

Tell me when Prabhakar Rao and Sravan Rao will be brought back from the US. We will put BRS leaders in jail within 48 hours of bringing them to the state. Union Ministers Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay Kumar are protecting KCR and KTR. If Prabhakar Rao and Sravan Rao fled to the US, why are Modi and Union Minister Sanjay not bringing them back? We filed cases in the sheep scam, but the ED took all the files. When will the ED arrest the suspects in that case?

- Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister TG P4



Jagan, YSRCP MLAs stage walkout

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) legislators walked out of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Monday, protesting the denial of Opposition status to their party. The YSRCP members, who attended the session initially, disrupted Governor Justice S Abdul Nazeer's address, demanding recognition as the main Opposition. They argued that their exclusion violated democratic principles and accused the ruling government of suppressing their voice. As their protests and sloganeering failed to elicit a response, they moved to the well of the House, insisting on their demand. Despite the commotion, the Governor continued his speech. Eventually, Jagan, along with YSRCP MLAs and MLCs, boycotted the session and exited the Assembly while chanting slogans.

Earlier, Jagan entered the Assembly through Gate No. 4, designated for MLAs and MLCs, instead of Gate No. 1, which is reserved for the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Ministers, and the Leader of the Opposition.

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Want a Kashmir where no life is lost due to terrorism: Shah



EVERYONE SAYS 'CONTENT IS KING,' BUT FEW ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN IT



Razesh danda confirms Mazaka and Samajavaragamana SEQUEL IN WORKS

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DON'T MISS...

Efforts on to save 8 trapped workers

Rescue operations at the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel collapse site near Domalapeda have intensified, with efforts underway to locate and extract the trapped workers. A multi-agency team, including personnel from the Army, Navy, Singareni Collieries, the central government's roadways department, Jaypee, and Navayuga, has so far conducted seven rounds of tunnel inspections. The team comprises 584 expert personnel who have previously been involved in successful rescue missions in Uttarakhand...

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3 in 5 die after cancer diagnosis

Three in every five people in India succumb to cancer following diagnosis with women bearing a "disproportionate burden" compared to men, an analysis of global cancer data has estimated. The incidence to mortality ratio in the US was found to be about one in four, while in China it was one in two, according to the results published in 'The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia' journal. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) study found that India ranked third highest in ...

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Gold rises Rs 350 to reclaim Rs 89K-mark

Gold prices rose Rs 350 to trade near a record high at Rs 89,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 88,750 per 10 grams on Friday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased Rs 350 to Rs 88,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,350 per 10 grams. "Gold traded with a modest gain on Monday as geopolitical and trade tensions continued to provide ..."

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Playing cover drive is 'catch-22': Kohli

Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli admitted that his trademark cover drive puts him in a "catch-22" situation as it has been a weakness lately but playing the shot gives him control over the innings. Kohli crafted a memorable unbeaten century against Pakistan, steering India to a six-wicket win. His 111-ball masterclass featured the cover drive prominently, a shot that has in recent time led to his downfall but remains a signature weapon in his arsenal. "It's a 'catch-22'. I mean, it's (cover drive) kind of been my weakness ..."

-SPORTS

'Brand Andhra' in revival mode: Guv

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer on Monday commended the TDP-led government for its unwavering focus on public welfare and efforts to restore the state's former glory under the 'Brand Andhra' initiative.

Addressing the Budget Session of the Assembly, Governor Nazeer highlighted the severe financial challenges faced by the state, attributing the crisis to the governance of the YSRCP between 2019 and 2024.

He alleged that the previous regime had left Andhra Pradesh on the brink of financial collapse.

"White papers have exposed the gross mismanagement of state finances, the diversion of resources, the erosion of state revenues through the plundering of natural assets, and flawed policies in excise and sand mining. Additionally, 25 years of future income were discounted by diverting government taxes," Nazeer stated.

He was referring to the seven white papers presented by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, detailing the alleged financial mismanagement under the previous YSRCP government.

The Governor accused the YSRCP administration of burdening the state with excessive debt through high-interest borrowings, violations of central government guidelines, and the diversion of funds meant for centrally sponsored schemes, among other irregularities.

He also pointed to the collapse of

Nazeer says previous YSRCP regime of financial mismanagement, high debt, and policy failures that left the state in crisis



- Highlighting key initiatives, Governor praises the Naidu government's focus on welfare measures, infrastructure improvements, and attracting major investments
- Notes AP's economic growth, increased per capita income, and efforts to lead in Artificial Intelligence

Continued on Page 2

YSRCP demands Oppn party status

VIJAYAWADA: Reiterating its demand for Opposition Party status, the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) asserted that it is the natural choice for the role in the Assembly. Speaking outside the Assembly on Monday, YSRCP Council leader Botsa Satyanarayana stated that the House consists of two wings—the ruling coalition in the treasury benches and the YSRCP as the primary opposition. "We raised our concern during the Governor's address, but there was no response. A democracy cannot function without an Opposition, which



serves as the voice of the people. The government has no option but to concede to our rightful demand for Opposition Party status," he said.

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No chance: Pawan

VIJAYAWADA: Deputy Chief Minister and Jana Sena Party Chief Pawan Kalyan firmly responded to the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leaders, stating that the opposition status cannot be granted as the YSRCP was in power during the previous regime. He emphasised that the Jana Sena is recognised as the second-largest party in the Assembly. "It's not appropriate to claim that we will enter the Assembly only if we are given opposition status," he remarked. The Budget session of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly commenced on



Monday morning with the Governor's address to both Houses. However, as soon as the Governor began speaking, YSRCP MLAs and MLCs raised slogans demanding opposition status and later staged a walkout.

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CM: Expand WhatsApp governance across dists



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to enhance the reach of WhatsApp governance by establishing Manamitra WhatsApp governance cells at all district collectorates.

During a review meeting on Real-Time Governance at the State Secretariat on Monday, the Chief Minister stressed the need for widespread utilisation of WhatsApp-based governance services. He stated that the State Government would soon provide 500 different services through the platform and urged officials to create public awareness about it.

Naidu instructed district collectors to prioritise the initiative by setting up dedicated WhatsApp governance cells in their offices and closely monitoring its implementation. He emphasised that the objective is to offer government services more conveniently, with WhatsApp playing a key role. He

- The State Government plans to offer 500 services through WhatsApp governance, with a focus on public awareness
- Naidu emphasises the need for AI expertise in households and the use of drone patrolling for enhanced law enforcement
- Instructs officials to implement GPS tracking in APSRTC buses and explore its use in pension distribution
- Orders strict action against illegal belt shops and directed measures to improve free sand supply

also suggested introducing a QR code system to further increase public awareness.

The Chief Minister highlighted the need to streamline grievance redressal and bill payments through WhatsApp governance. He urged officials to raise awareness through village and ward secretariats and reiterated the necessity of having an Artificial Intelligence (AI) expert in every household.

On law and order, Naidu stressed the importance of technology-driven policing, directing officials to introduce a drone patrolling system on par with police patrols. He also called for the installation of GPS systems in APSRTC buses to help passengers track their journeys in real time and suggested exploring GPS tracking for pension distribution.

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SIT to probe charges against ex-MLA Vamsi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe allegations of illegal mining, land grabbing, extortion, and other offences involving former Gannavaram MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan and his associates.

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AP FiberNet chief resigns

GV Reddy also steps down as TDP's national spokesperson

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader GV Reddy has resigned as Chairman of AP FiberNet Limited, sending shockwaves through the party. In a letter to TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, he also stepped down as the party's national spokesperson and relinquished his primary membership, citing personal reasons. Reddy stated that he would now focus on his career as a lawyer.

Addressing the media in Vijayawada recently, Reddy criticised AP FiberNet's performance, stating, "In the past nine months, the only organisation in the state that has made no progress is AP FiberNet



Limited. Since we took charge, not a single new connection has been provided, and even existing services remain unreliable. We have been facing severe criticism from cable operators and consumers over these issues. Officials are now scrambling to cover up their failures."

Reddy levelled serious allegations against AP FiberNet Managing Director Dinesh Kumar and three other senior officials—Chief Technology Officer Bharadwaj, Business Head Suresh, and Procurement Officer Shashank—accusing them of conspiring against the government and engaging in activities that undermine the organisation. Announcing their immediate dismissal, he said they were responsible for the company's decline.

He further revealed that 410 illegal appointments at AP FiberNet were yet to be cancelled, and salaries were still being disbursed despite no official dismissals.

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4 workers electrocuted while cleaning sump

PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a tragic incident, four workers were electrocuted while cleaning a sump at Kali Gardens near Nambur village in Guntur district on Monday after coming into contact with a live electric wire.

Superintendent of Police Satish Kumar said the workers entered the sump using an iron ladder to clean it. The sump, used for collecting cow dung and urine from the 70 cows at Kali Gardens, is cleaned periodically.



The deceased were identified as Yekula Rajesh, Yadagiri Balaiah, Gandala Mahamkali Rao, and Shivaram Kashi Babu. The SP visited the accident site, and the police registered a case. The bodies were shifted to the GGH for postmortem.

Three workers—Rajesh, Balaiah, and Mahamkali Rao—entered the sump first and were electrocuted after touching a live wire connected to an electric motor.

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FROM SCENIC GETAWAYS TO DREAM WEDDINGS

APTDC's resorts to turn into destination nuptials

JAVVADI LAKSHMANA RAO
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■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Imagine saying "I do" amidst rolling hills, lush valleys, or the tranquil coastline of Andhra Pradesh. With APTDC's revamped wedding venues, couples can now turn their special day into an unforgettable experience. Whether it's a grand affair or an intimate celebration, Andhra Pradesh's scenic landscapes are ready to play host to love stories that last a lifetime

With the grandeur of the Eastern Ghats, the serenity of the Bay of Bengal, and the charm of misty hill stations, Andhra Pradesh is set to become a sought-after destination for dream weddings. The Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) is embarking on a grand initiative to reposition its resorts as premier wedding venues, catering to the growing demand for intimate and picturesque nuptials.

Recognising the surge in destination weddings, APTDC has undertaken an extensive transformation of its hotels and resorts in North Andhra. From luxurious accommodations to customised culinary experiences, the

corporation is leaving no stone unturned. Newly renovated banquet halls upgraded guest rooms, and personalised wedding planning services are all part of the effort to craft seamless and memorable celebrations.

For couples keen on finding the perfect wedding date, APTDC has released a dedicated 2025 'muhurta' calendar, listing auspicious dates to simplify planning. The initiative aims to attract not just local clientele but also couples from across the country

looking for unique wedding locations. APTDC operates 200 rooms across seven resorts in Visakhapatnam and Alluri Seetharama Raju districts, with key locations in Araku, Ananthagiri, Lambasingi, and the bustling coastal city of Visakhapatnam. These venues

have long been favourites for corporate events and celebrations, but with the new initiative, they are being specially curated for destination weddings. A dedicated three-member business development team, led by Divisional Manager G Jagadish, is working to ensure sustained demand from government agencies, universities, and private organisations. To meet rising expectations, resorts in Araku, particularly Mayuri and Valley Resorts, are undergoing major upgrades, incorporating luxury rooms and unique craft huts for an enhanced experience. Ananthagiri and Lambasingi, known for their breathtaking landscapes, are being revamped with dedicated outdoor wedding spaces and additional guest accommodations.

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AP to be turned into drug-free State: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand has emphasised the need for complete coordination between central and state departments to achieve a ganja and drug-free Andhra Pradesh. He made this statement during the first state-level Narco Coordination (NCORD) meeting held at the State Secretariat on Monday.

Vijayanand called for immediate action to eradicate cannabis cultivation and proposed enhanced collaboration among relevant agencies. He highlighted the establishment of the Elite Anti-Narcotics Group for Law Enforcement (EAGLE) last November to strengthen anti-drug operations. Stressing the urgency of the issue, he urged departments to coordinate with bordering states to combat drug trafficking effectively.

The Chief Secretary also underscored the need to bolster rehabilitation and de-addiction centres to sup-



port those struggling with addiction. He announced that the state-level NCORD committee would meet quarterly to review progress, while District Narco Committees, led by Collectors, would hold regular meetings at the district level.

Participating virtually, DGP Harish Kumar Gupta reported a significant decline in local ganja cultivation. However, he pointed out that Andhra Pradesh remains a key transit route for cannabis smuggling from Odisha and other states, with stringent measures being taken to curb this activity.

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True leadership survives failures with perseverance

The quality of political leadership does not lie in achieving successes or victories but in surviving and facing failures and defeats head-on without losing moral strength and gaining lost ground each day with persistence and perseverance. This has been the survival tactic of most political parties worldwide for decades. The parties and their leaders who could not digest failures and lost confidence lost ground and went into oblivion. The very nature of power is such. It lures and eludes forever. Success follows those who understand the elusive nature of power and keep going irrespective of the

severity of pain, strain and struggle. Power is not permanent, and so is defeat or failure. It is a game of losing and gaining and meanwhile, mastering the art of survival. Whether it is the US or India or for that matter, any nation elections do not come each day and power does not change every day. It has its time. Endurance matters for every party and leader. Here is where the quality of leadership stands and counts. Without understanding the facts and realities of the day, there is no use in criticising the decisions of ruling parties every day without any substance. The ruling party cannot fall each day and opposi-

The parties that lost power should analyse the reasons for their defeat and take remedial measures to regain public confidence. This is the way to shoulder the weight of defeats rather than warning officials and current governments about their deeds

tion does not come to power every day. They have to stay their course until their time comes to face the test of the day. If we observe the developments in Telugu states, it comes to our mind that opposition parties have no patience to wait for their chance. It is

not even one year since elections were held in these states and power changed hands. We can't understand the minds of seasoned politicians who ruled the states for years without allowing the opposition to utter a word against them and are now unable to



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confine themselves to the roles mandated by the people in

democratic elections. We speak great about the US and praise its democratic values. The Democratic Party lost in the recently held Presidential elections and the Republican Party under the leadership of Donald Trump came to power. This is the fact of the day and the Democratic Party that lost does not want the Trump admin to fall day and it plays its role as the constructive opposition by allowing the ruling party to have its day. They respect and honour the public mandate and wait for their chance to strike. This is what happens and should happen logically. By ignoring these fundamental tenets of democracy,

why do these leaders create chaos every day as if something unthinkable had happened and their respective states are getting ruined under the current admins? If this kind of propaganda goes unending it will mar the development prospects of the states concerned. Governments may change but the official setup does not change and remains permanent. Whichever party comes to power, must work with the same officials and use their services to implement their policies. Despite knowing the facts and role of officials, why should politicians warn officials about their acts under the present admin? Warning them doesn't

serve any purpose but makes them wary about carrying out their responsibilities. The parties that lost power should analyse the reasons for their defeat and take remedial measures to regain public confidence. This is the way to shoulder the weight of defeats rather than warning officials and current governments about their deeds. Five years are more than enough to properly assess the reasons for defeat and take steps to gain public support. Nothing happens in isolation. Leaders should search for the cause of their defeats instead of getting isolated.
(The writer is a senior journalist)

Fight for people's causes: Jagan to cadre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy held a crucial meeting with party MLAs and MLCs, stressing the need for a resolute fight against the government amid rising public discontent. He urged party members to view their current position as a battlefield, emphasising that every step must be taken towards victory. Highlighting the importance of an uncompromising stand

on public issues, he called for honest and sincere efforts to champion the people's cause. "Victory is assured if we stand with the people and remain among them," he said, cautioning against any retreat in the fight for public welfare. He dismissed fears of the current government, assuring unwavering support to every member and framing this as an opportunity to prove the party's strength as the opposition.



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Rescue operations at the Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel collapse site near Domalapatna have intensified, with efforts underway to locate and extract the trapped workers. A multi-agency team, including personnel from the Army, Navy, Singareni Collieries, the central government's roadways department, Jaypee, and Navayuga, has so far conducted seven rounds of tunnel inspections. The team comprises 584 expert personnel who have previously been involved in successful rescue missions in Uttarakhand. Additionally, 14 specialized rat-

hole miners have been deployed to aid in the search.

The team of rat miners, who had rescued the construction workers trapped in the Silkyara Bend-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand in 2023, has joined the rescue teams to extricate the men. Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy expressing optimism, he stated that a mobile phone belonging to one of the trapped officials had rung, and based on its signal, their location had been identified.

After being trapped for over two days under debris and muck, the chances of survival of the eight persons in the SLBC tunnel following a partial collapse appear

SLBC TUNNEL COLLAPSE

Rescue team race against time to save eight trapped workers

- 584 experts, 14 rat-hole miners deployed
- Cell Phone of one of them rang which helped track location
- Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren in touch with TG Govt
- Family members of workers from Jharkhand heading to TG



bleak, even as every effort is made to reach them. On the orders of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, officials left for Telangana with the family members of workers from Jharkhand trapped in the under-construction tunnel in Telangana. Under the leader-

ship of Gumla District Administration, one member each from 4 families and a police officer left for Telangana from Birsra Munda Airport. Hemant Soren said, "Our officers are in touch with the Telangana government"

Despite relentless efforts by the Indian Army, Navy, NDRE, SDRF and other agencies, no breakthrough has been achieved so far in the rescue operations as the teams had to navigate through thick muck, tangled iron rods, and cement blocks to reach the accident spot in the tunnel to extricate the persons who have remained trapped for over two days inside the tunnel after a section of it collapsed in the SLBC project in Telangana's Nagarkurnool district on Saturday morning.

To trace the missing workers, sniffer dogs were brought in, but their movement was hindered due to water accumulation inside

the tunnel. Meanwhile, repairs on the damaged conveyor belt have been initiated. Authorities have ruled out the vertical drilling proposal, which involved creating an opening from above to access the trapped workers. Currently, five gas-cutting machines are operating round the clock as part of the rescue efforts.

State Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has been personally monitoring the rescue operations from the Domalapatna project site since morning. Later in the evening, he chaired a high-level review meeting at the JP office, attended by Special Chief Secretary for Disaster Management Arvind Kumar, District Collector Badavathi Santosh, local MLA Dr. Vamsi Krishna, HYDRABAD Commissioner Ranganath, and senior officials from the Army, Navy, NDRE, SDRF, MoRTH, Navayuga, SCCL, and JP organizations.

The persons who have been trapped in the collapsed tunnel for the past over 48 hours have been identified as Manoj Kumar and Sri Niwas from Uttar Pradesh, Sunny Singh (Jammu and Kashmir), Gurpreet Singh (Punjab) and Sandeep Sahu, Jegta Xess, Santosh Sahu and Anuj Sahu, all from Jharkhand. Of the eight, two are engineers, two operators and four labourers. Their families are arriving to the Site.

4 workers electrocuted while ...

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Supervisor Shivarama Kashi Babu rushed to rescue them but also suffered electrocution. Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar expressed deep sorrow over the incident in Pedakakani, Guntur district, and extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. He assured them of the government's full support during this difficult time. Following the tragedy, the Minister contacted local legisla-

tor Dhulipalla Narendra and other officials to inquire about the circumstances of the accident. He called for a thorough investigation and directed officials to take preventive measures to avoid such incidents in the future. "The government stands with the families of the victims, and we will ensure all possible assistance is provided to them. Safety is paramount, and we appeal to citizens to take necessary precautions while dealing with electrical work," Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar stated.

AP to be turned into drug-free...

Continued from Page 1

He also announced plans to develop a database of inter-state drug trafficking gangs and stressed the need for collaboration with departments like Railways and Transport to enhance enforcement. A Ravikrishna, IGP of EAGLE and State NCORD Convener, presented details of District Narcotics Control Cell operations across 26 districts. He noted that 56 NCORD

meetings were conducted at the district level in 2024, with two meetings already held in 2025. Last year, authorities registered 1,820 drug-related cases, seized 53,097 kg of cannabis, confiscated 815 vehicles, and arrested 5,045 individuals, securing 45 convictions. Efforts are also underway to identify and monitor marijuana cultivation hotspots, particularly in the Alluri Seetharamaraju district, using drone surveillance. To encourage alternative livelihoods

for tribal communities, over 46 lakh seedlings of various crops were distributed. Additionally, 12,163 awareness programmes were conducted across schools and colleges to educate youth on the dangers of drug abuse.

Excise Commissioner Nishant and officials from various departments, including Medical and Health, participated in the meeting, reaffirming the government's commitment to tackling drug-related issues in the state.

APTDC's resorts to ...

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APTDC is also harnessing the power of digital marketing to elevate its brand. Social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook are being actively used to reach prospective couples. The corporation is also working on promotional videos to highlight the natural beauty and exquisite facilities of its resorts, with plans to rope in celebrities as brand ambassadors.

"Our goal is to transform APTDC resorts into the ultimate destination for weddings and celebrations," said G. Jagadish, DVM, APTDC. "By upgrading facilities, enhancing services, and amplifying our digital outreach, we are confident of making a significant mark in Andhra Pradesh's tourism sector."

With a bold revenue target of Rs 40 crore—double its earnings from the previous year—APTDC is implementing strategic measures to unlock new avenues for growth. From April last year to January this year, the corporation generated Rs 19.77 crore from its resorts, Borra Caves tourism, and water sports. The renewed focus on weddings is expected to propel its financial success to new heights.

AP FiberNet chief ...

Continued from Page 1

He also blamed administrative negligence for a Rs 370 crore penalty imposed by GST authorities and demanded that the amount be recovered from MD Dinesh Kumar and HR ED Ramesh Naidu. According to him, despite the vigilance committee recommending the suspension of Rs 60 crore in payments, the officials went ahead with the transactions, which he vowed to recover.

Reddy stated that he would lodge complaints against Dinesh Kumar and Ramesh Naidu with the Chief Secretary and Advocate General and act as per their directives. He insisted that AP FiberNet had functioned efficiently under the previous government and clarified that his allegations were strictly against the officials, not the YSR Congress Party.

He also attributed the mismanagement under the previous administration to the political setbacks faced by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Predicting a bleak future for the organisation, he warned, "If the inefficiency of officials is not addressed, AP FiberNet will cease to exist in another six months." He expressed concerns that he might be blamed for the company's downfall, citing issues such as disruptions in cable services and dismissed employees allegedly extorting money to retain their positions.

SIT to probe charges...

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The move follows a Vigilance and Enforcement (V&E) Department report exposing large-scale illegal activities linked to Vamsi.

The SIT, headed by Inspector General of Police (IGP) GVG Ashok Kumar of Eluru Range, includes Superintendent of Police (SP) K Prathap Sivakishore of Eluru District and SP D Narasimha Kishore of East Godavari, along with other officers as required. The government has directed all concerned departments to extend full cooperation. According to the V&E report, Vamsi is accused of illegal excavation of gravel and building stones in Krishna district, causing a Rs 195 crore revenue loss to the state. He is also alleged to have forcefully acquired land, registering properties in his name and that of his associates. The report further highlights his illegal earth extraction from Panakala Cheruvu, allegedly yielding illicit gains of Rs 100 crore.

Meanwhile, the SC/ST court in Vijayawada has permitted police to take Vamsi into custody for three days for further questioning. His interrogation will take place from 10 AM to 5 PM daily, with the court directing authorities to provide him with basic amenities, including a Western toilet and a bed during detention. Vamsi is currently lodged in district jail for his alleged role in the Satyavardhan kidnapping case. Police are also seeking permission to interrogate him over the attack on the Gannavaram TDP office

Jagan, YSRCP...

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Since the formation of the new government, this is the fourth Assembly session. Jagan attended only the first day of the first session and skipped the second and third entirely. His demand for Opposition status was rejected by Speaker Ch Ayyannapratrudu, citing that YSRCP lacked the required 18 MLAs.

CM: Expand WhatsApp...

Continued from Page 1

Expressing concern over the persistence of illegal liquor outlets (belt shops), the Chief Minister instructed officials to take stringent action against those operating them. He also directed authorities to identify and penalise liquor shops supplying stock to these illegal outlets. Naidu further stated that efforts

would be made to improve the free supply of sand to the public and instructed officials to focus on its effective implementation.

Chief Secretary K.S. Jawahar Reddy, Principal Secretary (GAD) Mukesh Kumar Meena, CMO Secretaries Pradyumna, Ravichandra, and Rajamouli, and RTGS CEO K. Dinesh Kumar were among those present at the meeting.

'Brand Andhra' in revival...

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In its initial days, the Naidu administration took several steps, including the repeal of the Land Titling Act, an increase in social security pensions to Rs 4,000, and the announcement of a mega District Selection Committee (DSC) recruitment drive for 16,347 teachers.

Other initiatives outlined by the Governor included strengthening the education sector, conducting a skill census to enhance employment opportunities, improving rural infrastructure, launching a mission for pothole-free roads, and implementing a free sand policy. "We have laid a strong foundation by introducing 22 new policies that will drive sustained growth and prosperity. I am proud to share that our efforts are already yielding

results. We are attracting global giants like Google, ArcelorMittal, Tata Power, Greenko Group, BPCL, and others, bringing in massive investments," he said.

The Governor further stated that the state had received investment commitments amounting to Rs 6.5 lakh crore, with the potential to generate approximately four lakh jobs. According to Nazeer, the first advance estimates for 2024-25 indicated that Andhra Pradesh's economy had expanded to Rs 16 lakh crore, recording a nominal growth rate of 13 per cent. He highlighted that the state's per capita income had risen to Rs 2.68 lakh, up from Rs 2.37 lakh in the previous year, driven by robust growth across sectors such as agriculture and allied activities (15.8 per cent), industries (6.7 per cent), and ser-

vices (11.7 per cent).

The Governor underscored Andhra Pradesh's push to lead a new technological revolution through Artificial Intelligence (AI) to shape the future of governance, industry, and economic growth.

Outlining future plans, he announced that the state government aims to introduce a Family Benefit Card under the Family Benefit Management System (FBMS) to streamline welfare schemes and related activities. The budget for 2025-26 is scheduled to be presented on 28 February.

Finance Minister P Keshav is expected to table the budget for the full financial year 2025-26, following the Rs 2.94 lakh crore budget he had presented in November 2024, when just over four months remained in FY25 after two vote-on-account budgets.

YSRCP demands...

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Citing a recent instance, he remarked that the government reacted only after YSRCP leader Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy visited the Guntur Mirchi Yard to highlight farmers' issues. "Following his visit, the coalition government made a knee-jerk reaction, giving the impression of taking action, but nothing significant has happened so far," he alleged.

He further questioned the ruling coalition's claims of engaging with the Centre on the issue. "What is the outcome? A positive result can only be achieved through persistent questioning from the Opposition," he said.

Referring to the case filed against YSRCP leaders after their visit to the Mirchi Yard, he criticised the government for allegedly misusing the election code.

No chance: ...

Continued from Page 1

Speaking to the media after the Governor's address, Pawan Kalyan criticised the YSRCP members' behaviour, calling it inappropriate, especially considering that the Governor, despite his ill health, made the effort to address the Assembly.

He condemned the actions of senior YSRCP leaders who disrupted the Governor's speech by shouting slogans and tearing papers. He asserted that opposition status is not something to be demanded but rather granted by the people.

"The people have not given the YSRCP opposition status—they have only given them 11 seats. They should accept this reality and participate in the Assembly proceedings," he said.

Sessions to be held for ...

Continued from Page 1

Following the Governor's address, a resolution thanking him will be taken up for discussion tomorrow (Tuesday), with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expected to respond on the same day. The Assembly will be adjourned on February 26 and 27, and budget discussions will begin on March 3. The discussions are scheduled to conclude by March 19, with two reserve days allocated. If necessary, sessions will also be held on March 20 and 21.

The BAC also deliberated on bills to be introduced and various other topics. BJP leader Vishnu Vardhan Raju suggested including more issues for discussion. The ruling party has listed 24 topics for deliberation, including

eight months of governance achievements, the Polavaram-Banakacharla link, Amaravati as the capital, road construction and repairs, R&B, the Davos visit, investments, youth employment, the Swarna Andhra Vision 2047, and industrial and IT policies.

The government has also proposed discussions on the alleged failures of the previous government, including scams, encroachments on forest, temple and revenue lands, the liquor scam, and the Kakkinada Port scam. Other issues to be discussed include pending dues and payments, WhatsApp governance with 161 services, fee reimbursement arrears, education sector reforms, and revenue-related matters.

The BAC has decided to conduct assembly sessions five days a week.

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APSRTC to operate 130 special services tomorrow

Services will be operated by various depots to facilitate access to Siva temples in NTR district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In anticipation of Mahashivaratri, the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Department (APSRTC), now referred to as the Andhra Pradesh Public Transport Department (APPTD), will run approximately 130 special bus services to various Saiva Kshetrams in the NTR district on February 26. These services will be operated by multiple depots to facilitate access to the temples within the district.

In this connection, NTR District Public Transport Department Officer MY Danam released a statement on Monday. He indicated that

Danam advised that pilgrims intending to travel to Srisailem could reserve their seats on these special bus services through online booking

90 special bus services would be available within the district to accommodate pilgrims wishing to perform special pujas at different Shivalayams.

Additionally, 43 special bus services have been designated for the Guntur district, specifically for travel to Kotappakonda.

Furthermore, Danam noted that among the total of 130 special bus services, 20 would operate from

Vijayawada to Srisailem. An additional 13 services will connect Vijayawada to Amaravati, while two services will be available to Bhimavaram, he said. Additionally, the APSRTC will operate special bus services from Jaggayyapeta to Kodada, Jaggayyapeta to Nandigama Circle, and Tiruvuru to Guttapadu, he added.

Moreover, he said that 23 special bus services will run between

Jaggayyapeta and Muktyla, and 15 services will operate between Tiruvuru and Neeladri. The APSRTC will also provide special bus services to Pavitra Sangamam from Ibrahimpatnam, Kondapalli, and Mylavaram, he explained.

In the meantime, Danam advised that pilgrims intending to travel to Srisailem could reserve their seats on these special bus services through online booking. He also mentioned that the APSRTC is prepared to run additional bus services in response to the anticipated influx of pilgrims. He encouraged individuals to reach out to their nearest bus depots for more information.



CM assured solution to Kolleru Lake issues: MP

PNS ■ ELURU

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has assured public representatives from Eluru district that the government is committed to finding a permanent solution to the long-standing issues faced by residents of the Kolleru region.

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar, along with other district representatives, met Chief Minister Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan at the Amaravati Secretariat to highlight the challenges faced by the people of Kolleru.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister conducted a review and discussed the issue in detail. MP Mahesh Kumar pointed out that

despite the central government approving the allocation of 15,000 acres of assigned land and 7,000 acres of society land, the previous YSRCP government failed to conduct surveys and define boundaries, causing significant hardship for Kolleru residents.

In response to public appeals, MP Mahesh Kumar urged the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister to take necessary steps to resolve the issue and ensure justice as per the Supreme Court's verdict.

Chief Minister Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Kalyan assured that the government would stand by the people of Kolleru and work towards a fair resolution without harming the environment.

The Chief Minister also stated that legal measures were being explored to temporarily halt demolitions in the region under the Supreme Court's orders.

A high-level review meeting with environmental and forest department officials will be held soon to assess the situation, following which a final decision will be taken. The Chief Minister assured that, based on official reports, justice would be ensured for Kolleru residents, and they need not worry.

He instructed district representatives to convey the government's commitment to the people, while Deputy Chief Minister Kalyan pledged to escalate the issue to the Central government for further resolution.



Central team praises water conservation efforts in NTR district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The implementation of the Jal Shakti Abhiyan (JSA) in NTR district has been commendable, particularly the geotagging of all works, observed Central Nodal Officer and Telecommunications Director R Madhava Rao during a recent visit to the district.

Madhava Rao, accompanied by Technical Officer and Scientist Reshmi S Raman Pillai, expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) under the

JSA initiative. The team arrived in the NTR district on Monday for a three-day visit. They inspected farm ponds and ring trenches in mango orchards in Nunna and Pathapadu villages of Vijayawada Rural mandal, aimed at improving groundwater recharge and conservation. The team also reviewed canal plantations, drinking water tanks, recharge pits, and other water conservation infrastructure.

During their visit, the JSA team interacted with farmers to assess the impact of the initiatives. Before their field inspection, they held a

meeting with NTR District Collector and Programme Coordinator Dr G Lakshminsha, who provided an overview of MGNREGS and JSA's progress through a PowerPoint presentation.

The team was accompanied by NTR DWAMA Project Director (PD) A Ramu, Assistant Project Director (APD) T Jaichandra, Vijayawada Rural MPDO P Muralikrishna Prasad, Plantation Manager K Usha Rani, EC Satish Chandra, Engineering Consultant Srinivas, Kiranmayi, Nunna Panchayat Secretary D Srinivasa Rao, and other officials.

Eye cancer: A rare but serious threat

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

While cancer is commonly linked to the lungs, breast, or skin, few realise that it can also affect the eyes. Though rare, eye cancer can be life-threatening, leading to permanent vision loss or even eye removal if not detected early. Unfortunately, low awareness results in late diagnoses, limiting treatment options, says Dr Anusua Ganguly of LV Prasad Eye Institute, Vijayawada.

India bears one of the highest burdens of eye cancer, especially in childhood cases. Retinoblastoma, a life-threatening eye cancer in children, is more prevalent in India than in other countries. The Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of retinoblastoma cases globally, with India leading in reported cases.

In adults, ocular surface squamous neoplasia (OSSN) and sebaceous gland carcinoma are the most common eye cancers. OSSN is the leading eye malignancy in those above 10 years, while sebaceous gland carcinoma accounts for 53% of all eyelid cancers in India—significantly higher than in Western nations.

In contrast, uveal melanoma, a common eye cancer in the West, is rare in India.

Secretaries must attend Budget sessions: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed all departmental secretaries to be present in the Assembly during the ongoing budget sessions, Chief Secretary K Vijayanand announced.

In a virtual meeting from the State Secretariat on Monday, Vijayanand instructed secretaries, principal secretaries, and special chief secretaries to ensure ministers receive comprehensive information in advance. He stressed the need for clarity on actions taken by both the previous and current governments.

He also directed nodal officers to be prepared and departmental secretaries to submit detailed responses to both starred and



unstarred questions a day before the sessions. No leave or foreign travel approvals will be granted during the budget meetings.

Legal fraternity rallies for HC Bench in Visakhapatnam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Legal professionals from seven districts across Andhra Pradesh have come together to demand the immediate establishment of a High Court Bench in Visakhapatnam, citing the city's robust infrastructure and the urgent need for accessible judicial services.

A large-scale agitation has been planned, following a crucial meeting held on the District Court premises on Monday. The meeting, presided over by Bar Association president Bevara Satyanarayana, witnessed participation from lawyers representing Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Parvathipuram, Visakhapatnam, Anakapalli, Alluri Sitararama, and Kakinada districts.

Key resolutions emerged from the gathering, with the primary demand being the establishment of a High Court Bench in Visakhapatnam. Lawyers also called for the establishment of a Principal High Court and a Central Administrative Tribunal in the city. Additionally, the assembly resolved to urge the Central government to withdraw the Advocate Amendment Bill. "The demand for a High Court Bench in Visakhapatnam is not new; it dates back to 1993," stated Bevara Satyanarayana.

He highlighted the severe hardship faced by legal professionals, who are forced to travel approximately 700 kilometres to Vijayawada for legal proceedings. A steering committee will be formed to present the issue to the Chief Justice of the High Court and the Chief Minister.

Bar Council vice-president Krishna Mohan reiterated the demand's origins in 1989-90 and stressed the need for immediate government intervention.

V&E cracks down on petrol bunk fraud, hefty fines imposed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a statewide crackdown on fuel fraud, the Vigilance & Enforcement (V&E) department, in coordination with the Civil Supplies and Legal Metrology departments, conducted surprise inspections at petrol bunks across 26 districts on Saturday.

The raids carried out on the directives of V&E Director General Harish Kumar Gupta, exposed serious irregularities, including the tampering of pulsar boards in fuel dispensing units.

At a petrol bunk in Sanapa village, Ananthapuramu district, officials discovered extra electronic chips in two dispensing units, allegedly used to manipulate fuel output in favour of dealers. In Rajahmundry, discrepancies were found in fuel delivery, with two nozzles dispensing 50 ml and 40 ml less per 5 litres. Similar shortages were detected in Eluru (30 ml per 5 litres) and Nellore (40 ml per litre). Erratic fuel dispensing was also reported in Kurnool.

Apart from fuel tampering, officials uncovered violations such as non-functional free air machines, poor labour record maintenance, and missing mandatory signage, including price boards and complaint boxes.

Some petrol bunks also failed to display explosive safety rules, lacked first aid kits, and had dirty toilets and garbage-strewn premises.

A total of 36 teams inspected 73 petrol bunks across the state, leading to six cases under the Legal Metrology (LM) Act, 2009, and three under Section 6(a) of the Essential Commodities (EC) Act, 1955.



Officials seized 14,503 litres of petrol, 14,585 litres of diesel, and 561 litres of 2T oil in Nellore, valued at Rs 32.77 lakh.

Additionally, three pulsar boards (two tampered and one original) worth Rs 75,000 were confiscated in Ananthapuramu district, bringing the total seizure value to Rs 33.77 lakh.

In Kurnool, the Assistant Controller of Legal Metrology filed a case under Section 8/25 of the LM Act, 2009, imposing a Rs 25,000 fine on a petrol bunk dealer, which was promptly paid.

V&E Director General Harish Kumar Gupta warned fuel dealers against fraudulent practices that exploit consumers and cause financial losses to the public. He assured that more surprise inspections would be conducted statewide to ensure compliance and accountability in fuel retail operations.

Godavari Pushkarams to follow Kumbh Mela model

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is planning arrangements for the 2027 Godavari Pushkarams on the lines of the ongoing Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

A team led by Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana is visiting Prayagraj to study the arrangements made by the Uttar Pradesh government for managing the massive influx of devotees. Acting on Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's directive, Minister Narayana, along with Municipal Commissioner and Director Sampath Kumar and Rajahmundry Municipal



Commissioner Ketan Garg, embarked on a two-day tour.

Upon arrival, Kumbh Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand briefed the delegation with a PowerPoint presentation covering crowd management, traffic control, and security measures. The team also visited the command control centre, where they observed real-time monitoring of the Mela area.

Later, Minister Narayana inspected the bathing ghats, reviewing sanitation and crowd management strategies. The team will continue its study on Tuesday before returning to Andhra Pradesh.

Anagani slams Jagan over Oppn status for YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Revenue Minister Anagani Satya Prasad has hit out at former Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, accusing him of being more concerned about securing opposition status than addressing public grievances. He criticised Jagan's approach, calling it authoritarian in nature.

The minister pointed out that several leaders, including Venkaiah Naidu, Jaipal Reddy, and Puchchalapalli Sundarayya, effectively raised public concerns in the Assembly without holding opposition status. He also cited former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who voiced national issues in the Lok Sabha despite not being the Leader of the Opposition.

Drawing a parallel, he noted that in 2004, the Congress party lacked opposition status in the Lok Sabha, yet Rahul Gandhi attended sessions and raised public concerns.



In contrast, he accused Jagan of using the opposition status issue as political rhetoric rather than engaging with real problems.

Satya Prasad further claimed that Jagan's sudden presence in the Assembly today was driven by fear of losing his legislative membership. He asserted that if Jagan were genuinely committed to public welfare and legal responsibilities, he would attend Assembly sessions regularly instead of making excuses.

BLOOM TIME



A worker sprays flower blooming hormones to boost the flower growth of the trees on the Seed Access Road at Venkatayapalem in Amaravati on Monday. Photo by ChVijaya Bhaskar



Lifer for 5 in murder case

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The Anantapur District Court in Anantapur on Monday sentenced five persons to life imprisonment for the brutal murder of a youth, Matti Pawan Kumar. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 20,000 on each of the convicts. According to the police, the incident took place on April 12, 2022, when the five accused fatally assaulted Pawan Kumar at Narsala village. The deceased and the convicts were former friends, but disputes over financial matters led to enmity between them.

The accused mercilessly attacked Pawan Kumar with sticks and iron rods, resulting in his death. Shockingly, they also recorded the gruesome act and circulated the video on social media. One of the convicts, Chikkepalli Nagendra, filmed the killing on his mobile phone and forwarded the video to another accused, Talari Sudhakar. The police later seized the mobile phones and sent them for forensic examination to establish digital evidence.

The brutal murder and its video recording created a sensation across the district.

Treating the case as a challenge, the police conducted a thorough investigation and successfully proved the charges in court.

Anantapur District Court Judge G. Srinivas sentenced the five accused—D. Shajit, Chintaku Ramesh, Chikkepalli Nagendra, Talari Sudhakar, and Talari Arun—to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 20,000 on each.

Public Prosecutor Ramamallu Harinath Reddy played a key role in securing the conviction. Notably, all five convicts are below 25 years of age.



Guv's address 'directionless', says Sharmila

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president YS Sharmila on Monday slammed Governor S Abdul Nazeer's address to the state legislature, calling it "directionless" and riddled with "half-truths and falsehoods".

Pointing out the lack of a clear statement on the implementation of welfare promises, the APCC president accused the TDP-led NDA government of wasting eight months without demonstrating any real commitment. "The Governor's address has disappointed people who were expecting the fulfilment of poll promises," she said in a press release, criticising Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's Swarna Andhra 2047 vision as a "farce". Focusing on the YSRCP, Sharmila questioned whether the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led party was more concerned about securing opposition status or addressing people's problems.

According to her, YSRCP legislators attended the Assembly only out of "fear of losing their membership".

If the YSRCP is committed to people's welfare, she urged its members to attend the Assembly from Tuesday. She also slammed Jagan Mohan Reddy saying that there was no change in him even in the face of "public resentment".

Collector stresses need to improve financial literacy

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P. Prashanthi has underscored the importance of enhancing financial literacy among the public.

Releasing a wall poster to mark 'Financial Literacy Week (FLW)' on Monday, she stated that financial reforms at the grassroots level would be closely monitored from February 24 to 28, targeting specific segments of the population.

"The objective of FLW is to raise awareness on financial literacy and improve people's financial well-being through focused campaigns," the Collector said.

She highlighted that financial literacy equips individuals to manage money effectively, plan for their future, and make responsible financial decisions. It also educates them about their rights as consumers of financial products and services.

"This year's theme is 'Financial Literacy: Women's Well-being,' and awareness programmes will be organised accordingly," she added.

LDM D.V. Prasad noted that RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra has launched a priority programme on financial literacy, focusing on understanding risks and rewards in financial decision-making. He stated that the initiative aims to empower women with financial knowledge.

The campaign covers topics such as risk diversification, responsible borrowing, maintaining a good credit score, and managing household budgets, with a special focus on homemakers, working women, and women entrepreneurs.

He further mentioned that the Reserve Bank, in collaboration with banks and other stakeholders, will conduct awareness programmes and outreach activities across the country during the week. Joint Collector S. Chinna Ramudu and other officials were present at the event.



PM ADARSH YOJANA WORKS TO BE COMPLETED BY MARCH 31

Meanwhile, Collector Prashanthi directed officials to complete works under the 'PM Adarsh Yojana' by March 31, marking the end of the financial year.

Reviewing the progress of the scheme with the CEOs of Eluru and Kakinada Zilla Parishads, she instructed that works in rural Scheduled Caste-inhabited areas under the Panchayat Raj and Rural Water Supply Organisation be expedited.

"The Central Government has sanctioned funds for West Godavari and East Godavari districts, with Rs 5 crore allocated for 100 works. These include CC roads, drains, SWPC sheds, pipelines, and solid-liquid waste management, which must be completed within the deadline," she told officials. The Collector stressed the need to utilise the sanctioned funds fully and ensure timely completion of the projects.

GRADUATE MLC POLLS

Take measures for transparent counting of votes, officials told

PNS ■ ELURU

Election Observer Ch. Sridhar has directed election officials and staff to ensure transparent arrangements for the counting of votes in the MLC Graduates' Constituency elections.

The Election Observer inspected the arrangements for the counting of votes, scheduled for March 3, at C.R. Reddy College. He also examined the ballot boxes. The MLC Graduates' Constituency elections for the combined West Godavari and East Godavari districts will be held on February 27.

Sridhar instructed the election staff to have a thorough understanding of the election and vote-counting procedures. He emphasised that the counting process must be conducted in a peaceful atmosphere.

Election Returning Officer and District Collector K. Vetri Selvi directed polling officials and staff to conduct the MLC elections in strict adherence to the guidelines of the Election Commission of India. She stressed that the counting staff must ensure the process remains transparent and smooth.

"The counting supervisors and staff

have been briefed on the procedure, including primary counting, detailed counting, handling of rejected and doubtful votes, roles of counting agents, and other key aspects," she said.

The vote-counting process will begin on March 3 at 8 a.m. Polling officers, staff, and agents of various political parties must reach the counting centres by 6 a.m. on the day. A total of 35 candidates are contesting, and the total number of voters is 3,14,984.

Acknowledging that the counting process is expected to continue for about three days, the Collector stated that shift-wise vote-counting staff have been appointed. The process will be conducted in 17 rounds across 28 tables.

On the occasion, DRDA PD R. Vijayaraju, Master Trainee Srinivas, and Phani explained the procedures for vote counting, duties of counting agents, detailed scrutiny of primary stage votes, handling of rejected and doubtful votes, opening of ballot boxes, and bundling of ballot papers through a PowerPoint presentation.

Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy and RDO Achyut Ambarshih were also present.



Evolve segment-wise development plans: WG Collector to officials

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has instructed officials to prepare comprehensive, constituency-wise development plans with a clear vision for the future.

Chairing a meeting with officials on district development, Collector Nagarani emphasised that the plans should be formulated with a thorough understanding of each constituency's population, geography, economy, and infrastructure.

She stressed the importance of considering key natural resources such as rivers, tourist destinations, agricultural zones, industrial areas, and heritage sites while drafting the vision document.

Referring to the constituency profile, she stated that essential details—including location, area, terrain, and natural resources—should be documented. She also directed officials to include current population statistics, literacy rates, and the participation of men and women in the workforce.

The plan should outline the existing state of healthcare, education, housing, transport,



water supply, electricity, and public amenities while also highlighting key environmental and cultural aspects. Additionally, it must provide a clear roadmap for implementation, she asserted.

The Collector instructed officials to align the development plans with the ten principles, objectives, and recommendations of Swarna Andhra. She stated that if any project in the constituency had not been allocated funds in the state budget, it should be explicitly mentioned that it was being proposed under the public-private partnership (PPP) mode. She also directed that details of ongoing upgrades and new projects in each sector should be clearly listed in the prescribed format.

She said the government is committed to implementing

Vision Plan 2024-2029 to achieve sustainable growth, modern infrastructure, and inclusive development. By strengthening agriculture, industry, education, health-care, and tourism, the government aims to build a happy, healthy, and prosperous society. She also stressed the need for the People's Survey to be conducted effectively across the district.

She further explained that the survey aims to identify the bottom 20% of the population in terms of living standards, ensuring financial empowerment through the P-4 (Public-Private-People Partnership) model.

DRO Mogili Venkateswarulu, CPO K Srinivasa Rao, and several other officials attended the meeting.

No extra charges from Deepam-2 beneficiaries: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmi has issued a stern warning to gas agencies, stating that their licences will be revoked if they collect extra charges from beneficiaries of the Deepam-2 scheme. He emphasised that not even a single rupee should be collected beyond the MRP from the beneficiaries.

Dr Lakshmi held a meeting at the collectorate in Vijayawada on Monday, which was

attended by officials from the Civil Supplies, Legal Metrology departments, and the LPG Dealers Association. Discussions focused on IVRS survey reports and the implementation of the free gas cylinder scheme.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Lakshmi said that the Deepam-2 scheme is being successfully implemented in the district. The State government credits the gas cylinder subsidy amount directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts within 48 hours, he said.

BJP protecting KCR & KTR in phone tapping case: CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said the BJP is 'protecting' former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and BRS Working President KT Rama Rao in the phone tapping case.

"The BJP is forcing the BRS to support it in the MLC elections using the phone tapping cases. The BJP threatened BRS leaders that there would be arrests in the phone tapping cases if they failed to support the BJP in the MLC elections.

The BJP won eight LS seats in Telangana using the phone tapping case," the CM said.

"Tell me when Prabhakar Rao and Sravan Rao will be brought back from America, we will put the BRS leaders in jail within 48 hours of bringing them to the state. Union ministers Kishan Reddy and Bandi Sanjay are protecting KCR and KTR. If Prabhakar Rao and Sravan Rao fled to America, why is PM Modi and Central Minister Bandi Sanjay



not bringing them back to the country? If we filed cases in the sheep scam, the ED took all the files. When the ED will arrest the accused in it. Why is the Centre not heeding Telangana's request to issue Red Corner notices to Prabhakar Rao and Sravan Rao? Why is the ED not arresting KTR in the E-Car Race case," the CM said.

Addressing an MLC election public meeting at Nizamabad on Monday, the CM said the BJP and the BRS have entered

into a dark agreement and asked the BRS to reveal why it is not contesting the MLC elections.

The CM said there was no change in KCR even though the people threw him out. KCR is conspiring against the Congress government sitting in his farmhouse. BRS leaders, who did 'nothing' in the last 10 years are criticising the Congress government. The BRS leaders are now saying that the Congress government did 'nothing' after assuming charge, he said.

Dr. NTR University intercollegiate sports meet kicks off

PNS ■ ELURU

The Dr. NTR University of Health Sciences (NTRUHS) Intercollegiate Sports Meet commenced with a vibrant opening ceremony at ASR Homoeopathic Medical College, Tadepalligudem.

Dr. DSVL Narasimham, Vice-Chancellor of NTRUHS, attended as the chief guest, while Dr. U.S.V. Prasad, Principal of ASR Homoeopathic Medical College and Chairman of the sports meet, presided over the event and welcomed the participants.

Dr. Vijay Srujith, Director of Trinity Hospitals, Tadepalligudem, and Dr. E. Trimurthy, Secretary of the Sports Board, NTRUHS, Vijayawada, also participated in the inauguration. The dignitaries formally launched the event by lighting the ceremonial lamp.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Narasimham drew parallels between sports and life, underscoring the importance of adaptability, perseverance, and strategic thinking. He encouraged students to embrace challenges, reorganise their thoughts in the face of setbacks, and strive for continuous improvement.

"Winning a medal is not as impor-



tant as participation and overcoming obstacles. What truly matters is the effort put in," he remarked.

Dr. Vijay Srujith highlighted the strong link between physical and mental well-being, noting that academic and career pressures often take precedence over physical health. He appreciated the efforts of the organisers in bringing together over 20 colleges and urged students to cultivate confidence and a positive mindset.

The sports meet saw participation from 20 AYUSH and physiotherapy col-

leges. Events for men included volleyball (18 teams), cricket (15 teams), badminton (20 teams), table tennis (7 teams), chess (15 teams), and athletics (18 teams). Women competed in volleyball (6 teams), throwball (12 teams), badminton (12 teams), table tennis (4 teams), chess (8 teams), and athletics (10 teams).

Dr. Trimurthy and Dr. Prasad also addressed the gathering, emphasising the role of sports in holistic development.

FIVE ARRESTED IN ROBBERY CASE

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police have arrested five persons, including the daughter-in-law of a 75-year-old woman, in connection with a robbery that took place in Jagannadhapuram.

Speaking to the media on Monday, SDPO Devaraj Manish Patil said that on February 14, Chaganti Rajitha (19), along with three accomplices, forcibly entered the house of Chaganti Sukravaram Mahalakshmi (75) and looted gold jewellery and other valuables. The accused tied and gagged the elderly woman before committing the crime. The maid-servant was also found to have assisted in the robbery.

The victim, who lived alone in her house on Yanam Road, alerted the police after managing to free herself. Following an investigation, the police arrested all five accused, including Rajitha.

ACROSS THE STATES



Six varsity students booked for thrashing junior

Six students of a private university here have been booked for allegedly beating up a fellow student with a belt, police said on Monday. According to police, the victim, a second-year BA student, in his complaint said that six senior students tried to rag him when he was in his friend's room last Thursday. Upon objecting to their commands, they allegedly beat him up with a belt, hit him with a steel bottle and also broke his mobile phone. Rai police station SHO Kuldeep said. The complainant, a student of O P Jindal Global University, also alleged that they shot a video of the incident and threatened him with dire consequences if he lodged a complaint, the SHO added. Police said a case has been registered in this regard and an investigation into the matter is on. Meanwhile, a spokesperson of O P Jindal Global University said the varsity is cooperating with police to assist in the probe.



Manipur Gov distributes Kala Akademi awards

Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Monday distributed Manipur State Kala Akademi (MSKA) annual awards and fellowships to distinguished personalities who contributed to Manipuri art and culture in various forms. Speaking at the event at Raj Bhavan, Bhalla said, "I had heard and read about Manipuri art and culture, but today, I have witnessed firsthand why it is renowned across the world." "Manipur is known for its richness and diversity in the field of art and culture. While classical Manipuri dance is renowned worldwide, Lai Haraoba and other folk dances from both the valley and the hills vividly showcase the depth and richness of our ancient cultural heritage," he added. The governor remarked, "Ever since its inception in 1972, MSKA has been conferring fellowships and awards to people distinguished not only in art and culture but also in literature and fine arts. These awards symbolise the highest standard of excellence and achievement by artists, writers, and practitioners of fine arts."



Arunachal farmers to receive Rs 226.46 crore under PM-KISAN

Farmers in Arunachal Pradesh are set to receive Rs 226.46 crore under the 19th installment of the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN), officials said. Under the 19th installment, around Rs 22,000 crore will be directly transferred to the bank accounts of 9.8 crore farmers nationwide. Eligible farmers will receive Rs 2,000 as part of the Rs 6,000 annual benefit, distributed in three installments. The installment was released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a programme in Bihar's Bhagalpur. Events were organised at Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) across the country where exhibitions showcased natural farming, organic farming, and GI-tagged products, highlighting sustainable agricultural practices. Arunachal Pradesh agriculture minister Gabriel D Wangsu participated virtually alongside departmental officers. Officials praised the scheme's impact on the agrarian economy and lauded the inspiring messages shared by distinguished guests, an official statement said here.

Want a Kashmir where no life is lost due to terrorism: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is peace in Jammu and Kashmir and this peace has to be permanent, and the Narendra Modi government's aim is to make a Jammu and Kashmir where no life is lost due to terrorism, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Monday.

Interacting with youngsters from Jammu and Kashmir who have come to the national capital under the Watan Ko Jano youth exchange programme, Shah also said the people of Jammu and Kashmir had equal rights over the entire country, like the people of any other state, and the entirety of India looked at the people of the Union Territory with love and respect.

When terrorism comes to an end, there is no need for the deployment of police and that day is not far, he added.

"When there is peace, no police will be required. This message has to be carried by you to your friends, family and villages... When you go home, tell your friends, neighbours that the entire country is living in peace and the people of Jammu and Kashmir should also live in peace," Shah said.

There is peace in Jammu and Kashmir and this peace has to



"When there is peace, no police will be required. This message has to be carried by you to your friends, family and villages... When you go home, tell your friends, neighbours that the entire country is living in peace and the people of Jammu and Kashmir should also live in peace," Shah said

be permanent and "our aim is to make a Jammu and Kashmir where no life is lost due to terrorism", he added.

"Violence brings nothing. Due to the decades of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, 36,000 people lost their lives," the home minister said.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made the country equal for all by abrogating Article 370 and, now,

the people of Jammu and Kashmir had equal rights anywhere in India, like the people of Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat or Rajasthan.

"You have rights over Jammu and Kashmir. Is it not good that you also have equal rights over the other 29 states of the country? Like Jammu and Kashmir, the whole country is yours," he said.

Peace is most important for

everyone and, under the Modi government, peace and development have come to Jammu and Kashmir, hospitals, roads and bridges have come, infrastructure has been created, he added.

"The entire country looks at the people of Jammu and Kashmir with love and respect. It is because peace is prevalent there. It is because of peace, development is taking place in Jammu and Kashmir," the home minister said. There are 30 states in the country and Jammu and Kashmir is one of them. Together, all these 30 states become India, he said.

"Our country is our home. If you don't step out of Jammu and Kashmir, you will not be able to know the country. So, don't you think that you should visit and know the country well? In your next school vacation, you must visit any of the states along with your parents. If required, have a fight at home but you must visit one of the states," he added.

In the past 10 years, terrorism has come to an end in Jammu and Kashmir, incidents of blasts and stone pelting have come to an end, and schools are opening regularly, the home minister noted.

Shah said there was no theatre earlier and no one could go to watch a film.

Social security remains a vital pillar of social justice: Mandaviya



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Social security remains a fundamental pillar of India's commitment to social justice, Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday said, noting that its coverage increased to 48.8 per cent of the total population in 2024 from 24.4 per cent in 2021.

Addressing the inaugural session of the Regional Dialogue on Social Justice 2025, Mandaviya said,

"The unemployment rate has declined from 6 per cent in 2017-18 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24, while the Labour Force Participation Rate has increased from 49.8 per cent to 61.1 per cent."

These positive indicators underscore the impact of our reforms and initiatives. Labour reforms have been a foundation of India's efforts to mod-

ernise its workforce policies, he added.

The consolidation of 29 labour laws into four simplified Labour Codes has promoted labour welfare, universalised wages and social security, and ensured safer working conditions, he pointed out.

These reforms have also improved the ease of doing business by streamlining registration, license, and compliance procedures, the minister noted.

"Social security remains a fundamental pillar of India's commitment to social justice. The ILO's World Social Protection Report 2024-26 highlights India's remarkable progress, reaching 48.8 per cent in 2024.

We are in the process of further collecting the data with the ILO," Mandaviya said.

India proud of its contributions to UN peacekeeping: EAM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will continue to contribute meaningfully to the cause of UN peacekeeping and it is committed to supporting Global South nations in building peacekeeping capacities, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Monday.

Jaishankar also said that the participation of women in peace operations in various parts of the globe has made the missions more diverse and inclusive. The external affairs minister was speaking at the inaugural session of an India-hosted conference on "Women Peacekeepers from the Global South".

The conference has brought together women peacekeepers from 35 nations to explore the evolving role of women in peacekeeping operations and discuss strategies to enhance their participation.

It aims to strengthen the role of women in UN peacekeeping by fostering dialogue, sharing experiences, and

improving collaboration among the nations of the Global South.

Jaishankar said India is proud of its contributions and association with UN peacekeeping, a commitment that spans decades. "Since the 1950s, India has contributed over 2,90,000 peacekeepers across more than 50 missions. In fact, India remains the largest Troop Contributing Country to this day," he said.

Jaishankar said India strongly believes that peacekeeping is an "effective instrument" in the maintenance of international peace and security. India has unfortunately lost nearly 180 peacekeepers, whose supreme sacrifices are etched in the history of our collective endeavours forever, he said.

"The participation of women in peace operations makes it more diverse and inclusive. It is essential that we continue to increase the representation of women in peacekeeping," Jaishankar said.

Rajasthan Assembly disrupted amid uproar

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan assembly on Monday witnessed uproar by Congress members, who have been holding a dharna in the assembly since Friday evening against a minister's remark against former prime minister Indira Gandhi and suspension of six MLAs.

After 13 minutes of the proceedings, the House was adjourned till 12 noon.

As soon as the Question Hour began at 11 am, the Congress MLAs raised slogans and tried to disrupt the house.

However, Speaker Vasudev Devnani called listed questions and the proceedings began. The speaker also asked suspended MLAs to go out of the House but they remained present.

With the protest of the Congress MLAs continuing,



the speaker adjourned the proceedings till 12 noon.

Chaos erupted in the assembly on Friday after BJP minister Avinash Gehlot's remarks against former prime minister Indira Gandhi.

During the Question Hour on Friday, Gehlot had pointed to the opposition and said, "In the 2023-24 budget also, like always, you named the scheme

(on working women's hostels) after your 'dadi' (grandmother) Indira Gandhi."

The remark had triggered an uproar in the House, which led to three adjournments and suspension of six Congress MLAs, including PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasara, Ramkesh Meena, Amin Kagzi, Jakir Hussain, and Sanjay Kumar.

Farmers are backbone of Indian economy: Union Min Puri

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Farmers are the backbone of the Indian economy and custodians of food security, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri said on Monday.

Puri was speaking at the "Kissan Samman Samaroh" programme here.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday released the 19th installment of PM-KISAN Samman Nidhi at Bhagalpur in Bihar.

The minister joined the programme virtually from Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar, along with several farmers and dignitaries, an



official statement said. Addressing farmers and other members of the Guru Nanak Dev University, Puri said farmers' welfare is the top priority of the central government led by Prime Minister Modi.

"Farmers are the backbone of our economy. They are the caretakers of our land and the custodians of our food security," he noted.

The minister said farmers have now become energy producers and the government is striving to increase ethanol blending across the country for their benefit.

"Our farmers have now become energy producers. The total ethanol blending earlier was 1.5 per cent, but now it has reached 19.6 per cent, following which the farmers have been paid more than Rs 90,000 crore," he said.

Gujarat to host AICC session after 64 years

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

When the Congress holds its AICC session in Ahmedabad in April, it will only be the third time in the party's 139-year-old history that Gujarat will host this mega conclave with the last one held 64 years ago in Bhavnagar.

Gujarat Congress president Shaktisinh Gohil on Monday thanked the party's high command on behalf of the people of Gujarat for deciding to organise the key session in the state.

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) session on April 8 and 9 will deliberate on the challenges posed by the BJP's "anti-people" policies and its alleged attack on the Constitution, as well as on charting the outfit's future road map, the opposition party said in New Delhi on Sunday.

"The party has given a chance to Gujarat to organise the AICC session on April 8-9 in Ahmedabad city, the biggest centre of independence struggle where an ashram of Mahatma Gandhi (Sabarmati Ashram) is located. I thank the working committee and high command for deciding to organise the session here," Gohil said while addressing the media.

He said the party wanted to organise the session at Mahatma Mandir in Gandhinagar "but have been told unofficially that the venue will not be provided for the purpose". Gujarat, which



houses birthplaces of independence heroes Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, will host an AICC session for the third time in the Congress history with the last one organised at Bhavnagar in 1961 when Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy was the party's president, the Rajya Sabha MP said.

The AICC's first session in Gujarat was organised at Haripura near Bardoli in 1938, when Sardar Patel had taken the responsibility for the event, he said.

It was organised to mark the 10th anniversary of Bardoli satyagraha, a non-violent farmer protest led by Patel which was launched to oppose the British government's excessive taxation. At the Haripura session, Bose had first proposed the idea of establishing a planning commission and launching five-year plans, the GPC president maintained.

"The blueprint issued by Bose in the 1938 session was implemented by the country's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru 12 years later," he said.



Don't work in silo, get rid of unproductive systems

Prez Murmu to railway services officers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that railway services determine the quality of daily lives of a large number of people, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday asked the railway services officers to get rid of the burdens of unproductive systems and not to work in a silo.

Addressing a group of probationers of the railway services, who had called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here, the president said a major part of India moves on the railway tracks every day and hence it is not an exaggeration to say that Indian Railways is a social, cultural and commercial lifeline of the country.

Railway services determine the quality of daily lives of a large number of people, the president said addressing the officer trainees of the Indian Railway Protection Force Service (IRPFS), the Indian Railway Management Service (Accounts) and the Indian Railway Management Service (Traffic).

"I will make a special appeal to all the young officers of the three different wings of the railways to always keep above what is called 'working in a silo'."

You are not working only for the vertical you are employed in. You are working for the overall effectiveness of the railways as a change agent and service provider to the nation on the move," she said.

Murmu also underlined the need to differentiate between what the railway was during the colonial era and what role it has to play in the India of Amrit-Kaal.

3 in 5 die after cancer diagnosis: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Says women disproportionately affected

Three in every five people in India succumb to cancer following diagnosis with women bearing a "disproportionate burden" compared to men, an analysis of global cancer data has estimated.

The incidence to mortality ratio in the US was found to be about one in four, while in China it was one in two, according to the results published in "The Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia" journal.

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)



study found that India ranked third highest in cancer incidence, after China and the US, and accounted for over 10 per cent of the world's cancer-related deaths, ranking second

after China.

Researchers also projected that in the coming two decades, India will face a formidable challenge in managing deaths related to cancer incidence,

with a yearly increase of two per cent in cases as the population ages.

The team examined trends in 36 types of cancer across age groups and genders in India over the past 20 years, using the Global Cancer Observatory (GLOBOCAN) 2022 and Global Health Observatory (GHO) databases.

"Approximately three out of five individuals would be expected to succumb to mortality if diagnosed with cancer in India," the authors wrote.

The findings also revealed that the five most common cancers affecting both genders

collectively account for 44 per cent of cancer burden in India.

However, women in India were found to bear a "disproportionate burden", as breast cancer continues to be the most prevalent cancer, contributing to 13.8 per cent of new cases from both genders, and cervical cancer the third most (9.2 per cent).

Among women, breast cancer made up for nearly 30 per cent of new cases and over 24 per cent of related deaths, followed by cervical cancer, accounting for over 19 per cent of new cases and almost 20 per cent of deaths.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

German election Tik Toked

As Germany votes to elect its new chancellor, far right may make substantial gains thanks to its Tik Tok campaign

Germany votes in a snap federal election, a political shake-up triggered by the collapse of the three-party coalition government at the end of last year. With 59.2 million eligible voters, this election is set to reshape the country's political landscape, potentially heralding a shift towards conservatism and a stronger far-right presence. At the forefront of the race is Friedrich Merz, the 69-year-old leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Merz has emerged as the frontrunner to become Germany's next chancellor, advocating for economic stability, stricter immigration policies, and a reassertion of Germany's leadership in Europe. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is poised to make historic gains, emerging as the second-largest political force. This comes at the expense of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party (SPD), which has suffered due to economic stagnation and dissatisfaction with the previous coalition government. The Green Party and the Free Democrats (FDP), both



part of the fallen coalition, have also struggled to maintain voter confidence. Meanwhile, the Left Party is fighting to remain relevant amid internal divisions and the broader shift in political sentiment.

This election is taking place at a critical juncture for Germany, with pressing domestic and international challenges shaping the national narrative. Germany, the EU's largest economy, is grappling with slow growth, rising inflation, and concerns about industrial competitiveness. Many voters are looking for a leader who can restore economic stability and drive innovation. Besides, the country has faced growing debates over migration policies, with many Germans expressing concerns about integration and border security. The AfD has capitalised on this sentiment, calling for stricter immigration controls. With growing geopolitical tensions, including relations with China, Russia, and the United States, Germany's next leader will need to navigate foreign policy challenges carefully. But the biggest factor that is being analysed is why the AfD is gaining ground? Indeed, the rise of the AfD can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, economic dissatisfaction has pushed voters towards populist rhetoric, with the AfD portraying itself as the party of change. Secondly, frustration with the previous coalition's handling of immigration and energy policy has bolstered nationalist sentiments. An interesting aspect of this election has been the role played by social media, particularly TikTok. The AfD has effectively leveraged TikTok to reach younger audiences, spreading populist messages through short, engaging videos, often laced with negative content. Meanwhile, mainstream parties have struggled to counteract misinformation and viral narratives that favor the far-right. This election underscores the growing influence of digital platforms in modern politics, raising questions about regulation and the impact of algorithm-driven content on democratic processes. Whatever the outcome, it will have far-reaching implications for Germany, the EU and beyond.

Historically, state governments have played a central role in appointing VCs by constituting independent search committees. However, the UGC's draft proposes a shift, granting Governors—functioning as Chancellors of state universities—control over these committees. Governors, constitutionally expected to act as neutral figures, have increasingly been accused of serving partisan interests, particularly in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal. By formalizing the Governor's role in academic appointments, the UGC guidelines risk politicizing the process, potentially undermining academic independence and turning universities into ideological battlegrounds. The fears of state governments are not unfounded. In Tamil Nadu, for example, the DMK has accused the Governor of deliberately delaying VC appointments to push candidates aligned with the ruling party at the Centre. Similarly, Kerala has witnessed repeated stand-offs between the Governor and the state government over academic

New VC appointment rules undermine State autonomy



K S TOMAR

The UGC's draft guidelines, while ostensibly aimed at ensuring uniformity in VC appointments, have opened a Pandora's box of political and constitutional concerns

The University Grants Commission's (UGC) draft guidelines proposing a shift in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors (VCs) have ignited a political storm. By granting Chancellors—predominantly Governors—the authority to constitute search-cum-selection committees for appointing VCs, the UGC has stirred concerns about federalism, state autonomy, and academic independence. Adding to the controversy, non-compliance with these guidelines could disqualify state universities from UGC funding schemes, creating a direct clash between the Centre and opposition-ruled states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh. This move, seen as a veiled attempt to centralise power over state universities, places the spotlight on India's federal structure and the simmering tension between state governments and Governors, especially in opposition-led states. At the core of the debate is the growing role of Governors, often viewed as proxies of the Centre, in state governance.

Historically, state governments have played a central role in appointing VCs by constituting independent search committees. However, the UGC's draft proposes a shift, granting Governors—functioning as Chancellors of state universities—control over these committees. Governors, constitutionally expected to act as neutral figures, have increasingly been accused of serving partisan interests, particularly in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal. By formalizing the Governor's role in academic appointments, the UGC guidelines risk politicizing the process, potentially undermining academic independence and turning universities into ideological battlegrounds. The fears of state governments are not unfounded. In Tamil Nadu, for example, the DMK has accused the Governor of deliberately delaying VC appointments to push candidates aligned with the ruling party at the Centre. Similarly, Kerala has witnessed repeated stand-offs between the Governor and the state government over academic

appointments. The new guidelines only add fuel to these already volatile relationships. The UGC's draft guidelines also raise significant constitutional questions. Education, as a subject under the Concurrent List, allows both the Centre and states to legislate on it. However, the Constitution also upholds federal principles, granting states substantial control over their universities. The new guidelines, by empowering Governors to dominate the VC appointment process, are being viewed as an encroachment on states' jurisdiction. Several states may challenge these guidelines in court, arguing that they violate the federal structure enshrined in the Constitution. States like Tamil Nadu have already passed laws to curtail the Governor's powers in academic governance, reflecting a broader pushback against what they see as an overreach by the Centre.



For opposition-ruled states, where educational institutions are often viewed as bastions of intellectual and political autonomy, the UGC's guidelines have deepened fears of central overreach. The ruling dispensations in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal have expressed strong apprehensions about Governors using this newfound authority as an extension of the Centre's political influence. In West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's government has long accused the Governor of interfering in the state's affairs, particularly in



THE FEAR IS THAT SUCH INTERFERENCE COULD STIFLE INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY, WITH UNIVERSITIES BECOMING VEHICLES FOR PROPAGATING THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S POLITICAL AGENDA

the educational domain. The UGC guidelines could exacerbate this friction, allowing the Governor to influence appointments to academic institutions. Such moves, critics argue, undermine the intellectual independence that universities in the state have historically enjoyed. In Kerala, where the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government has vociferously defended educational autonomy, the guidelines are being seen as an outright encroachment on the state's constitutional rights. The state government fears that politicised appointments could compromise the ideological neutrality and academic standards of its universities.

The DMK-led Tamil Nadu government has also repeatedly opposed the Governor's increasing interference in educational appointments. The state has even passed legislation to reduce the Governor's control over the VC selection process, only to have it stalled by the Governor. For Tamil Nadu, these new guidelines are a direct challenge to the state's efforts to safeguard its educational institutions from external political influence. Universities, as centres of higher learning, thrive on autonomy and academic freedom. The UGC's intervention threatens to compromise these principles by potentially turning VCs into political appointees. Critics argue that such appointments could erode academic independence, with VCs prioritising political allegiance over edu-

cational excellence. In opposition-led states, this concern is particularly acute. The fear is that such interference could stifle intellectual diversity, with universities becoming vehicles for propagating the central government's political agenda. This interference also undermines the confidence of academicians and researchers.

Scholars worry that political considerations will outweigh merit in appointments, leading to a decline in the quality of higher education. The resulting chilling effect could discourage free thought and innovation in academic institutions. The controversy over VC appointments is emblematic of a larger tussle between the Centre and states over federalism. For states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal, the guidelines represent an erosion of their autonomy in managing critical domains such as education. This growing centralisation also poses questions about the role of Governors in a federal structure.

A balanced approach, one that respects state autonomy while ensuring accountability in academic governance, is the need of the hour. Without such a resolution, the guidelines risk becoming another flashpoint in the Centre-state relationship, with significant implications for India's federal structure and the future of its education system.

(The writer is a senior political analyst and strategic affairs columnist)

PICTALK



A parrot perches on a 'Palas' flower, in Bastar

PTI

Navigating differences: Lessons in collaboration from a life in leadership



SANJAY CHANDRA

My experiences have taught me that to find common ground one must show patience, open to dialogue and accommodate perspectives different from your own

I have been trying to set up a small library within my condominium complex. A lady was apprehensive about the criticism from a select few for the expenditure on this noble venture. Her sharp rejoinder that she could never stoop so low to my simple solution of inviting the critics to inaugurate the library left me seething. In another instance, a lady unequivocally told me that she would not work with another lady in the Art and Literature Festival I am organizing within my society. I found their response irrational. I have worked in the government sector for more than 30 years out of the 35 years of an active professional life.



The initial 17 years were spent in handling big teams of literate or semi-literate staff. My success depended upon their performance. I could not achieve much without the support of subordinates, peers, and superiors. I did not have the luxury of going back to my seniors to shift a person if he did not perform. I also could not go back asking for a transfer if I felt overwhelmed by the people who

had strong unions, and who would not hesitate to run me down even at the slightest hint of weakness. I was taking stock of the previous day's performance with my senior supervisor in my very first posting in a maintenance shed that had more than 1,000 staff. A group of staff and their leaders barged into the room to air their grievances. An unruly element from the crowd threw an earthen tea cup to land right in front of me on the table. I had to gulp down the insult to present a brave face as I thundered in the most authoritative voice I could muster that the meeting was over and I would not discuss any further. It turned out that they were testing me and the leaders

tried their best to be on my right side. A senior visited my shop floor during lunch hours in another posting in a production unit a few years later. A place where a lot of grease was used was usually quite gloomy with layers of the sticky substance accumulating over years. The shop floor would also not be the cleanest of the places at lunchtime. Railways was an extremely hierarchical organisation with the seniors considering themselves masters at insulting the subordinates, particularly the officers, who would not retaliate in front of the staff out of a sense of propriety. This senior gentleman shouted at me that if the cleaning staff was not available, then I should have cleaned myself.

My supervisor and the staff showed more compassion as they rushed around. There were many such incidents when I felt degraded and insulted. I did not have the same options that the two young ladies wanted to exercise. To give credit to both, they are well educated, one of them having studied psychology in college, the other is a medical professional. I find a similar unwillingness in other younger professionals. They are rigid in their approach to daily problems and would rather not talk to a person with contrary opinions than sit down to resolve them. The attitude often spills into the personal lives also. There would always be some difficult times. There is a need to discuss and find a middle ground. I would like to bring their attention to the famous words of Abraham Lincoln, "I do not like that man. I must get to know him better." It will take a lot of time and effort. But in the end, it will be worth it.

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FARMERS DESERVE FAIR PRICES

Madam — The Union Agriculture Minister talking about the government working out schemes (February 23) to prevent distress sale of farm produce is welcome. India continues to be predominantly an agrarian country. It's contribution to the country's GDP was around 51 per cent at the time the country got freedom. Still, we had to depend on aids like PL480 to feed the poor. Thanks to the green revolution taken up with all by the government as well as the farming community with all sincerity the country is upgraded to food surplus status. But due to the shifting of focus from agriculture to industry, agriculture is suffering the worst, facing all sorts of odds at every level.

Though every commodity's price is fixed by the producer, it doesn't hold good for the farm produce. The government doesn't volunteer to take the ground reality into account and fix the cost, leaving it to the market dynamics. This policy has allowed the middlemen to play havoc. This reality, coupled with the apathetic moves of the government, has resulted in millions of farmers resorting to committing suicide. Many small farmers are deserting their farming activities and migrating to cities seeking daily wage jobs for their livelihood. The government is still not sensitised to address the issues but comes out with plans to monopolise farming by a few private corporations. It is good that the minister has now talked about the woes of the farmers who fail to get reasonable returns and the consumers who fail to get the benefit of the plenty. It would be a meaningful act of the government to discuss with the farmers and address their woes without attaching any political strings. Farmers are the real wealth creators and providers of food security.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

MEDIA TARGETS KIIT UNIVERSITY

Madam — After the suicide of a Nepali student at Odisha's KIIT University following an unhealthy relationship, some sections of the media are targeting the university

Virat shines as India beats Pakistan



India has beaten its archrival Pakistan by six wickets in their group A match of the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 at the Dubai International Cricket stadium. Virat Kohli has once again proved his supremacy against Pakistan in the ICC tournaments, delivering a scintillating unbeaten century with a memorable knock off 111 balls. The win propelled India to the top of Group A with 4 points,

virtually securing a semifinal berth, while Pakistan faced the threat of an early exit, suffering their second consecutive defeat. Kohli's knock featuring seven exquisite boundaries dismantled Pakistan's hopes as their premier pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf struggled to make an impact after Afridi dismissed Rohit Sharma (20 off 15) early with a fiery yorker. It is Kohli's 51st ODI tonne by becoming the fastest batter to reach 14,000 ODI runs during his innings. With 51 centuries in ODIs and 30 in Tests, with 7 double centuries in international cricket, Kohli is regarded as one of the greatest batsmen of all time. Kohli is often referred to as the King Kohli by his fans and supporters due to his achievements and contributions to the game.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

to satisfy their agenda. Now, the context of justice for the deceased girl has been diverted to their own vendetta. As a result, the last couple of days have been very dramatic for the student fraternity. Other students in KIIT who have come for higher studies from outside and their parents have been in a distributing mind state. They should not suffer from the media trial. Considering the incident, the state government formed a high-level committee to probe into it. Now it's become a political farce; every day different political outfits are staging protests in the evening in front of the main gate like a daily routine, which is ruining the academic environment on the campus. Amid all of this, we should not forget the contributions of this university to the sports and education systems of the state. Let's make a healthy environment for the other students of KIIT and have faith in the law.

Susant Pal | Bhubaneswar

TRUMP DISRUPTING WORLD ORDER

Madam — US President Donald Trump's economic and geopolitical decisions have

raised global concerns. His imposition of tariffs on Mexico, Canada, Brazil, and China has strained trade relations. His remarks about annexing Canada and Panama are alarming, while his characterisation of India as the highest tariff-imposing nation risks diplomatic tensions. On foreign policy, Trump's abandonment of Ukraine, despite US Democrats pushing it into conflict with Russia, has left the nation vulnerable. His call for Palestinians to vacate Gaza and seek refuge in Egypt and Jordan adds to Middle East instability. If America alienates nations through unilateral policies, it risks losing global leadership. A hostile US stance could push China and Russia closer. No country, not even the US, can remain strong forever without allies. For America to truly remain great, Trump must adopt a more cooperative and balanced approach to international relations.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE HANDWRITING BLUES: A STORY OF DECLINE

Some see handwriting as a reflection of character, but it shifts, evolves and often declines beyond recognition



APS MALHOTRA

Some conjecture that a person's handwriting can give a glimpse into that person's character. But I am a sceptic in this regard, because, in my opinion, the handwriting of an individual is not a constant, but keeps on morphing as time goes by. A case in point is your humble friend, who has seen his handwriting deteriorate over the past few decades, till now, in my fifth decade, it is nothing more than a painstaking, almost illegible scrawl- although, with the advent of the now ubiquitous personal computer and other sundry devices, the negative impact of this deterioration has been minimised, especially in official work. Because today, when I write a note on any file with my hand, others find it rather difficult to 'decrypt'. Even filling simple financial documents like a cheque is a nightmare now, a stiff challenge, that is increasingly being left to my better half to handle, as bank people, on a few occasions, have raised doubts about the authenticity of my signature. But before the readers start commiserating about the sad and agonising state of my handwriting, I will share with them that this was not always the case. In the early years of school, I was the darling of my teachers because of my neat and clean handwriting, which made me the cynosure of my peers. Writing on four-line copies, I would get full marks in English handwriting.

The slide commenced from middle school onwards, when I shifted from writing with a pencil to writing with a ball pen, and the copy changed from one with four lines to that with two lines. But the hand was still steady, and teachers did not have any problem reading my answer sheets, as was evident from the good grades I continued to get in my exams. But I am sure, that as I entered college and the university in the mid-eighties, the good professors would have become



increasingly impatient in poring over my messy answer sheets, with scribbles galore. Throughout, my father, a diligent and thorough gentleman, with very precise and beautiful handwriting, kept counselling me to stem the rot, even as I secured a job in the public sector in 1991. He gently warned that it would adversely impact my prospects of growth in the corporate world, especially when this was the period when all office work was conducted on well-defined sheets of paper- which, in my case, were to be yellow pages.

Before leaving for Bombay (as Mumbai was then called), I scoffed at Dad's gentle, but consistent reprimands. It was only when I took my first, tentative steps in the company did I realise that what Dad had been emphasising over the years was not an iota away from the truth. I faced a mild, personal nudge from some bosses on this account, but others were not so kind, and their reaction bordered on outright contempt, reprimand and disapproval. But Dad was an eternal optimist. He still harboured a strong wish to get my handwriting back on track, even at this stage, for which he purchased a book- 'Techniques to improve your handwriting'. I was back in kindergarten.

So, whenever I came home to Delhi for a break, he would insist that I sit with him, at least for some time, and practice on ways to improve my, by now abominable handwriting. But by this point, my mind, like that of all young men, was engrossed in finer things of life than improving my writing ability, which, I realised, was destined to be an exercise in futility. This cat-and-mouse game continued even after I got married in 1993. It was only after I became a father in 1995 did Dad finally buried his desire to improve my handwriting to a decent level.

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

RBI should go for an 'accommodative' stance



UTTAM GUPTA

While inflation has been steadily declining, the RBI opted to retain its 'neutral' stance, signaling a measured approach rather than give push to boost liquidity and demand



On February 7, 2025, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra announced the decisions taken by the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in its sixth bi-monthly meeting of the current financial year (FY). It has reduced the policy rate or the repo rate (the interest rate at which the RBI lends to banks) by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first repo rate cut in nearly five years. Moreover, it has continued with a neutral stance which it shifted in its fourth bi-monthly review/announcement on October 10, 2024, from its earlier stance of "withdrawal of accommodation". In 2016, the Union Government put in place an institutionalized framework to enable the MPC to formulate monetary policy and determine the key interest rates including the policy rate for inflation targeting. It mandated the RBI to fix the policy rate in such a manner as to maintain the Consumer Price Index or CPI (it corresponds to a basket that includes food, fuel, manufactured goods, and select services) within the target range of 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent).

The RBI decides the policy rates once in two months during each FY. The mandate initially given for five years ending March 31, 2021, has since been extended for a further period of five years. The current mandate will continue till March 31, 2026. The other crucial policy instrument the RBI uses for targeting inflation is Liquidity - jargon for the quantum of credit available in the banking system. Pumping more liquidity along with a reduction in the policy rate represents a scenario which in jargon is described as an 'accommodative' policy stance. The terminology was coined by the outgoing governor Shaktikanta Das in June 2019 when he started going for aggressive cuts in the policy rate and an increase in credit availability.

Since June 2022 the RBI changed its stance to "withdrawal of accommodation" and had stuck to it till October 9, 2024, when in the fourth bi-monthly review, the MPC decided to go for a "neutral" stance. A



THE PROBLEM IS RBI'S OBSESSION WITH INFLATION. MALHOTRA RECOGNISES THAT INFLATION IS ON A DOWNWARD TRAJECTORY. YET, HE DOESN'T WANT TO RELINQUISH HIS NEUTRAL STANCE CITING GLOBAL ECONOMIC CHALLENGES "PROGRESS IN GLOBAL DISINFLATION IS STALLING"

"neutral" stance connotes that the RBI has vowed to keep its options flexible meaning it will neither squeeze liquidity by restricting credit availability and keeping policy rates high nor go for unrestrained lending at low interest rates.

While inflation targeting is important, it is equally necessary to dovetail the monetary policy to sustain the momentum of high growth. During the second quarter of the current FY, growth in GDP plummeted to a low of 5.4 per cent down from a high of 8.1 per cent during the second Qr of FY 2023-24. For the current FY 2024-25, it is estimated at 6.4 per cent against 8.2 per cent recorded during FY 2023-24. Seen in this backdrop and an overarching need to achieve a growth of 8 per cent on a sustained basis in line to make India a 'developed economy' by 2047, the RBI could have given the desired push. It could have gone for an 'accommodative' policy stance by opting for a significant cut in the policy rate and pumping sufficient cash into the banking system. However, it has stuck to a "neutral" stance while reducing the repo rate by a small 0.25 per cent. RBI's reluctance has to do with a mindset that was reflected in ex-Governor Das's observation while announcing the first bi-monthly policy of the current FY. He had said "The elephant has now gone out for a walk and appears to be returning to the forest."

We would like the elephant to return to the forest and remain there on a durable basis." Put simply, he meant there was no need to start reducing interest rates until inflation reached the target of 4 per cent and stayed at that level. The incumbent Governor has continued with this mindset. In February 2023, the policy rate was at a peak of 6.5 per cent. During FY 2022-23, the CPI inflation was hovering around 8 percent.

In the following year, it started decreasing from 7.4 per cent in July 2023 to 5 per cent in September 2023, 4.8 per cent in October 2023 and 5.1 per cent during January/February 2024. For FY 2023-24, it was 5.4 percent. During the current FY also, it has kept low; 5.08 percent in June 2024 and 3.54 percent in July of 2024. After a brief spurt of 6.2 per cent in October 2024, in January 2025, it declined to 4.3 per cent. During FY 2024-25, the RBI has estimated it at 4.8 percent. Given the above, from the third quarter of FY 2023-24, the CPI inflation has remained well within the target range of 4 per cent (+/- 2 per cent). This position continues during the current FY. For FY 2025-26, the RBI expects it to be 4.2 per cent. Thus, there was a strong case for a significant reduction in the repo rate besides the injection of sufficient liquidity. This would have helped in stimulating demand thereby giving a boost to economic growth besides helping millions of borrowers reduce their EMIs and helping industries, especially MSMEs reduce the cost of servicing their loans. But, this was not to be.

The problem is RBI's obsession with inflation. Malhotra recognizes that inflation is on a downward trajectory. Yet, he doesn't want to relinquish his neutral stance citing global economic challenges "progress in global disinflation is stalling."

Put simply, he fears imported inflation impacting CPI hence, a "neutral" stance will provide MPC flexibility to respond to evolving macro-economic environment." A major factor contributing to wide variations in CPI inflation is food inflation which has a weight of around 40 per cent and is impacted predominantly by supply side/seasonal factors whereas monetary policy instruments work on the demand side. Invariably, food inflation main-

tains an upward trend even as a small disruption in supply caused by seasonal factors can lead to spiralling prices.

As long as food remains a part of the CPI basket, inflation targeting will always remain a problem. There is an urgent need to exclude it while setting benchmark interest rates, an idea that was mooted by the Chief Economic Advisor in the Economic Survey (ES) for 2023-24. The CEA argued that monetary policy has no bearing on the prices of food items, which are dictated by supply-side pressures.

For instance, during 2021-22, wheat output was affected by unusually high temperatures. During 2022-23, rains accompanied by hailstorms acted as a spoiler. During the first half of FY 2023-24, food inflation went up due to a spike in the prices of vegetables caused by seasonal factors. The spurt in food prices during October 2024 also had to do with supply-side pressures only.

The RBI can achieve little to control them by keeping the policy rate high. The RBI should take the idea mooted in the ES - 2023-24 on board. Meanwhile, it should consider reducing the weight of food inflation in CPI to reflect the contemporary reality. The current 40 per cent weight is based on the Consumption Expenditure Survey (CES) of 2011-12 whereas Summary Statistics from the 2022-23 CES point towards a significant reduction.

While formulating its monetary policy, the RBI's prime responsibility is to ensure macro-economic stability its pivotal focus being on keeping inflation within reasonable bounds. However, it can't be oblivious of the dire need to support economic growth which could be adversely impacted if it doesn't relax the credit environment.

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

M23 rebellion and Rwanda's role: The escalating crisis in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

At the heart of this conflict lies a web of ethnic tensions, political grievances, and economic exploitation, particularly vast mineral wealth of DRC

The recent escalation of violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a stark reminder of the region's deep-rooted instability. The resurgence of the M23 rebellion, which led to the seizure of Goma and further advances into South Kivu, is not merely an internal Congolese crisis—it is a conflict with significant regional and international implications. Rwanda's involvement, whether direct or indirect, remains contentious, as accusations of its support for M23 persist.

While Kigali denies these allegations, the sophistication of M23's operations raises serious questions about its backing. At the heart of this crisis lies a complex mix of ethnic tensions, political grievances, and



DEBASHISH JAINA

economic exploitation, particularly concerning the DRC's vast mineral wealth. For years, Rwanda has been accused of providing M23 with financial and military support, a claim reinforced by multiple UN reports and statements from Western governments. Kigali, however, insists that it is acting in self-defence, citing the threat posed by the Democratic Forces for the

Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Hutu militia operating in eastern DRC with historical ties to the perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Yet, Rwanda's actions go beyond border security. The conflict's economic dimension cannot be ignored, with Rwanda being accused of profiting from the illicit exploitation of Congolese minerals, particularly coltan, a key component in electronic devices.

The capture of Rubaya, a coltan-rich area, by M23 last year suggests that economic interests play a crucial role in shaping the rebellion's trajectory. M23 claims to be fighting for the rights of ethnic Tutsis in eastern DRC, arguing that the Congolese government has failed to protect them from persecution. While

there is historical evidence of ethnic violence against Tutsis in the region, M23's actions undermine its credibility. Rather than advocating for political rights through diplomatic means, the group has engaged in violence, forced displacement, and human rights violations. Its strategy of seizing key cities and resource-rich territories suggests an agenda extending far beyond self-defence.

The DRC, backed by the international community, has dismissed M23's claims, arguing that the group is acting as a proxy for Rwanda's regional ambitions. The latest attempt by regional leaders to broker peace, with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the East African Community



(EAC) calling for an immediate ceasefire, reflects a growing recognition that the crisis cannot be resolved through military means alone. However, the reality on the ground tells a different story. M23 had briefly declared a ceasefire before resuming attacks, signalling that diplomatic efforts are struggling to keep up with battlefield developments.

The DRC's call for UN sanctions against Rwanda, coupled with protests in Kinshasa

where demonstrators burned portraits of President Paul Kagame, indicates a deepening rift between the two countries. With diplomatic ties severed and hostilities intensifying, the prospects for a negotiated settlement remain bleak.

A purely military solution is unlikely to yield lasting peace. The Congolese army has historically struggled to contain well-equipped rebel groups, and the presence of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUSCO, has done little to prevent the latest wave of violence. Foreign military intervention, whether from regional forces or international actors, risks escalating the situation rather than resolving it. The most viable path forward is a combination of military containment and political

engagement. Strengthening the DRC's security forces to prevent further territorial losses is crucial, but diplomatic efforts must also address the root causes of the conflict, including ethnic grievances and economic exploitation.

The global demand for coltan and other precious resources ensures that armed groups can sustain themselves through illegal mining operations. Without stronger international regulations and accountability measures, companies sourcing minerals from conflict zones will remain complicit in financing violence. Holding both state and non-state actors accountable for their role in resource exploitation is essential for breaking the cycle of conflict. The ongoing crisis in eastern

DRC is not just about M23 or Rwanda's alleged involvement—it is part of a larger geopolitical struggle that has plagued the region for decades. Unless regional actors commit to genuine peace efforts and the international community enforces stricter measures against illegal mineral trade, the conflict will persist.

The path to stability requires addressing both security concerns and economic incentives that drive armed groups. Without meaningful action, eastern DRC will remain trapped in a cycle of violence, with its people bearing the brunt of a war that serves the interests of powerful actors far beyond its borders.

(The writer is a foreign policy researcher; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



DBS to 'shrink workforce' by 4,000 due to AI adoption

Global banking major DBS Group expects a 10 per cent reduction in its workforce over the next three years as artificial intelligence adoption goes deeper into the operations, its chief executive Piyush Gupta said on Monday. Gupta said AI is different and unlike any other technologies adopted in the past, and added that he is struggling to create new jobs for the first time in his over 15-year stint at the helm of the Singaporean bank. "This year, my current projection is that in the next three years, we are going to shrink our workforce by 4,000 or 10 per cent," Gupta said, speaking at the Indian IT industry lobby group Nasscom event here. Attributing his outlook to the advent of AI, Gupta said, "AI is very powerful. It can self-create and also mimic". Pointing out that AI is "different", Gupta said in the last ten years, there have not been any job cuts in the group. He reminisced that in 2016-17, the bank embarked on a digital transformation which was seen impacting 1,600 people but added that almost all of them were repurposed in consultation with unions and other representatives.



Rupee declines 4 paise to close at 86.72 against USD

The rupee dropped 4 paise to 86.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid a steep fall in the domestic equity markets and a rise in Brent crude prices. However, a flat greenback against major currencies prevented further decline in the domestic unit, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 86.58, went up 10 paise from Friday's close of 86.68, but gave way through the session. It eventually settled at 86.72 (provisional), 4 paise lower than the previous day's close. "The RBI is all set to do a 3-year buy/sell swap of USD 10 billion on February 28 to ease the tightening liquidity position, thus bringing premiums further down. Exporters may sell the cash dollars requirement on an upticks while importers may buy good dips," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading flat at 106.61. "The dollar has slid more than 3 per cent from its January peak on tariff issues leaving little appetite for traders to load up on fresh dollar holdings."



LG Corp chief visits India ahead of IPO

LG Corporation Chairman and CEO Kwang Mo Koo is on a two-day visit to India ahead of the proposed initial public offering of its Indian unit, according to industry insiders. Koo is meeting with the senior leadership of LG Electronics India, including its Managing Director, to review the performance and take stock of the preparations for the local subsidiary's upcoming IPO, they added. He is also expected to discuss investment proposals for the Indian market, one of the largest markets for the South Korean Chaebol. It is unclear whether he is scheduled to meet with any top policymakers here. He is likely to visit the Greater Noida plant of LG Electronics India. An e-mail sent to LG Electronics India remained unanswered. Last week, LG Electronics started roadshows for the upcoming initial public offering of its Indian units, where the South Korean chaebol will sell over 10.18 crore shares amounting to a 15 per cent stake, which, according to some reports, may raise up to USD 1.5 billion.

NTPC, Reliance, Adani commit Rs 4 lakh cr investment in MP

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group, Reliance Industries Ltd and state-owned power producer NTPC were among over a dozen companies that on Monday committed to investing about Rs 4 lakh crore across businesses in Madhya Pradesh.

While Adani promised Rs 1.1 lakh crore in pumped storage, cement, mining, smart-meters, and thermal energy, Reliance committed Rs 60,000 crore to set up biofuel projects in the state.

Speaking at the Invest Madhya Pradesh, the state's eighth edition of investment summit, Adani promised another Rs 1 lakh crore in a greenfield smart city, an airport project, and a coal-gasification project for which the ports-to-power conglomerate is in talks with the state government. "Today, I am proud to announce new investments of over Rs 1,10,000 crore in the areas of pumped storage, cement, mining, smart-meters

and thermal energy. These multi-sectoral investments will create more than 1,20,000 jobs in Madhya Pradesh by 2030," he said.

Adani said the plans are not just about investments, but they are milestones in a shared journey one that would make



the state a national leader in industrial and economic growth.

NTPC Chairman and Managing Director Gurdeep Singh said his firm and its subsidiaries and joint venture partners will invest Rs 1.2 lakh crore in setting up 2 gigawatt of renewable power generation capacity in Madhya Pradesh. NTPC will also look at investing another Rs 80,000 crore in two sites of greenfield nuclear power plants in the state.

INDIA, UK FTA TALKS

Goyal pitches for liberal visa regime to promote trade, investments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday pitched for a more liberal visa regime for businesses and professionals to promote bilateral trade and investments between India and the UK.

He also said that India has "never ever" discussed immigration in any free trade agreement negotiations.

The remarks assume significance as India and the UK trade ministers announced resumption of talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA).

The announcement was made by Goyal and UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds, who is here on an official visit.

As part of the FTA, India is seeking easy visa norms for smooth movement of skilled professionals.

Under the pact, he said, the two countries are opening up services in a "big way" and also opening up economies to attract more investments.

"We have also as a part of



In almost all these countries, to incentivise education, business and attract more people, countries "do give a certain period of time for students to gain practical experience to work in their country but that is short-term business work visas. It has nothing to do with immigration as such," he added.

He said that immigration has never been a part of any trade negotiations.

"India has never ever discussed immigration in any free trade agreement negotiations," Goyal said.

Reynolds said that business mobility is a separate issue from immigration. India's ask for easier business and professional visas have been a sticking point in the pact.

already quite open between the two countries. And if we both wish to expand our trade and investments, obviously we have to be faster and more liberal in our issuance of visa," he said.

Goyal added that in several countries, including the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, Indian students travel for education.

In almost all these countries, to incentivise education, business and attract more people, countries "do give a certain period of time for students to gain practical experience to work in their country but that is short-term business work visas. It has nothing to do with immigration as such," he added.

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US market a wild card for Indian IT: Nasscom

PNS ■ MUMBAI

United States, the largest market for the USD 282 billion Indian IT sector, is a "wild card" for the industry, lobby grouping Nasscom's president Rajesh Nambiar said on Monday.

Speaking to reporters Nambiar said the tariff threats by the US may turn out to be the biggest headwind for the sector.

"Broadly, if you were to look at the headwinds, the biggest unknown there would be the tariffs and the impact of what happens in the US market," Nambiar said.

He was quick to add that one should not forget that the US contributes 60-62 per cent of the revenues for the sector.

"It is a bit of a wild card at this point of time. We do not know what is going to be in store," Nambiar said.

It can be noted that since assuming office on January 20, President Donald Trump has threatened to impose reciprocal tariffs with the intent of strengthening the American economy.

Speaking at Nasscom's annual NTLF event earlier in the day, the country's second largest IT services exporter Infosys' chief executive and managing director Sahil Parekh said the Indian IT sector should not fear the Trump impact.

Gold rises Rs 350 to reclaim Rs 89,000-mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 350 to trade near a record high at Rs 89,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 88,750 per 10 grams on Friday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased Rs 350 to Rs 88,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,350 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded with a modest gain on Monday as geopolitical and trade tensions continued to provide a safe haven demand to hedge against uncertainty," Saamil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of



Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Last week, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity hit fresh peaks of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams, respectively.

However, silver traded flat at Rs 1 lakh per kg.

Further, Gandhi highlighted that the US dollar has provided an additional boost for the precious metal. The dollar

index fell for the third week in a row and is trading lower amid mixed US macro data.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery appreciated Rs 118 to Rs 86,128 per 10 grams.

"Gold traded within a range, posting minor gains, supported by Comex gold holding above USD 2,925. Rupee weakness provided additional support to MCX gold," Jateen

Trivedi, VP Research Analyst -- Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, said.

Globally, spot gold also rose USD 5.50 to USD 2,941.55 per ounce.

"Gold prices continue to hover near all-time highs as the dollar weakens amid escalating geopolitical and economic uncertainty," Abans Holdings' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said. The precious metal's rally is expected to persist as safe-haven demand remains strong, with central banks worldwide continuing to accumulate gold to hedge against economic volatility and policy uncertainty, Mehta added.

Starbucks lays off 1,100 corporate staff

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Starbucks plans to lay off 1,100 corporate employees globally as new Chairman and CEO Brian Niccol streamlines operations.

In a letter to employees released Monday, Niccol said the company will inform employees who are being laid off by mid-day Tuesday. Niccol said Starbucks is also eliminating several hundred open and unfilled positions.

"Our intent is to operate more efficiently, increase accountability, reduce complexity and drive better integration," Niccol wrote in the letter.

Starbucks has 16,000 corporate support employees worldwide, but that includes some employees who aren't impacted, like roasting and warehouse staff. Baristas in the company's stores are not included in the layoffs.

Niccol said in January that corporate layoffs would be announced by early March. He said all work must be overseen by someone who can make decisions while the Seattle coffee giant reduces the complexity of its structure and eliminates silos within the company that slow communication.

"Our size and structure can slow us down, with too many layers, managers of small teams and roles focused primarily on coordinating work," Niccol wrote.

MARKET BENCHMARK INDICES SINK OVER 1 PC

Investors become poorer by Rs 4.22 lakh cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth eroded by Rs 4.22 lakh crore on Monday as the BSE Sensex fell below the key 75,000-mark, down over 1 per cent, amid a sharp fall in US markets, non-stop foreign fund outflows and worries over US tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 856.65 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 74,454.41, registering its fifth day of decline. During the day, it slumped 923.62 points or 1.22 per cent to 74,387.44.

The NSE Nifty dropped 242.55 points or 1.06 per cent to 22,553.35.

In the last five trading sessions, the BSE barometer lost 1,542.45 points or 2 per cent and the Nifty tanked 406.15 points or 1.76 per cent.

In the last five trading sessions investors' wealth eroded by Rs 2.34 lakh crore, which is less than Monday's loss of Rs 4.22 lakh crore.

In the past five trading days, on two occasions investors' wealth rose.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 4,22,983.08 crore to Rs 3,97,97,305.47 crore (USD 4.59 trillion) in a single trading session on Monday.

"The market is more concerned about the US' likely move to reciprocate higher tariff levies on exporting nations,

which could impact developing countries including India.

"Also, FIIs showing no signs of putting brakes on their India exit strategy continue to weigh heavily on markets, with expensive valuations driving investors to curb their equity bets here," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel and NTPC were among the biggest laggards.

'Water security critical for \$30 tn economy'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Water security challenges could significantly impact India's ambitious economic growth targets, India G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant said on Monday.

Addressing an event here, Kant highlighted the stark disparity between India's population and water resources, noting that while the country houses 17 per cent of the global population, it has access to merely 4 per cent of the world's freshwater resources.

"India's ability to grow from a USD 4 trillion economy to a USD 30 trillion economy is fundamentally a function of



water (management)," Kant said. "Our capacity to grow in an environmentally sustainable manner and improve

citizens' quality of life depends entirely on how we manage this critical resource," he added.

He outlined three key solutions: restoring local water bodies, deploying advanced technology for real-time monitoring, and community-based water management.

Kant encouraged the industry to take a leading role in efficiently managing water resources.

"Industry must lead the way in recycling and reusing water, bringing in the best technology and capabilities. This will be crucial for ensuring India becomes water secure," he emphasised.

Tech sector revenues to grow 5.1pc to USD 282.6 bn

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Indian tech sector's revenues are set to grow 5.1 per cent to USD 282.6 billion in FY25, and likely to climb up further to USD 300 billion in FY26, lobby grouping Nasscom said on Monday.

The revenue growth is on the "right trajectory", the body's president Rajesh Nambiar told reporters here, pointing out to revenue growth of 4 per cent in FY24, 5.1 per cent in FY25 and the over 6.1 per cent needed to cross its expectation of crossing USD 300 billion in FY26.

"It has been a good outcome broadly given everything happening around us," Nambiar said pointing to aspects like geopolitics, and tariffs which are dominating the worries at present.

Nasscom said the sector, which includes IT services companies, business process management companies, global capability centres and e-commerce companies, added 1.26 lakh new jobs in FY25 to take the overall employment to 58 lakh.

Nambiar hinted that the industry will continue to add employees in the same pace



that it did last year.

The Indian IT sector's FY25 growth is likely to be faster than the 4.7 per cent growth in global tech services spending in the calendar year 2024,

Nasscom said, adding that India's share in global sourcing stood at 58 per cent as of FY25.

Among the segments, the IT services companies' rev-

enues will grow 4.3 per cent to USD 137.1 billion while the BPM industry will see its revenues grow by 4.7 per cent to USD 54.6 billion.

The engineering research and development space is the fastest growing at 7 per cent at USD 55.6 billion, Nasscom said.

The domestic revenues for the sector which has been traditionally focused on exports will grow 7 per cent to USD 58.2 billion, outpacing exports' 4.6 per cent growth at USD 224.4 billion, Nasscom said.

The body said the export

revenues between Indian and global multinationals are evenly split at present, and denied that the heft of the foreign 'companies has increased courtesy of the global capability centres (GCC) play.

It pegged the total number of GCCs at 1,760 and added that such units employ 19 lakh people at present. A Nasscom official said the overall sentiment is still positive despite all the headwinds which the industry is facing, and a survey of chief executives conducted by the body revealed that they are more confident than last year.

GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON CARBON MARKET

Experts discuss ways to tackle climate change

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Policymakers, industry leaders, researchers and other experts on Monday came together for a global conference on carbon markets, which seeks to explore ways to tackle climate change and ensure a sustainable future.

Union Minister for Power and Housing & Urban Affairs Manohar Lal inaugurated the conference -- Prakriti 2025 (Promoting Resilience, Awareness, Knowledge, and Resources for Integrating Transformational Initiatives). The two-day event seeks to provide a platform for national and international experts, policymakers, industry leaders, researchers, and practitioners to engage in discussions and exchange ideas on the global carbon market's current trends, challenges, and future directions, the power ministry said in a statement.

The International Conference through carbon markets, the ministry said. Addressing the event, the minister shared the government's vision on the critical role of carbon markets in tackling climate change. He emphasised the importance of transitioning to renewable energy (RE) to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and achieve emissions targets, the statement said.

on Carbon Markets - PRAKRITI 2025, organized by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power, brought together global leaders and experts from various sectors to discuss and explore innovative approaches in addressing climate change future.



Anticipation builds for My Melbourne as trailer drops



The trailer for *My Melbourne*, an anthology of four powerful stories set in Melbourne, is out now, offering a glimpse into the unique, thought-provoking tales of human connection, resilience and identity. Set against the multicultural backdrop of Melbourne, the film delves into the diverse experiences of four characters, each facing their own personal journey. With its India release scheduled for March 14, 2025 across cinemas, *My Melbourne* brings together the creative genius of four renowned Indian filmmakers – Kabir Khan, Imtiaz Ali, Rima Das and Onir. The four stories, all inspired by true incidents and each directed by different filmmakers, provides a lens into Melbourne's diverse communities while addressing universally relevant themes of race, gender, sexuality and disability.

NANDINI - Directed by Onir tells the story of Indraneel, a queer Indian man, reunites with his estranged father in Melbourne to complete a ceremonial ritual.

JULES - Directed by Arif Ali, creatively guided by Imtiaz Ali tell the story of a newly married Sakshi who forms an unexpected bond with Jules, a homeless woman.

EMMA - Directed by Rima Das tells the story of a talented deaf dancer, grapples with self-doubt and discrimination until a chance meeting with another deaf dancer inspires her to embrace her uniqueness and find her inner strength.

SETARA - Directed by Kabir Khan is a real life story of a 15-year-old Afghan girl, who rebuilds her life in Melbourne after fleeing the Taliban.



what's brewing?

The Waking of a Nation explores the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre through powerful new lens

Sony LIV has launched the much-anticipated trailer for their upcoming show, *The Waking of a Nation*, a powerful historical drama inspired by true events. Created and directed by National Award-winning and International Emmy-nominated filmmaker Ram Madhvani, the show is set to premiere on March 7.

Based on the background of one of the most pivotal moments in India's struggle for independence, the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, the series delves into the tensions and catalysts behind this dark chapter in history. *The Waking of a Nation* follows Kantilal Sahni (played by Taaruk Raina), as he uncovers a deep conspiracy rooted in colonialism and white supremacy. The show reimagines history through the lens of the Hunter Commission's inquiry.

Creator Director Co-producer Ram Madhvani expressed his excitement for *The Waking of a Nation*, calling it one of his most cherished projects. "It's more than just a show—it's my way of highlighting

India's rich history and the struggles we've faced. Sharing the story set against the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the hidden conspiracy surrounding it holds a deeply personal significance for me. I'm proud of the unique storytelling style I've brought to this project and am thrilled to collaborate with Sony LIV and my talented cast, Taaruk, Nikita, Sahil and Bhavsheel. Amita Madhvani and I and our team at Ram Madhvani films can't wait for audiences to experience this powerful tale of courage and resilience."



Speaking about his role as Kantilal Sahni, Taaruk Raina shared, "Being part of *The Waking of a Nation* has been one of the most profound experiences of my career. This isn't just a show, it's a tribute to the countless, often forgotten, individuals who sacrificed for India's independence. Playing Kantilal Sahni, a man caught between duty and truth, has been both a challenge and an honour. This story is not just about history; it's about the courage to seek justice, even when the odds are stacked against you. I hope this series serves as a reminder of the resilience and sacrifices that shaped our nation."

Produced by Ram Madhvani and Amita Madhvani, this epic series features a stellar ensemble cast, including Taaruk Raina, Nikita Dutta, Sahil Mehta and Bhavsheel Singh Sahni, among others. The show is written by Shantanu Srivastava, Shatrughat Nath, and Ram Madhvani.

Sharvari gets her 'battle ready' for Alpha

Sharvari, known for her role in *Munjya*, is leaving no stone unturned as she trains for her upcoming role in the highly anticipated film *Alpha*. The actress has been pushing herself to new physical limits to get in peak shape for the demanding part. Sharvari on Monday shared a glimpse of her rigorous workout routine with a battle ropes session on social media, giving her fans a sneak peek into her preparation process.

In a series of photos shared on her social media account, Sharvari can be seen wearing a black tank top and shorts while performing battle ropes exercises on what looks like an open terrace. She captioned the images, "Battle ropes for today... Battle ready for #Alpha soon! #MondayMotivation," showcasing her commitment and dedication to getting into top shape for the role.

Aside from her fitness routine, Sharvari also took time out to attend the Attari-Wagah border ceremony in Amritsar. Dressed in a traditional outfit, the actress witnessed the impressive daily retreat ceremony by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). The ceremony, known for its display of discipline and patriotism, left a lasting impression on Sharvari.

After the event, she met with BSF personnel and expressed her admiration for their unwavering dedication and commitment to the nation.

STANDALONE



Get ready for chills and thrills! Karan Tacker shares a spine-tingling glimpse from the teaser of *Bhay*, where he steps into the shoes of Gaurav Tiwari, India's top paranormal investigator. Brace yourself for the ultimate supernatural experience!

Vaani Kapoor's Mandala Murders gets final refinements ahead of release

Netflix's highly anticipated thriller *Mandala Murders*, starring Vaani Kapoor, is set for a 2025 release, and production on the series has now resumed. While the main shoot concluded earlier this year, director Gopi Puthran and his team have returned to the set to capture additional footage. The decision to restart filming follows feedback from the editing team, who suggested refinements to enhance certain scenes. According to a source close to the production, during the editing process, the creators and editors felt that some scenes could benefit from adjustments to further intensify the suspense and depth of the thriller. "When the show reached the editing table this year, the makers and the editing team felt that certain portions needed



to be fine-tuned to enhance the crime thriller's tension and intensity. So, a call was taken to rework those scenes and add some sequences," the source explained.

The remaining filming, which has been underway for the past week, is focused on crucial scenes that will tie together the series' complex narrative.

The production team is aiming to finish these final sequences, ensuring they meet the high expectations surrounding the thriller. With about a week of filming left, the team is set to wrap up these vital scenes before considering the material ready for completion.

DUPAHIYA BRINGS A PERFECT BLEND OF COMEDY AND CHAOS, TRAILER OUT

Prime Video has unveiled a fascinating trailer for its upcoming Original series, *Dupahiya*. Created and executive produced by Salona Bains Joshi and Shubh Shivdasani under their banner, Bombay Film Cartel, the series is directed by Sonam Nair and created and written by Avinash Dwivedi and Chirag Garg. Set against the backdrop of a fictional village Dhadakpur, *Dupahiya* is a comedy-drama that weaves fun and drama with small-town charm. With a

perfect blend of humour, chaos and intrigue, the Original series is brought to life by a highly talented and versatile cast, featuring Gajraj Rao, Renuka Shahane, Bhuvan Arora, Sparsh Shrivastava, Shivani Raghuvanshi and Yashpal Sharma in the lead roles. The series is set to premiere exclusively on Prime Video in India and over 240 countries and territories worldwide on March 7. The trailer kicks off in the fictional village

of Dhadakpur—also known as the Belgium of Bihar—that is on the cusp of celebrating being crime-free for 25 years. But chaos strikes when a never-seen-before motorbike, that was purchased as a wedding gift gets stolen 7 days before the ceremony! With the fate of the wedding left hanging, the journey the family and the ex-lover of the bride take to find the *Dupahiya* forms the heart of this comedy that deals with the hopes and aspirations of simple people.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

9	5	2	1					
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Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Meat from a sheep
- Talk in a friendly way
- A sewed joint
- Wound someone
- Envious
- A green gemstone
- Cunning
- Moist
- Border
- Jail
- A region's weather conditions
- Save from danger
- Forever
- A long sharp animal tooth
- Twirl around

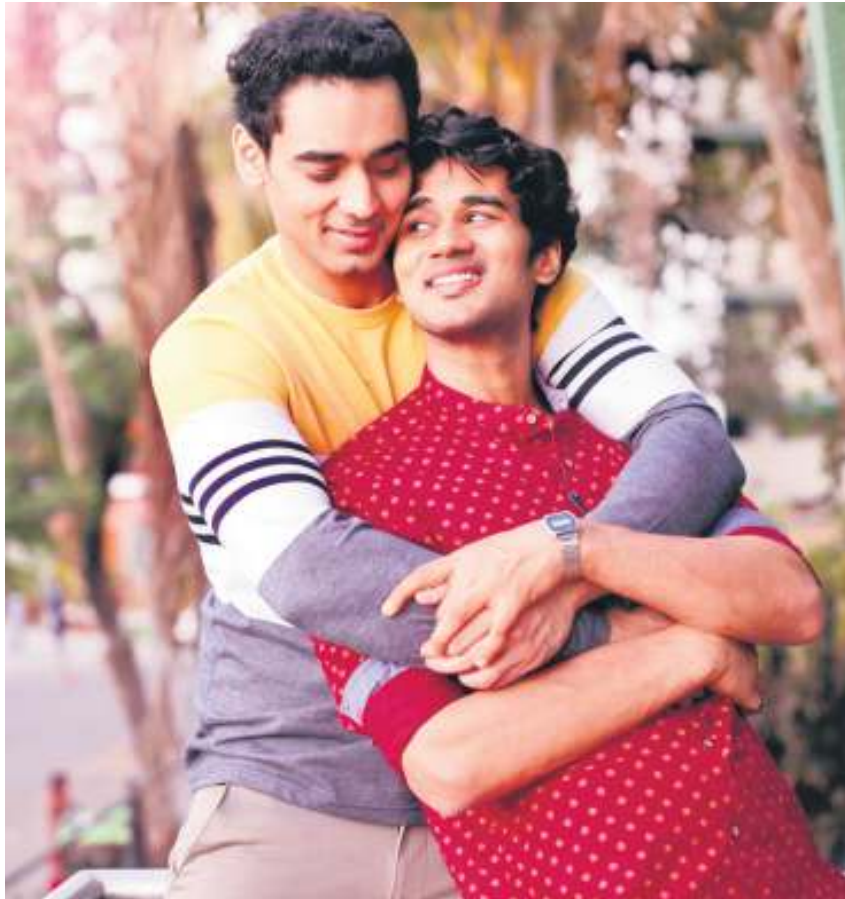
DOWN

- A face disguise
- Go on a journey
- Drag along
- Three times four
- Ask



SRIDHAR RANGAYAN

Everyone says 'CONTENT IS KING,' but few actually believe in it



SRIDHAR RANGAYAN, WHO IS CURRENTLY ENJOYING THE SUCCESS OF HIS LATEST VENTURE, KUCH SAPNEY APNE, GETS CANDID WITH THE PIONEER SHARING MORE INSIGHTS AROUND THE PROJECT

to the storytelling: "Humans exist within society, and all our emotions are shaped by our interactions with it. But we shouldn't be bogged down by societal pressures."

He further describes Kuch Sapney Apne as a "complete family film" that integrates romance, drama, songs and humour while addressing real-life issues. "We aspired to create a mainstream film that appeals to the masses while staying true to its social message," he adds.

For Rangayan and co-writer cum co-director Saagar Gupta, authenticity is paramount. They draw inspiration from real people, avoid exaggerated cinematic techniques, and focus on casting actors who truly embody their roles rather than relying on star power.

"We believe in creating scenes that reflect everyday life, carefully strung together to form a nuanced narrative," he says. By keeping the storytelling raw and relatable, the film ensures that audiences remain engaged while absorbing its deeper themes.

While the film faced no creative challenges, securing funding and distribution was a struggle. Rangayan points out the paradox in the industry: "Everyone says 'content is king,' but few actually believe in it. Most chase big stars and major production houses."

Despite these hurdles, the film was made possible through the support of 125 crowdfunding contributors and a few dedicated investors who believed in its vision.

"Our hopes rest with those who still value good cinema—films that not only entertain but also hold a mirror to society," he says.

Rangayan credits the film's emotional depth to its talented cast. "We prioritise casting actors based on the character's needs, not their celebrity status," he explains. The team conducted workshops before shooting, ensuring that everyone was on the same page.

Having collaborated with actors Mona Ambegaonkar, Shishir Sharma and Abhay Kulkarni for over 25 years, Rangayan shares that the trust between them played a crucial role. "We knew they would deliver, and they always have," he says.

Kuch Sapney Apne challenges societal norms while celebrating love and resilience. It is a story that dares to dream and dares to love—one that is bound to leave a lasting impact on audiences. With a stellar cast, evocative storytelling, and a heartfelt message, the film promises to be a poignant addition to India's evolving cinematic landscape.

It is 2025 and we are beyond stories of coming out and identity angst. It is time to delve into real issues head-on

resonated not only in India but across the globe, from Serbia to Jamaica.

With *Kuch Sapney Apne*, which won the highest award at the Mysuru International Film Festival - the Best Indian Feature Film Award, the filmmaker wanted to move beyond conventional queer narratives. "It is 2025 and we are beyond stories of coming out and identity angst. It is time to delve into real issues head-on," he asserts. At its core, the film conveys the message that love is love and that every relationship—regardless of gender or identity—comes with its own set of challenges.

The film seamlessly weaves personal emotions with broader societal issues, tackling topics like patriarchy, infidelity and transphobia. Rangayan explains that this balance was key

Rangayan explains that the film's international collaboration came about through the NFD Film Bazaar Co-Production Market in 2023. While scouting for a location outside India to align with the script's demand—where the lead character Kartik has a fleeting romance abroad—Sweden emerged as the ideal choice. "We had many friends there who generously supported us—offering their homes, offices and even a motorboat for shooting," Rangayan shares, emphasizing the warm and collaborative spirit that helped bring the film to life.

Known for crafting narratives that are both intimate and globally relevant, he believes in starting with a personal story and blending it with experiences from the world around him. "For mass audiences to enjoy a film, it has to be both personal and universal," he says. His films have

TEJAL SINHA
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With *Kuch Sapney Apne*, filmmaker Sridhar Rangayan once again delivers a deeply personal yet universally resonant story. The Indo-Swedish co-production, set to release on February 21, explores the complexities of love, trust, and acceptance—not just in queer relationships but in all human connections. Featuring acclaimed actors Shishir Sharma (*Raazi*, *The Family Man*) and Mona Ambegaonkar (*Godmother*, *Evening Shadows*), the film navigates themes of resilience, societal norms and personal aspirations.

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Rarity and seasonality of lichen planus

PNS| EXCLUSIVE

Lichen Planus is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that can impact the mouth, nails and genitalia. Although the precise reason is unknown, potential causes include immunological or allergic reactions, exposure to specific medications, dyes, and other chemicals, as well as illnesses like Hepatitis C. One out of every 100 persons will eventually get lichen planus. It cannot spread to other people and it is not brought on by an infection. Middle-aged men and women are typically affected by lichen planus. Lichen planus on the skin affects men and women equally, but oral (within the mouth) lichen planus is twice as common in women. In very young or very old people, the sickness is uncommon. Although lichen planus isn't strictly "seasonal" in the sense that it only manifests during specific seasons, some research indicates that its symptoms may intensify or worsen with the changing of the seasons. This is especially true for actinic lichen planus, which is exacerbated by sun exposure and may be more obvious in the summer.

Symptoms of Lichen Planus

Typical symptoms of Lichen Planus include lacy-white lesions in the mouth that can hurt or cause burning, thin white lines over the rash, purplish coloured bumps or lesions with flat tops on the skin or genitalia that develop and spread over the body for several weeks or a few months or itching at the site of the rash, which typically appears on the wrists, lower back, and ankles.

Lichen Planus increase during Covid-19

Dr. Sunil Kumar Prabhu, consultant - dermatology, at Aster RV Hospital highlights, "There has been an increased incidence of certain autoimmune disorders post Covid-19 and Lichen Planus can be considered one such immunological disorder that tends to have a slight higher preponderance in the years following covid and has been substantiated in certain academic scientific journals. However, the exact mechanism of this, though not known, can be an immunological

Lichen Planus is a chronic inflammatory condition that affects the skin, mouth, nails and genitalia, often causing discomfort and long-term complications. While its exact cause remains unclear, experts link it to immune system reactions, allergies, certain medications, and infections like Hepatitis C. *The Pioneer* delves into this condition, shedding light on its symptoms, potential triggers and management strategies to help those affected navigate its challenges with better awareness and care



trigger that can increase the incidence of Lichen Planus. Approximately 1-2% of the global population is affected by it. A specific type of Lichen Planus known as "Actinic Lichen Planus" can flare up during the summer."

Treatment

For oral lichen planus, special mouthwashes and sprays can be used to relieve symptoms like burning or sore gums; however, topical corticosteroid creams or ointments are usually used to manage inflammation and itching on the skin, while oral medications such as antihistamines can help with itching and in severe cases, oral steroids may be prescribed. It's important to consult a healthcare professional for the best treatment plan based on the severity of your condition.

Prevention

Lichen planus cannot be prevented, but once it has developed, there are things you may do to prevent its progression - Prevention of any skin damage, Using cool compresses rather than scratching, reduction of stress in life helps prevent progression. Stopping smoking, drinking, proper oral hygiene practice and staying away from foods that tend to irritate the mouth are also preventive measures to be followed.

Effects if left untreated

The chronic inflammation caused by lichen planus can cause chronic itching, discomfort, painful sores, scarring, especially in the mouth and genital areas and in severe cases, an increased risk of oral cancer. Depending on the severity, lichen planus can also have a significant impact on quality of life due to pain and difficulty eating or having sex.

BEYOND GREAT PRODUCTS

The secrets to hair care business success

The hair care industry is booming, driven by growing consumer demand for high-quality products and innovative solutions. But creating a profitable business in this space requires more than great products—strategy, customer focus, and operational excellence. Here are essential tips to help you stand out and succeed in this competitive market:

Know your customers inside out

Success in hair care starts with understanding your customers' unique needs. Hair is personal—everyone has different concerns, hair types and routines. Use tools like social media interactions and direct feedback to learn what your audience wants. Whether it's solutions for curly hair, damaged strands, or scalp care, tailoring your products to meet these needs builds trust and long-term loyalty with us.

Focus on quality first

No matter how great your branding is, your products must deliver results. From shampoos to treatments, invest in high-quality ingredients and innovative formulations. Research and development are your best friends here—products that genuinely solve problems drive repeat purchases and encourage word-of-mouth recommendations, which are priceless for growth.

Make your products easy to find

A solid distribution network ensures your products reach the right people at the right time. Whether you sell online, in stores, or through salons, your products need to be accessible and visible. An omnichannel strategy—one that combines online platforms and physical locations—can help you expand your reach and maintain steady sales.

Offer personalised experiences

Today's end-consumers expect personalisation. Use data to recommend products that suit individual hair concerns, and engage them with meaningful content like styling tips, hair care routines and product guides. Brands that offer value beyond just selling products build stronger relationships with their customers.

Deliver exceptional customer service

Great customer service can set you apart in a crowded market. Be prompt, empathetic, and knowledgeable when resolving customer issues. A smooth purchasing experience and effective support turn one-time buyers into loyal customers who trust your brand.

Collaborate with influencers

Influencer marketing is a game-changer in the hair care space. Partner with influencers who align with your brand's values and speak to your target audience. Positive testimonials and social proof, like customer reviews, also go a long way in building credibility and trust.

Diversify your product range

The more versatile your product line, the wider your audience. Offer solutions for different hair types and concerns, such as frizz control, hair growth, or color protection. Expanding your product range ensures you stay relevant while addressing evolving consumer needs.

Invest in smart marketing

Digital marketing is non-negotiable in today's landscape. Use social media, SEO and targeted ads to build awareness and drive sales. A seamless e-commerce experience—from user-friendly websites to smooth checkouts—also makes it easy for customers to buy your products online.

Go Green

Sustainability matters more than ever. Consumers increasingly choose brands that prioritise eco-friendly packaging, cruelty-free practices, and responsibly sourced ingredients. Adopting sustainable practices not only enhances your brand image but also connects you with environmentally-conscious customers.

Adapt to seasonal trends

Hair care needs change with the seasons. From sun protection products in summer to moisture-rich treatments in winter, staying ahead of seasonal demands ensures your offerings remain relevant year-round. Smart marketing campaigns can further highlight these shifts and drive sales.

Manage your finances wisely

Profitable businesses are built on sound financial management. Keep track of expenses, optimise cash flow and budget for slower periods. Allocate resources for growth opportunities, product improvements, and team training to ensure long-term stability.

Building a thriving hair care business isn't just about what you sell—it's about how you deliver value to customers. By focusing on quality, personalization, and customer satisfaction, while staying agile and innovative, you can create a brand that truly stands out. In this fast-evolving industry, staying connected to your audience and adapting to trends will be the keys to long-term success.

Mahesh Ravaria is the Founder and CEO of Beauty Garage India Pvt Ltd, a trailblazing figure in the beauty industry. His primary responsibilities within the organization include spearheading sales, marketing strategies, and overseeing expansion initiatives to ensure Beauty Garage's continued growth and market dominance.

(Beauty Garage Professional is transforming a multi-million dollar Hair Care Sector and reinventing hair and scalp health with groundbreaking products and a top-notch distribution network. It's a truly Made in India success story with the only Indian company manufacturing products and introducing innovative treatments such as Hair Botox. With a dedicated team engaged in continuous product research and technology exploration, the company has a remarkable growth story in the thriving Indian hair care market.)

(The author, Mahesh Ravaria, is the Co-founder and CEO of Beauty Garage Professional.)



RAZESH DANDA CONFIRMS MAZAKA AND SAMAJAVARAGAMANA SEQUEL IN WORKS

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Razesh Danda is a producer who has been making films with actors like Sundeep Kishan, Allari Naresh, Kiran Abbavaram and Sree Vishnu and he has been doing well. Out of his four films, *Samajavaragamana* was a huge hit, while *Ooru Peru Bhairavakona* turned out to be a profitable venture.

Now, he is coming up with a new film titled *Mazaka*, starring Rao Ramesh and Sundeep Kishan. The producer shared that he no longer wants to make experimental films and will focus on entertainment.

"I experimented with *Itlu Maredumilli Prajaaneekam* and *Bachchalamalli*, but both didn't perform well commercially, though the first one earned me a good reputation," said Razesh Danda. "So, I have decided not to take the experimental route in the coming days."

Razesh had high hopes for *Bachchalamalli*, but it

AHEAD OF THE FILM'S RELEASE, MAZAKA PRODUCER TALKS ABOUT HIS FILM AND ADDRESSES RUMORS ABOUT HIS ALLEGED DIFFERENCES WITH SUNDEEP KISHAN

didn't meet expectations. What went wrong? "I think the execution didn't work," he admitted. However, he is confident about *Mazaka*. "We screened the film for many of my friends, distributors and others, and everyone liked it. They all said that the entertainment and emotional quotient would definitely work for this film," he said.

The film was initially set for a Sankranti release in January but is now releasing on February 26 for Shivaratri. Was the last-minute rush a concern? "In the industry, many films are made with the release date in mind and my film was no different," Razesh explained. "Sundeep Kishan was busy with three projects and coordinating dates for multiple actors caused delays in shooting."

The trailer was released only on Sunday, just three days before the film's release.

"Actually, we released a song earlier, which is trending on top, so we delayed the trailer release," he said. He added that if a film has strong content and positive word-of-mouth, people will come to theaters.

"For my earlier film *Samajavaragamana*, we released the trailer well in advance, but I believe the paid premieres held a few days before release contributed to its huge success. That's why I'm planning paid premieres for *Mazaka* on Tuesday night as well," he said.

There were reports that Bheems Cecirolo was the first choice for the film's music. Razesh clarified, "From the beginning, we had Leon James onboard for the music."

The producer believes *Mazaka* will be a big film for Sundeep Kishan. "It will perform better for him compared to *Ooru Peru Bhairavakona*," he

said. He also confirmed that the film is being released with table profits. When the script was first presented, Rao Ramesh was the immediate choice for the father's role. "Then we were looking for another actor, and Sundeep Kishan agreed to do the film after hearing the story," Razesh revealed.

Speaking about *Mazaka*, he said that the scenes between Rao Ramesh and Sundeep Kishan are definite highlights. "There's a twist just before the interval that drives the second half of the film. There are also many emotional moments. But the unique aspect of this film is Rao Ramesh's romance with a girl. We've never seen him in such a role before—it's packed with entertainment and I'm sure people will love it," he said.

The producer is planning a big release on Shivaratri. "Generally, big films don't expect high collections on Thursdays, so I'm confident that my film will gain momentum over the weekend," he said. Did the delay in production increase the budget?

"Generally, for any film, the budget increases by around 10% beyond the estimated cost," he stated.

Razesh is already planning a sequel to *Mazaka*. "Yes, we are planning it with the same director, and it's going to be titled *Double Mazaka*," he confirmed.

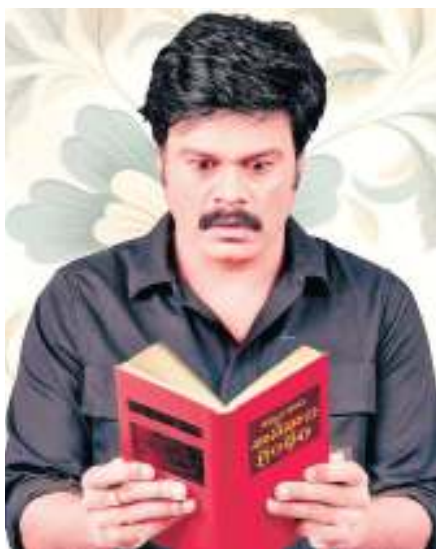
Regarding a sequel to *Samajavaragamana*, he said, "Yes, the director is currently working with Ravi Teja and after that, we will move forward with the sequel."

As for his upcoming projects, Razesh revealed that two films are in the pipeline. "One is an action thriller with Samyuktha, and the other is a love story with Kiran Abbavaram," he said.

There have been reports about differences between Razesh and Sundeep Kishan, allegedly causing delays in *Mazaka*. Will Sundeep Kishan be a part of the *Mazaka* sequel? "You shouldn't ask that question," Razesh responded. However, he added, "I want to continue making films with Allari Naresh, Sundeep Kishan and others."



Saptagiri returns as lead in *Pellikani Prasad*



look, generating buzz among audiences.

Directed by Abhilash Reddy Gopidi and produced by KY Babu, the film is getting a major boost as it will be released by Dil Raju's prestigious banner, Sri Venkateswara Creations (SVC).

The title *Pellikani Prasad* is a well-known phrase among Telugu audiences, popularised by the film *Malleswari*, starring Venkatesh and Katrina Kaif. The first look poster showcases Saptagiri in various quirky expressions, emphasising the film's

Saptagiri, who began his career as a comedian before transitioning into lead roles, is making a comeback as a hero with *Pellikani Prasad*. After a brief return to comedic roles, he is now back in the spotlight with this film. The makers have unveiled the first

humorous and lighthearted tone. Shekar Chandra is composing the music, while Priyanka Sharma plays the female lead. Muralidhar Goud, Laxman and Annapurna are also part of the supporting cast. The film is set for release on March 21.



Yash's *Toxic* sets a new benchmark as India's first dual-language spectacle!

After the phenomenal success of *KGF*, Kannada cinema has gained international recognition, and Yash has become a global star. Now, he is back with *Toxic*, a high-budget venture that is already making history. This is the first large-scale Indian film to be conceptualised, written and filmed in both English and Kannada. The film will also be dubbed into multiple Indian and international languages, including Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam.

Written and directed by internationally acclaimed filmmaker Geetu Mohandas, *Toxic* is set to redefine cross-cultural storytelling. Shooting in both English and Kannada ensures authenticity for

Indian audiences while making the film accessible worldwide. "Our vision for *Toxic* was to craft a narrative that resonates authentically with both Indian and global audiences," says director Geetu Mohandas. The film is jointly produced by Venkat Narayana and Yash's Monster Mind Creations.

The international crew includes action choreographer JJ Perry, known for his work in *John Wick* and *Fast & Furious*. Last month, on Yash's birthday, the team released a Birthday Peek, offering a glimpse into *Toxic*'s world. The teaser generated significant excitement, showcasing the film's massive scale and international-standard production values.



SECOND SONG FROM DEPUTY CM'S FILM RELEASED

Actor-turned-politician Pawan Kalyan, now the Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, is gearing up for the release of *Hari Hara Veera Mallu*. Promotions began a few weeks ago and now, the makers have released the second single, which has become an instant chartbuster, further heightening anticipation for the film. From the very first note, the song captivates listeners with its high-energy beats and electrifying vibe. Pawan Kalyan's powerful screen presence after a long hiatus adds to the excitement, keeping fans glued to their screens. Nidhi Aggarwal, starring opposite Pawan Kalyan, brings a refreshing charm, while Anasuya Bharadwaj and Pujitha Ponnada add elegance with their graceful dance moves. The film's music is composed by MM Keeravani, with vocals by Mangli, Rahul Sipigunj, Ramya Behara and Yamini Ghantasala. Lyrics are penned by Chandrabose. With director Krish exiting the project, Jyothi Krishna has taken over. Produced by AM Ratnam, *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* is slated to be the first major summer release of 2024, hitting theatres on March 28.



Nani turns brutal as Sarkaar in *HIT 3*

Director Sailesh Kolanu is back with the third installment of the *HIT* series, and this time, Nani takes the lead. In the previous films, Vishwak Sen and Adivi Sesh played investigative cops, but in *HIT: The Third Case*, Nani steps in as Arjun Sarkaar. The film is produced by Prashanti Tipirneni along with Nani. To mark Nani's birthday, the teaser, titled *Sarkaar's Laathi*, was released on Monday.

The story follows a string of murders with a disturbingly similar pattern, leaving the police baffled. As a last

resort, they turn to Arjun Sarkaar—a name that instills fear in criminals. Nani's portrayal of Sarkaar is intense and brutal.

The teaser hints at an action-packed, violent narrative. One particularly harrowing scene shows Nani stabbing a criminal in the stomach and lifting the knife upwards, causing blood to splatter onto the ceiling—a chilling testament to the character's ruthless nature.

Srinidhi Shetty of *KGF* fame plays the female lead. *HIT: The Third Case* is set for a theatrical release on May 1.

STANDALONE



Namrata Shirodkar attended a star-studded wedding in Abu Dhabi, UAE, alongside Jr NTR, Ram Charan and others. She shared photos with the attendees on Instagram. Notably, Mahesh Babu's absence from the event sparked speculation about the actor working on his upcoming project with SS Rajamouli and Priyanka Chopra.