

the pioneer

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FAM stresses the need to maintain G20 integrity



INDIA-US TRADE PACT WILL BE MOTHER OF ALL DEALS: GOYAL



Return of the Dragon finds its strength in the second HALF




QUOTE OF THE DAY

The pioneer

While Andhra Pradesh is openly diverting Krishna waters, the Telangana Government is merely watching silently. Revanth Reddy, Chandrababu Naidu, the Congress and the BJP are working against Telangana's interests. Uttam Kumar Reddy was merely reading from a script given to him, without understanding the gravity of the situation. Modi and Chandrababu intimidated Uttam. So Congress leaders were afraid to question the BJP's role in the water crisis

- Jagadish Reddy, BRS MLA P4



DON'T MISS...

Minister's promise to tomato farmers

Transport Minister Ramprasad Reddy has assured tomato farmers that the government is taking all necessary steps to ensure remunerative prices for their produce. He urged farmers not to worry about the current price slump. In a statement on Friday, the minister acknowledged that falling tomato prices have caused significant losses to farmers. To address this, the government has initiated procurement at Rs 8 per kg to support them. Tomato cultivation spans 4,303 acres in the Kadapa district...

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Vintage cars turn heads, bring smiles

It was nothing short of a history lesson on wheels as classic, pristine cars took over the streets of Delhi on Friday during the 11th edition of the "21 Gun Salute Concours d'Elegance," showcasing a regal collection of rare cars that left even the finest, modern, high performance cars behind by a margin. The annual heritage show, flagged off by Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat at India Gate, featured over 100 vintage cars and 50 motorcycles - from iconic models such as the exquisite...

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Barytes, mica, quartz are 'major' minerals

The government on Friday said that it has changed the classification of barytes, feldspar, mica and quartz into the category of major minerals. This move would pave the way for an increased exploration and scientific mining of such resources that are primary source of many critical minerals. Earlier, these were classified as minor minerals. "The Ministry of Mines wide gazette notification dated 20th February, 2025 has shifted minerals Barytes, Feldspar, Mica and Quartz from the list of minor minerals..."

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Gill gives India confidence

Shubman Gill has an invincibility cloak hung around his shoulder in ODIs these days. Conditions and oppositions do not feature in his set-list. After taking a dominant avatar against England recently at home, Gill faced a different challenge against Bangladesh in India's Champions Trophy (CT) opener in Dubai on Thursday night. The pitch was sluggish and the bowlers consistently probed for weakness. But Gill beat both to notch up his eighth ODI hundred that led India to a six-wicket victory....

-SPORTS

TG urges KRMB to halt release of water to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telangana government has complained to the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB), urging it to stop releasing water from the Srisailem and Nagarjuna Sagar reservoirs to Andhra Pradesh, alleging that the latter has already drawn more than its allocated share.

Telangana's Principal Secretary for Irrigation, Rahul Bojja, along with Engineer-in-Chief Anil Kumar and Nagarjuna Sagar Chief Engineer Ajay Kumar, met KRMB Chairman Atul Jain at Jal Soudha to press their demand. Bojja submitted a formal letter on behalf of the Telangana government, insisting that Andhra Pradesh refrain from further water withdrawals.

The Telangana officials have urged KRMB to ensure that no water is released to Andhra Pradesh from the reservoirs and have requested an allocation of 107 TMC for Telangana until May.

KRMB had scheduled a special meeting on the issue on Friday, but Andhra Pradesh sought a postponement until Monday. In response, Telangana officials have demanded that water transfers to Andhra Pradesh be halted until the matter is discussed at the rescheduled meeting.

Despite repeated appeals,



- Telangana alleges that Andhra Pradesh has already drawn more than its allocated share
- Telangana's irrigation officials met KRMB Chairman Atul Jain and submitted a formal complaint
- They demanded that AP refrain from further water withdrawals from the reservoirs
- Telangana has requested an allocation of 107 TMC of water until May
- KRMB's special meeting postponed at AP's request, leading to TG's demand for an immediate halt in water transfers
- TG officials dissatisfied with KRMB's response
- They claim that directives from the Union Minister have not been properly implemented.
- The dispute highlights ongoing tensions between TG and AP over water-sharing

Telangana officials remain dissatisfied with KRMB's handling of the issue, claiming the board has not taken adequate action. They also allege that directives from the Union Minister have not been properly implemented.

The dispute underscores ongoing tensions between the two states over water-sharing and river management, with Telangana asserting its rights over the Krishna River's resources.

KRMB postpones special meeting to February 24

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) has postponed its emergency special meeting to February 24. The meeting was meant to discuss water allocations and other issues concerning Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the remaining period of the current year.

The meeting was scheduled to be attended by key officials, including Andhra Pradesh's Special Chief Secretary for Water Resources and Telangana's Chief Secretary for Irrigation, along with KRMB Chairman Atul Jain. However, Andhra Pradesh's Special Chief Secretary informed in advance that he would be unable to attend due to prior commitments and requested the KRMB to reschedule it to Monday.

Following this request, the KRMB has decided to hold the meeting on Monday at 3:30 PM at Jal Soudha in Hyderabad. The board has communicated the revised schedule to both states. The meeting will focus on water distribution and other key issues related to the Krishna River's management. The postponement underscores the ongoing coordination and negotiations required to manage water resources effectively in the region.



Puri: AP railway network in major expansion mode

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri highlighted the major expansion of the railway network in Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing a press conference on the Union Budget 2025 here on Friday, he noted that the expansion since 2014 has surpassed the scale of Sri Lanka's entire railway system, underscoring the Centre's commitment to the state's development.

The minister announced the approval of greenfield airports at Dagadathi, Bhogapuram, and Orvakal (Kurnool), along with upgrades to Vijayawada and Tirupati airports to international standards.

He also mentioned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a new terminal building at Kadapa Airport.

Puri stated that funds under the PRASAD scheme have been sanc-

tioned for the development of major temples, including those at Srisailem and Simhachalam, reaffirming the Centre's focus on preserving cultural heritage.

Referring to Prime Minister Modi's foundation stone laying for the Srikakulam Natural Gas Project in 2022, Puri outlined various welfare measures, such as free ration distribution to underprivileged citizens.

He assured that investments in irrigation projects, capital development, and port construction reflect the Centre's long-term vision for Andhra Pradesh.

The minister highlighted the establishment of premier educational institutions in the state, including the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Visakhapatnam and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Tirupati, which are expected to boost education and research.

Continued on Page 2



Rammohan seeks Rs 11,600 support price for chillies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu has urged the Centre to set a support price of over Rs 11,600 for chilli farmers in Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to the media after a key meeting organised by the Ministry of Agriculture in Delhi, he stressed the need for immediate assistance to farmers facing financial distress.

Naidu highlighted Andhra Pradesh's potential in chilli exports and called for establishing an international market. He said Union Agriculture Minister Shivaraj Singh Chouhan had taken note of the issue and assured consultations with exporters before making a decision.

The minister added that the government would assess the gap between market prices and production costs to address farmers' concerns. He emphasised the struggles of chilli farmers, particularly in Rayalaseema, Guntur, and Palnadu, and assured them of necessary support.

The farming community now awaits the Centre's response, hoping for measures to ensure fair prices and economic stability.

Rs 1,000 cr NALA Tax evasion scam uncovered

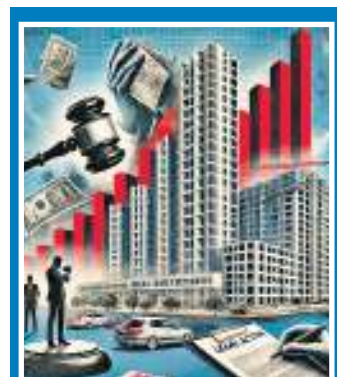
Charges of preferential treatment, underreporting, and political influence surface amid tax recovery drive

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A massive tax evasion scandal, involving over Rs 1,000 crore in outstanding Non-Agricultural Land Assessment (NALA) dues, has shaken the real estate sector in the erstwhile districts of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, and Srikakulam. The scandal highlights a glaring disparity in tax enforcement, with allegations of preferential treatment for large-scale developers, many with ties to the previous YSRCP government, while individual homeowners face stringent scrutiny.

NALA tax is levied upon the conversion of agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes, a mandatory step for real estate development. Developers are accused of widespread underreporting of land areas in numerous projects, some spanning five to twenty acres, and circumventing established tax regulations. Disturbingly, building permits and occupancy certificates, which are legally contingent upon clearance of NALA tax liabilities, were reportedly issued despite these outstanding dues.

"It's a clear case of unequal enforcement," a source within the revenue department, speaking on condition of anonymity, told this publication. "While common citizens are held accountable for every



"It's a clear case of unequal enforcement," a source within the revenue department, speaking on condition of anonymity, told this publication.

rupee, large developers seem to have operated with impunity."

Sources allege that during the previous YSRCP government's tenure, influential political figures exerted pressure on officials to overlook these dues, facilitating the unchecked expansion of large-scale projects.

Continued on Page 2

AP, TN ink handloom sales pact

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant step towards promoting handloom textiles, Andhra Pradesh-based APCO and Tamil Nadu's Co-Optex have entered into a partnership agreement. The two organisations have set a target of achieving textile sales worth Rs 9.20 crore this year. The agreement was formalised during a Buyer-Seller Meet held in Vijayawada in the presence of Andhra Pradesh Handloom and Weavers Minister S. Savitha and Tamil Nadu Handlooms Minister R. Gandhi.

As part of this initiative, APCO



has signed a deal with Co-Optex to expand the market reach of Andhra Pradesh's handloom products in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, Tamil Nadu's

handloom products will be made available in Andhra Pradesh through APCO and other business entities.

Continued on Page 2

12 kids hurt as school bus overturns

PNS ■ NELLORE

Twelve students were injured when a school bus overturned at Bodilingalpadu village in Tada mandal on Friday. According to the police, the bus, belonging to a private institution, was carrying 30 students when it veered off the road and overturned in nearby agricultural fields. The injured students were rushed to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Sullurpet in a 108 ambulance.

As news of the accident spread, anxious parents rushed to the hospital to check on their children.

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Survey underway on Sajjala's land

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Officials have begun a survey of estate lands owned by the family of YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy following allegations of encroachment on government and forest land. The survey is being conducted in CK Dinne Mandal of YSR District, near the Chittoor-Kurnool National Highway, with teams from the revenue and forest departments, along with land surveyors, involved. Preliminary reports indicate that of the 146 acres owned by the Sajjala family, nearly 55 acres may include forest land.

The family's holdings include 71.49 acres under Sajjala Sandip Reddy, 16.85 acres under Sajjala Janardhan Reddy, and 21.46 acres under Y Satyasandip



Reddy. While the Forest Department denies jurisdiction over the disputed land, the Revenue Department claims otherwise. With political implications at play, the government has ordered a thorough survey to settle the matter, and the findings are expected to have significant consequences.

Cases filed over 'morphing' of Pawan's photos

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following complaints from Jana Sena Party leaders and activists, police have registered multiple cases across Andhra Pradesh over the alleged morphing of Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's photographs. Law enforcement authorities have initiated action against individuals accused of sharing objectionable morphed images on social media.

Cases have been lodged in Tirupati, Chittoor, Nellore, Bapatla, and Vijayawada, primarily over derogatory comments about Pawan Kalyan. In Narasaraopet, a specific case has been filed regarding morphed and offensive content. Jana Sena supporters have demanded stringent action, prompting the police to

intensify their investigation. The Vijayawada Cyber Crime Inspector stated that four cases have been registered concerning body shaming and inappropriate comments made online.

The controversy arose after Pawan Kalyan's recent visit to the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, accompanied by his wife Anna, son Akira, and director Trivikram Srinivas. Their visit, which included ritualistic holy dips, garnered significant attention on social media.

However, some users allegedly morphed these images, leading to body shaming and derogatory remarks, drawing widespread condemnation.

PNS ■ NEW YORK

New FBI director Kash Patel has vowed to "rebuild" trust in the bureau as he becomes the first Indian-American to lead the country's premier law enforcement agency after being confirmed by the US Senate.

The Republican-led Senate narrowly voted to confirm 44-year-old Patel on Thursday. The Senate voted 51 to 49 to confirm Patel. Two Republicans, Susan Collins and Lisa Murkowski, voted against his confirmation.

The nomination faced intense scrutiny from Democrats on Capitol Hill who have warned that Patel is poised to use the position to seek retribution against Trump's perceived political enemies.

In his confirmation hearings, Patel also denied keeping a list of "deep state" enemies, while playing



"Kash is a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and 'America First' fighter who has spent his career exposing corruption, defending justice, and protecting the American people."

down controversial past remarks he had made such as referring to law enforcement officials who investigated Trump as "criminal gangsters".

After his confirmation, Patel posted on X, "I am honoured to be confirmed as the ninth Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Thank you to President Trump and

Attorney General Bondi for your unwavering confidence and support."

"The FBI has a storied legacy—from the "G-Men" to safeguarding our nation in the wake of 9/11. The American people deserve an FBI that is transparent, accountable, and committed to justice. The politica-

tion of our justice system has eroded public trust—but that ends today. My mission as Director is clear: let good cops be cops—and rebuild trust in the FBI," he said.

He also warned that the agency would hunt down those who seek to harm Americans.

He was the 18th Cabinet official approved by lawmakers since Trump was inaugurated a month ago.

Patel takes the helm of an FBI in flux after the justice department forced out some of its top officials and demanded the names of agents who investigated the 2021 riot by Trump supporters at the US Capitol.

Patel replaces Christopher Wray whom Trump picked in 2017. Wray resigned before inauguration day last month after the incoming Republican president indicated he would fire him.

Republicans have defended Trump's pick to lead the FBI, arguing that Patel will bring needed transparency to the FBI and dismissing controversial past statements as hyperbole.

After announcing Patel as his FBI pick, Trump posted on social media calling him "an advocate for truth, accountability, and the constitution".

"Kash is a brilliant lawyer, investigator, and 'America First' fighter who has spent his career exposing corruption, defending justice, and protecting the American people," Trump said.

Meanwhile, Democrats say Patel is a far-right conspiracy theorist with little experience in law enforcement, and someone who would put fealty to Trump above his oath to lead a department that is meant to operate independently.

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Maha Kumbh & police - a revelation of transformation

I will be honest. I am an optimist. I believed this transformation was possible. Yet, I was sceptical. If not about the change itself, at least about the timeline. I always thought it would happen in some distant future. Not right now. And that the change itself would be very gradual. The challenges are numerous. The impediments are wide-ranging, spanning social, political, economic, and historical circumstances. What I experienced, read in the media, and heard from others only reinforced my scepticism. I would have lost hope long ago if not for my optimistic nature and tenacious faith in our nation.

A 24-hour visit to the Maha Kumbh was all it took to shatter and dissolve my scepticism. I am talking about the police, who stood out in the crush of

humanity in Prayag. In a flash, gone was the image of the police as a force out to lord over civilians. A force created in its present form by our past colonial masters predominantly to control Indians, which ethos it so stubbornly hangs on to. A force to be feared and avoided if possible. Amidst the sea of humanity flowing towards the confluence of holy rivers to take a dip were the Uttar Pradesh police working tirelessly and patiently against humongous odds to make every pilgrim's visit as comfortable, hassle-free and memorable as possible. And that transformation of the UP Police - from a force that controls to one that serves with compassion - was a sight to behold.

While the attitudinal change itself was a shocker, its significance grows manifold when we realise the unprece-

The drastic improvement in Law and Order in a few years alone sets the Uttar Pradesh Police apart and deserves our kudos. The UP Police has outdone itself with Kumbh. It has shown that the same force can excel at driving fear among criminals while serving citizens with a humane, responsive, and considerate attitude.

dent odds under which the police served. This year's Kumbh, being a 144-year event, has already seen tens of crores of Hindus take a dip over the past five weeks at the Triveni Sangam in Prayag. Most days, the pilgrim count crossed ten million (one crore), many times more than Prayagraj's population, which is estimated to be less than 15 lakhs (1.5 million). Put another way, devotees arriving daily at Prayag outnumber the

entire population of countries like Sweden, Portugal, and Greece. A floating population like this, unprecedented anywhere in the world, obviously puts unimaginable stress on every civic amenity, from transportation, shelter, water, sanitation, and health to security, resulting in unparalleled stress to the personnel handling those services.

What compounds the police's challenge is that, apart from security and orderly



KISHORE POREDDY

crowd management, every area of Kumbh operations adds to their burden. Be it traffic jams that extend hundreds of kilometers or overwhelmed sanitation or water services, every one of them has the potential to turn into a security issue, which the

police need to address. Compounding the stress is the unbroken, relentless flow of devotees 24x7 for an extended period. Even cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Paris or New York are unused to this kind of continuous activity through day and night.

There is no denying that departments like health, sanitation, transport, and others perform under similar constraints as the police. But their personnel are accustomed to delivering services. It is not just the performance, which by itself is praiseworthy, but the concurrent transformation in the police's ethos that is significant. No visitor to Kumbh had complaints about Police behaviour. None of the usual highhandedness one has grown to expect from the police, especially under stress, is to be seen, much less

experienced. No complaints of corruption or harassment were reported, even in the media.

The Uttar Pradesh Police is already well known throughout India for transforming the Law and Order situation in the state under the Bharatiya Janata Party's rule headed by Chief Minister Yogi. Gone are the days of Jungle Raj, when Bahubalis ruled. Gone are the days when communal and casteist considerations dominated regular police work. Gone are the days when women felt insecure leaving their homes after sunset. Gone are the days when criminals with multiple arrest warrants against them roamed freely without an iota of fear. Now, the criminals fear the Uttar Pradesh Police and not vice versa.

The drastic improvement in Law and Order in a few years

alone sets the Uttar Pradesh Police apart and deserves our kudos. The UP Police has outdone itself with Kumbh. It has shown that the same force can drive fear among criminals while serving citizens with a humane, responsive and considerate attitude. While many commissions and committees have presented voluminous reports on Police reforms, Kumbh and the UP Police have proved that under purpose-driven leaders like Yogi, backed by strong political will and the necessary technical, financial and logistic support, the police in India can make giant strides in Law and Order while treating citizens not as subjects but like the true masters they are in a democracy. Hats off to Chief Minister Yogi and the UP Police.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

YSRCP faces internal turmoil over Sajjala's influence

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) is grappling with increasing internal discord as dissatisfaction grows over the dominance of party general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy. Despite mounting criticism from party leaders and grassroots workers, the party president and former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy continues to entrust him with key responsibilities, further deepening the discontent.

Sajjala has recently been given charge of all affiliated party wings while retaining his role as state coordinator. However, his growing authority has sparked backlash, with party activists openly expressing their displeasure. Discontent has spilled onto social media, where workers have questioned his leadership and even demanded his removal.

At a recent YSRCP central

office meeting, Sajjala urged youth, student, and intellectual wings to counter misinformation against Jagan and expose the ruling coalition's failures. Instead of rallying support, his remarks intensified opposition. One party worker pleaded with Jagan to reconnect with the cadre, stating, "At least now, please listen to us." Others pointed out that while Jagan personally engaged with the public during his 3,500-km padayatra, Sajjala had not.

Criticism of Sajjala has intensified, with some party workers likening him to controversial political figures. One particularly scathing comment read, "This 'Saddula Ramakrishna Reddy' should not be in the party. He will ruin it." Others questioned why Jagan insisted on imposing him on the cadre despite the visible unrest.

Political analysts view this dissent as a significant challenge for Jagan ahead of the



upcoming elections. Senior political commentators remarked, "The dissent against Sajjala is not a minor rebellion but reflects deep-seated frustration among party workers. If Jagan ignores these concerns, it could weaken YSRCP's grassroots support."

They further warned that overlooking grassroots feedback has historically led to electoral setbacks.

Senior media analysts have noted that YSRCP's strength has traditionally come from direct public engagement. "Sajjala's increasing control is seen as a barrier to this, and the

party risks losing touch with its base," one observer pointed out. Jagan now faces a crucial leadership test. His unwavering trust in Sajjala contrasts sharply with growing dissatisfaction among party workers. Political observers believe his handling of the discord will determine YSRCP's future trajectory.

As the opposition gains momentum, addressing internal grievances and fostering unity will be critical. Political analysts summarized, "Jagan's challenge is not just countering political adversaries but also ensuring internal unity to safeguard the party's electoral prospects." Whether Jagan recalibrates his leadership approach or continues backing Sajjala amid mounting opposition remains to be seen. However, one thing is clear—the internal pressure within YSRCP is intensifying, and failure to address it could have significant political consequences.

Senate confirms...

Continued from Page 1

"(Patel's) poor judgment and lack of experience make him wholly unqualified to keep Americans safe as our FBI Director. I voted no," Senator Martin Heinrich said on X. "We will vote no," Sen. Adam Schiff (D-California) said at the morning news conference. "Our Republican colleagues, intimidated by this president and threats of primary challenges from the MAGA (Make America Great Again) world, may vote to confirm him. But... they will have to live with that vote."

In his new position, Patel will lead a mammoth organisation with more than 30,000 employees, hundreds of offices nationwide and a sprawling mandate to investigate cases involving national security, terrorism and violent crimes. Since long before his nomination, Patel has called for profound changes within the FBI. His 2023 book described the bureau as "a tool of surveillance and suppression of American citizens" and said its powers should be dramatically curtailed.



MP Sivanath meets LS Speaker

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) paid a courtesy visit to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla at his residence in New Delhi on

Friday. During the meeting, MP Kesineni Sivanath presented a bouquet to Speaker Om Birla as a gesture of respect and gifted him the idol of Lord Venkateswara.

Cases filed...

Continued from Page 1

Jana Sena activists have strongly criticised the misuse of these images and lodged multiple police complaints. Authorities have intensified their probe, focusing on tracking social media accounts involved in circulating the morphed images.

In view of rising concerns over objectionable social media content, Andhra Pradesh police have stepped up efforts to curb misinformation and defamatory posts. Officials have assured that stringent action will be taken against those found guilty in the ongoing investigation.

Puri: AP railway network...

Continued from Page 1

Puri described the 2024-25 budget as the first full-fledged budget under the anticipated Modi 3.0 administration, projecting India's rise to the world's fourth-largest economy. He pointed out that under Modi's leadership, the number of airports in India has doubled from 75 to 150, while crude oil consumption has increased to 5.5 million barrels per day.

He recalled that on February 25, 2024, Prime Minister Modi dedicated AIIMS Mangalagiri, marking a significant milestone in healthcare infrastructure. Under the Smart Cities Mission, urban development projects have been launched in Amaravati, Kakinada, Tirupati, and Visakhapatnam. He also noted that three industrial corridors are being developed in the state under the Industrial Corridor Development Programme.

On the Polavaram project, Puri assured that necessary funds have been allocated for its completion. He announced a record allocation of Rs 9,417 crore for Andhra Pradesh's railway budget for 2024-25, an 11-fold increase from the average allocation of Rs 886 crore between 2009 and 2014. A new 57-km railway line connecting Errupalem, Amaravati, and Namburu is expected to be

completed within five years.

He also noted that Andhra Pradesh has achieved 100% electrification of railway tracks, with six Vande Bharat trains currently operational.

Additionally, 73 railway stations are undergoing redevelopment under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Infrastructure development remains a key focus, with over 4,741 km of national highways constructed and five greenfield corridors being developed under the Bharatmala Project. The Bengaluru-Kadapa-Vijayawada Expressway, worth Rs 14,000 crore, is currently under construction.

Reaffirming the Centre's commitment to industrial growth in Andhra Pradesh, Puri discussed initiatives such as the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor (VICIC) and industrial hubs in Machilipatnam, Donakonda, and Yerpedu-Srikalahasti, which are expected to drive economic growth.

On economic and political matters, Puri asserted that India's policies have strengthened its global standing.

He dismissed concerns over rising petrol prices, stating that fuel prices in India remain competitive compared to many countries. He also expressed confidence in the BJP's prospects in the upcoming elections in Bihar.

Mini-truck donated to Tirumala temple

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

An automobile company donated a mini-truck to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on Friday.

The mini-truck worth Rs 6.6 lakh was handed over to a TTD official in front of a temple.

"A mini-truck was donated to Tirumala (TTD) on Friday... The vehicle keys were handed over to the temple's AEO Mohan Raju, in front of the Srivari temple," an official release said.

Temple officials and representatives from the automobile company were present during the donation.

YSRCP slams trolling of minor, demands action

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leader Pothina Mahesh strongly condemned the alleged inhumane trolling of a young girl from Vijayawada by TDP and Janasena supporters on social media after she expressed admiration for former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Mahesh criticised the targeting of innocent children and questioned whether such actions would be acceptable if directed at the families of those involved.

He also lashed out at the Deputy Speaker for allegedly participating in the trolling and accused certain media outlets of compromising journalistic ethics. Expressing concern



over the psychological distress caused to the child, he alleged that Janasena's social media wing was spreading misinformation by altering the child's identity online.

Citing past incidents, including the hidden camera controversy in university girls' washrooms, Mahesh ques-

tioned the silence of TDP and Janasena supporters on such issues.

He demanded that a POCSCO case be filed against those responsible and urged the DGP and Home Minister to take immediate action to protect children from such harassment.

MERGER OF AGRICULTURE, HORTICULTURE UNIVERSITIES AP Chambers urges CM to reconsider proposal

NS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation (AP Chambers) has urged Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to reconsider the proposed merger of the Agriculture and Horticulture Universities in the State.

AP Chambers President Potluri Bhaskara Rao and Secretary B Raja Sekhar, in a representation, highlighted the crucial role played by both universities in strengthening the State's agrarian economy.

Emphasising their distinct contributions, they stated that

the Chamber strongly advocates retaining their independent status to ensure specialised research, focused education, and sector-specific innovation. Agriculture and Horticulture are distinct disciplines, each with unique challenges and opportunities. While agriculture focuses on crop production, soil management, and food security, horticulture specialises in high-value crops such as fruits, vegetables, spices, and floriculture, which significantly contribute to exports and rural employment.

The Chamber opined that maintaining separate universities would enable focused

research and innovation, specialised education and training, effective farmer outreach programmes, better funding and industry collaboration, and support the government's vision for agri-based growth.

Bhaskara Rao and Raja Sekhar pointed out that the food processing sector, a key driver of economic growth in Andhra Pradesh, has immensely benefited from research and support from horticulture-focused institutions. Over the past 7-8 years, the State has emerged as India's horticulture hub, ranking first in fruit production and second in vegetable exports. With the

launch of the Food Processing Policy 2024-29, Andhra Pradesh has reinforced its commitment to horticulture-based industries, value addition, and export promotion.

AP Chambers asserted that retaining the independent status of both universities aligns with this vision and will further strengthen Andhra Pradesh's leadership in the agribusiness sector. It strongly urged the State government to maintain the separate identities of the Agriculture and Horticulture Universities for the sustained growth of farmers, agripreneurs, and allied industries.

AP, TN ink handloom...

Continued from Page 1

Handloom textiles from Andhra Pradesh will also be sold at Co-Optex showrooms and various textile stores across Tamil Nadu.

During the Buyer-Seller Meet, Minister Savitha inaugurated the event and, along with Minister R. Gandhi, visited the stalls set up by Co-Optex.

They examined the qual-

ity and pricing of the handloom products and reiterated their commitment to supporting the sector.

Minister Savitha highlighted the government's ongoing efforts to expand market opportunities for handloom products and enhance the economic well-being of weavers.

She noted that several handloom expos and exhibitions have been conducted at

the state and national levels, alongside training sessions on modern designs and consumer preferences.

"The agreement between APCO and Co-Optex is expected to usher in a new era of growth and sustainability for the handloom sector in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, ensuring that the rich heritage of traditional textiles continues to thrive," she said.

12 kids hurt as...

Continued from Page 1

They alleged that the school management was operating outdated buses unfit for service.

Parents also criticised the authorities for their inaction against the errant school management. Meanwhile, officials from the police and education departments were relieved that the students escaped with injuries and no casualties were reported.

Rs 1,000 cr NALA Tax evasion...

Continued from Page 1

Many of these developments are reportedly linked to key YSRCP leaders, some of whom, despite facing penalties, have yet to settle their outstanding payments.

The current coalition government has acknowledged the issue and initiated discussions with real estate groups regarding potential reductions and future compliance. Visakhapatnam, particularly the Bheemili revenue division encompassing Madhurawada, Kommadi, and Endada, has witnessed a surge in real estate activity involving developers with

YSRCP affiliations. Large residential projects in areas like Kapuluppada and Rushikonda have significantly contributed to the ballooning tax liabilities, which total crores of rupees. While some developers have made partial payments, others have resorted to legal challenges to avoid their dues.

One prominent project in Kurmannapalem, developed on 9.5 acres, should have incurred taxes in 25 installments. However, records suggest that only Rs 1.5 crore was levied on 7.5 acres, raising serious concerns about deliberate underreporting. Despite incomplete tax pay-

ments, the project was completed and plots were sold. Currently, over 30 individuals owe more than Rs. 1 crore each in pending dues, with one large plot alone accounting for over Rs 300 crore in arrears. Outstanding NALA dues in the Madhurawada-Kommadi-Yendada region approach Rs. 300 crore, while the overall unpaid taxes exceed Rs. 800 crore, attributed to nearly a hundred defaulters.

"The scale of the evasion is staggering," a senior government official commented. "We are committed to recovering every rupee owed to the exchequer." Officials also

pointed to a revenue department officer, previously embroiled in controversies during the previous administration, whose negligence has significantly hampered tax collection.

As the new government intensifies its efforts to recover these outstanding dues, the focus is on whether stringent measures will be implemented to hold defaulters accountable and recoup lost revenue. The real estate sector is closely monitoring these developments, anticipating a move towards greater transparency and adherence to tax regulations.

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Hotels to get Green Leaf Rating for cleanliness

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmiha has said that the government will introduce Green Leaf Rating for hotels, lodges and other hospitality facilities that uphold excellent standards of environmental cleanliness and hygiene, ensuring a pleasant experience for tourists.

On Friday, Dr Lakshmiha chaired a coordination meeting with officials from various departments at the Collectorate to discuss the implementation of Swachhata Green Leaf Rating System (SGLRS).

Highlighting the significance of the hospitality sector in the national and State economy, the Collector explained that the Green Leaf Rating aims to promote responsible tourism by encouraging safe and hygienic hospitality practices while considering environmental and community welfare. The rating system will be applicable to hotels, lodges, homestays and dharamshalas (charitable inns).

He said that one leaf rating requires 100-130 points for effective solid waste, sewage and wastewater management. Three leaf rating requires 130-180 points for higher sanitation and hygiene standards. Five leaf rating requires 180-

Goal is to promote responsible tourism by encouraging hygienic hospitality practices



200 points representing the highest level of cleanliness and sustainability.

To facilitate the rating process, a district-level committee will be formed, chaired by the District Collector. The Superintending Engineer of the Rural Water Supply Department will act as the convener, and the District Tourism Officer will serve as the member secretary. At the divisional-level, a verification sub-committee will be established, chaired by the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO).

The Collector stressed that hotels, lodges and other hospitality establishments should first be mapped on the Swachh

Bharat Abhiyan (Granin) website. Authorities must conduct awareness programmes at the divisional level to educate business owners about the rating system and its benefits.

Workshops and training programmes will also be held at the district-level to ensure proper implementation. The goal is to assign ratings to at least 1,000 hospitality locations across the State by October 2.

The Green Leaf Ratings will benefit both tourists and hotel owners, Dr Lakshmiha noted. He encouraged Vijayawada's hospitality industry to strive for higher ratings and enhance the district's reputation as a premier tourism and hospitality destination, given its strategic location as the Gateway to Amaravati.

The meeting was attended by Superintending Engineer of Rural Water Supply S Vidyasagar, ZP CEO K Kannamanaidu, AP Hotels Association President RV Swamy, AP Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) Divisional Manager Chaitanya, District Tourism Officer A Shilpa, Special Officer for Village and Ward Secretariats G Jyothi, DPO P Lavanya Kumari, and District Tours and Travels Association representative T Ravikumar, among others.

AMEYA '25 brings together talent and spirit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The two-day AMEYA 2025, the annual flagship event of SRM University-AP's management precinct, was a great success. The event brought together a vibrant mix of entrepreneurial spirit, formal business interactions and engaging cultural activities, creating an amalgamation of spirit, strategy and synergy.

The B-Fest was officially launched by Vice-Chancellor Prof K Manoj Arora, Registrar Prof R Prem Kumar and Dean-Paari School of Business, Prof. Bharadhwaj Sivakumar. The highlight of the inauguration was the unveiling of the AMEYA flag through a drone, symbolising the limitless potential the fest aimed to unlock. The event also attracted more than 600 external participants from various educational institutions in the vicinity, making it a grand celebration of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Some of the highlights of AMEYA '25 were the Biz Hunt, B-Quiz, Mr & Ms

600 external participants from various educational institutions in the vicinity were present



Ameya, the awe-inspiring chenda melam, numerous stalls set up by students, and a prize pool worth 1.75 lakh.

With 28 participants emerging victorious across a range of competitions, the event showcased exceptional

talent. Notable achievements included Dishi Jain and Ms Octavio being crowned Mr & Ms AMEYA '25; Vignesh and his team triumphed in the Biz Hunt alongside Shashank and his team as the runners-up. Shaleem Raju, JohnHamsa

and Kannam Naidu won the B-Quiz. The fest proved that success knows no bounds when passion and talent unite. AMEYA'25 truly lived up to its name: boundless spirit, competition, and celebration.

POSB ATM card delays leave Vizag pensioners struggling for cash

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A frustrating delay in the delivery of new ATM cards by the India Post Office Savings Bank (POSB) is causing considerable hardship for customers in Visakhapatnam, especially pensioners and senior citizens. With expired cards and long waits for replacements, many are forced to endure lengthy queues at post offices just to access their savings.

Several postal pensioners across the city have been waiting for months for new cards after their previous ones expired, leaving them in a lurch. Sources within India Post have acknowledged the delay and stated that steps are being taken to address the shortage. The current strategy involves procuring unsold ATM cards from agency and rural post offices, where demand is lower, and redistributing them to urban users. This initiative is aimed at alleviating overcrowding at post offices and ensuring smoother transactions for POSB ATM cardholders.

However, this solution has sparked new concerns. Many customers have expressed worry over the validity of these reallocated cards, which are reportedly set to expire within a few months.

Call to make environmental protection part of life

Take up pollution prevention as social responsibility

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Giving a call for integrating environmental protection into daily human activities, Dr. P. Krishnappa, Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board, emphasised the importance of sustainable practices during the two-day UGC National Conference on Sustainable Strategies for Social, Economic, and Environmental Development, which commenced at the Acharya Nagarjuna University's Deichman Auditorium on Friday.

The conference was chaired by Prof Kancherla Gangadhara Rao, Vice-Chancellor. An esteemed gathering of experts, researchers, and academics from various regions including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and both Telugu States was present.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Dr Krishnappa highlighted that environmental conservation must be an integral part of human lifestyles. He called upon every individual to

take up pollution prevention as a social responsibility, asserting that the concept of recycling should be deeply embedded in Indian culture, particularly in today's context where its necessity is ever more pressing. He advocated for extensive research on recycling practices within universities to foster effective solutions.

Dr Krishnappa also urged the Central and State governments to implement environmental policies that promote the country's economic and social development. In light of the food crisis, he noted that the Green Revolution has brought about revolutionary changes in food production. However, he cautioned that the overreliance on chemical fertilisers to achieve higher yields is leading to severe issues, including a rise in chronic diseases such as cancer.

Prof Gangadhara Rao underscored the need for sustainable social development strategies that should be followed globally. He pointed out that both Central and State governments have introduced sev-

eral new schemes aimed at sustainable population development. He stressed the importance of reducing pesticide usage and promoting organic farming to mitigate health and environmental impact.

Dr K Rajendran, Dean of the Environmental Department at SRM University, suggested leveraging technology to eliminate waste in industries.

ANU Rector, Prof Ratna Shila Mani, remarked that environmental pollution is escalating due to human errors, while the University Registrar, Prof G. Simhachalam, emphasised the need to balance current needs with the future generations' requirements without compromising.

The Director of the National Conference, Prof P. Brahmajee Rao, elaborated on the significance of the event, which saw the participation of 40 environmental experts and researchers presenting their studies.

The resolutions adopted during the conference will be forwarded to the UGC and government agencies for action.

Perni Nani files complaint to DGP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Senior YSRCP leader and former minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) filed a complaint with the DGP over a 'baseless case' registered against him following Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's visit to Guntur Mirchi Yard on February 19.

Perni Nani clarified that he was not present at the event or in Guntur on the day in question, terming the allegations as completely false and driven by vested interests aiming to tarnish his reputation.

He emphasised his commitment to public service and described the complaint as a malicious attempt to mislead authorities and the public.

In a formal letter to the DGP, Perni sought a thorough investigation into the matter and demanded action against those responsible for filing the false complaint.

Special trains to Prayagraj

Around 60,000 passengers have travelled by the trains run by SCR from Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During the ongoing Maha Kumbh 2025, the Indian Railways is operating special trains towards Prayagraj from all parts of the country. The Railways has planned to operate over 13,000 trains out of which 12,583 had already run. Since January 13, around 3.09 crore pilgrims have been handled by the Indian Railways towards Prayagraj. The Railways has made comprehensive arrangements to facilitate their travel, including colour-coded tickets and additional shelter areas to ensure smooth boarding and deboarding of passengers.

The South Central Railway operated a significant number of special train services towards Prayagraj from various



destinations of the Zone. The Zone has till date operated 115 trains from the Vijayawada region, which includes regular and special services. These trains have been operated on different dates in January and February during the Kumbh Mela period. The advance reservations in these special trains have been utilised fully. Till date, around 60,000 pas-

sengers have travelled by these trains run by SCR from Vijayawada region.

These trains have been operated via Prayagraj Cheeki to important destinations like Gaya, Azamgarh, Banaras, and Danapur, from various stations in the Vijayawada region like Vijayawada, Guntur, Machilipatnam, Kakinada and Narsapur.

Home Minister promises justice for Sai Sadhana Chit Fund victims

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha has assured that justice will be served for the victims of the Sai Sadhana Chit Fund scam. The assurance came during a meeting at her camp office in Vijayawada, where Narasaraopet MLA Dr Chadalavada Aravind Babu led a delegation of victims to submit a memorandum.

According to the MLA, the victims have suffered losses amounting to approximately ₹200 crore due to the fraudulent activities of the chit

fund company. He reported that the majority of the affected individuals are from the impoverished and middle-class segments of society, urging the Home Minister to ensure that they receive justice.

Responding to the concerns raised, Anitha revealed that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has already been established to investigate the case. She further assured that one of the accused has already been arrested and confirmed her commitment to ensuring justice for all victims.

YSRCP slams CM over chilli farmers' crisis

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) has criticized Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, alleging a lack of sincerity in addressing the ongoing crisis faced by chilli farmers. The party accused Naidu of making inconsistent statements and engaging in political manoeuvring rather than taking concrete measures to support the affected farmers.

Speaking to the media on Friday, YSRCP MLC Botcha Satyanarayana stated that Naidu only took notice of the chilli farmers' plight after former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the Guntur Mirchi Yard and inter-



acted with the farmers. "With the issue gaining significant public attention and the government coming under scrutiny, Naidu hurriedly sent a letter as a face-saving measure and claimed he was going to Delhi to meet the Union Minister. However, the reality is that the Union Agriculture Minister was not in Delhi at the

time, nor did Chandrababu visit the national capital for this purpose. His visit was solely to attend the swearing-in ceremony of the BJP Chief Minister," Satyanarayana alleged. Satyanarayana further criticized Naidu for his delayed response, accusing him of failing to take proactive steps to stabilize chilli prices before the crisis escalated. "Chandrababu's response was merely a publicity stunt, executed in a disjointed and incoherent manner. His anti-farmer stance has remained consistent over the years," he added.

In response to criticism over YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's visit to the Mirchi Yard, Satyanarayana defended the former Chief Minister's

engagement with farmers, asserting that he was addressing a genuine public concern. "As our party is not contesting the elections, the question of violating the election code does not arise. Moreover, a musical event was recently conducted despite the election code being in place, which raises questions about double standards," he said.

YSRCP leaders have urged the state government to implement immediate and effective measures to support chilli farmers and stabilize prices to prevent further distress in the agricultural sector. They called for a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges faced by farmers and ensure their long-term economic security.

GITAM University trains 900 staff in CPR

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The GITAM Institute of Medical Science and Research (GIMSR) Simulation-Based Medical Education (SBME) Unit has successfully trained approximately 900 staff members in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) techniques, enhancing the university's emergency preparedness and patient safety. This initiative is part of GIMSR's goal to become a fully CPR-trained institution.

The comprehensive training program has equipped staff from various departments, including housekeeping, security, oxygen plant personnel, patient relations executives (PREs), pharmacy, nutrition, hospitality, ambulance drivers, staff nurses, technicians, and doctors, with life-saving CPR skills. This widespread training ensures a coordinated and effective response to medical emergencies across the university.

"The training adheres to international resuscitation protocols, with institution-specific enhancements for

maximum efficiency and real-world applicability," said Dr Divya Banna, Head of the GIMSR Emergency Medicine Department. She further emphasized that her team is preparing to train an additional 900 staff members in the near future, further strengthening the institution's emergency response capabilities.

GIMSR Pro Vice-Chancellor Dr. Gitanjali Batmanabane highlighted the critical role of CPR training, stating, "CPR can be the difference between life and death, particularly for hospital staff and frontline workers." She commended GIMSR's efforts in setting a national benchmark for emergency response training and reaffirmed the institution's commitment to saving lives within the community.

Dr. Batmanabane also praised the SBME team for their dedication and expressed optimism that the trained personnel will serve as community volunteers, extending their life-saving skills beyond the university to assist individuals in emergencies.



Make drainage pumping station operational soon: VMC chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has called for the swift operationalisation of the drainage pumping station located on the HB Colony premises. On Friday morning, during the inspection, he reviewed various areas including Iron Yard, Atkinson School Road, Urmila Subbarao Road, Joti Nagar, Gollapudi Bypass Road, Sitara Road, HB Colony, CVR Flyover, New Bhagat Singh Nagar, and Brahmaya Street.

The Commissioner stressed the need for immediate repairs and the rapid activation of the drainage pumping station in HB



Colony. He instructed officials to ensure that side

drains are cleaned regularly and to prevent any waste



accumulation in vacant lots that could lead to water stagnation. All damaged culverts are to be repaired, and inspections of outfall drains should be conducted frequently, with routine desilting processes in place as well as the construction of retaining walls where necessary.

Dhyanchandra further inspected the Anna Canteen situated in HB Colony and spoke to the public about the quality of food. He directed the officials to maintain constant availability of potable water, ensure no leakages in the drinking water supply, and keep toilets sanitary for the public utilising the Anna Canteens.

Officials directed to ensure smooth Sivaratri celebrations

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari district Collector P. Prashanthi has directed officials to make elaborate arrangements for the upcoming Maha Shivaratri celebrations on February 26.

The Collector held a review meeting with officials, including Superintendent of Police D. Narasimha Kishore, on Friday to assess the preparations for the mega-religious event. She noted that lakhs of devotees visit Shiva temples after taking a holy dip in rivers and the sea.

She instructed officials to set up control rooms to monitor crowd movements. Thousands of devotees are expected to throng Pattiseema Veerabhadra Swamy temple in Sitanagar



mandal, Goshpad Ghat in Markandeya Swamy temple Kovvur, Pushkar Ghat in ghat at Kotilingala. Rajahmundry, and "To prevent drowning inci-

dents, a sufficient number of boats and expert swimmers should be stationed at all bathing points. Control rooms must be established at all 'Shaiva Kshetrams' to regulate the crowds," she said.

She also directed temple Executive Officers to coordinate with RWS officials to ensure a proper drinking water supply and with health officials to set up medical camps. Sanitary staff should be deployed at temples, and APSRTC should operate additional buses on routes witnessing heavy footfall.

The Collector emphasised that liquor sales should be strictly prohibited around temples on Maha Shivaratri. Medical and health officials

were instructed to keep 108 ambulances ready. Makeshift toilets and dress-changing rooms should be set up at bathing ghats to ensure convenience for women.

She further directed officials to install CCTV cameras and public address systems to effectively manage crowds.

SP Narasimha Kishore stated that adequate police security would be in place at all Shiva temples to maintain law and order. The SDRF, rescue teams, and fire brigade personnel would also be deployed.

Additional SP L. Arun, RDOs Krishna Naik and Rani Sushmita, DMHO Dr. K. Venkateswara Rao, and ZP officer Santhamani were among those present at the meeting.

Minister Nimmala dares YSRCP for open debate on Veligonda project



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu has challenged the YSRCP to an open debate on the dedication of the PS Veligonda project to the public without completing its works.

The Minister inspected the approach road works at Jinnuru village, where a bridge is being constructed across the Narasapuram main canal at a cost of Rs 3 crore. He also reviewed the drinking water supply works in the village. Speaking to the media, he criticised YSRCP leaders for

allegedly spreading falsehoods regarding the Veligonda project.

"I challenge the YSRCP leaders to an open debate on the Veligonda project and its dedication to the people by the then Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy before the works were completed. Since assuming office, I have visited the project thrice," Ramanaidu stated.

He asserted that after the coalition government took charge, he personally assessed the project's status, interacted with farmers in the ayacut area, and held discussions with

officials at various levels.

Clarifying his stance, the Minister said he had spoken on the Veligonda project only after fully understanding its progress and statistics. "The YSRCP leaders have distorted my remarks and are making counter-allegations, exposing their negligence towards the project," he remarked.

Nimmala Ramanaidu further questioned former Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy on why he dedicated the project to the public without its completion. "No leader dedicates an incomplete project to the people," he lashed out.

Centre gives nod for 'Bhimavaram bypass road': Srinivasa Varma

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Srinivasa Varma has made it clear that the Centre has approved the construction of the Bhimavaram bypass road.

The construction of a bypass road in Bhimavaram has been pending for the last 25 years. The Central government has approved the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the 27 km bypass road from Akividu to Veerasaram.

"As much as 590 acres of land is required for the construction of the bypass road as per the estimations. The bypass road goes through Akividu, Ajjumuru, Cherukuvada, Chinna pulleru, Peddapulleru, Sisali, Kolanapalli, Kolanapalli, Kopalle, Pedamiram, Chinamiran, Rayalam, Bhimavaram Gudipudi,



Taderu, Goraganamudi, Pennada Agraaharam, Srungavruksham and Veerasaram bride.

The bypass road project has faced many hurdles in the form of court cases and other legal issues. Now the bypass

road project would be resumed and would go expeditiously, the Union Minister assured. Railway bridges would be constructed across the railway line wherever needed on the bypass road, he mentioned. MLA Anjibabu said that

Union Minister Srinivasa Varma had striven hard for the bypass road project and met Union Minister Nitin Gadkari many times and convinced him. The bypass road would help for the development of the region, the MLA hoped.

NHRC seeks report on Tirupati incident

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Chief Secretary of Andhra Pradesh and the Director General of Police to submit an action-taken report within four weeks regarding the alleged attack on elected representatives in Tirupati.

The petitioner, YSRCP MP Maddila Gurumoorthy, has called for justice and the protection of democratic rights.

The complaint highlights that during the Deputy Mayor Election of Tirupati Municipal Corporation on February 3, a group of elected representatives, including corporators and office-bearers, were attacked.

Two rowdy sheeters allegedly led a mob that vandalised a bus carrying the representatives.

The miscreants broke windows, assaulted the driver, and deflated the bus's tires. This incident occurred in the presence of the police and was widely covered by the media.

Despite a complaint being filed with the Superintendent of Police, Tirupati, the names of the accused were not included in the FIR (No. 18/2025, dated 03.02.2025, PS SVU Campus).

The High Court had earlier ordered the police to escort the bus, raising concerns about the lack of security. The NHRC's intervention seeks to address these concerns and ensure accountability in the matter.

41 killed in 90 road accidents in Krishna in Jan: DC

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has said that 41 people lost their lives in 90 road accidents in January 2025 and urged everyone to wear helmets and fasten seatbelts.

Addressing a road safety committee meeting here on Friday, the Collector reviewed the causes of accidents, including drunk driving, hit-and-run cases, and black spots, with officials concerned.

He stated that 90 road accidents occurred in January alone, resulting in 41 fatalities and injuries to 76 people. Expressing concern over the rising number of road accidents in the district, he emphasised the need for stricter enforcement of road safety measures.

The Collector said that 83 hit-and-run cases had been registered in the district, and compensation had been provided in 23 cases. He noted that students were facing difficulties in crossing NH-216 at SS Gollapalem village in Machilipatnam mandal and directed officials to conduct a survey and take necessary measures to resolve the issue.

Collector directs officials to ensure transparency in land re-surveys



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad has issued directives to officials to provide farmers with prior notification of land re-surveys in their respective villages, along with all necessary legal notifications. This initiative aims to promote transparency and increase farmer participation in the re-survey process.

Collector Prasad conducted a field inspection of the ongoing land re-survey in Dakamarri village, Bheemunipatnam mandal, on Friday. He was accompanied by local officials during the visit. The Collector inspected agricultural lands, offered guidance to officials and staff involved in the survey, and interacted with farmers to address their concerns and collect feedback on the process.

Prasad stressed the crucial role of farmer cooperation in the successful execution of the re-survey. He explained that the objectives of the re-survey

include safeguarding land ownership, accurately identifying boundaries, and resolving long-standing land disputes. He encouraged farmers to utilize the conveniently located survey facilities and emphasized that officials must actively integrate farmer input at every stage of the process. Beyond the land re-survey, Collector Prasad also conducted a surprise inspection of the Dakamarri village secretariat. He reviewed the services offered to the public, evaluated staff adherence to time management protocols, and inquired about pending public requests and the efficiency of service delivery. The Collector instructed secretariat staff to maintain consistent availability for residents and to expedite the resolution of their requests. He also directed the Mandal Parishad Development Officer (MPDO) to implement sanitation measures in Dakamarri village, highlighting the importance of public health and directing field staff to prioritize sanitation efforts. Among those accompanying the Collector on his visit were Bheemunipatnam Tahsildar Rama Rao, the MPDO, Survey Department officials, and other relevant personnel.

Russell's viper found in Siva temple, rescued

PNS ■ NANDYALA

A Russell's viper, one of the deadliest venomous snakes, was spotted inside the Shiva temple near Srirama Theatre on Friday, causing panic among devotees.

Upon noticing the four-foot-long snake, devotees fled in fear and alerted the temple priest, who immediately informed snake catcher Mohan.

Mohan arrived at the temple, safely captured the viper, and later released it into the forest. Temple authorities heaved a sigh of relief as no untoward incident occurred.

Minister assures remunerative price for tomato farmers

PNS ■ KADAPA

Transport Minister Ramprasad Reddy has assured tomato farmers that the government is taking all necessary steps to ensure remunerative prices for their produce. He urged farmers not to worry about the current price slump.

In a statement on Friday, the minister acknowledged that falling tomato prices have caused significant losses to farmers. To address this, the government has initiated procurement at Rs 8 per kg to support them.

Tomato cultivation spans 4,303 acres in the Kadapa district. The government has already procured 12 metric



tonnes from the Madanapalle tomato market and 7.5 metric tonnes from the Mulakalacheruvu market yard. The purchased stock is being sent to rythu bazaars in Guntur, Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, and Ongole.

Farmers may receive Rs 10 to Rs 15 per kg in the coming days as the Centre has been urged to

intervene and stabilise prices.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister K. Atchannaaidu held a review meeting with agriculture and marketing officials on Friday. He directed officials to ensure that farmers receive fair prices.

The government has procured 1,000 quintals of tomatoes from Anantapur, Kurmool, Vizianagaram, and Anakapalli markets, supplying them to rythu bazaars. Additionally, the Centre is set to procure tomatoes under the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS) through NAFED and NCCF.

It may be noted that tomato prices had plummeted to Rs 4 per kg, severely impacting farmers.

KGH holds specialised training on GBS

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In response to growing public concerns over Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) cases, King George's Hospital (KGH) conducted a specialised training session at Andhra Medical College (AMC) on Friday. The initiative aimed to enhance medical preparedness and equip healthcare professionals with

"Expert-led session aims to enhance medical preparedness and dispel misconceptions"

the latest knowledge and techniques for effectively managing the condition. The session brought together faculty members, postgraduate students, and junior doctors from both AMC and KGH. Delivering the keynote address, Dr. S. Gopi, Head of

the Department of Neurology at KGH, provided critical insights into the etiology, clinical presentation, diagnostic techniques, and current therapeutic approaches essential for the effective management of GBS.

Addressing prevalent misconceptions, Dr. Gopi emphasized that GBS is not contagious, unlike the coronavirus. He clarified that GBS is an autoimmune disorder in which the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the peripheral nervous system, rather than being caused by a viral infection. He reassured the public that there is no need for panic regarding the condition.

TG will face water shortage if AP is not stopped: BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former minister G. Jagadish Reddy came down heavily on the Congress and BJP governments, accusing them of failing to protect Telangana's legitimate share of Krishna waters.

Speaking at a press meeting at the Telangana Bhavan, he said that while

Andhra Pradesh was openly diverting Krishna water, the Telangana government was merely watching without taking any action.

He warned that if the situation continued, the state would soon face severe water shortages for drinking and irrigation.

Jagadish recalled that

former minister Harish Rao had already sounded the alarm regarding the crisis, highlighting how AP's water theft was putting Telangana's farmers at risk. However, instead of addressing these concerns, Congress Minister Uttam Kumar Reddy responded with irrelevant statements. He ridiculed Uttam's remarks, calling them "empty words" that failed to acknowledge the real issue.

4-yr-old girl dies as bus hits car

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A family's pilgrimage turned tragic early Friday when a four-year-old girl was killed in a bus-car collision at RC Puram junction.

Haripriya died instantly when a speeding private bus struck the car carrying her and her parents, Venugopal and Ashwani, on the Naidupet-Puthalapattu highway. The family, from Kadiri, had visited the Srikalahasti temple and were travelling to Tirumala.

Marteru-Prakkilanka road works pick up pace

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

On the directions of the Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh, the Marteru-Prakkilanka road repair works are being carried out expeditiously.

Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh on Friday inspected the Marteru-Prakkilanka road works. He spoke to the engineers and the officials and directed them to ensure that the road repair works were completed by the prescribed time.

He ordered the engineers to maintain quality standards while carrying out the work. If



quality is maintained the road lasts for several years, he told them.

The 12.7 KM Marteru-Prakkilanka road repairing works in the Nidadavole constituency have been taken up as the Minister has evinced special interest. The 12.7 km road goes on Teeparru canal bund in Peravali mandal.

The villagers yearned for the reconstruction of the badly damaged 12.7 km road. On the appeals of the villagers of the areas, the Minister focused on road construction. The Tourism Minister is monitoring the road works from time to time.

630 kg ganja seized, 8 peddlers held

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Police seized 630 kg of ganja and arrested eight peddlers in Payakaraopeta town while it was being transported in a vehicle.

SP Tuhin Simha told the media on Friday that acting on a tip-off, police conducted vehicle checks and intercepted a vehicle carrying the contraband. The seized ganja, valued at Rs 30 lakh, was being transported from Visakhapatnam district to Hyderabad.

In the operation, police also confiscated a car and two motorcycles used by the



accused. The SP commended the police personnel for their

efforts in seizing a significant quantity of ganja.

ACROSS THE STATES



ED attaches assets of ex-CBI DSP

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Friday that it has attached residential properties worth about Rs 1 crore as part of a disproportionate assets case-linked money-laundering investigation against a former CBI DSP. Rajeev Kumar Rishi, the former deputy superintendent of police of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), was first booked by his own organisation under sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act, the ED said in a statement. According to the statement, it was alleged that Rishi had acquired "disproportionate" assets of Rs 1.44 crore in his name and in the name of his family members during the check period between November 9, 2012 and January 14, 2021. This was 113.36 per cent more than his legitimate income during the said period, the ED said. The officer could not be contacted immediately for a response on the allegations levelled against him by the ED.



Bihar: Class-10 student shot dead by classmate

A minor boy was shot dead, while another suffered injuries following a clash between two groups of students in Bihar's Rohtas district on Friday, police said. The Class-10 student, Amit Kumar, succumbed to injuries during treatment, and his classmate has been detained for the crime, Superintendent of Police Raushan Kumar said. "Preliminary investigation revealed that an altercation took place between two groups of students inside an examination centre in Sasaram on Thursday... When Amit and another student, Sanjit Kumar, were returning home in an autorickshaw, they were stopped by one of their classmates who shot at them and fled," he said. A police team reached the spot and took them to the nearest government hospital. "While Amit died during treatment, the condition of Sanjit is reported to be stable."



Mizoram to introduce new health scheme

Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma on Friday said his government will soon launch a new health insurance scheme providing coverage of up to Rs 5 lakh to beneficiaries. The scheme is likely to be implemented in the new fiscal, he added. During a discussion on the governor's address in the budget session, Lalduhoma said his government initially pursued the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) administration's plan to roll out a healthcare scheme with Rs 1,000 crore loan support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). "However, despite efforts, the loan could not be secured, prompting the government to develop an alternative plan," he added. The chief minister said discussions have been held with pensioners, government employees, and private hospitals to ensure support for the scheme. "We are confident that we can implement the healthcare scheme with Rs 5 lakh coverage per year from our own funds, without borrowing from ADB," he said. The proposed scheme will offer cashless treatment, and the government hopes to finalise agreements with private hospitals soon.

FLAG MEETING WITH PAK

India raises issues of firing, terror activities

PNS ■ JAMMU

India and Pakistan held a flag meeting along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Friday, in an effort to de-escalate tension after several recent incidents of cross-border firing and an IED attack, official sources said.



The brigade commander-level flag meeting took place in the Chakkan-Da-Bagh crossing point area, with both sides highlighting the need to maintain peace along the border, the sources said.

However, no official statement was issued by the Indian Army on the 75-minute-long meeting that started at around 11 am.

The sources said the Indian military delegation lodged a strong protest over the recent unprovoked cross-border firing incidents, infiltration attempts by terrorists and smuggling of narcotics and weapons.

The meeting took place in a congenial atmosphere and both sides agreed to honour the ceasefire agreement in the larg-

er interest of peace on the border, the sources said.

Ceasefire violations along the border of Jammu and Kashmir have been rare since the two neighbouring countries renewed an agreement on February 25, 2021.

Two Indian Army personnel, including a captain, were killed and another was injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) attack carried out by suspected terrorists in the Akhnour sector of the Jammu region on February 11.

Two Army personnel were injured in separate incidents of small-arms firing from across the LoC in Rajouri and Poonch

districts on February 10 and February 14, while two more Army personnel were injured in separate land-mine explosions in Poonch over the last week.

The extent of damage on the Pakistani side in the retaliatory action was not known immediately but officials had said the enemy forces also suffered "heavy casualties".

Meanwhile, the sources said an explosion took place on the zero line in the Nakerkote area of the Digwar sector in Poonch at 9:20 am but there was no casualty.

The cause of the blast was not known immediately, they added.

'SOMETHING DISGUSTING'

SC on Delhi HC passing 30-40 pages pre-arrest bail orders

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Supreme Court on Friday expressed reservations over the Delhi High Court passing 30 to 40 pages anticipatory bail orders and said it was "something disgusting".

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh which was hearing an appeal against a high court order said, "What is happening in the Delhi High Court is something disgusting. The high court writing 30-40 pages while disposing of an anticipatory bail plea is like hinting the trial court that here is a reason for you to convict. Essentially, it's a conviction order."

The top court was hearing the bail plea of medical practitioner Aadhar Khera in a cheating case.

Khera moved the top court against the order of the Delhi High Court, which in its 34-page order on February 6, denied him the reprieve.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Khera, submitted it was the petitioner's father who was running the firm in question through the petitioner and his mother.

He said the high court equated his role with his father and denied the petitioner anticipatory bail ignoring the fact that he had joined the investigation in the case.

Luthra argued that the chargesheet was filed in the case.

Following the submissions, the bench sought the response of Delhi Police and granted Khera protection from arrest in the case.

AI should be used for improving rural lives: Dhankhar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) should be used for improving the agriculture sector, and asserted that the rural population represents both opportunities and responsibilities.

Speaking at the inaugural session of 21st General Session of African Asian Rural Development (AARDO) Conference, the vice president also stressed using technology to alleviate suffering.

Speaking at the event, Dhankhar said the rural regions

EAM stresses the need to maintain G20 integrity

PNS ■ JOHANNESBURG

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday emphasised the joint efforts of India and China in maintaining the integrity of the G20 amid a "polarised" global situation.

Jaishankar is in Johannesburg on a two-day visit to South Africa to participate in the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

"We should recognise that in a polarised global situation, our two countries have worked hard to preserve and protect the G20 as an institution. This in itself testifies to the importance of international cooperation," he said in his opening remarks at a bilateral meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting here.

South Africa is hosting the G20 for 2025, with this meeting marking the beginning of a series of engagements scheduled throughout the year. As the premier forum for international economic cooperation, the G20 plays a critical role in steering the global economy through the significant challenges it faces.

The members of the G20 are: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy,

Calls for cooperation between India-China



Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, the African Union and the European Union.

Jaishankar noted that forums like the G20 have provided opportunities for India and China to engage in dialogue, even during challenging periods in their bilateral relationship.

"Such gatherings have provided an opportunity for our interaction, even when our ties were going through a difficult phase," he said.

Reflecting on developments

since his last meeting with Wang in Rio de Janeiro during the G20 Summit in November 2024, Jaishankar acknowledged ongoing diplomatic exchanges.

"Our NSA and Foreign Secretary have visited China and there have been discussions about various aspects of our relationship. These have included management of peace and tranquillity in the border areas as well as other dimensions of our ties. I am glad today to have a further exchange of views," Jaishankar said as he recalled that India and China are members of the G20, SCO and BRICS.

Ministers facing allegations must quit, says Hazare

PNS ■ PUNE

Veteran social activist Anna Hazare on Friday said ministers facing allegations should immediately resign.

The opposition has been seeking the resignations of NCP ministers Dhananjay Munde and Manikrao Kokate.

Munde, MLA from Parli in Beed, is under fire from the opposition and some Mahayuti colleagues after close aide Walmik Karad was held in an extortion case linked to the abduction and brutal murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Massajog in Beed on December 9.

Kokate was on Thursday sentenced to two years imprisonment by a Nashik court in a 1995 case where he was charged with submitting fake documents to get flats under a government quota.

Without taking names, Hazare said, "If a minister faces allegations, it would be inappropriate on his part to remain in the cabinet even for a minute. He must immediately tender his resignation. If you have made a mistake, then there is no need to remain in power."

nurture 3.6 billion lives, including 894 million rural Indians, "representing both our opportunity and responsibility."

A challenge to our intellect in form of emergence of disruptive technology. Artificial intel-



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has levied a penalty of more than Rs 3.44 crore on BBC World Service India for alleged contravention of foreign direct investment (FDI) regulations, agency officials said on Friday.

The federal probe agency also fined three of its directors with more than Rs 1.14 crore each as it issued an adjudication order against the British broadcaster under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

The adjudication proceed-

ED slaps Rs 3.44 cr penalty on BBC WS India; fines 3 directors

ings were initiated after a show-cause notice was issued on August 4, 2023, to BBC WS India, its three directors, and the finance head for various "contraventions" under the said law.

BBC WS India, which is a 100 per cent FDI company, engaged in uploading/streaming news and current affairs through digital media but "did not" reduce their FDI to 26 per

cent, and kept it at 100 per cent in "gross violation" of the regulations issued by the government of India, sources said.

The press note 4 issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) on September 18, 2019, stipulates a 26 per cent FDI cap for digital media under the government approval route, they said.

BJP's 'double-engine' govt in UP a failure

PNS ■ RAE BARELI (UP)

Rae Bareli Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Friday launched a scathing attack on the BJP, calling its "double-engine government" in Uttar Pradesh a complete failure and one with "no engine" at all.

Gandhi accused the UP government of failing to address unemployment and inflation and also alleged that the Centre was resorting to privatisation. He emphasised that if the Congress was voted to power in the state, its government would bring in job opportunities as it had in states such as

No engine at all: Rahul in Rae Bareli

Karnataka and Telangana.

"This is not a 'double-engine' government; rather, it is a government with no engine at all," Gandhi said while interacting with youth in the Lalganj area on the second day of his visit to his parliamentary constituency.

"The public is struggling with serious issues like inflation and unemployment, yet the government has no concrete solutions," he said.

The leader of opposition in Lok Sabha alleged that unem-



ployment was rising and blamed the BJP government for it. He alleged that demonetisation destroyed small businesses and GST reforms failed

to support them.

"The youth studied but they are still unemployed because (Prime Minister) Narendra Modi implemented demonetisation, which killed small businesses. Corruption, Adani, Ambani -- you need to understand the connection."

"If you want jobs, the first step is to revive and protect small businesses. GST needs to be changed. Until banks open their doors to you, employment will not be possible," he said.

Bhutan PM calls Modi his 'mentor', seeks guidance



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Friday described his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi as his "elder brother" and "mentor" and sought his guidance to help him contribute to transformation of public service in the neighbouring country.

In his keynote address at the School of Ultimate Leadership (SOUL) conclave here, Tobgay made liberal use of Hindi that drew multiple applause from the audience.

"Without a doubt, I see an image of an elder brother in you, who always guides me and helps me (Nisandeh, aap mei ek bade bhai ki chhavi dekhta hun, jo sadaiv mera margdarshan karte hain, aur mujhe sahayta

detehain"), he said.

Tshering termed the SOUL initiative a "brainchild of Modi", adding, it is yet another testament to his unwavering commitment to nurturing authentic leaders and empowering them to serve the great republic of India. In his address, the Bhutanese prime minister humbly submitted that he had come to attend the event to not offer any leadership lessons but to "learn as a student".

"Leadership is not about titles, it is not about positions, it is about vision, it is about courage, it is about the ability to inspire change. Leadership is about transformation, it is about taking society where it stands today, and guiding it towards a future that is more prosperous, more peaceful and happier for all," he asserted.

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

Vintage cars turn heads, bring smiles

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

It was nothing short of a history lesson on wheels as classic, pristine cars took over the streets of Delhi on Friday during the 11th edition of the "21 Gun Salute Concours d'Elegance," showcasing a regal collection of rare cars that left even the finest, modern, high performance cars behind by a margin.

The annual heritage show, flagged off by Union Culture and Tourism Minister

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat at India Gate, featured over 100 vintage cars and 50 motorcycles -- from iconic models such as the exquisite 1939 Delahaye (Figoni et Falaschi, 1903 De Dion Bouton, the oldest in the concours to 1917 Ford Model T Roadster, 1935 Buick 90 L Ex Ayodhya and 1935 Cadillac Fleetwood.

A pilgrimage of sorts for many car enthusiasts, the event has participants from across the country, including the likes of industrialists Yohan

Poonawalla, late Tata Sons chairman Rattan Tata's younger brother Jimmy Tata, and renowned car collector and restorer Viveck Goenka, flaunting their well-preserved beauties.

Gujarati businessman Daman Thakore, who has lost the count of rallies and shows he has attended with his bright red, vintage convertible -- the 1950 MG YT, affectionately christened 'Lal Pari' or the Red Angel -- was revved up for the special event.

"I've had this small, one-and-a-quarter engine car with us since I was three, and it brings so much joy to people's faces wherever it goes. That's why we keep it running. The car was manufactured in England in 1950, and only 900 of these were made by MG."

"To showcase these cars in rallies or shows, we work for at least three to six months beforehand, ensuring everything in the car is in the perfect working order. Even the clock on the dashboard is



original and accurate," said the 50-year-old, who drove the tiny 56-horsepower car on a 13,500 km journey to London through 14 countries with his family in 2023.

A flurry of selfies and head-turning were evident as the

rare marques paraded through the streets, painting the town in bygone royal hues from the India Gate to the expansive Ambience Golf Greens in Gurugram, where these timeless beauties would be on display for the next two days.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trump's peace offensive

Though US President Trump is attempting to resolve the prolonged war in Ukraine, the effectiveness of his methods remains uncertain

As the war in Ukraine enters its third year, US President Donald Trump is trying to broker peace. However, his approach has sparked controversy, as it appears to sideline Ukraine in key negotiations. With Russia still holding a significant portion of Ukrainian territory, the implications of this initiative could reshape the geopolitical landscape of Europe and beyond. The critical questions remain: What would a Trump-led peace deal entail? How would it affect Ukraine's sovereignty? And what choices do Ukraine and Europe have in response? If Ukraine is sidelined in these negotiations, it could be pressured into accepting a deal that legitimises Russia's territorial gains, effectively rewarding aggression. For Russia, such an outcome would be a strategic victory, allowing it to retain control over nearly a fifth of Ukraine's land, including areas it currently does not fully control. A peace deal without Ukraine's full participation and interests at its core would have profound consequences. The Ukrainian government has consistently main-



tained that any agreement must include the restoration of its 1991 borders and accountability for war crimes committed during the invasion. However, a Trump-negotiated settlement could pressure Kyiv into compromising its sovereignty in exchange for an end to hostilities.

For Europe, such a scenario would be equally troubling. If Russia emerges from the conflict with territorial gains, it could embolden further aggression against NATO's eastern flank. The Kremlin's broader objective has always been to reverse the strategic impact of the Soviet Union's collapse and limit the sovereignty of Eastern European nations. A weakened

Ukraine would shift the burden of deterrence squarely onto NATO's shoulders, requiring significant military investments and commitments to prevent further Russian expansion. The effectiveness of Trump's initiative is highly uncertain. While a ceasefire might reduce immediate bloodshed, it would not necessarily lead to lasting stability. If Ukraine is forced into a compromised peace, resistance movements could emerge, leading to prolonged low-intensity conflict. Additionally, the global implications of a weakened Ukraine extend beyond Europe. A victorious Russia could inspire China to take a more aggressive stance on Taiwan, believing that the West lacks the resolve to uphold international law. Trump's initiative to end the Ukraine war could mark a turning point in the conflict, but the manner in which it is pursued will determine its impact. If Ukraine is sidelined and forced into territorial concessions, the consequences could be dire—not just for Kyiv but for the entire European security framework. While a peace deal might bring temporary relief, a settlement that fails to address Ukraine's sovereignty could embolden Russia and reshape the global balance of power in ways that will be felt for decades to come. The choices made in the coming months will define the future of Ukraine, Europe, and world security.

PICTALK



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

A reminder of Delhi's seismic vulnerability



SATENDRA SINGH

The 4.0 magnitude earthquake that shook Delhi-NCR recently underscores Delhi's alarming seismic risks, given its location on active fault lines

In the early morning of February 17, 2025, the residents of Delhi-NCR awakened by a sudden unexpected jolt awakening due to a tremor. A 4.0-magnitude earthquake struck the region, with its epicentre located near Dhaula Kuan, Delhi, sending shockwaves throughout the city along with neighbouring NCR. Although the quake was relatively minor, its impact felt stronger because it originated from a shallow depth and was intensified by widespread fear of bigger earthquakes. People hurriedly evacuated their homes, buildings swayed and social media was abuzz with concern.

This event served as yet another reminder that Delhi remains dangerously vulnerable to seismic shock vulnerability to seismic activity. Delhi hazily sits on several active fault lines, including the Delhi-Haridwar Ridge and the Mahendragarh-Dehradun fault. The city falls in Seismic Zone IV and is recognised as being at high risk for earthquakes. Its closeness to the Himalayas, one of the most seismically active areas globally, further increases its risk. According to geoscientists, the Indian plate is continually pushing beneath the Eurasian plate at a rate of about 47 mm per year, generating significant underground stress.

When this stress is released, it results in earthquakes—ranging from minor to devastating. History has shown us the potential destruction of earthquakes. The 2001 Bhuj earthquake in Gujarat, which registered 7.7 on the Richter scale, resulted in over 20,000 fatalities and left entire towns in rubble. If a similar earthquake event were to strike Delhi-NCR, the aftermath could be even more disastrous. Simulations from global seismic studies, including the USGS PAGER system and the GEM Global Seismic Risk Map, indicate that a 7.7-magnitude earthquake in Delhi could result in between 150,000 to 250,000 deaths. The combination of a dense population, ageing infrastructure, and unplanned urbanisation makes the capital particularly vulnerable to widespread devastation. One major concern facing the city is the quality of construction.



Many buildings, especially in older areas and unauthorised settlements, are not designed to endure strong earthquakes. Although there are strict regulations set by the National Building Code and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), enforcement often remains weak. High-rise buildings and even some government facilities in the region frequently lack the necessary retrofitting to enhance their earthquake resistance. With over 30 million people living in Delhi-NCR, the scale of destruction from a significant earthquake could be unimaginable. So, what steps can be taken? Demolishing all unsafe buildings and reconstructing them with seismic-resistant technology is neither practical nor economically viable. However, sincere efforts can be made to raise awareness about the earthquake risk and ensure people are prepared for a potential major earthquake in Delhi.

First and foremost, raising awareness and ensuring preparedness should be a top priority. Every household needs to have a well-defined earthquake survival plan. Schools and workplaces should regularly conduct earthquake drills to prepare individuals for how to react during tremors. Simple actions, like securing heavy furniture, identifying



SEVERAL CITIES LIKE TOKYO AND SAN FRANCISCO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE BUILDINGS MORE EARTHQUAKE-PROOF. DELHI SHOULD LOOK TO THESE GLOBAL EXAMPLES TO REDUCE THE RISK OF WIDESPREAD CASUALTIES

safe areas in homes, and having emergency kits ready, can greatly improve safety. The government also needs to take necessary actions in this regard.

A comprehensive structural audit of buildings, particularly those constructed before modern seismic standards were established, is urgently required. Buildings that fail to meet safety criteria should be reinforced and retrofitted. It is essential to enforce the use of earthquake-resistant construction methods in new projects. Retrofitting at-risk buildings may be expensive, but it is a crucial investment for protecting lives.

Additionally, public infrastructure needs to be reassessed. Bridges, flyovers, and metro stations need to be evaluated for their ability to withstand seismic activity. Several cities like Tokyo and San Francisco have successfully implemented advanced technology to make buildings more earthquake-proof. Delhi should look to these global examples to reduce the risk of widespread casualties.

A city that is well-prepared for disasters always invests in the education and awareness of its residents. Creating an Earthquake Awareness Museum in Delhi, akin to the one in Bhuj, Gujarat, could make a significant impact on

people's awareness, not only from Delhi NCR but from all over the country.

This museum could highlight Delhi's seismic history, delve into the science behind earthquakes, and inform the public about safety protocols. Additionally, a dedicated "Earthquake Clinic" within the museum could provide free consultations with engineers on how to house earthquake resistance at a reasonable price. Moreover, implementing an efficient early warning system could significantly minimise the risk of casualties. For instance, Japan's earthquake early warning system alerts people just seconds before a quake, allowing people to take cover. Establishing a similar system in Delhi should be a national priority. Despite scientific advancements, earthquakes remain unpredictable. However, we can control the level of preparedness when a disaster strikes. The recent tremor in Delhi is more than just a fleeting event—it serves as a warning. Ignoring it could be disastrous. The time to take action is now before nature delivers a lesson that is too harsh to endure.

(The writer is former executive director of National Institute of Disaster Management, Govt. of India; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PEACE TALK WITHOUT UKRAINE

Madam — It is indeed a strange move that Ukraine is not involved in the peace talks being held to bring the Ukraine war to an end. America is holding talks with Russia, the country that pounds Ukraine. Any meaningful negotiation should be between the countries on the war and others may facilitate reaching a settlement to end the war. In the process, any other country may help but not keep the victim behind the screen. Ukraine has unnecessarily taken up war with Russia. The demand of Russia was that Ukraine should not take membership in NATO as it disturbs its security concerns. For NATO also Ukraine joining the group will add to its strategic security concerns. That is why it extended all possible help, like weapons and funds, except for its soldiers to Ukraine.

The sanction against buying Russian fuel also proved to be a failure, as all the EU members were buying the same Russian fuel through India. Ultimately Ukraine is at a loss but gives a sound lesson to others not to depend on others' strength to wage a war, but instead to sort the issues out through diplomatic strength. It is also time to remember the moral story that when two parties decide to fight each other, there are always other parties to reap rich harvests. The giants in the field of weapons production found Ukraine a flourishing market to pump in weapons. It is also time to rethink before deciding to enter the war field, over-assuming one's strength.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

WHO RECEIVED \$21 MILLION FROM US?

Madam — US President Donald Trump has once again questioned the United States' decision to allocate \$21 million for voter turnout efforts in India. Speaking at the FII PRIORITY Summit in Miami, he said, "\$21 million for voter turnout, why do we need to spend \$21 million for voter turnout in India?" Trump expressed his respect for India and its Prime Minister Narendra Modi but wondered why the US needs to spend millions on voter turnout in a foreign country. He further argued that

Tharoor praises PM Modi's achievements



Senior Congress leader and MP Shashi Tharoor's praise for PM Modi's achievements during his recent visit to the US, followed by his article in a national daily praising Kerala's startup economy under the

ruling LDF alliance, has not gone down well with his party leaders. In a stifling political atmosphere where political parties are baying for each other's blood, his praise does not help his party's attempts to target the NDA and the LDF governments on these issues.

But Tharoor, a former diplomat and well-known for his intellect, is a rare class of politician who has the spine to speak their mind. He has proven time and again that he is a true statesman who deeply believes in democratic values. On his criticism, he has further clarified that we cannot always speak only in terms of party interests. Thus, his principled political behaviour is a lesson for all political leaders.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

India, with its strong economy and high tariffs on US goods, doesn't need such financial support.

"They got a lot of money. They're one of the highest taxing countries in the world in terms of us. We can hardly get in there because their tariffs are so high. Hence, the \$21 million allocation was part of a larger list of international aid programmes cancelled by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), headed by Elon Musk. There is no doubt a lot of money, white and black, is used. Then who knows that foreign funding is also not another source? Hope the NDA government should come out clearly on who revived this 21-million-dollar (about 176 crore rupees) and how this money was distributed. As reported earlier, the money can't be received by the Election Commission legally.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

MULTILINGUALISM FOSTER UNITY

Madam — A recent incident highlights the importance of embracing multilingualism in India's diverse political landscape. During the INDIA bloc meeting in Patna,

DMK leader TR Baalu requested a translation of Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's Hindi speech into English, as DMK chief MK Stalin was unable to follow Hindi. The request was met with a sharp reaction from Kumar, who emphasised that leaders should understand Hindi, leading to an uncomfortable moment for the DMK delegation. The DMK's resistance to the three-language formula stems from its commitment to preserving Tamil. While this is admirable, instances like these underline how knowing a third language, including Hindi, can be a practical asset. Whether for employment, travel, or national collaboration, multilingual ability fosters inclusivity and avoids such avoidable embarrassments. Balancing linguistic pride with pragmatic multilingualism is key. Leaders and citizens alike must view additional language skills as tools for growth rather than threats to cultural identity.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The road to change: A story of hope in Uttarakhand's remote Villages



HEMA RAWAL

As government initiatives push forward rural road development, the hope remains that these villages will soon find themselves linked to a future of greater possibilities

In the mountains, roads are more than just paths from one place to another—they are lifelines. They connect people to schools, hospitals, and markets, making daily life easier and opportunities more accessible. For many remote villages in Uttarakhand, however, the wait for a proper road continues, shaping everyday realities in ways that outsiders rarely see.



In Surag and Bhagdhanu villages of Garud Block, Bageshwar District, the absence of a proper road is a challenge that residents navigate every day. The people here have adapted—carrying essentials on foot, finding their ways to reach schools and markets, and supporting each other through difficult times.

mountains, but during the rains, they often slip on the muddy paths and fall down the slopes. It's heartbreaking to see, and it makes our work much harder." For many, the challenge is not just about movement but about access to essential services. Nandi Devi, 45, explains how women and elderly residents face particular difficulties: "When someone falls ill, finding transport is nearly impossible. Vehicles don't come here because of the poor road conditions. We have to rely on each other and make do with what we have."

A Journey to Education

For students, an incomplete road is more than an inconvenience—it shapes their future. Bhavana Rawal, a 10th-grade student, walks 5 km every day on an unpaved

road to reach her school in Sailani, 9 km away. "Most of the time, we manage, but during the rains, we arrive at school covered in mud. On some days, we can't go at all," she says. Kavita, 18, has similar concerns. "During the monsoon and winter, getting to school is incredibly difficult. The steep paths become dangerous, and there is always the fear of slipping. Sometimes, we miss school for days, which affects our studies."

The Road Ahead

Efforts have been made over the years to bring road connectivity to Surag and Bhagdhanu. A survey for the road's construction was conducted, and discussions continued resolving land-related concerns. Local leaders, like village head Champa Devi,

have been advocating for progress, and there is optimism that change will come. In Uttarakhand, over 33,500 km of roads have already been built, with 171 km of new roads planned for 2024-25 under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Across the state, better road connectivity has opened doors to education, healthcare, and employment. There is hope that the Rs 70,000 crore allocated in the Union Budget for rural roads will also reach villages like Surag and Bhagdhanu, ensuring that they, too, become part of this expanding network.

For now, the people of these villages continue their journeys—on foot, through difficult terrain, with patience and resilience. But with consistent efforts from local communities, government agencies, and policymakers, the day is not far when these paths will finally be paved, bringing with them new possibilities for those who have waited the longest.

(The Author writes on development and a resident of Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand. Views are personal. Charkha features)



FIRST COLUMN

MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES IN LIFE

Those who exhibit positive behaviour and make righteous choices excel and live a meaningful life



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Yes, there are five choices; by making them we can excel in life. These are to become good people. We know whom we call good. They are good in their behaviour, choices, etc. The next level is of those, who are not only good but they mostly follow dharma also, which pleases God. The next level is that of welfare workers, who dedicate their lives to the service of humanity without any selfish motive. Out of the followers of dharma, God appoints some as His (nimitta) instrument to carry out activities for God to uphold dharma. The top-most level of course is of bhaktas (devotees) of God. I will now give details regarding how one can become these five and what benefits one will derive by doing so.

To be good in spiritual parlance means to have the highest percentage of the mode of goodness. There are three modes, which are: goodness, passion and darkness. They are always competing with us. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 14.10) The mode of goodness is illuminating and free from diseases on account of purity. (14.6) The mode of passion suffers from the fault of attachment. (14.7) One is too attached to certain acts and their results. Unfortunately, the results are not in our hands. (2.47) One, therefore, suffers from anxiety, fear, depression, etc.



The mode of darkness deludes, which gives rise to many faults like carelessness. (14.8) Lord Krishna has set out in great detail about activities in goodness in the Bhagavad-Geeta. If we imbibe them, the percentage of the mode of goodness will gradually increase in us. There are many benefits in doing so and the best is goodness being the stepping stone to devotional life—the highest, and good karmaphalas of course. The next level is of persons, who strictly follow dharma besides being good.

This sets them apart from the masses. One is aligned with the plan of God for us, who is for upholding dharma. God even incarnates to do so. (6.7) We know what dharma is; it is the highest moral and religious principle. Benefits are many including accumulating pious karmas. The third higher level is that of welfare workers. God promises no 'durgati' (bad end) for such persons. (6.40) This is a big achievement because old age and bad ends are very scary prospects for human beings. Lord Krishna has singled out King Janaka as the role model in the Bhagavad-Geeta (3.20) in this connection.

The next higher level is that of 'nimittas' (instruments) of God; He chooses them from those who are habitually followers of dharma and are inclined to serve God as Arjuna did. God does everything as a karta for them and they get credit for the acts done. (11.33) The topmost category is those of devotees of God. Their rise is from being good people to strict followers of dharma. Then, they do spiritual practices like praying, darshan of God's Deities, offering obeisance to God, chanting of God's names and mantras, dhyan of God, thanking God for favours done, etc.

They become very dear to God, who is everything. (7.19) The top-most benefit of being a devotee of God is liberation in a few lives. (6.45) I am going to describe the benefits in greater detail because these are the highest. God guides, and He, being omniscient, knows what will work every time. I have made a habit of praying for guidance anytime I have some doubts about something. I have been surprised by God's response. They are no longer intuitions because they work. The same happens in the case of help. God helps His devotees like one cannot even dream of.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher, views are personal)

Beyond the boundary: The passion, intelligence and legacy of cricket



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Cricket, the game of glorious uncertainties, is almost a religion in our country. It often gets more attention than other sports but then you have to play it to experience its magic



There are people who frown upon what they view as the obsessive interest that many Indians have in cricket and, to a lesser extent, soccer. One wonders how many of them are familiar with Rudyard Kipling's reference to the "flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddled oafs at the goal" in his poem, *The Islander*, first published in *The Times*, London, on January 4, 1902. One also wonders whether even those who are familiar are aware that any attempt to cite the quote in vindication of their position, can run into a squall.

He wrote the poem in anger, as he felt that the English cricket team that was on an ashes tour of Australia in 1901-02, was getting more attention from the public than the British soldiers who were dying in the Boer War in South Africa, which was then limping towards an end. People paid lip service to their valour and "Then ye returned to your trinkets; then ye contented your souls/ With the flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddled oafs at the goals."

It is clear from the lines that follow that Kipling's rebuke was addressed not primarily at Britishers who played cricket and soccer but his countrymen in general for not doing enough to cope with the challenges that were going to confront the British empire—of which he was an unabashed apologist. These read, "Given to strong delusion, wholly believing a lie, / Ye saw that the land lay fenceless, and ye let the months go by/Waiting some easy wonder, hoping some saving sign/Idle—openly idle—in the lee of the forespent Line. / Idle—except for your boasting—and what is your boasting worth/If ye grudge a year of service to the lordliest life on earth?"

The reference in the last line was to conscription for military service that many in Britain abhorred. Let us, however, not digress, especially when it not even caused by "perfume from a dress"—as TS Eliot puts it in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Our original concerns were cricket and soc-



INTELLIGENCE WAS NEEDED TO TAILOR ONE'S BATTING AND/OR BOWLING TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE PITCH AND THE NATURE OF THE OUTFIELD, THE MIND HAD TO BE SET TO WORK TO FIND OUT THE VULNERABILITIES OF THE PLAYERS OF THE OPPOSING SIDE, AND DEVISE THE STRATEGY TO WIN A MATCH

cer, to which we must now revert. I have never played much soccer. I played cricket for my College (Presidency) and clubs (Union Sporting and Dakshin Kolikata Sangsad), in Kolkata in the 1950s. Even at those levels—by no means lofty—I realised that playing required a lot of intelligence and application of mind, intense concentration, reflection, enormous will power and determination, courage, considerable physical fitness and huge reserves of stamina.

Intelligence was needed to tailor one's batting and/or bowling to meet the demands of the pitch and the nature of the outfield. The mind had to be set to work to find out the vulnerabilities of the players of the opposing side, and devise the strategy to win a match. Determination was needed to continue fighting even when the odds were heavily loaded against one, will power to calm the butterflies that began in fluttering in one's stomach as one walked out to bat and took guard, and courage not to run away from fast bowling on a wicket with uneven bounce where one could get hurt any moment.

The matches we played were mostly for a day. As an opening batsman, I could be at the wicket for a maximum period of three hours. As a first-change medium pacer, I bowled a maximum of eight overs in two spells. As the skipper of my college team, I fielded mostly at first slip or short square leg, which meant I did not have to do much running around. Yet I was pretty much drained out at the end of it all. Cricket matches are war by other means among well-established rivals, and particularly so when it comes to India and Pakistan, or

England and Australia for the ashes. It, however, also has other dimensions. If history, to quote TS Eliot again—this time from *Gerontion*—"has many cunning passages, contrived corridors," cricket has its tantalising moments and amusing anecdotes.

Several of the latter relate to Dr WG Grace, a legend of English cricket who had an MRCS and LRCP against his name. In one of these, he had gone to a village to play in a charity match, and a massive crowd had turned out to watch. A huge cheer rent the sky as he walked to the wicket and took guard. Then the unthinkable happened. A village lad who was bowling shattered his stumps with the devil of a delivery. The umpire signalled "out." A deadly hush fell on the ground. Grace did not move. He looked at the bowler and said, "All of these people have come to see WG Grace bat and not your monkey tricks. So go back and start bowling."

There are stories relating to India as well. One of these is about Ganesh Bose who, along with his brother, Kartik Bose—both my maternal grand-uncles—constituted the bedrock of Bengal's batting from the late 1920s to late 1940s. A dashing batsman, he was once out to a rank bad shot in a critical match. One of his maternal uncles, who was among the spectators, rushed to him as he returned to the pavilion, and unleashed a mouthful of colourful abuses. Ganesh Bose glared at him for a moment and then said between his teeth, "I would have buried you here had you not been my maternal uncle (mama na hole tomake eikhane punte pheltam in Bengali). There are many stories about Kartik Bose too.

There was a good spinner who played college and club cricket and kept long hair, which fell on his eyes every time he bowled. Watching him at the Cricket Association of Bengal's nets at the Eden Gardens, which he conducted, Bose had asked him several times to cut his hair. As the spinner showed no sign of complying, he summoned one of Kolkata's many roadside barbers who sat in the Kolkata Maidan, and, as the nets concluded, had a crew-cut administered to him.

I had to give up cricket shortly after 21. Those days, cricket offered neither money nor the kind of career I wanted. The crunch came when I saw some of those who played with me join the railways at subordinate levels, while my friends at college joined the Indian Railways Traffic Service and the Indian Railways Accounts Service, both central services of the Government of India, as officers.

It was a deeply painful step. My family's link with cricket goes back to the time of Saradaranjan Ray (1858-1925), principal Metropolitan College and elder brother to my maternal great-grandfather, Upendrakishore Ray (1863-1915). A brilliant player himself and dubbed WG Grace of Bengal, he is known as the father of Bengal cricket. His grand nephew, Shivaji Ray, played for Bengal in the Ranji Trophy tournament. A person who was deeply saddened by my decision was another of my maternal grand-uncles, Prabhataranjan Ray. Very fond of me and a great supporter of my cricket, he watched every match I played.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

US exits Paris Agreement again: A setback for global climate action?

As the climate crisis escalates, the US exit threatens to disrupt climate diplomacy, financial commitments and emission reduction efforts worldwide

The newly elected president, Donald J. Trump has ordered the withdrawal of the United States from Paris Agreement on global warming for the second time, the first official exit being on November 4, 2020. The question is—Will the global momentum to cut emissions get stalled once again, as has happened in the past? Will other countries fill up the void or will we witness reduced contributions?

Though the withdrawal announcement of the world's biggest economy aligns with America first in international environmental agreements, can it disrupt the international climate diplomacy, at a critical moment of the climate crisis? With 200

countries committing towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and keeping the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius, the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015 showcased the collective accountability and shared responsibility of nations in addressing climate issues.

In his tenure, the former president, Joseph R Biden Jr has often communicated the vital role of the US in leading the world in curbing fossil fuel pollution. The support to developing countries for transitioning to renewable energy, building resilient infrastructure and adapting to climate change is essential to mitigate the adverse consequences of the



TAVISHI TEWARY

phenomenon and pace up the global progress on emission reduction.

This is in sharp contrast to the recent, yet not surprising announcement. Mr. Trump has often referred to it as an unfair and one-sided agreement that permits the South, particularly China and India to free-ride the economic burden of the North. With less than a year for it to be

effective, the U.S. will soon find itself with the other three countries—Iran, Libya and Yemen—of not being a party to the Paris agreement. This further raises the question of whether must all the countries contribute equally in terms of efforts and resources.

Though the principle of "Common but Differentiated Responsibility" has been undermined at all successive CoPs, does it imply that the developed countries can default on their financial commitments and jeopardise the global climate commitment?

With the announcement of US retrenchment from the agreement in 2017 and the beginning of the formal



withdrawal process, the International Energy Agency reported that global energy-related CO2 emissions increased by 1.7 per cent in 2018, after a steady decline over the last three years. In recent times, as is already known that the NDCs of

individual countries are not in pace with the Paris pact goal. With the withdrawal of the US, will it imply that countries will have to make greater reductions in emissions? Will it be possible? However, the key lessons learned from

this episode underscore the importance of political stability for long-term climate commitments. As an outcome, countries like China will take advantage of this situation by leveraging themselves as reliable and committed partners in global climate leadership. It will also halt the mitigation and adaptation efforts of developing countries due to the disrupted support from developed countries. Ceased contribution of the U.S. to the Green Climate Fund will hinder the availability of critical resources for developing countries. This tops up the already low pledges announced in COP29 at Baku this year compared to the demand by developing countries.

All of this can disrupt critical alliances, deviate nations to scale down their climate commitments and impact the world's ability to fight climate change.

The U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement raises urgent concerns about global climate action. As nations strive to meet climate goals, America's absence could weaken commitments, disrupt funding, and shift leadership dynamics. The world must now adapt, ensuring collective progress continues despite political instability and shifting priorities in international climate diplomacy.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, FORE School of Management, New Delhi; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Rupee falls 7 paise to close at 86.71 against US dollar

The rupee pared initial gains and settled 7 paise lower at 86.71 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by sustained foreign fund outflows and a recovery in the American currency index. Forex traders said the Indian rupee declined on Friday on weak domestic markets and a recovery in the US dollar index. However, weak crude oil prices cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a positive note at 86.50 against the greenback. During the session it pared the gains and fell to an intra-day low of 86.77 before ending the session at 86.71 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a loss of 7 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee appreciated 34 paise to close at 86.64 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.22 per cent higher at 106.61. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.42 per cent to USD 76.16 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 424.90 points, or 0.56 per cent, to settle at 75,311.06, while the Nifty fell 117.25 points, or 0.51 per cent, to 22,795.90 points.



India's forex reserves drop to \$635.721 billion

Snapping the three-week rising streak, India's forex reserves dropped by USD 2.54 billion to USD 635.721 billion in the week ended February 14, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous reporting week, the reserves had increased by USD 7.654 billion to USD 638.261 billion. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in September 2024. The forex kitty however declined thereafter due to forex market interventions by RBI to reduce volatility in the rupee. For the week ended February 14, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, decreased by USD 4.515 billion to USD 539.591 billion, the data released on Friday showed. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. Gold reserves, however, increased by USD 1.942 billion to USD 74.15 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 19 million to USD 17.897 billion. India's reserve position with the IMF was up by USD 14 million at USD 4.083 billion in the reporting week, the data showed.



AEPC to expand apparel exports into newer markets

Apparel exporters body AEPC on Friday said it is planning to expand the global reach of Indian apparel in 2025-26 by diversifying into newer and non-traditional markets to boot shipments. The sector's exports rose by 11.6 per cent to about USD 13 billion during April-January 2024-25 despite global headwinds, geopolitical challenges and supply chain disruptions, Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) Chairman Sudhir Sekhri said. "The council has planned to promote the global reach of Indian apparel exports by diversification of markets to newer and non-traditional markets through its export promotion activities in 2025-26," he said.

MPC MINUTES

Rate cut appropriate monetary policy response: RBI Guv

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra opined that rate reduction was an appropriate monetary policy response at this juncture citing movement of inflation towards the central bank's 4 per cent target, said the MPC meeting minutes released on Friday.

Malhotra, along with five other members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had voted for a 25 basis points reduction in the short-term lending rate (repo) to 6.25 per cent. The RBI at its meeting held from February 5 to 7 effected the rate cut after a gap of five years.

"Given the macroeconomic outlook when inflation is expected to align with the target, and recognising that monetary policy is forward-looking, I view a lower policy rate to be more appropriate at the current juncture," Malhotra said, according to the minutes.

Chairing his first MPC meeting, he had also pointed out that rising uncertainties on global financial markets and trade policy front, coupled with continuing risk of adverse weather events pose risks to



the inflation and growth outlook.

While the central bank had reduced the rate, it continued with the neutral stance of monetary policy.

"This will provide the flexibility to respond to the evolving macroeconomic environment. By taking this logical course, monetary policy will be able to fulfil its mandate and play its part in the sustainable development of the Indian economy," Malhotra said.

India-US trade pact will be mother of all deals: Goyal

PNS ■ KOCHI

The proposed bilateral trade pact between India and the US will be the "mother of all deals" that will provide huge opportunities for Indians and Americans to work together, Union minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday. Addressing the Invest Kerala Global Summit (IKGS) here, the commerce and industry minister said he has come here to express the central government's solidarity and full support to the event.

His comments also came against the backdrop of differences between the BJP-led Centre and the Kerala government, which is headed by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), on various issues.

The minister mentioned about India's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE and said it was the world's fastest ever negotiated free trade agreement.

"We hope to start the process soon for CEPA with Bahrain," he said in the presence of ministers from Bahrain and the UAE.

According to Goyal, India is



already in dialogues with the European Union, the UK and Oman for the trade deals.

"... we will soon start discussing with the Trump administration of the US a strong, powerful economic engagement and a bilateral trade deal which will be the mother of all deals providing huge opportunities for Indians and Americans to work together and complement each other's strengths in this very turbulent world," the minister said.

Highlighting the growth opportunities in Kerala and the country, Goyal told investors not to miss the bus and with respect to the state, not to miss the boat.

"... those who miss the boat

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.

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. Besides, they ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts.

In 2023, the US-India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at \$190.08 billion (\$ 123.89 billion in goods and \$ 66.19 billion in services trade). That year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at \$83.77 billion, while imports were \$40.12 billion, leaving a trade gap of \$ 43.65 billion in favour of India.

Stock markets fall on FII outflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Falling for the fourth straight day, benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 425 points on Friday due to selling in auto, pharma and banking shares and relentless foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dropped 424.90 points or 0.56 per cent to settle at 75,311.06. During the day, it tanked 623.55 points or 0.82 per cent to 75,112.41.

The NSE Nifty declined 117.25 points or 0.51 per cent to 22,795.90.

In four trading days, the BSE barometer tumbled 685.8 points or 0.90 per cent while the Nifty declined 163.6 points or 0.71 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra tanked



over 6 per cent.

Adani Ports, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Zomato, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

Tata Steel, Larsen & Toubro, HCL Tech, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank and NTPC were among the gainers.

"A combination of negative factors such as relentless FII selling, falling rupee, expensive valuations and the US threat of reciprocating tariff levies continue to drive investors away from Indian equities."

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,311.55 crore on Thursday, according to

exchange data.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 1.18 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.43 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, auto dropped 2.60 per cent, consumer discretionary (1.49 per cent), oil & gas (1.42 per cent), realty (1.33 per cent), telecommunication (1.19 per cent) and consumer durables (0.87 per cent).

Metal emerged as the only gainer and jumped 1.23 per cent.

As many as 2,246 stocks declined, while 1,701 advanced and 113 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark declined 628.15 points or 0.82 per cent and the Nifty went lower by 133.35 points or 0.58 per cent.

ESIC adds 17.01 lakh new members in December

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) added 17.01 lakh new members in December 2024, payroll data released on Friday showed.

As many as 20,360 new establishments were brought under the social security ambit of the ESI scheme in December last year, thus ensuring social security to more workers, a labour ministry statement said.

As per the data, out of the total 17.01 lakh employees added during the month, 8.22 lakh employees amounting to around 48.35 per cent of the total registrations belong to the age group of up to 25 years. Also, the net enrolment of female members was 3.46 lakh. Besides, a total of 73 transgender employees were registered under the ESI scheme during the month, affirming the commitment of ESIC to deliver its benefits to every section of the society.

The payroll data is provisional since the data generation is a continuous exercise, it stated.



'India to harvest bumper wheat crop during rabi'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is likely to harvest bumper wheat crop during the current rabi (winter-sown) season on the back of higher acreage and conducive weather conditions so far, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Friday.

India produced a record 1,132.92 lakh tonnes of wheat in 2023-24.

"We will have bumper wheat production this year. Crop health is good," Chouhan told reporters here.

The area under coverage of wheat stood at 320 lakh

hectare in the rabi season of 2024-25 crop year (July-June) as against 315.63 lakh hectare in the preceding year.

Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi, too, expected bumper wheat production in 2024-25 on the back of higher sowing areas.

He said the crop condition is good so far with normal day-night temperature.

On Thursday, the Department of Food and

Public Distribution tightened the stock limit on wheat for wholesalers, retailers and processors to keep prices under check and asserted that there is ample stock of food grain in the country.

The department said it is maintaining a close watch over the stock position of wheat to control prices and ensure easy availability in the country. It takes suitable appropriate interventions to ensure price stability

for the consumers in the country. As per the revised stock limit to be applicable till March 31, the government said traders/wholesalers can keep only 250 tonnes of wheat as against the earlier norm of 1,000 tonnes. For retailers, the stock limit has been revised to 4 tonnes for each retail outlet. The limit was 5 tonnes earlier. "As part of continuous efforts to moderate prices of wheat, the central government has decided to revise the wheat stock limit applicable until 31st March 2025," an official statement said.

India ready to meet 270 GW of peak power demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is ready to meet up to 270 GW of peak power demand during summer season this year and the government will make it mandatory for thermal plants, especially those using imported coal, to run at full capacity, Union Power Secretary Pankaj Agarwal said on Friday.

In 2024, the country was able to meet the peak power demand of 250 GW during summer against the projected

demand of 260 GW.

Addressing a press conference here, Agarwal informed that thermal power plants in the country have sufficient coal stocks of 51 million tonnes, which is enough for generating electricity for 21 days. "If we require we will invoke Section 11 (of Electricity Act) for meeting the demand," Agarwal assured.

The Section 11 allows the government to mandate power producers to operate plants in a specified manner in extraor-

inary circumstances.

Earlier last year, the power ministry had invoked Section 11 and mandated plants using imported coal to run at full capacity to avoid any shortage of power in the country in view of demand projections.

Union Power Minister Manohar Lal who was also present on the occasion said that there is sufficient domestic coal at present and the country's peak power demand is expected to touch 335 GW in 2030.

Power secretary Agarwal

informed that India had met peak power demand of 250 GW during summer season in 2024 against the projected demand of 260 GW.

He also assured that India is ready to meet the 270 GW of power demand during summers this year.

About the supply of fuel for coal-based thermal plants, the minister said that the proportion of blending of biomass pellet will be increased to 7 per cent from existing five per cent from April 1, 2025.

Barytes, felspar, mica, quartz are 'major' minerals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday said that it has changed the classification of barytes, felspar, mica and quartz into the category of major minerals.

This move would pave the way for an increased exploration and scientific mining of such resources that are primary source of many critical minerals.

Earlier, these were classified as minor minerals.

The Ministry of Mines vide gazette notification dated 20th February, 2025 has shifted minerals Barytes, Felspar, Mica and Quartz from the list of minor minerals to the category of major minerals," an official statement said.

The development came on the heels of the government's National Critical Mineral Mission which seeks exploration and mining of critical minerals within the country including recovery of these minerals from various mines, overburden and tailings.

Quartz, felspar and mica are found in pegmatite rocks, which are an important source of

many critical minerals such as beryl, lithium, niobium, tantalum, molybdenum, tin, titanium and tungsten among others. These minerals have important role in various new technologies, in energy transition, spacecraft industries, and healthcare sector, among others.

When the leases of quartz, felspar and mica mines are granted as minor mineral leases,

the lease holders do not declare existence of critical minerals associated with it such as lithium, beryl, etc as their primary objective is to use these minerals as minor minerals for construction, glass/ceramic making, etc. Consequently, the critical minerals associated with these minerals are neither getting extracted nor reported, the mines ministry said.



India needs to cut tariffs for its own good: Niti Aayog

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tariff does not protect any country and India needs to cut tariffs for its own good, irrespective of who tells India to do so, NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said on Friday. Addressing the 69th Foundation Day of All India Management Association (AIMA), Subrahmanyam further said that being open to the world has to be among the top five priorities of India if it wants to become a developed country.

To cut tariffs, India must complete trade agreements

with the European Union, the United Kingdom and other major economies, he added.

The Niti Aayog CEO stressed that deregulation at both centre and the state levels are critical for making India a part of the global supply chains.

There is interest in India but people visit, see and fly to other countries, he said.

Subrahmanyam pointed that Indonesia, Vietnam, Turkey and others have been beneficiaries of 'China plus one' strategy of global companies.

He argued that global value



chain needs more than PLI (production linked incentive) -- it needs deregulation and skilling too.

The Niti Aayog CEO termed the paperwork involved in

business horrendous, which is killing the MSMEs.

According to him, the Niti Aayog is trying to push India into global supply chains in different sectors.

He informed that the Aayog's recommendations for the electronics component supply chain are awaiting Cabinet clearance and it is working on the steps needed by auto component, chemicals, textiles and footwear sectors to join global supply chains.

Subrahmanyam informed that the Niti Aayog has conceptualised a national manufacturing mission which will be launched in three months. The mission will coordinate with more than 20 ministries on manufacturing related policies, he added.

Along with manufacturing, he opined that education and agriculture have to be the top three priorities of the country to become a developed country. He said that India has a conundrum of a large population with vacant jobs because of a paucity of relevant skills.

Agriculture has to be transformed by shifting it away from rice and wheat to horticulture, floriculture, dairy and such activities, Subrahmanyam added. Referring to the disparity between states, he said that the states that offer the best education and the best business experience are richer and growing richer.

Pace issues can't diminish the emotional power of *Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal*

TEJAL SINHA
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Plot:

Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal follows the story of Kaushalji (Ashutosh Rana), an accountant in the small town of Kannauj and his wife (Sheeba Chaddha), a homemaker with a passion for perfume making. Despite their individual interests, both are caught up in the daily grind of life and unable to pursue their dreams. Their son, Yug (Pavai Gulati), works in an agency in Noida, often criticising his parents for their outdated ways. However, Yug's life takes a turn when he meets Kiara (Isha Talwar), a free-spirited woman who challenges his rigid views on life. Their relationship becomes the catalyst for change, inspiring Kaushalji and his wife to embrace modernity, even to the extent of considering mutual separation to pursue their personal dreams. The film explores the emotional rollercoaster that follows as the family learns to navigate their relationships, values and self-identity.

Analysis:

Seema Desai's direction brings a refreshing yet relatable perspective on generational gaps and evolving family dynamics. The film shines a light on how modernity often clashes with traditional values, and the emotional journey of Kaushalji and his wife emphasises the importance of rediscovering one's passions. Desai balances the humor and emotional depth well, making the film accessible to a wide audience. At its core, *Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal* is a reflection on how the fast-paced, career-driven life of the younger generation sometimes overlooks the dreams and desires of the older generation. While the pace feels slow in the first half, it picks up in the latter part



DIRECTED BY:
 Seema Desai

PRODUCED BY: Jyoti

CAST: Ashutosh Rana, Sheeba Chaddha, Pavai Gulati, Isha Talwar, Brijendra Kala, Grusha Kapoor

Streaming on:
 JioHotstar

RATING: 3.5/5

as the emotional stakes grow, leaving the audience invested in the characters' growth and eventual realisation.

Highlights:

The strength of the film lies in its relatability, as it speaks to anyone who has struggled to balance family expectations with personal desires. The key moment of the

story—when Kaushalji and his wife decide to pursue their own dreams—becomes a turning point not just for the characters but for the viewers as well. The film encourages the audience to reflect on their own relationships with family, especially the aspirations of parents who often sacrifice their dreams for the sake of their children. The humour is well-timed and

the dialogues thoughtfully explore modern relationships. While the first half could have been tighter, the second half comes together beautifully with a satisfying and heartwarming climax that ties up the emotional arc of the characters.

Drawbacks:

The film's pacing is somewhat uneven,

especially in the first half. Some scenes feel drawn out and could have been trimmed down to maintain the narrative's momentum. There are moments where the storyline lingers too long on certain aspects, such as the initial family dynamics and the setup for the shift in Kaushalji and his wife's thinking. Though these moments are integral to building the emotional foundation of the film, they slow down the plot. Despite these pacing issues, the latter part of the film, particularly the climax, more than makes up for the slow start with its emotional payoff and satisfying resolution.

Performances:

The ensemble cast of *Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal* brings immense depth to the film, with each actor giving an outstanding performance. Ashutosh Rana, in the role of Kaushalji, delivers a nuanced performance that beautifully captures the inner conflict of a man caught between tradition and change. His body language, expressions, and attention to detail make his portrayal both realistic and endearing. Sheeba Chaddha complements Rana's performance perfectly. As Kaushalji's wife, her portrayal of a homemaker whose life revolves around family expectations resonates with authenticity. Her eyes alone speak volumes, reflecting the silent sacrifices of countless women in similar situations.

Pavai Gulati as Yug brings a refreshing energy to the film. He plays the character with conviction, capturing the youthful idealism and frustration of a son who feels disconnected from his parents' lifestyle. Isha Talwar's Kiara is equally captivating, portraying a modern woman who challenges Yug's worldview. Talwar's charm and charisma elevate the film, and her on-screen chemistry with Gulati feels natural and convincing. The supporting cast, including Grusha Kapoor, Diksha Joshi and Brijendra Kala, also add value to the film, contributing to its overall warmth and depth.

Technical Aspects:

On the technical front, *Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal* excels in creating a visual atmosphere that enhances the emotional tone of the story. The cinematography beautifully captures the contrast between the traditional setting of Kannauj and the modern, fast-paced world of Noida. The film uses this setting to mirror the generational divide, with the town representing the older generation's traditional values and Noida symbolising the younger generation's modern outlook. The music, which includes Qawwali and light-hearted tunes, complements the narrative perfectly, providing a subtle yet effective backdrop to the unfolding story.

Seema Desai's direction is commendable, especially in handling the film's emotional arc. While the pacing issues in the first half may detract from the overall flow, the film eventually picks up momentum and delivers a satisfying conclusion. The writing is another strength of the film, with dialogues that are both sharp and heartfelt, making the characters' emotional journeys feel real and relatable.

Verdict:

Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal is an endearing and insightful film that explores the intersection of family values, personal growth, and modernity. The film is a celebration of self-discovery, reminding viewers of the importance of pursuing one's dreams, even in the face of familial obligations. Despite its pacing issues in the first half, the film's emotional depth and the powerful performances from the cast, especially Ashutosh Rana and Sheeba Chaddha, make it a worthwhile watch. It is a perfect film to watch with family, offering not only entertainment but also a valuable lesson on family bonds, dreams, and the balance between tradition and modernity. Streaming on Jio Hotstar, *Kaushaljis Vs Kaushal* is a heartfelt movie that deserves to be seen, especially over a weekend with loved ones.

'Drawing inspiration from real-life experiences gave me the emotional depth for *Mrs.*'

PNSI HYDERABAD

In ZEE5's latest movie *Mrs.*, Sanya Malhotra delivers a remarkable portrayal of Richa, a woman caught between traditional expectations, family responsibilities and her own dreams. The film explores the struggles of women who are burdened with managing a household while their personal aspirations are often sidelined. In an insightful conversation, Sanya shared her thoughts on the role and how it allowed her to reflect on stereotypes deeply ingrained in society. Sanya acknowledged that portraying Richa was both challenging and deeply moving, as her character mirrors the experiences of millions of women. "Portraying Richa made me reflect on the deeply ingrained stereotypes, especially the idea that managing a home is solely a woman's responsibility," Sanya shared. She emphasised the importance of equal sharing of responsibilities, noting that the film reinforced the need to break outdated norms. "In reality, it's essential for everyone to understand that it's important to share the workload equally. The film highlights how crucial it is to recognize the effort that goes into these everyday tasks and to challenge the traditional notions of gender roles."

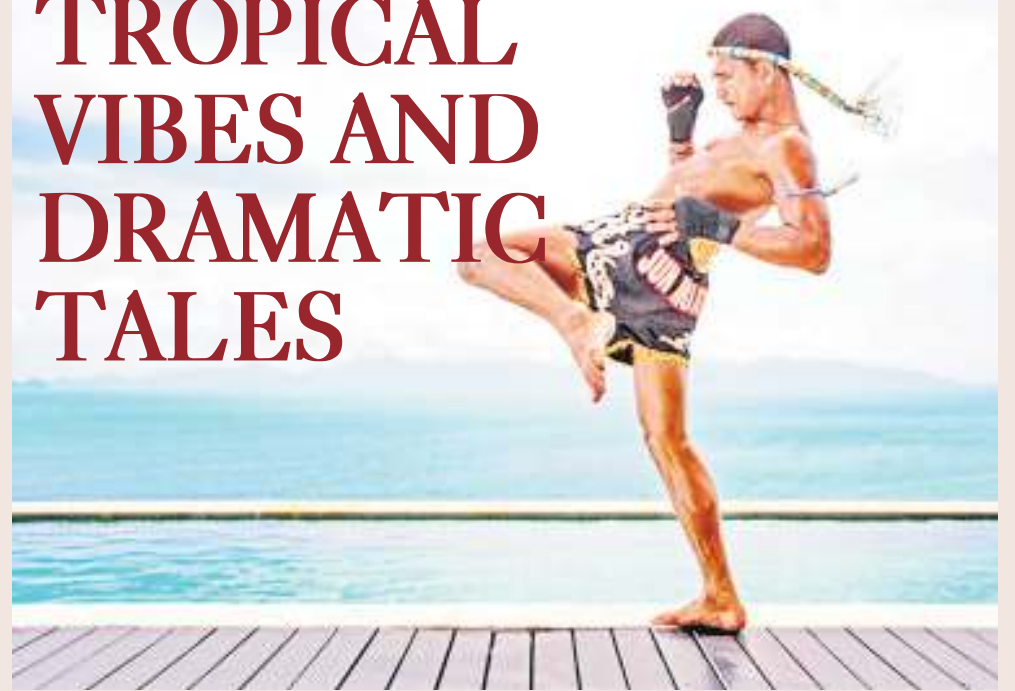
Richa's emotional journey, particularly her aspiration to

become a dancer while being forced into domestic chores, offered Sanya a unique opportunity to dive into the internal struggle of women who are often expected to give up their dreams for the sake of family. "Richa's emotional journey was both challenging and moving because her story mirrors the reality of millions of homemakers," Sanya explained. "Drawing inspiration from real-life experiences gave me the emotional depth and authenticity needed to bring Richa's internal struggles to life." For Sanya, it was important to develop a backstory for the character to better understand her motivations and balance the emotional complexities. "For every character I work on, I love developing a backstory. This helps me navigate and balance the journey of the character," she added.

Sanya also spoke highly of her co-star, Nishant Dahiya, who played her husband Diwakar in the film. "He played Diwakar's character with so much empathy," Sanya praised. She recalled a memorable moment during the script reading. "I remember the first time we were reading the scripts over a Zoom call, I texted Arati (Director Arati Kadav) on the side saying, 'Oh my god, he is so much into Diwakar's character!' I was like, 'What's going on?' But then I realised, he was just so deeply connected to the character, and I feel that's the only way you can truly play such roles."

In *Mrs.*, Richa's journey to reclaim her dreams amidst mounting expectations and a husband who is oblivious to her struggles paints a poignant picture of many women's lives. Sanya's portrayal of Richa not only highlights the sacrifices women make but also urges a broader conversation about shared responsibility in relationships and the importance of supporting women in their dreams.

TROPICAL VIBES AND DRAMATIC TALES



Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui partnered with Max to host a viewing party of the HBO Original Series *The White Lotus Season three*. The pool and beachside of the resort played host to the much-anticipated first episode on February 17, 2025 as guests of the resort and friends of Four Seasons gathered to celebrate the Emmy-winning original series. Featured in the latest season, the resort's facilities and services are geared up to welcome guests to a place where the tropical beauty of Thailand and a world of drama collide. "It is a privilege and honour to have our property featured on the HBO Original Series *The White Lotus Season three*," says Four Seasons Resort Koh Samui General Manager Jasjit Assi. "We look forward to welcoming our jet-setting guests to showcase the very best of Four Seasons experiences and true Thai hospitality."

From Reel to Real Capturing the essence of Thailand's quintessential island life, guests can relive the show with an immersive experience at various venues across the resort. While the stretch of white sand Main Beach serves as a stunning backdrop to enjoy sunbathing or swimming in the crystal-clear waters, CoCoRum Bar is where all the action is at with lively beverages and bites coming together for a memorable experience. At the resort's hilltop Koh Thai Kitchen, authentic southern Thai cuisine and breathtaking views capturing the rich culture and flavours of Thailand lead the way to the resort's sacred Spirit House - a serene and culturally significant location that embodies

Thai spirituality.

A Delectable Experience by the Sea In addition to the premiere viewing, the beachside experience at the resort is transformed into The White Lotus Bar at CoCoRum, with cabanas, small bites and beverages inspired by the series. The resort's chic poolside lounge with decadent cocktails, CoCoRum emphasizes artisanal spirits and is home to Asia's only rum vault.

With The White Lotus Bar takeover at this iconic venue from February 17 to May 16, 2025, guests can enjoy a special menu of cocktails including one from each of the Four Seasons properties featured in the show: **● PINEAPPLE SUITE:** The tropical flavours of Hawaii are infused into a decadent cocktail inspired by Maui in Season one. **● THE LOTUS:** Deep within Sicily's romantic charm, the cocktail from Taormina, a location featured in Season two, takes its place on this special menu. **● COCONUT PARADISE:** Bringing

the magic back to the tropics, the cocktail from Koh Samui's iconic filming location for Season three combines the sweet aroma of coconut with the gentle scent of Thai pandan leaves.

Complementing the beverage selection, the resort has also curated a menu of light bites that reflect the signature flavours from the three destinations including Pomelo and Shrimps on rice crackers (Yam Som-O), Guacamole, Wagyu Beef Tostada and Grilled Tiger Prawn Tacos.

"It is a privilege and honour to have our property featured on the HBO Original Series *The White Lotus Season three*"



Gill gives India confidence against Pakistan

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Shubman Gill has an invincibility cloak hung around his shoulder in ODIs these days. Conditions and oppositions do not feature in his set-list. After taking a dominant avatar against England recently at home, Gill faced a different challenge against Bangladesh in India's Champions Trophy (CT) opener in Dubai on Thursday night. The pitch was sluggish and the bowlers consistently probed for weakness. But Gill beat both to notch up his eighth ODI hundred that led India to a six-wicket victory. The 125-ball century was the slowest he has made so far, but was perhaps the most important in his career. That uncharacteristically sedate outing carried a deeper meaning as it validated Gill's growing stature as India's all-weather batter in white-ball formats.

His form is a good omen when legends like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, who have been performing that role for several years, are in the twilight zone of their careers. And with important matches against Pakistan and New Zealand lined-up, India would need him to continue in the same vein. There were a couple of signature shots last night — a cracking short-arm pull off pacer Tanzim Hasan and a spearing, lofted cover drive off the same bowler for a four. Those hits in the ninth over were breathtaking, showcasing Gill's otherworldly timing, but even more mesmerising was his transformation to a batter full of self-restraint after that. When Rohit Sharma (41) got out in the 10th over, Gill was batting on 26 off 23 balls, and a lift-off looked imminent. But it wasn't there. His next boundary came in the 33rd over when pacer Taskin Ahmed returned to attack.



Till then, Gill was milking the spinners and pacer Mustafizur Rahman, a lethal slower ball, for singles and twos, ensuring that the quick start given by Rohit would not go in vain. In that phase, the 25-year-old scored just 30 runs off 52 balls, showing admirable situational awareness.

It was of little surprise when Gill termed it as a "satisfying" effort. "Definitely one of my most satisfying innings that I have played. The message was sent from outside that I have to try to bat till the end and that's what I tried to do," Gill would say later to the host broadcaster. Rohit was also chuffed to see the Punjab cricketer adhering to the team order. "He's been batting brilliantly of late and what he showed us (against Bangladesh), it shouldn't surprise anyone. What was good to see was he was there till the end," said Rohit. Along with carrying his bat through, Gill also tweaked his tactics as per the game's evolving needs. A feature of Gill's batting was him coming down the track even against pacers, something he does not usually do. Generally, he stays at the crease to drive, flick or pull the quicker bowlers, a minimalistic approach

that reduces the risk quotient. Gill explained that change in his approach. "Cutting the ball wasn't easy because the balls which were outside the off-stump weren't coming onto the bat that nicely. So, I thought of using my feet to even the fast bowlers and tried to go over the circle," he added. The strategic fluidity apart, Gill's willingness to look beyond easy-on-the-eye but fleeting knocks will stand India in good stead in this tournament. If the early signs are anything to go by, then the pitches in Dubai could remain slow-burners. While Pakistan have only one spinner in Abrar Ahmed, New Zealand will be a more formidable rival as they have two excellent white-ball spinners in Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell. They were exceptional in stifling Pakistan in the middle overs in Karachi on a flatbed and the Kiwis can pose a bigger threat on the slack Dubai deck.



Kohli is putting lot more pressure on himself: Kumble

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India captain and coach Anil Kumble feels Virat Kohli is putting a "lot more pressure on himself" in his effort to get out of the lean patch, and advised the batting icon to remain mentally relaxed. Since the 2023 ODI World Cup, Kohli has hit just one fifty while scoring 137 runs in six ODI innings. "I think he's trying a bit too hard. You can see that in the way he is going about his innings. He just needs to not worry about it," Kumble said on "ESPNcricinfo". "Rohit comes in there, has the freedom because there is plenty of batting and all of them are in great form. Similarly for Virat, he just needs to come in and not worry about anything else," he added. "All players go through tough moments in their career, but I get a feeling watching him bat, I think he is putting a lot more pressure on himself," Kumble added. Kumble reckoned a relaxed approach would help Kohli in getting out of the rut. "When you have that kind of pressure and you have that kind of expectation, you suddenly start putting undue importance to all of that and then try hard to do well. "When you do that, you're not really relaxed. The best innings that I am sure he's played, he's not even thinking about all of that." In India's Champions Trophy

opener against Bangladesh, Kohli struggled to score, and was eventually dismissed on 22 by leg-spinner Rishad Hossain, making it the Indian's sixth consecutive dismissal against spin. "To start off against spin, on surfaces like that, you need a lot of confidence. He's certainly trying too hard to manoeuvre that. He's a good player of spin when he's in form, when he wants to just knock singles off and keep rotating the strike. "Now he's trying too hard to score runs rather than just his manoeuvre, and that's been his game plan. He just needs to relax a little bit and not worry too much about the outcome of what happens on the field rather than just go out there and have the freedom to play naturally, what he does really well." Kohli doesn't have big-hitting game anymore: Manjrekar Former India batter Sanjay Manjrekar said Kohli's lean run in Australia has left him in a "tight corner," affecting his confidence. "He still wants to show that he's up there for a fight, and I am starting to see maybe there's a little bit of bravado as well, and why not? You can't be revealing what's inside you." He suggested that Kohli might no longer possess the big-hitting ability to dominate bowlers at will. "Virat doesn't have the big game anymore. We've seen on occasion him playing the big shot, but he can't hit at will like a Shubman Gill does."

Kerala enter Ranji Trophy final

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A resilient Kerala on Friday sealed their maiden Ranji Trophy final by taking a dramatic two-run first-innings lead over Gujarat, 68 years after making their debut in Indian cricket's premier domestic competition. Going into the final day at 429/7, the home side, who won the Ranji title in 2016-17, needed just 29 runs to take a first innings lead. However, left-arm spinner Aditya Sarwate delivered under pressure, taking all three wickets to bowl Gujarat out for 455 in 174.4 overs to leave them two runs short of the mark. Making only their second semifinal appearance, the visitors had been left frustrated by a dogged 72-run eighth-wicket stand between Jaymeet Patel (74 overnight) and Siddharth Desai (24 overnight). They started the day needing three wickets with just 28 runs to defend. Kerala, who last made the semifinals in 2018-19 after making their Ranji debut back in 1957, will face Vidarbha in the summit clash after the latter defeat heavyweights



Mumbai by 80 runs in the other semifinal. Sarwate's breakthroughs came amid high drama, including a dropped catch, a tight stumping decision, and a successful DRS review that overturned a caught-out call to an LBW dismissal. First it was Kerala skipper Sachin Baby, who dropped the well-set Jaymeet with Gujarat 23 runs shy of a lead. But Jaymeet could not make it count and perished for 79 (177 balls; 2x4) in the same over when he dragged his foot outside the crease while the ball passed his outside edge for Mohammed Azharuddeen to complete an excellent stumping. After multiple replays, umpire finally ruled him out as his

to LBW. Nagwaswalla and last man Priyajitsinh Jadeja brought Gujarat within eight runs when Kerala missed a half-chance, with the ball slipping from Salman Nizar's grasp. Jalaj Saxena nearly claimed his fifth wicket as Nagwaswalla's inside edge brushed past leg stump, leaving Gujarat just two runs short. Then came the decisive moment. Sarwate tossed one up, Nagwaswalla swung hard, and the ball ricocheted off Nizar's helmet at short leg before lobbing to Baby at slip. The Amay Khurasiya-coached side erupted in celebration, securing a historic Ranji final berth as a dejected Nagwaswalla walked back in disbelief. For Kerala, Sarwate, who had started the day with 1/101, ended with figures of 45.4-7-111-4. Jalaj, who toiled hard for 71 overs, returned with 4/149 including 14 maidens. With their maiden Ranji final berth secured, Kerala batted with ease in the second innings, scoring 114 for four in 46 overs in their second innings in the drawn affair.



India interested in hosting 2030 CWG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is "interested" in hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games (CWG) and also conduct all those disciplines that were axed from the 2026 edition to ensure that the country's medal tally is not affected when the event is held in Glasgow, a source in the sports ministry revealed on Friday. The last date to submit an 'Expression of Interest' to host the 2030 CWG is March 31 and the ministry source said the process will get underway soon. "We are interested in hosting the 2030 Commonwealth Games and a formal interaction has taken place with the Commonwealth Games Federation on this. We have also proposed that all the disciplines that have been removed from the 2026 CWG be held in India," the source said. India last hosted the CWG in 2010. The ministry's push to have the axed events of the 2026 edition in India is a way to ensure that the CWG remains a high medal-yielding competition for the country. Last year, in a huge blow to India's medal prospects, key sports such as hockey, badminton, wrestling, cricket and shooting were dropped from the programme by host city Glasgow, which announced a pruned roster of 10 disciplines to keep the event budget-friendly. "We are merely looking to ensure that our medal tally does not suffer. An informal proposal (to have axed disciplines in India) has been

put across, we will see how the host city responds to it," the source said. India had given a similar proposal for the archery and shooting competitions of the 2022 CWG in Birmingham and the CGF, along with the host city, had even approved it by agreeing to add the medals won to the finally tally. However, the idea could not be executed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Table tennis, squash and triathlon were also axed by Glasgow in a bid to limit the cost and streamline logistics given that only four venues will host the entire showpiece there. The total number of events at the Games is nine less than the 2022 Birmingham edition. The 23rd edition of Games is scheduled to take place from July 23 to August 2, marking Glasgow's return as host after 12 years. Athletics and Para Athletics (Track & Field), Swimming and Para Swimming, Artistic Gymnastics, Track Cycling and Para Track Cycling, Netball, Weightlifting and Para Powerlifting, Boxing, Judo, Bowls and Para Bowls, and 3x3 Basketball and 3x3 Wheelchair Basketball will form the sports programme in the 2026 CWG. Olympic bid on track. India is also eyeing the hosting rights of the 2036 Olympic Games for which a letter of intent was sent to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) last year. "We are now waiting for the IOC elections to wind up next month for things to move ahead. The final decision on this is not coming before

Jiri Lehecka beats Carlos Alcaraz in Qatar Open quarterfinals

PTI ■ DOHA

Top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz lost for just the second time this year on Thursday when 25th-ranked Jiri Lehecka beat him 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the Qatar Open. Alcaraz's only other defeat in 2025 was to Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open quarterfinals. The 21-year-old Spaniard, ranked No. 3, won the Rotterdam Open earlier this month. "I've talked with my team, with my coach, and honestly I don't know what I could have done better," Alcaraz said in a press conference. "Honestly, I don't know. It was kind of a difficult feelings, I guess. I have to give credit to him as well, because when he was down, especially in the third set, he didn't give up."



Alcaraz led 4-2 in the third set and had a break point on Lehecka's serve, but couldn't finish off the Czech, who won the next three games to advance to the semifinals. The 23-year-old Lehecka will next play eighth-seeded Jack Draper, who knocked out Matteo Berrettini 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. "The match was up and down since the beginning," Lehecka

Rublev saved one match point and needed eight of his own to subdue second-seeded Alex de Minaur 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (8). Rublev reached his fourth semifinals in Doha, where he won the title in 2020. He'll next face Canada's Félix Auger-Aliassime, who beat Daniil Medvedev when the Russian retired after losing the first set 6-3. "Unfortunately, I had food poisoning. Very disappointed to end my run here in Doha like this as I feel like I was playing well," Medvedev said in a statement. Auger-Aliassime said on court he thought Medvedev was "playing normal" until he retired. "And then I broke, I held my serve. And he just told (the umpire) that he didn't want to shake our hands because he was sick."

Attention to detail, loyalty towards craft make Shami lethal

PTI ■ DUBAI

A difficult and painful injury layoff firmly behind him, seasoned India pacer Mohammed Shami says attention to detail and loyalty towards his craft make him lethal in ICC events where he only cares about breakthroughs and not his economy rate. Shami grabbed an brilliant five-wicket haul in India's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh to play a pivotal role in the team's six-wicket triumph. In the process, he also became the fastest Indian and the second quickest overall to reach 200 ODI wickets here on Thursday night. "In ICC events, if my ball gets hit a little, that's okay, but I should get a wicket, then that will be better for my team. I always think about this," Shami said at the post-match press conference. The 34-year-old quick battled

a career-threatening 14-month layoff due to an ankle injury during the 2023 ODI World Cup. He returned to international action last month in the limited-overs series against England and is now leading India's attack here in the absence of an injured Jasprit Bumrah. "I just try to complete my skill with utmost loyalty. Like I have completed my 14 months - How loyal are you to that skill? How hungry are you to achieve your goal...How you will get that rhythm again. You should be hungry," Shami said when asked about his love affair with ICC events. While wrecking Bangladesh here, Shami became India's leading wicket-taker in 50-over ICC events. His tally now stands at 60, overtaking former India pacer spearhead Zaheer Khan. The retired left-arm seamer had taken 59 wickets in 32 innings while Shami crossed

the mark in just his 19th innings. He has 55 wickets in ODI World Cups across three editions, with 24 coming in the 2023 tournament hosted at home. Shami said he has always focussed on minor details like rhythm, and level of discomfort while bowling to understand where he stood in terms of his form. "Is your rhythm good? Do you have any discomfort? I pay attention to those things. I do not pay attention to the result. I pay attention to the present. And I always try to meet the situation that is in demand. Am I good at that or not?" he said giving a peek into his mind. Shami, who claimed his sixth ODI fiver here, also has the most five-wicket hauls for India in the format. He recalled the frustration he felt while watching India's woes in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy last month when Bumrah shouldered the



enormous burden of leading the attack without him at the other end. "It was very difficult...When you see that your team is very close to the edge, or it's a very close match, at that time you miss your bowlers who you used to bowl along with, or your unit. I wish I was there," he said. "I could have contributed something. Could have helped," he added.

Shami has been candid enough to admit that the injury left him devastated to the extent that he feared he wouldn't be able to play again. But the pacer said once he made a domestic comeback towards the end of 2024, his confidence rose up again. "...I got to play domestic matches to gain confidence and to see my rhythm. To see what changes have come in the last 14 months or after the surgery...I got four international matches to play and I played 8-9-10 domestic matches. That gave me a lot of confidence," he said. All set for Pakistan clash Sunday would be the proverbial show-stopper of ICC events when India take on Pakistan, hoping to add another exciting chapter to the rivalry that is almost always the marquee match of an ICC event. Shami said nothing changes for his team in terms of mindset. "After winning, there is no

point in having a mindset. You should stay in the same frame when you win a match and when you perform well. I don't think you need to think too much about the ICC tournament or any international match," he said, down-playing the giddy excitement that media drums up before India-Pakistan matches. "You should believe in your skills and back yourself. I always work on these two things that I believe in myself and back myself. So, it's not a matter of mindset to change. If you don't change in difficult times, then you don't change in such times," he added. Social media doesn't matter. Another aspect of modern cricket that Shami dismissed as insignificant is the social media scrutiny that the players face. "I always say that the social media of today is such that you create some unwanted

things. You always run things in the media that shouldn't run. So, I don't think we should think too much," he said. Shami dedicated his performance to his late father Touseef Ali, a farmer who had tried his hand at fast bowling in his youth. "That is for my father because he is my role model. He was always there for me," he said. He also thanked the Indian team management for backing him. "Whether it's a question of the captain or the coach, it's very important for every player to have this support...If you have players who trust you, it gives you peace of mind," he said. "The responsibility that I have been given, the role that I have been given, whether I am able to fulfil the responsibility that has been given to me, I always try to find that out," he added.

RETURN OF THE DRAGON FINDS ITS STRENGTH IN THE SECOND HALF

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Pradeep Ranganathan became an overnight star with the success of *Love Today*, which was a massive hit even in Telugu. He not only directed the film but also played the lead role. Now, he returns as the lead actor in *Return of the Dragon*, directed by Ashwath Marimuthu. Anupama Parameswaran and Kayadu Lohar play the female leads, while well-known directors like KS Ravikumar, Gautam Menon and Mysskin appear in acting roles. Here's a look at the story and how the film fares.

STORY

Ragavan (Pradeep Ranganathan), nicknamed "Dragon" in college, is a carefree and mischievous student who never attends classes, takes exams lightly, and spends most of his time with friends. Due to his poor academic record, he is required to write 48 supplementary exams to complete his degree. However, his reckless behavior leads the college principal (Mysskin) to expel him.

Determined to hide the truth from his parents, Ragavan lies that he has secured a job with a salary of Rs 18,000, when in reality, he spends his days idling at a friend's place. His college girlfriend, Keerthi (Anupama Parameswaran), initially supports him but later becomes frustrated with his failures. She eventually leaves him to marry a professor, telling Ragavan that he has failed in every aspect of life—academically, professionally, and personally.

Angered by Keerthi's rejection, Ragavan decides to prove himself. He acquires a fake engineering degree and secures a job at a prestigious software company. His salary soars, and he moves from a slum to a gated community, getting engaged to a wealthy woman, Pallavi (Kayadu Lohar).

Just as life seems to be going smoothly, Ragavan's past catches up with him. The college principal unexpectedly appears at his office, threatening to expose his forged



REVIEW

degree. However, instead of revealing the truth immediately, the principal presents him with a proposal. What does the principal want? How does Ragavan react? What happens to his engagement with Pallavi? The answers unfold in *Return of the Dragon*.

ANALYSIS

Unlike his previous films, where Pradeep Ranganathan served as both director and lead actor, in *Return of the Dragon*, he focuses solely on acting, with Ashwath Marimuthu (*Ori Devuda*) at the helm. The title stems from Ragavan's college nickname, "Dragon," but the significance of the "return" is something the audience must discover while watching.

The film subtly conveys an important message: when someone achieves success through dishonest means, another deserving individual suffers. It also explores the psychological burden of guilt—when given a second chance to correct a mistake, choosing the wrong path can lead to lasting regret. The director effectively delivers this message, though it takes until the second half for the story to delve into its core theme.

The first half of the film is lighthearted, filled with college antics, playful rivalries and humorous moments. While some scenes pro-

vide laughs, the narrative shifts gears when the principal confronts Ragavan just before the interval. The second half takes on a more serious tone, building up to an intense and emotionally charged final act.

The film's climax is particularly gripping, filled with unexpected twists that showcase Ashwath Marimuthu's storytelling skills. The emotional depth peaks in the final moments, with all actors delivering strong performances. The film begins with the principal addressing his students, sharing Ragavan's story as a cautionary tale and this framing device effectively sets up the narrative. While the humor and energy of the first half make for an entertaining watch, it's the second half that elevates the film with its dramatic intensity. One of the standout moments is when Ragavan, after serving time in jail, returns home, and his father assures him that he will always be there for him—a scene that resonates deeply.

PERFORMANCES

Pradeep Ranganathan delivers another compelling performance, particularly excelling in the emotionally charged climax. His natural acting style keeps the character relatable. Mysskin adds depth to his role as

the strict yet layered principal, making his character memorable.

Anupama Parameswaran shines in a brief yet impactful role, leaving a strong impression despite limited screen time. Kayadu Lohar brings glamour to the film and plays her part well. KS Ravikumar, Gautam Menon, and the rest of the cast contribute effectively. Indumathy and George Maryan, playing Ragavan's parents, are perfectly cast, delivering some of the most touching moments in the film.

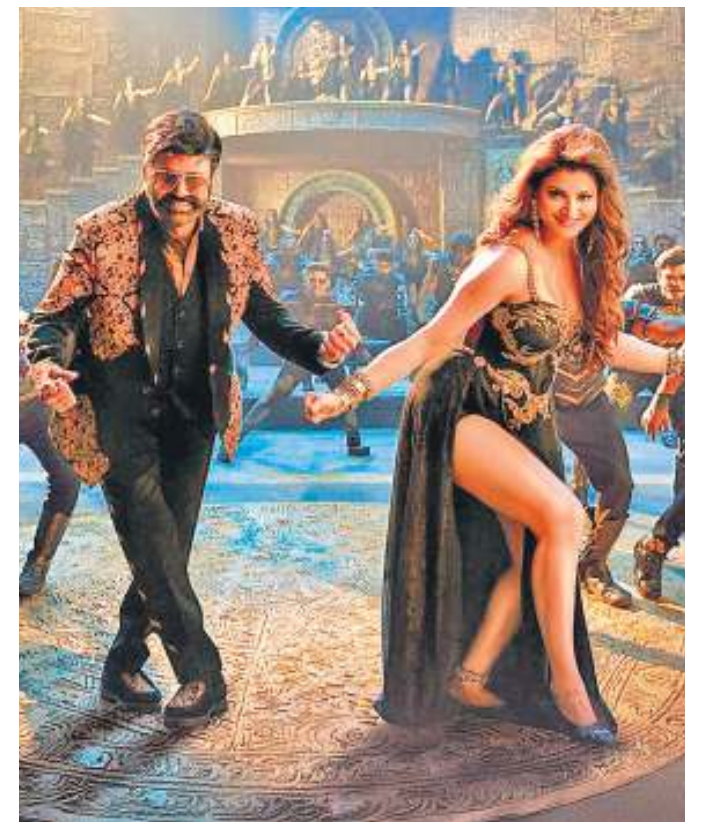
TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The dialogues, especially in the second half, are thought-provoking and enhance the film's impact. Leon James' music and background score are decent but not particularly memorable. Cinematography by Niketh Bommireddy is visually appealing and captures the film's shifts in mood effectively.

VERDICT

Return of the Dragon starts off slowly but picks up after the interval, leading to a gripping second half with an engaging narrative and a strong message. While there are a few cinematic liberties and loopholes, the performances—especially in the latter half—make it a worthwhile watch. If you enjoy a mix of humor, drama, and unexpected twists, this film is worth checking out at least once.

Cast: Pradeep Ranganathan, Anupama Parameswaran, Kayadu Lohar, Mysskin, Gautam Vasudev Menon, KS Ravikumar, and others
Cinematographer: Niketh Bommireddy
Music: Leon James
Producers: Kalpathi S Aghoram, Kalpathi S Ganesh, Kalpathi S Suresh
Writer and Director: Ashwath Marimuthu
Rating: 3/5



Balakrishna's *Daaku Maharaaj* streams uncut on Netflix

Rumors have been circulating about possible edits in the OTT release of *Daaku Maharaaj*, starring Balakrishna. Reports suggested that Netflix had removed scenes featuring Urvashi Rautela, particularly in response to controversy surrounding the song *Dabidi Dabidi*, which was criticized for certain choreography elements.

However, the film, which started streaming on Netflix from Thursday night, remains uncut. Every scene that was shown in the-

aters, including Urvashi Rautela's sequences and the *Dabidi Dabidi* song, is intact on the streaming platform.

Directed by Bobby Kolli, *Daaku Maharaaj* was released on January 12, aiming to capitalise on the Sankranti festival. The film performed well in its first week but saw a drop in collections later due to competition from *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam*. Despite this, trade analysts consider it a successful venture.



REVIEW

Brahmajji shines in this dark comedy set in a Telangana village

Following the success of *Balagam*, several films have explored Telangana's rural backdrop. Baapu, starring Brahmajji, Amani and Sudhakar Reddy, follows a similar path but leans into dark comedy instead of emotional drama. In Telangana, the term "Baapu" is often used to refer to one's father or an elderly figure, which sets the tone for this film's theme.

STORY

Set in a Telangana village, the film revolves around Mallanna (Brahmajji), a debt-ridden cotton farmer struggling to support his father Rajayya (Sudhakar Reddy), wife Saroja (Amani), daughter (Dhanya Balakrishna), and son (Mani Aegurla). Hoping to clear his debts, Mallanna plans to sell his cotton, but his son's mistake ruins the entire crop in the rain. Desperate, he contemplates suicide, believing his family would receive Rs 5 lakh in government compensation. However, his wife opposes this idea, suggesting an alternative—killing the elderly father instead.

Meanwhile, Chanti (Racha Ravi) discovers a gold idol but mysteriously loses it. What happens when Rajayya learns about his family's deadly plan? Where did the gold idol go? The answers unfold in Baapu.

ANALYSIS

While *Balagam* was an emotional drama rooted in Telangana's culture, Baapu attempts a different approach by mixing dark comedy with a social issue. The film highlights the struggles of farmers but lacks the emotional depth needed to leave a lasting impact.

The premise has potential, especially when the family debates killing their father before the interval, which builds curiosity for the second half. However, the screenplay loses grip on the narrative post-interval. The climax feels rushed, and the humor in the latter half works only in parts. Compared to *Balagam*, Baapu falls short in execution and emotional engagement.

The film's biggest strength is its realistic portrayal of rural life, as it was shot in an

actual village. However, weak storytelling and limited production values hinder its impact. Director Dayakar Reddy, in his debut, shows promise but needs stronger writing and execution to fully bring his ideas to life.

PERFORMANCES

Brahmajji delivers a stellar performance, proving once again why he is a versatile actor. His portrayal of Mallanna is both natural and engaging, making this one of his most memorable roles in recent times.

Sudhakar Reddy plays his part well, offering a few laughs, but his character lacks the emotional weight needed to connect deeply with the audience. Amani delivers another strong performance, while Dhanya Balakrishna does her job well despite her role being underwhelming. Young actor Mani Aegurla stands out with an impressive act. Avasarala, Racha Ravi and others provide solid support. RR Dhruvan's music is a highlight, with a few good songs that complement the film's setting.

VERDICT

Baapu has an interesting concept and strong performances, especially from Brahmajji. However, the film struggles with emotional depth, inconsistent narration, and rushed storytelling. While the dark comedy works in places, it lacks the grip needed to make a lasting impact. This one may find appreciation in parts but is unlikely to achieve commercial success.

Cast: Brahmajji, Amani, Balagam Sudhakar Reddy, Dhanya Balakrishna, Avasarala, Racha Ravi, Mani Aegurla, and others

Music: RR Dhruvan

Cinematographer: Vasu Pendem

Producers: Raju, Ch Bhanuprasad Reddy

Writer & Director: Dayakar Reddy

Rating: 2.5/5

Dhanraj's direction adds depth to familiar father-son story in *Ramam Raghavam*

The comedy show *Jabardasth* has been a breeding ground for many talented actors who have made their mark in the film industry. While several actors from the show have ventured into cinema, with Venu Yeldandi making his directorial debut with *Balagam*, Dhanraj is the latest to join the ranks of actors-turned-directors with his film *Ramam Raghavam*. The film, starring Samuthirakani and Dhanraj in the lead roles, was released with little fanfare and here's a closer look at what it offers.

STORY

Dasaradha Ramam (Samuthirakani) is a sincere and honest worker at a registrar office in a small town. He is well-respected for his integrity and frankness. Despite his good qualities, his son, Raghava (Dhanraj), is involved in questionable activities and dreams of quick wealth. Raghava refuses to hold down a steady job and instead befriends a lorry driver (Harish Uttaman), leading him further down a path of shortcuts to success. In an attempt to help his son, Ramam gets him a job at a petrol pump.

However, Raghava's impulsive decisions soon land him in trouble, resulting in a Rs. 10 lakh debt. To cover this, he forges his father's signature and implicates Ramam in the process. Upon learning the truth, Ramam files a police complaint against his own son, leading to Raghava's arrest. Angered and seeking revenge, Raghava hatches a plan with the lorry driver to kill his father and claim the insurance money. The story unfolds with twists and turns, revealing how Raghava's plan plays out and whether Ramam can make his son successful despite the conflicts.

REVIEW

Cast: Samuthirakani, Dhanraj, Pramodini, Harish Uttaman, Satya, Moksha, Prudhvi, Srinivas Reddy, and others

Music: Arun Chilliveru

Cinematography: Durga Prasad

Producer: Prudhvi Polavarapu

Director: Dhanraj

Release Date: February 21, 2025

Rating: 3/5

ANALYSIS

At its core, *Ramam Raghavam* follows a familiar narrative—the classic story of a good father and a wayward son, a trope we've seen in Telugu cinema multiple times. However, Director Dhanraj brings a refreshing touch to the storyline, particularly in the second half. While the first half plays out like a standard tale of a father's love and the son's bad habits, it is in the latter half that the story truly picks up. Raghava's decision to turn against his father and his subsequent plan to kill him for financial gain adds suspense and emotional depth to the narrative. The unexpected twists in the second half turn what could have been a predictable drama into a gripping and emotional experience, leaving the audience invested in the fate of the characters.

Though Dhanraj is primarily known for his acting, his directorial skills are evident, especially in how he handles the latter part of the film. The transitions from father-son drama to an emotional thriller are well-executed, making it clear that Dhanraj has found a new avenue for his talent.

PERFORMANCES

Samuthirakani, a seasoned actor known for his strong performances, brings depth to the character of the father. Although his Telugu is not flawless, he effectively conveys the emotion and sincerity of the role. Dhanraj, in the role of the son, offers a decent performance, though it is hard for the audience to buy into the father-son dynamic between him and Samuthirakani due to their age gap. Casting

a younger actor might have made this relationship feel more believable and potentially helped the film's commercial appeal.

Pramodini shines in her role as the mother, particularly in the film's emotional climax, where her performance is impactful. Harish Uttaman plays an essential supporting role as the lorry driver and does so convincingly. Other supporting actors, including Satya, Sunil, Srinivas Reddy and Prudhvi, add value to the narrative with their performances.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Despite being a low-budget film, *Ramam Raghavam* manages to maintain a solid technical quality. The music, composed by Arun Chilliveru, complements the emotional tone of the film. The cinematography by Durga Prasad captures the essence of the characters' struggles and the dramatic shifts in the story. Though the budget may be limited, the film does not compromise on its technical execution.

VERDICT

Ramam Raghavam marks a promising directorial debut for Dhanraj. While the first half might feel like a familiar tale of familial conflict, the second half adds intrigue, making the narrative more engaging and emotionally charged. The father-son relationship and the emotional twists offer a different take on a well-worn storyline. However, the film may not achieve commercial success, primarily due to the lack of buzz around its release and the casting choices. Nonetheless, it is a commendable effort from Dhanraj as a director and his growth in this new role is evident. If you're looking for a heartfelt family drama with a few surprises, *Ramam Raghavam* is worth a watch.

Harish Shankar joins *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama* in a special role

Character actor Suhas, who successfully transitioned into lead roles, continues to choose diverse and compelling scripts. One of his upcoming projects is the romantic drama *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama*. The film features Malayalam actress Malavika Manoj, known for Joe, making her Telugu debut as the female lead. Directed by debutant Ram Godhala and produced by Harish Nalla, the film's distribution will be handled by Rana Daggubati's Spirit Media.

In an exciting addition, renowned director Harish Shankar will make a special guest appearance in the film. The makers felt that

only Harish Shankar could do justice to this particular role and successfully convinced him to take it up. His portion of the shoot has already been completed.

"This movie will be a milestone in Suhas' career. We are ensuring top-notch quality without any compromises. It will be a perfect blend of tender romance and humour," said producer Harish Nalla. He also expressed his gratitude to Harish Shankar for accepting the role. Adding to the film's appeal, former actress Anita Hassanandani is making her comeback with this project, while popular comedian Ali will also play a key role.



STANDALONE



Popular director Anil Ravipudi received the Vijayakrishna Silver Crown Award on the occasion of late Vijaya Nirmala's birthday at an event held at Ravindra Bharathi, Hyderabad. The award was instituted by Vijaya Nirmala's son, VK Nares, in memory of his mother. Telangana Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar presented the award to Anil Ravipudi. Actors Manchu Vishnu, Sivabalaaji and Pavitra were also present at the event.