and review the progress of various financial inclusion schemes including PM SVANidhi Schemes.

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

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

The performance of PSBs has shown significant improve-

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

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

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

finance ministry had said in a statement.

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



Tata Power partners with Amazon Web Services

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



FSIB selects candidates for 2 LIC MD positions

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

Gujarat govt presents Rs 3.70 lakh crore budget

NO NEW TAX PROPOSED

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

The 12-month deadline for the DRHP expires in

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

Asked if the choppy market conditions are leading to a delay, the official said even in this situation there are some offerings hitting the market. Responding to a question on the reasons behind the delay in share sale, the official pointed towards challenges on the manpower front, saying the amount of work to be done is very large. NSDL had received a go-ahead from Sebi for the IPO in September last year.

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

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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



breather, according to exchange data.

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

"The news fuelled market



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

Real estate consultant Anarock and ETRetail released their joint report at

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

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



ment.

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

population are driving this growth, Anarock said.

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

structure, IESA said in a statement.

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

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

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



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

It is projected that 83 per

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

contributing to 7 per cent of sales, it stated.

Vinayak Walimbe, Managing Director at Customized Energy Solutions Pvt Ltd India, and President (Interim), IESA, emphasised, "India has witnessed a substantial rise in the electricity consumption, reaching 1,543 TWh in 2023-24 (7 per cent increase over last year)."

He noted that according to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), electricity consumption at public charging infrastructure was 465 GWh during April-October 2024, which has more than

doubled compared to 204 GWh in 2022-2023.

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

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

India to be high-income country by 2047: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

A sectoral technology roadmap could play a pivotal role in enabling this transformation, it noted.

Advances in AI-driven chip design, touchless manufactur-

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

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

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

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



what's brewing?

AMIDST SPIRITUAL ENERGY OF MAHA KUMBH, ABHISHEK BANERJEE FILMS HIS NEXT PROJECT

Renowned for his dynamic and unconventional roles, actor Abhishek Banerjee is currently in Prayagraj, filming for an upcoming project shrouded in secrecy. While details about the film remain undisclosed, the choice of Maha Kumbh Mela as the backdrop has sparked intrigue, adding an extra layer of cultural and spiritual depth to the production.

Abhishek was spotted on set alongside Shahana Goswami and the film's crew, fully immersed in the electrifying atmosphere of one of the world's largest religious gatherings. The Maha Kumbh, which attracts millions of devotees and seekers from across the globe, has infused the shoot with an energy that seems to complement the essence of the film.

Though the makers have yet to reveal the storyline or additional cast details, industry insiders suggest that this could be one of Abhishek's most ambitious projects to date. Known for his powerful performances in films like *Paatal Lok*, *Stree* and *Apurva*, the actor has built a reputation for picking intense and unconventional narratives. His involvement in this Prayagraj-based project only heightens curiosity about its theme and significance.



Sharvari steps into Sooraj Barjatya's world of romance

Filmmaker Sooraj Barjatya, known for crafting some of Bollywood's most cherished love stories, has found his new leading lady. Sharvari has been finalized as the female lead in his upcoming film, starring alongside Ayushmann Khurrana. This yet-untitled project is set to be a timeless romance, staying true to the signature Barjatya style of family-centric storytelling.

Earlier in December 2024, reports confirmed that Ayushmann Khurrana had been cast as the new Prem in Barjatya's next directorial venture. The filmmaker had been searching for a fresh face to bring innocence and vulnerability to the role of the leading lady. After an extensive selection process, Sharvari emerged as the perfect choice.



The industry has been closely following Sharvari's rise since last year, and bagging a film with a filmmaker of Barjatya's stature is seen as a major milestone in her career. The source added, "This is a significant stamp of approval for Sharvari as one of the most promising new-generation actresses in Bollywood."

'SOME CONNECTIONS ARE BEYOND TIME': Akshay Kumar on his spiritual journey with Mahakal Chalo



Mahakal Chalo is a power-packed devotional anthem that combines soulful spirituality with upbeat music, making it resonate across generations—especially with Gen-Z listeners. The track exudes the roaring aura of Lord Shiva, amplified by Akshay's impassioned vocals.

Collaborating with Palash Sen and Vikram Montrose, the actor immersed himself in the creative process. "Every moment spent creating this with Palash Sen and Vikram Montrose has been filled with faith and devotion. Singing for Mahadev is a reminder that he chooses the moments, and we simply surrender," Akshay expressed.

With lyrics penned by Shekhar Astitwa and a soul-stirring composition by Vikram Montrose, *Mahakal Chalo* is choreographed by the legendary Ganesh Acharya. Released on February 18, just ahead of Maha Shivratri on February 26, the song is already making waves as a perfect anthem for the festival.

Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar has once again embraced his spiritual side with the release of his latest devotional track, *Mahakal Chalo*. Following the success of *Shambhu*, this song is another heartfelt tribute to Lord Shiva, capturing the essence of devotion and unwavering faith.

'Having millions of followers doesn't mean a Rs 100 crore film'

Veteran actor Jaaved Jaferi has voiced his skepticism regarding the widely held belief that an actor's social media following directly translates to box office success. During a conversation, he challenged the notion by citing examples of actors like Urvashi Rautela and Salman Khan, emphasising that online popularity does not necessarily equate to ticket sales.



Ms. Briganza's iconic lesson gets a 2025 update in Nadaaniyan!

Nadaaniyan, the debut film of actors Saif Ali Khan and Amrita Singh's son Ibrahim Ali Khan, will premiere on Netflix on March 7, the streamer announced on Thursday. Also starring Khushi Kapoor, the romantic drama film is backed by Dharmatic Entertainment, the digital arm of filmmaker Karan Johar's banner Dharma Productions.

The much-anticipated film *Nadaaniyan*, has been generating excitement ever since its announcement. Adding to the buzz, the makers dropped a special date announcement video that brings back an unforgettable Bollywood moment.

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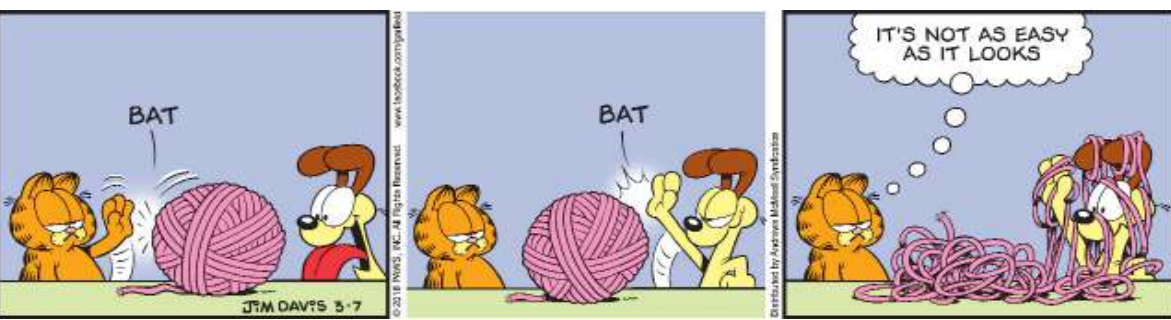
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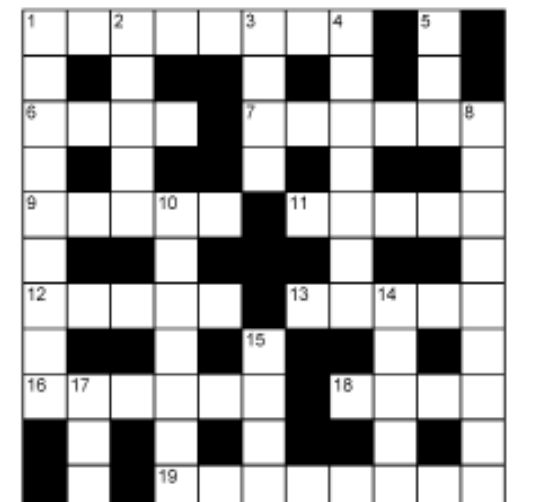
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Cold floating chunks in the sea
- Peas grow in these
- A type of bird
- Of greater age
- A long narrow piece
- Seven plus five minus nine
- Keep a car in here
- A hired car
- A prickly animal
- A passenger vehicle
- Occurring
- A hair near your eye
- Get to
- A heavy metal
- Enquire

DOWN

- Getting better
- Came to a finish
- Animals like large mice
- Make longer by pulling



OOPS! AB KYA?

A MADCAP WHOLESOME RIDE THAT TRIPS OVER ITS OWN TWISTS

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

PLOT

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

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

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

ANALYSIS

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

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

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

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

HIGHLIGHTS

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

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



PERFORMANCE

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

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

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

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

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

VERDICT

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



Director: Prem Mistry & Debatma Mandal

Produced by: Dice Media

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

Streaming on: JioHotstar

Rating: 3/5

Revolutionising baby & skincare

PMS|HYDERABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Celebrating love's most precious moments

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

The growing demand for platinum

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

A shift towards partnership

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

Platinum for every milestone

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

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

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

Affordability meets exclusivity

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

Why platinum for every chapter of love?

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

The perfect gift for every milestone

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

Mark your milestones with platinum.

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

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



Real Madrid pushes Manchester City out of Champions League

PTI ■ LONDON

Kylian Mbappé scored a hat-trick, Erling Haaland stayed on the bench injured and Real Madrid dumped Manchester City out of the Champions League. Mbappé's stellar trio of goals in the fourth, 33rd and 61st minutes in a 3-1 win gave Madrid a 6-3 victory on aggregate over the 2023 champion in their two-leg knockout playoff. "This has been the complete performance — attack, defense, with the ball and without the ball, we showed such high levels of quality," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "Almost the perfect night."

One superstar striker was watched by another from the sidelines. Haaland was not fit to start for an ultimately overmatched Man City because of a knee injury sustained late in a Premier League game Saturday. Paris Saint-Germain beat French rival Brest 7-0, to run up a 10-0 aggregate score, and will play either Liverpool or Barcelona in the round of 16. PSV Eindhoven ousted Juventus in the only one of the eight playoffs this week that went to extra time.

Defender Ryan Flamingo scored in the 98th minute for a 3-1 win on the night and 4-3 on aggregate. United States international Timothy Weah scored for Juventus. "Honestly, we slipped up," Weah said. "I felt like they were more aggressive on the night and we lacked a bit of aggression and hunger."

In the early game Wednesday, Borussia Dortmund started with a 3-0 lead at home to Sporting Lisbon and was barely stretched in a 0-0 draw. Sporting's Champions League campaign imploded after coach Ruben Amorim left for Manchester United in November. **Mbappé mastery** Mbappé's first goal of the two-leg playoff in Manchester was a lucky miscue, a looping effort off his shin to level at 1-1 in what ended a 3-2 win. His three goals in Madrid were classy and decisive. A first-time lob over City goalkeeper Ederson — who perhaps advanced too far, too soon — was followed by a low shot after leaving defender Joško Gvardiol on the turf. The third was a powerful left-footer from the edge of the penalty area when he had lured six Man



City players toward encircling him. "I have always said I didn't come here simply to complete a dream," said Mbappé, a boyhood Madrid fan who never won a Champions League at Monaco and PSG. "I want to play well, I want to mark an era." Coach Pep Guardiola's injury-hit side — with Ballon d'Or winner Rodri out since September and Kevin De Bruyne now rarely starting — has looked like a shadow of the heavyweight rival that met Madrid in each of the past three seasons, when each time the winner went on to lift the trophy. **Paris Saint-Germain hits 10** PSG has not lost anywhere since a Champions League defeat at

Bayern Munich three months ago, and the playoff against Brest proved a total mismatch. Brest had impressed in its first European season but went out with a whimper at Parc des Princes, after a 3-0 loss in the home leg. Wingers Bradley Barcola and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored in the first half. Midfielder Vitinha, Desiré Doué, left back Nuno Mendes, striker Ramos and Senny Mayulu netted after the break. PSG also beat Brest 5-2 in a French league game this month. **Sporting slumps post-Amorim** With Ruben Amorim as coach, Sporting was unbeaten in four Champions League games and stood second in the 36-team standings. The team he left behind went winless in six Champions League games under two different coaches. Dortmund also fired a coach midseason and newly hired Niko Kovac now has two wins on the European stage to offset two straight losses in the German league. Still, Sporting's prospects to be in the Champions League next season look better than Dortmund's.

Portugal's champion advances direct to the next league phase and Sporting currently is top, two points clear of Benfica. Dortmund is 11th in the Bundesliga and could need to win this Champions League title to earn a place in the next edition. **Round of 16 draw** Real Madrid, PSG, Dortmund and PSV join Bayern Munich, Benfica, Club Brugge and Feyenoord, which all advanced Tuesday, as playoff round winners who will be unseeded teams in Friday's draw. They will host the first-leg games on March 4-5. The top eight in the 36-team standings three weeks ago — Liverpool, Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Lille, Aston Villa — skipped the playoffs round and are seeded in the round of 16 draw. They host second legs on March 11-12. The round of 16 is in a new, tennis-like seeded bracket for the knockout stage in the expanded competition format. Madrid, as the 11th-place team in the standings and No. 11 seed already knew its next opponent would be Atletico or Leverkusen, who respectively placed fifth and sixth.



WPL: RCB eye hat-trick against Mumbai Indians

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Having set the pace with back-to-back emphatic victories, defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru would be eyeing a hat-trick of success against a star-studded Mumbai Indians in a WPL match at home on Friday. Smriti Mandhana's RCB hasn't put a foot wrong so far, be it chasing an imposing 200-plus target against Gujarat Giants or overhauling a tricky 140-odd runs against Delhi Capitals. Their overall strength has come to the fore in the two games they have played this season and are now leading the five-team chart with four points and a healthy net run rate. No other team so far has won all its matches. RCB would be guaranteed of an incredible reception when they play their first game this season at their iconic Chinnaswamy Stadium, and Mandhana, who had broken DC's back with a blazing 47-ball 81 in the previous game, would be eyeing an encore. The India vice-captain has been in red-hot form, bagging the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year award for 2024 and also being named to the ICC Women's T20I Team of the Year, and that streak of genius was evident in the way she disdainfully amassed her runs against DC. If it was a one-player show against DC, the resilience of the middle-order came to the fore against GG, whose lineup is a virtual who's who in

international women's cricket. The likes of Ellyse Perry, Raghvi Bist, Richa Ghosh and young Kanika Ahuja rose to the occasion to make the task look easy, winning by six wickets with plenty of balls to spare. Though RCB looked a bit thin on the bowling front, leaking far too many runs with teenage pacer VJ Joshihitha conceding 43 in her four overs and Australian stalwart Georgia Wareham giving away 50 in her three overs, it was a much-improved bowling performance against DC. But Mumbai Indians, the inaugural edition champions, would be tough customers with India captain Harmanpreet a hard taskmaster. They did lose to DC despite Nat Sciver-Brunton's peerless batting (80 off 59 balls) and her 73-run run partnership with Harmanpreet, but the class and calibre of the side is something RCB would be wary of. To add to the batting firepower is one of the most destructive top-order batters Hayley Matthews, along with Amelia Kerr. But MI's batting will still revolve around Sciver-Brunton, who has scored consecutive half-centuries, and Harmanpreet. If the team wants to go the distance, the two will, however, need the help of others. On the bowling front, the side has performed admirably with Sciver-Brunton and Shabnim Ismail creating a lot of problems for the rivals with the pace they generate.

Having smile solves half the problem: MS Dhoni

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Even if it's tough to do... Just forgive and move on." Mahendra Singh Dhoni became a life coach for once to share his secrets for a stress-free existence, describing himself as a carefree person who would not give up on a good night's sleep by paying attention to what others think of him. The 43-year-old former India wicketkeeper-batter, considered one of the game's greatest for captaining India to two World Cup titles in a storied international career, set a high benchmark for a leader with his calm and focused approach on the field. He is now gearing up for what most believe is his final IPL season as a player with Chennai Super Kings and at an event here, he turned philosophical when asked to give advice to fans and followers. "I think, keep life simple. Be honest to yourself, have gratitude towards people for whatever they have been doing for you. Don't always think, 'this is my birthright' and ask for more," the enigmatic big-



hitter said here on Wednesday evening during the launch of his app 'DHONI' powered by Single. Id where injured India keeper-batter Sanju Samson was also present. "I know the whole app (DHONI) says 'thoda aur' (a little more), but the whole thing is to have that gratitude, to say thank you, to respect the elders (and) to give love to the younger ones," he added. He then went on to stress on the need to have a forgiving attitude, which he feels is in short-supply right now. "I always felt having a smile on your face solves half the problem. Even if you're not in a comfortable position, even if it's tough to do, have the power

to-day life. "We all feel the pressure. We always say the grass is greener on the other side. We always feel that his or her life is better, but what is important is how you manage that stress, how prepared you are," he said. "I keep it very simple. Growing up, we were told 'you cannot be careless'. But I feel in today's environment, it is important to be a bit careless because you can't worry about each and everything that is happening around you. You cannot do things that are not in your control," he added. Dhoni said those who are obsessed with perception are not particularly constructive. He felt not every opinion merits a response or even consideration. "If you get carried away with what others are saying, what others are feeling, then that important thing of what needs to be done, often you are not really giving utmost attention to that," he said. "I am a bit careless in life. I don't give everything my 100 per cent attention because I feel this is important, (or) that's not important," he explained.

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

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan cricket team suffered a setback ahead of its Champions Trophy (CT) clash against India after opener Fakhar Zaman was ruled out owing to a recurring knee injury, prompting the inclusion of Imam-ul-Haq in the squad that left for Dubai on Thursday. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) made the change after getting the approval from the International Cricket Council's Event Technical Committee. The match against India is to be held on Sunday at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. "Twenty-nine-year-old Imam, who has played 72 ODIs, was named as a replacement after Fakhar was ruled out due to an oblique injury," said an ICC media release. Zaman had suffered an injury during the opening Champions Trophy match against New Zealand here on

February 19. "Unfortunately I am now out of ICC Champions Trophy 2025 but surely Allah is the best planner. Grateful for the opportunity. I will be backing our boys in green from home," Zaman posted on X. The 34-year-old, who has played 86 ODIs and averages a little over 46, had suffered a muscle strain while fielding in the New Zealand innings and remained away from the field for most part of the innings. The injury happened while he was chasing a ball to the boundary in the first over of the contest. Zaman's ouster is a blow to the side as he has been in reasonably good form. He wasn't able to open the batting in the second innings on Wednesday, forcing Saud Shakeel to take stance as a stop-gap opener. Zaman batted at No.4, scoring 24 off 41, but seemed visibly struggling during his knock during the match which Pakistan lost by 60 runs.

Pankaj Advani clinches 14th Asian Championship title



PTI ■ DOHA

Indian cue sports maestro Pankaj Advani has once again showcased his brilliance on the international stage, capturing an unprecedented 14th gold medal at the Asian Snooker Championship here. The triumph comes just days after he won the National Snooker Championship in Indore, proving yet again why he remains the country's

most celebrated cueist. Advani's victory in Doha adds to an already staggering list of accolades. He now holds five Asian snooker titles (across 15-red, 6-reds, and team formats) alongside nine Asian billiards titles, and his two Asian Games gold medals (2006, 2010) further highlight his dominance. With this latest win, he inches closer to an unprecedented achievement -- winning the National, Asian, and World Snooker Championships in a single calendar year. Having already accomplished this feat in billiards, completing it in snooker would make him the only player in history to do so in both disciplines. The final against Iran's Amir Sarkhosh was a battle of champions. Sarkhosh, a former Asian and world IBSF 6-red snooker champion, struck first, seizing an early lead. But Advani, known for his composure under pressure, responded in style.

Shami becomes fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star pacer Mohammed Shami became the fastest Indian bowler to reach 200 ODI wickets during the ICC Champions Trophy (CT) match against Bangladesh on Thursday. Returning to international cricket after a long injury layoff, Shami grabbed three wickets to reach the milestone in his 104th match and better former India pacer Ajit Agarkar's record of reaching the mark in 133 matches. Jaker Ali, who made 68, was his 200th wicket. Overall, the 34-year-old fast bowler is the second quickest



to 200 ODI wickets, behind Australian left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc, who needed 102 games. One of India's finest seamers, Shami averages less than 25

in the ODI format and has already taken five fifters and 10 four-wicket hauls. Shami is the eighth Indian to complete 200 wickets in ODI cricket.

South Africa seek to shed chokers tag against Afghanistan

PTI ■ KARACHI

Debutants Afghanistan will aim to continue their impressive rise in white-ball cricket, while South Africa will once again attempt to shed the 'chokers' tag when the two sides kick off their Champions Trophy (CT) campaign here on Friday. The inaugural Champions Trophy in 1998, which was called the Knockout Trophy at that time, remains the only ICC men's senior title that South Africa have secured despite having produced some of the world's greatest cricketers, especially in limited-overs format. The Proteas boast of a well-balanced squad with a formidable batting lineup. While skipper Temba Bavuma, Tony de Zorzi, Rassie van der Dussen, and Aiden Markram will anchor the top order, the big-hitting trio of Heinrich Klaasen, David Miller and Tristan

Stubbs are well-equipped to provide the final flourish. South Africa's biggest challenge heading into the tournament is their depleted bowling attack as key pacers Anrich Nortje, Nandre Burger, and Gerald Coetzee ruled out due to injuries. Known for his pace, aggression, and the knack of striking at crucial moments, Kagiso Rabada will be the Proteas' key weapon in both the powerplay and death overs. Marco Jansen, too, will be expected to step up significantly. His ability to build pressure and deliver impactful spells will be crucial. Meanwhile, Lungi Ngidi will be looking to rediscover his rhythm and confidence after a below-par showing in the recent tri-series. In the spin department, Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi will have vital roles. Since the 2023 ODI World Cup, South Africa have won



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

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

prove to be the proverbial banana peel. The war-torn nation has emerged as strong contenders to make the semifinals. Their impressive performances in recent ICC

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

underdogs but a force to be reckoned with. The Adghans have won four of their five bilateral series since the ODI World Cup, including one against South Africa in the UAE. Their biggest strength expectedly remains their spin attack comprising the redoubtable Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and left-armers Noor Ahmad and Nangeyalla Kharote. They will play all three group matches in Pakistan where spin will be a decisive factor. Pacer Azmatullah Omarzai has been a key figure in Afghanistan's ODI success, with his ability to swing the new ball providing them the powerplay edge. Fazalhaq Farooqi will be another crucial weapon with ability to provide early breakthroughs and effective variations at the death. In the batting department, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran will once

again be expected to provide a solid start. Their weakness, however, lies in their middle order, which has often struggled to maintain momentum. This inconsistency has been a concern, and addressing it will be crucial for their success in the tournament. **Squads:** **South Africa:** Temba Bavuma (c), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen, Corbin Bosch. **Afghanistan:** Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Raa Raja trailer grabs attention without showing actors' faces

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

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

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

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

Chiranjeevi celebrates wedding anniversary mid-air

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

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

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



tollywood



NTR-Prashanth Neel film begins with massive action sequence

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

Neel (*KGF: Salaar*) for a much-anticipated project.

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

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

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

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



Massive set erected for Nagabandham song sequence

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

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

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



VISHWAK SEN ACKNOWLEDGES LAILA'S FAILURE, PROMISES BETTER FILMS

Actor Vishwak Sen has faced heavy criticism for his latest film *Laila*, released on February 14, which was outrightly rejected by audiences. Playing a dual role—one as a model named Sonu and the other as a female character, Laila—the film was filled with double-meaning dialogues and vulgarity, drawing severe backlash.

Following the film's failure, Vishwak Sen issued a public apology, acknowledging the criticism. He also expressed regret for certain scenes in the movie, which led to financial losses for the producer. *Laila* was a passion project for him, but it backfired. In his statement, he admitted the film didn't meet expectations and vowed to be more mindful of his choices. "I promise that whether my films cater to class or mass audiences, they will never cross the line into vulgarity," he wrote. Vishwak Sen reassured fans that he is taking the feedback seriously and will work towards making better films. "Since the beginning of my career, I have chosen stories that resonate with me and I will continue to do so. However, from now on, every single scene will matter," he added.

Ending on a positive note, he thanked audiences for their constructive criticism and promised to return with a strong and promising project soon.