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**Assam to play key role in India's growth**  
**story: PM**

## LEADING CHARGE IN GLOBAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



With Fun, I Want Values in My Films:

## THRINADHA RAO



### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**Sanjay is hitting below the belt. He has been linking every issue with India and Pakistan and Hindus and Muslims. Sanjay is habituated to inciting communal hatred during every election. It is not proper for Sanjay to give the impression that the BJP ensured the victory of India in the Champions Trophy match between India and Pakistan at Dubai**

- Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC chief

P4

### DON'T MISS...

## Tuskers trample 3 devotees to death

Three devotees were trampled to death by a herd of elephants and two were injured at Y Kota village in Obulavaripalli mandal in Annamayya in the wee hours on Tuesday district when they were going to the famous Shiva temple, located at Kona village. Police said that about 30 devotees, belonging to the Kannegunta colony at Y-Koda village, were going to the famous Sideswara Swamy temple to worship Lord Shiva on Maha Shivaratri day. When the devotees were going through the forest area, a herd of elephants attacked them...

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## India, Japan kickstart wargame

Armies of India and Japan have kickstarted a mega two-week wargame at a Japanese military base in the foothills of Mount Fuji in line with the overall aim to bolster bilateral defence ties. The sixth edition of the 'Dharma Guardian' exercise that began on Monday is set to include an "expanded" range of activities that will reflect the growing defence cooperation between India and Japan, the Indian Army said. The wargame at the East Fuji training area is taking place amid mounting concerns in India...

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## 'India, UK trade pact beneficial for both'

The proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the United Kingdom is "genuinely beneficial" to both countries as it would help boost bilateral trade and investments, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds said on Tuesday. India and the UK on Monday announced resumption of negotiations for the FTA, which is expected to double or even triple bilateral trade from the current USD 20 billion in the next 10 years. Reynolds met Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to...

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## Atherton, Hussain praise Kohli

In awe of Virat Kohli's formidable ODI statistics, former England captains Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain believe that the Indian mainstay is probably the best batsman in the history of the format. Kohli played a master-class innings of unbeaten 100, his 51st century in ODIs, to steer India to a comfortable six-wicket win over arch-rivals Pakistan in a Champions Trophy match here on Sunday. "Virat Kohli in a run-chase in 50-over cricket, there's been nobody better in the history of the game, really..."

-SPORTS

# All promises will be fulfilled: CM

STATE GOVT MOVING AHEAD WITH THE GOAL OF SWARNANDHRA VISION-2047  
IT'S NOT THE RULING DISPENSATION THAT ACCORDS OPPOSITION STATUS FOR YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, on Tuesday, made it clear that all the promises made in the election manifesto will be fulfilled despite having heavy constraints.

"The TDP-led NDA government is committed to fulfil all the promises made to the people before elections," the Chief Minister said, and released on the floor of the Assembly the schedule on the implementation of the Super-Six schemes. Responding to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's address to the joint session of legislature, Chandrababu asked whether the demand of the YSRCP to sanction Special Category Status for the State against the norms is justifiable.

Making it clear that it is not the ruling dispensation that accords Opposition party status for the YSRCP, but the decision has to be taken by the people, the Chief Minister said that the alliance partners did not contest the polls for any selfish ends. They did it to rebuild the State thinking that it is possible only with the double-engine government. The Chief Minister said that the State government is moving ahead with the objective of Swarnandhra Vision-2047, and that the Central assistance for the development of the State is commendable.



**"We will work for 365 days and 24 hours a day with the solid commitment to implement the promises made to the people."**

"We will work for 365 days and 24 hours a day with the solid commitment to implement the promises made to the people," Chandrababu said, and pointed out the promises already implemented like revision of pension from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 and the assistance being extended to the differently abled.

Stating that the State is passing through various constraints due to the inefficient rule of the previous government, the Chief Minister said that on record from the floor of the House, he is appreciating the efforts of the Deputy Chief Minister, Pawan Kalyan. "Also, I appreciate the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in extending all kinds of cooperation for the progress of the State," Chandrababu said.

Referring to the poor condition of roads when he became the MLA for the first time, Chandrababu Naidu regretted that the proceedings of the House in the past five years were very unpleasant. "In my 40 years of political life for the first time I have experienced the demand that the MLAs of a party will attend the House only if Opposition status is accorded," he added.

Perhaps in the whole country it is only the YSRCP that has been demanding Opposition status, while leaving the problems being faced by the people to the winds, he remarked. The Chief Minister felt that sustainable development is possible only with a strong government.

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## Pawan Kalyan slams YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

During a discussion on a resolution thanking the Governor for his address, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said that the behaviour of the YSRCP leaders in the Assembly reminded him of the murder of former MP YS Vivekananda Reddy. He questioned how YSRCP leaders could behave in such a manner during the Governor's speech, while also reflecting on past violent incidents associated with the party.

Pawan Kalyan condemned the YSRCP's actions, describing them as a pattern of chaos and insults.

Continued on Page 2



## Support Deregulation Cell to alleviate compliance burden on businesses

Cabinet Secretary discusses with Chief Secretaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Union Cabinet Secretary Dr TV Somanathan held a video-conference with Chief Secretaries on Tuesday on Ease of Doing Business. During the National Conference of Chief Secretaries held under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi from December 13-15 last year, it was decided to set up a Deregulation Cell under a secretary-level coordinating officer in the Cabinet Secretariat to assist the States in reforming and simplifying the rules and procedures related to Ease of Doing Business.

The Deregulation Cell's purpose is to assist States in reforming and simplifying business regulations. Additionally, a Committee of Secretaries, acting as a task force for compliance reduction and de-regulation, was formed. During the video conference, Dr. Somanathan emphasised the importance of supporting the Deregulation Cell to alleviate the compliance burden on businesses.

He announced that a special task force committee would be visiting

the States starting in March. The Chief Secretaries were encouraged to arrange interdepartmental meetings to facilitate these visits. Dr Somanathan also welcomed the sharing of best practices among States regarding Ease of Doing Business.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary K Vijayanand highlighted the State's proactive measures under the Reduction of Compliance Burden (RCB) programme. He reported that Andhra Pradesh has successfully reduced 632 compliance requirements across more than 60 regulations. The State government has also established an Empowered Committee, chaired by the Chief Secretary, to oversee the implementation of this programme and review compliance reduction proposals from various departments.

Vijayanand reiterated the State's commitment to making Andhra Pradesh the most attractive investment destination in India. Since the beginning of 2025, over 60 cumbersome compliance requirements have been eliminated across seven departments.

Continued on Page 2

## Allegations on VC resignation baseless

Lokesh: if Opposition presents proof, an immediate investigation will be ordered

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

There was a heated argument between YSRCP and TDP members in the Legislative Council over the resignations of vice-chancellors of various universities across the State. YSRCP members alleged that the alliance government had threatened the VCs to forcefully tender resignation.

The Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, vehemently challenged the

allegations levelled by MLC Chandrasekhar Reddy regarding the forced resignations of vice-chancellors. Reddy had claimed that 17 out of 19 VCs were pressured to resign, a statement Lokesh strongly refuted.

In a fiery exchange, Lokesh demanded evidence from Reddy. "If you present proof, I will order an immediate investigation," he stated. He condemned what he termed baseless allegations and urged the Opposition to

substantiate their claims. "How can we intimidate the vice-chancellors when universities function under the Governor's purview? Tell us who threatened them," he questioned.

Lokesh also referenced a previous incident involving the Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) Chairman, recalling, "You locked the APPSC Chairman out of his own office, how can you talk about intimidation?" He insisted that Reddy retract his comments, asserting that the vice-chancellors' resignations stemmed from their own misconduct.

Continued on Page 2

## Illegal sand transport persists in Vizag

Lorry drivers exploit loopholes with fake waybills

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Despite the Andhra Pradesh government's attempts to streamline sand usage through flexible policies, illegal transportation continues to plague the region, particularly in Visakhapatnam, with lorry drivers exploiting regulatory loopholes using counterfeit waybills.

Over the past two to three months, hundreds of lorries loads of sand have been illicitly transported from the Nagavali and Vamsadhara river reaches in Srikakulam district to Visakhapatnam. These reaches, now under private management with a nominal fee of Rs. 200 per tonne for maintenance, loading, and transportation, are intended to operate under a transparent system. Waybills, detailing lorry information, departure time, and destination, are mandated to be uploaded daily to the Mines Department's website.

## SLBC TUNNEL COLLAPSE Water, silt impede rescue operations

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The rescue operation inside the collapsed SLBC (Srisailem Left Bank Canal) tunnel entered its fourth day, with the situation inside the tunnel growing increasingly dangerous.

Despite continuous efforts by 11 national and state agencies, including the Indian Army, Navy MAR-COS, NDRF, SDRF, the Geological Survey of India (GSI), SCLL rescue teams and experts from the L&T, the rising water levels, thick silt and unstable debris continue to impede progress.

Nagarkurnool Collector B. Santhosh, who has been closely monitoring rescue operations, described the conditions inside the tunnel as "extremely treacherous."

Rescuers are moving through waist-deep sludge with visibility reduced to near-zero due to the murky water and dust from the collapse. "We are facing a major challenge in reaching the last 50 meters where the eight workers are trapped. The tunnel is completely blocked by four to five meters of accumulated silt and debris, making entry almost impossible at present," the Collector said.

The tunnel, which has only a single entry and exit point, presents a very difficult problem for rescue teams. With no other escape route any movement inside the structure is dangerous. The Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) used for excavation remains stuck in the collapsed section complicating access. Experts are currently assessing the feasibility of drilling from the top or sides of the tunnel to create an access point.

## YS Jagan holds Praja Darbar

Interacts with citizens and party workers in Bhakarapuram



PNS ■ PULIVENDULA



Former Chief Minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, on Tuesday, conducted Praja Darbar at his residence in Bhakarapuram, where he interacted with citizens and party workers, listening to their concerns and accepting their appeals.

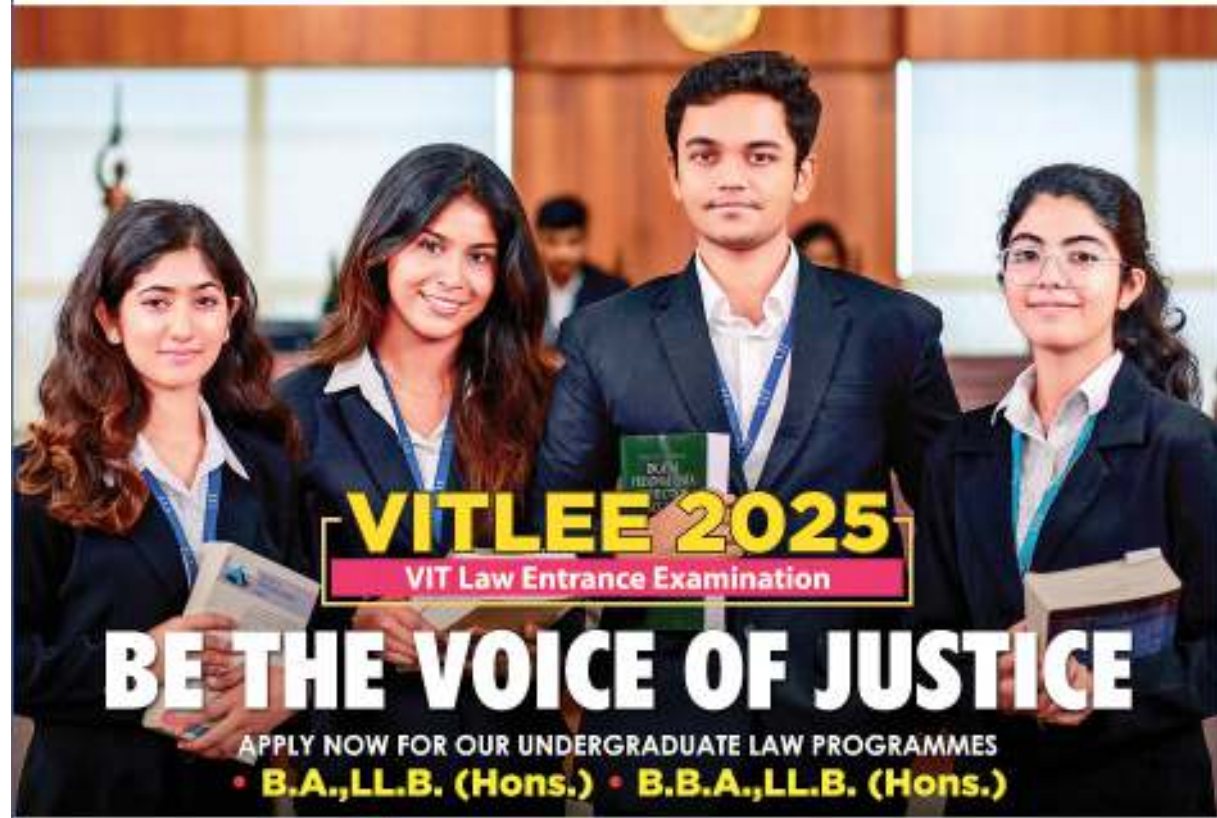
His visit infused a vibrant atmosphere in the constituency, drawing large crowds of supporters and activists eager to meet him. Enthusiastic fans and workers took selfies and photographs with YS Jagan. Meanwhile, recently appointed party leaders met the YSRCP chief to express their gratitude for their new roles, receiving guidance from him

to strengthen the party and fight for the people's cause.

As part of his two-day visit to Pulivendula, Jagan will remain accessible to the constituency's residents on Wednesday also. He will inaugurate the modernised Raja Reddy Eye Institute, upgraded by the LV Prasad Institution, on Wednesday.

Jagan comforts young admirer  
Jagan Reddy's visit to Pulivendula witnessed an emotional moment. Mehboob Sharif, a seventh-grade student from Pulivendula, walked barefoot for five kilometres under the scorching sun to meet Jagan at the helipad.



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# Why did KCR and Jagan skip Legislative Council polls?

It's natural for any political party to contest elections to ascertain its standing among the public. Political parties are always trying to gauge the public mood by contesting elections so that they can demonstrate their standing among the public, particularly during the period between two general elections. It's a must for political parties in the opposition to face the 'ability test' to get a chance to become the ruling party in future. All political parties assess their strength by contesting elections. If a political party skips elections it is nothing but allowing its cadres to remain idle and it will have a cascading effect on organisational strength. This will affect the party during crucial times like general elections. There may

be strong reasons for a particular party to keep itself away from elections. There is an opinion in politics that a political organisation gets an opportunity to strengthen its cadre base by taking part in elections. Every election enables political parties to interact with the people and thereby influence them.

The main opposition parties in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the BRS and the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), have decided to skip elections to their Legislative Councils. In Telangana, the BRS which ruled for nearly a decade is now licking its wounds after the defeat in the 2023 Assembly polls. Although it has 39 MLAs in the TG Assembly, the BRS has not been effective in facing the

**The main opposition parties in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the BRS and the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP), have decided to skip elections to their Legislative Councils. In Telangana, the BRS which ruled for nearly a decade is now licking its wounds after the defeat in the 2023 Assembly polls.**

ing Congress. After suffering two defeats at the hands of the BRS despite granting statehood for Telangana, the Congress endured agony for 10 long years facing desertions and loyalty switching to the BRS. The Congress also lost its principal opposition tag. Now the Congress, after getting an opportunity to rule the state, has been paying back the BRS in the same coin. It brought

BRS MLAs into its fold by assuring development in their constituencies. It has now become a fashion for all MLAs and MLCs to say some words like a caged parrot that they were compelled to switch over to the ruling party as their people demanded development. Now the BRS is not taking part in Council elections. The absence of the BRS has paved the way for a direct fight



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between the two ruling parties (the Congress and the BJP). The BRS prevented a triangular fight by distancing itself from Council elections. This move of the BRS would help the BJP as the BRS vote bank might vote for the BJP.

BRS chief K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) has by and large been a critic of the BJP. Now he has indirectly turned the poll in the BJP's favour by deciding to avoid the Council polls. What kind of strategy is this? How is it justified by the party's activists? Nearly 10 legislators out of 39 elected on the BRS ticket have gone to the Congress. This act of the MLAs has been challenged by the BRS in court under the anti-defection law. The BRS is anxiously waiting for the court verdict on this issue and is confident that it would win if by-polls are held. It may be mentioned here that the BRS had encouraged defections from the Congress when it was in power. The BRS leadership had assured the legislators who had defected that there would be no by-polls in their seats come what may. The

BRS is now suffering at the hands of the Congress whose principal opposition tag in the TG Assembly it had stripped when it was in power. Acquiring dominance over the principal opposition was the prime aim of the BRS's leadership. The BRS is now learning lessons as it gets the same treatment. The BRS is not confident of winning the Council elections. Interestingly, the BJP candidate in the Council polls has claimed the BRS's support. Although it appears to be avoiding elections the main beneficiary will be the BJP. In that way, the BRS leadership might be able to see the Congress getting defeated by the BJP. The BRS which has almost five times more MLAs in the Assembly (39 seats) than the BJP (8 seats) is now helping the latter. Boycotting

elections can affect its prospects. Coming to the YSRCP in AP, it has decided not to participate in the Council elections for its own reasons. Earlier, it had won a local body seat in the Council from North Coastal Andhra on its own. But the party had a nightmarish experience in the case of a Council seat (graduates) in the Rayalaseema districts where its chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy hails from. It lost that seat despite being the ruling party. The fear of a possible repetition of that might have made the party's leadership skip Council elections. The chances of a win may be bleak for the party if there is a direct fight like last year's general elections. The YSRCP might have thought that avoiding the polls was better than getting defeated.

## Energy Minister reviews progress of CBG plants

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Energy, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, held a crucial meeting with representatives from Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) at the AP Secretariat in Velagapudi on Tuesday, to assess the establishment of Compressed Bio Gas (CBG) plants in Andhra Pradesh. This review follows the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the State government and RIL, which outlines an investment of ₹65,000 crore for the development of 500 CBG plants, expected to generate approximately 2,50,000 jobs in the region.

Minister Kumar stressed the State government's commitment to creating a conducive environment for investors, noting a strategic shift from "Ease

**Stresses State Govt's commitment to creating conducive environment for investors**



of Doing Business" to "Speed of Doing Business." He reassured RIL of full support in expediting the CBG projects and called upon the State Revenue Minister to facilitate seamless land allocations for these plants. "Under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, we are focused on

enhancing the speed of business processes, aiming for efficiency and rapid project completion," Gottipati stated. He directed the Energy Department to ensure close coordination with RIL and to address any administrative or bureaucratic challenges promptly.

The Energy Minister highlighted the importance of fast-tracking approvals and creating robust infrastructure for new industries. He referenced the State's Single Desk Portal, which aims to streamline regulatory processes, improve transparency, and make business operations easier and quicker. This initiative is part of Andhra Pradesh's broader strategy to enhance its global competitiveness and attract both national and international investments. Officials from APTRANSCO, DISCOM and the Energy Department, alongside representatives from RIL, attended the meeting.

## Minister Subhash calls to elect Alapati in MLC elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Labour, Vasamshetti Subhash, has urged party workers and leaders to ensure the victory of educated candidate Alapati Rajendra Prasad (Alapati Raj) in the upcoming MLC elections for the Krishna-Guntur constituency. Speaking at the campaign meetings held at the party office in Pamaru and Vivekananda Degree College in Challa Palle, he stressed the importance of having the voice of educated individuals represented in the council.

During the meeting at the party office, the Minister stated that it is the responsibility of every party worker and leader to support Alapati Raj's candidacy. He provided insights on strategies to secure his win, including how to engage with graduates and the best approaches for campaigning. In his address to students at Vivekananda Degree College, he explained the necessity of electing Alapati Raj to voice the concerns of educated individuals in the council, particularly regarding unemployment issues. He emphasised that Raj's victory is crucial for bringing their matters to the government's notice. Minister Subhash also noted that Alapati Raj, recognised as a disciplined and capable individual, has the opportunity to represent the NDA coalition.



## Streamline data integration for efficient governance: RTG Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bhaskar Katamneni, Secretary of the Real Time Governance (RTG) Department, has issued an urgent directive to all government departments, emphasising the need for complete data submission to enhance governance through data integration. In a recent review meeting at the Secretariat, Katamneni highlighted the importance of creating a centralised data lake, and expressed concerns over several departments providing only partial data, which he deemed unacceptable. During the meeting, attended by officials from various departments, Katamneni underscored the critical necessity of accurate data sharing to facilitate the integration process essential to RTG's initiatives. One of the primary action items discussed was the appointment of Chief Data Technical Officers (CDTO) across all departments and their sections.

Despite previous instructions, only 202 of the 338 sections have completed these appointments, leaving 136 sections without a designated officer. Katamneni called for immediate action to finalise these appointments, stressing their importance for seamless coordination with RTG. Furthermore, he pointed out the issue of incomplete data submissions, urging departments to provide comprehensive datasets, particularly concerning government assets. The integration process aims to enhance operational efficiency and improve service delivery across all sectors. In line with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's vision, Katamneni stressed that effective data integration will accelerate public service delivery by eliminating delays. By consolidating data from various departments, the government aims to streamline processes that typically take months, enabling tasks to be

completed with a single click and enhancing departmental efficiency through technology. In addition to data integration efforts, Katamneni encouraged departments to communicate any specific challenges they encounter in improving performance. RTGS plans to use this feedback to develop tailored solutions that address these challenges, further optimising daily operations. Katamneni also addressed the need to accelerate GPS implementation in RTC buses. He urged RTC officials to expedite discussions and finalise an agreement with Google. If successful by the end of the month, the GPS system can be rolled out in RTC buses, marking a significant advancement in service delivery. Srikanth, Technical Service from the Home Department, and M Madhuri, Deputy CEO of RTGS, also attended the meeting.

## Minister Narayana continues inspection in Prayagraj

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana and his team continued their inspection on the second day in Prayagraj at the Maha Kumbh Mela, focusing on the preparations for the event. The Minister, accompanied by Municipal Department officials, assessed the arrangements on-site, particularly for the upcoming Godavari Pushkaralu scheduled for July 2027. On the first day, Kumbh Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand provided a PowerPoint presentation detailing the arrangements to the Minister's team. On Tuesday morning, the team toured the Kumbh Mela areas, traveling by boat to the Triveni Sangam to evaluate the facilities made for devotees. Minister Narayana inspected the bathing ghats, drinking water supply, restrooms and measures taken to ensure cleanliness. Officials briefed him on the management of waste, including the timely removal of offerings and others to prevent water contamination.

## Governor's address lacks direction: Botsa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Botsa Satyanarayana, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, has criticised the Governor's address for lacking direction and including politically-motivated remarks, such as references to the "destruction by the previous government", which he called deplorable. He slammed Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's uninformed comments on Opposition recognition, justifying the YSRCP's boycott of the session to protest the speech's irrelevance. Botsa clarified that the YSRCP has no issue with Pawan Kalyan taking the Opposition Leader role, as it depends on seat count, not vote share, despite the YSRCP's higher votes.



He dismissed arguments suggesting attendance on the day of the Governor's address should not count, stating that their presence was intended to bring public attention to their rights through the Governor's platform. Botsa affirmed that the party will convey the same stance if questioned by the Speaker, underscoring their readiness to address all issues based on context and timing

as a responsible political entity. He demanded a probe into the mass resignations of university vice-chancellors, coercion, and favouritism in their replacements. Botsa also highlighted the government's neglect of Group-2 exam candidates' roster system concerns, noting that despite protests and the CMO's request to postpone exams, APPSC ignored it, an insult to the CM. He criticised the government for prioritising long-term "Super Ten" plans for 2047 over unfulfilled "Super Six" promises, sarcastically questioning their commitment. Botsa reiterated the YSRCP's claim as the sole major Opposition, given the ruling coalition of three parties, and pledged to address all issues responsibly.

## Urgent steps needed to protect people from elephant attacks: DCM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In the light of the tragic incident at Gundalokana, where three devotees lost their lives due to an elephant attack, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Forest and Environment, Pawan Kalyan, has stressed the need for immediate safety measures for people in areas frequented by elephants. During a review meeting held at his camp office on Tuesday with senior officials from the Forest Department, the Annamayya District Collector and the local police, Pawan Kalyan expressed

**Officials asked to enhance awareness and safety protocols for visitors to forest areas**

deep condolences to the families of the victims and the injured. He called for the implementation of strategies to prevent such unfortunate events, especially with Maha Shivaratri approaching, which is expected to draw more visitors to temples near to forest. The Deputy Chief Minister instructed officials to enhance awareness and safety protocols for visitors to forest areas. He highlighted the importance of utilising Artificial Intelligence and

advanced technologies, similar to practices in Karnataka, to monitor elephant movements effectively. Additionally, he proposed installing railway line barricades in areas known for elephant activity and establishing early warning systems, such as radio collaring, to track elephant movements. Special campaigns should be designed to educate local residents and temple-goers about elephant behaviour and safety precautions. Pawan Kalyan urged officials to

consider both human safety and wildlife conservation, stressing the need for long-term solutions to prevent such incidents from recurring. The meeting was attended by Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Chiranjeevi Chaudhary, along with senior officials AK Naiak, Dr Shantipriya Pandey and BN Murthy. Collectors and Superintendents from Annamayya district joined virtually, including Collector Chamakuri Sridhar, SP Vidyasagar Naidu and DFO Sri Jagannath Singh.

## Allegations on VC...

Continued from Page 1

Highlighting the transparency of the current administration, Lokesh noted that 500 candidates had applied for the vice-chancellor positions and said that his government did not favour any particular group, unlike the previous administration. "Social justice was upheld, and appointments were made based on merit and expertise in education," he asserted. Lokesh criticised the Opposition for their past behaviour, stating, "Threats, intimidation and forcefully removing officials are your habits." He accused them of manipulating the system and reiterated the incident involving the APPSC Chairman as evidence of their tactics. He further remarked, "Unlike you, we don't send schoolchildren to the Chief Minister's meetings." Responding to the remarks made by YSRCP MLC Varudu Kalyani during the motion of thanks to the Governor's speech,

Lokesh stated, "We did not ask for positions. We only sought to protect the State's interests." He outlined several key achievements of the current administration, including securing ₹13,000 crore for the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, thus rescuing it from crisis. Additionally, he mentioned obtaining a railway zone and bringing in crucial funds for the Polavaram project and the development of Amaravati. "When Polavaram was abandoned, we stepped in to bring funds; this shows our sincerity," Lokesh remarked. He reiterated that the formation of a double-engine government has made the Central government's cooperation essential for the State's development. "We joined the NDA unconditionally. In just nine months, we secured funds that the previous administration failed to obtain in five years," he pointed out. Lokesh assured the members that the government is committed to the sincere development of Andhra Pradesh.

## All promises will be fulfilled...

Continued from Page 1

"Wealth can be created only with development following which the revenue of the government will go up," he said, and reaffirmed his commitment to distributing the wealth thus created to the poor. Making it clear that the State is moving forward with the aim of achieving 15 per cent growth rate, he said that his objective is to take the State to the level of \$42,000 per capita income by 2047. Reaffirming that the State is committed to fulfil the promise of providing 20 lakh jobs, the Chief Minister said that MoUs have already been signed with various companies for providing employment to 6.50 lakh youth. He also made it clear that the vacancies that arise in various government departments will be filled, and unemployment allowance to the tune of Rs 3,000 will be paid to the jobless youth. Appreciating Pawan Kalyan and Minister Lokesh for launching a mid-day meal scheme in the name of Dokka Seethamma, he

said school kits are being supplied in the name of Sarvepalli Radha Krishnan's name through Vidya Mitra scheme. Talliki Vandanam scheme will be implemented in May, he said and stated that Rs 20,000, including the Central assistance, will be paid to the farmers through Anna Data scheme in three instalments. The Chief Minister declared on the floor of the House that all the teacher vacancies will be filled through DSC in the coming academic year. Maintaining that Modi's is a success model while the former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is a failure model, the Chief Minister explained that development, wealth creation, welfare and achievements define the success model. Chandrababu asserted that his aim is that Telugu should be on top position across the globe and said that food security will be given highest priority. "My government's first priority is zero poverty. My aim is building a poverty-free State," Chandrababu Naidu concluded.

## Pawan Kalyan slams...

Continued from Page 1

He praised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for his ability to endure such behaviour over the years and remarked on the courage it takes to confront such leaders. Recalling specific incidents, he highlighted the YSRCP's destructive policies the way the Praja Veda was demolished, the demolition of over 200 temples, the way D Sudhakar died, the Jangareddygudem adulterated deaths, criticising High Court judges on social media, attacks on press leaders, the destruction of mangrove forests, how Chandrababu was kept in jail for 53 days, Amaravati farmers being beaten up to the point of bleeding, and the Tirupati adulterated laddu incidents. Pawan emphasised that despite challenges, his government remains committed to serving the people of Andhra Pradesh and has made significant strides in infrastructure development. He pointed out that while the previous government laid only 1,800 kilometres of CC roads in five years, his administration has already constructed over 4,000 km of roads in just six months. He also criticised the previous government for mismanaging funds related to the Jal Jeevan Mission and highlighted instances of corruption, such as the encroachment of 77 acres of forest land by the former Minister of Forests.

## Support Deregulation...

Continued from Page 1

He directed departments to address remaining compliance issues by the first week of March, in preparation for an upcoming review by a Government of India team. The Chief Secretary concluded by stating that the visiting team aims to exchange the best practices and provide recommendations to enhance the business environment further. Special Chief Secretaries Anantharam, B Rajasekhar, and Vani Prasad, Principal Secretaries Mukesh Kumar Meena, Shashi Bhushan Kumar, and S Suresh Kumar, Secretaries Dr N Yuvraj, MM Nayak, and Saurav Gaur and other officials participated in the video-conference.

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# All set for MLC polls

6,62,100 graduate voters, 22,493 teacher voters expected to cast votes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is prepared to oversee the polling for two Graduates Constituencies and one Teacher Constituency MLC elections scheduled for February 27 in the State. Following the ECI's directives, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Vivek Yadav has made all the necessary arrangements for the polling of the three MLC elections across the combined districts of Krishna, Guntur, East Godavari, West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam, and Vizianagaram.

As per the final publication of the nominations filed before the respective election officers, a total of 70 candidates are in the contest in the two Graduates' and one Teacher's MLC election. For the East Godavari-West Godavari Graduates' Constituency, 54 candidates filed nominations, however, 11 were rejected and eight candidates withdrew their nominations. Finally, 35 candidates are contesting in this segment.

Also, in the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Constituency, 40 nominations were filed, of which 10 were rejected, five candidates withdrew their nominations, and currently, 25 are in the fray. Whereas, in the Srikakulam-Vizianagaram-Visakhapatnam Teachers' Constituency, 10 candidates filed nominations and all are in the election contest.

In view of the three MLC election polling, the Election Commission arranged a Control Room at the Chief Electoral Officer Office in two shifts for monitoring the election on February 27 and counting on March 3.

For the polling process,

the Election Commission has appointed a total of 6,287 polling personnel in all three MLC constituencies. A total of 2,714 polling personnel for the East-West Godavari Graduates, 2,834 for the Krishna-Guntur Graduates, and 739 personnel for the Uttarandhra Teachers' Constituency.

The Commission has arranged three counting centres, and the counting will be held on March 3 -- Sir CRR Engineering College, Vaturu, for the East-West Godavari Graduates' Constituency, Andhra Christian College in Guntur for the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Constituency, and Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, for the Uttarandhra Teachers' Constituency.

Approximately 6,62,100 graduate voters and 22,493 teacher voters are expected to participate in the election. For the polling, the Election Commission has arranged 939 stations including 83 auxiliary polling stations for the graduate voters. Also, for the teacher voters, 123 polling stations have been arranged. The electoral rolls have been updated up to the last date of making nominations in the Graduates' and Teachers' Constituencies.

### Webcasting, videography at polling stations

According to the CEO, Andhra, Vivek Yadav, East Godavari and West Godavari Graduates' Constituency comprises Alluri Sitarama Raju, Kakinada, Dr BR Ambedkar, East Godavari (Rajamahendravaram), West Godavari (Bhimavaram) and Eluru districts. In this constituency, there are 3,14,984 voters. Of them, 1,83,347 are male voters, 1,31,618 are female, and 19 are others.

However, the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' Constituency comprises Krishna, Guntur, Eluru, Bapatla, and Palnadu districts. In this segment, there are 3,47,116 voters including 2,06,456 male, 1,40,615 female, and 45 other voters, he said.

Further, said the Uttarandhra Teachers' MLC Constituency comprises Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Parvathipuram Manyam, Alluri Sitarama Raju, Visakhapatnam and Anakapalli districts.

The Teachers' MLC Constituency has 22,493 voters, of which, 13,508 are male and 8,985 are female voters, he added. The election processes will be conducted under the surveillance of live webcasting, and videography, he said.

Meanwhile, CEO Vivek Yadav said that arrangements have been made at all the polling stations for safe drinking water, toilet facilities, ramp facilities, and tents wherever required. Additionally, uninterrupted power supply will be ensured to facilitate the voters to exercise their franchise on February 27. As per the guidelines from the ECI, voter information slips have been distributed to all enrolled electors, by the District Election Officer concerned, he explained.

He emphasised that voter slips provided by the District Election Officers will not be accepted as a form of identification at polling stations. Voters are required to carry one of the alternative identification documents approved by the Election Commission of India during the voting process, he said.

Additionally, he mentioned that the Election Commission of India (ECI) issued direc-

tives to the Prohibition and Excise Department regarding the sale of liquor, enforcing a Dry Day that takes effect 48 hours before polling begins.

### Special casual leave for government employees

Furthermore, he said orders were issued for the special casual leave provision on the poll day, February 27. The Central and State government employees, who are bonafide voters in the elections to State Legislative Councils are granted special casual leave on poll day to enable them to exercise the right of franchise, he said.

Regarding the employees of private establishments, requested all the private managements and authorities of business, trade, industrial undertaking, or other establishments in the State to grant necessary facilities to their employees who are registered voters in any of the Graduates' Constituencies, such as permission to attend office/duty late, he added.

On the other hand, he said adjustments of shifts, short absence of duty hours or otherwise should be arranged to enable to cast their vote on the day of the poll February 27.

Vivek Yadav said that a total of 8,515 police officials and staff have been deployed for the smooth conduct of the MLC elections.

Of them, 15 SPs and Additional SPs, 70 DSPs, 235 Inspectors, 607 Sub-inspectors, 1,501 Assistant SIs and Head Constables, 3,757 Police Constables, 348 Women Police Constables besides 141 AR Sis, 169 HCs, and 864 Police Constables, he said. Also, 673 Home Guards and 45 Women Home Guards are deployed for the polling, he added.

# Top cops inspect security arrangements for Maha Shivaratri

Large number of devotees are expected to visit various Shiva temples

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ahead of Maha Shivaratri, NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu and Krishna District Superintendent of Police R Gangadhara Rao visited several bathing ghats along River Krishna in Vijayawada and Krishna districts on Tuesday. They reviewed security arrangements for the festival, which will be celebrated on Wednesday, and directed officials to implement necessary measures to prevent any untoward incidents.

The Maha Shivaratri festival will be celebrated grandly at various Shiva temples in Vijayawada and across the NTR district. Celebrations will also take place at the Shiva temple on the hill of Yanamalakuduru in the Krishna district. Authorities in both districts anticipate a large influx of devotees who will offer special pujas and take holy bath in River Krishna.

Police Commissioner Rajasekhara Babu inspected security measures at several bathing ghats, including Durga Ghat, Punnami Ghat, Bhavani Ghat, and Pavitra Sangamam. He checked the facilities provided and the arrangements for queue lines at the Shiva temple. He also gave suggestions to police personnel regarding crowd management.

Later, Commissioner Babu, along with SP Gangadhara



Rao, visited the Lord Shiva temple on the hill at Yanamalakuduru. He had darshan of Lord Shiva and then inspected security arrangements along Krishna Karakatta from Ramalingeswara Nagar to Yanamalakuduru, and checked CCTV cameras. He also spoke to the Vijayawada police officials regarding traffic management and law enforcement.

To enhance safety during the holy baths in Krishna River, the police have deployed National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel to assist pilgrims in

case of emergencies, he said. The police are collaborating with related departments to ensure a successful Maha Shivaratri festival.

Meanwhile, NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha noted that the district administration has made extensive preparations for the festival. On Tuesday, he conducted a review meeting at the collectorate with officials from the Durga Temple, Revenue, Police, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, Water Resources, Fisheries, and other relevant departments.

He directed various officials

to make necessary arrangements and provide facilities at all bathing ghats along Krishna, including barricading. He also emphasised the need to set up facilities for drinking water, mobile toilets, and additional amenities in Vijayawada. Furthermore, he instructed the Health Department to set up health camps and ensure the availability of medicines.

Meanwhile, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanaandhra discussed sanitation, drinking water, and changing room facilities with officials.

## Parvathipuram Manyam selected for NITI Aayog's DARTP

Ambitious plan aims to boost agriculture, employment, and water conservation in Andhra Pradesh's rural heartland

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

In a significant move to tackle rural poverty, the Parvathipuram Manyam district in Andhra Pradesh has been selected to implement the ambitious District Agricultural Transformation Plan (DARTP), a national initiative spearheaded by the policy think tank NITI Aayog. The announcement, made by District Collector A Shyam Prasad, signals a concerted effort to revitalise the region's agricultural and rural economy. The DARTP will focus on enhancing the well-being of rural families by expanding economic opportunities, boosting agricultural productivity, and creating new employment avenues.

"This plan is pivotal to the district's future," stated Prasad during a review meeting at the Collector's office. "We must ensure that every aspect is handled with diligence and quality." The meeting, which assessed the progress of primary sectors, saw Prasad direct officials from agriculture and allied departments to compile a comprehensive DARTP report within 10 days, emphasising transparency and meticulous execution.

## Officials urged to ensure timely issuance of certificates

Sensitisation programme stresses adherence to timelines and due diligence in certificate issuance



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Civil Judge (Senior Division) and Secretary, District Legal Services Authority, M. Venkata Seshamma, has issued a strong call for the timely issuance of crucial public documents, including birth, death, caste, marriage, and income certificates. Speaking at a sensitisation programme focused on streamlining the certificate issuance process and addressing challenges faced by officials, she emphasised the vital role these documents play in public welfare.

Judge Seshamma stressed that officers and employees of all relevant departments must adhere to stipulated timeframes, ensuring no undue delays in the delivery of these essential certificates. She recommended that sensitisation programmes be conducted every six months under the

supervision of the District Medical and Health Officer (DMOH) for private hospital management, specifically addressing the registration and issuance of birth and death certificates.

"It is imperative that we ensure citizens receive these documents promptly," Judge Seshamma stated. "These certificates are fundamental for accessing various government services and entitlements."

She further advised officials to thoroughly review government guidelines (GOs) and exercise due diligence in all certificate issuance processes. In particular, she highlighted the importance of verifying the age of brides and grooms using Aadhaar cards, 10th class certificates, school leaving certificates, and municipal bar certificates before registering marriages. For certificates issued at ward secretariats, ward secre-

taries were urged to carefully examine relevant GOs before processing applications.

GVMC Chief Medical Officer Dr ENV Naresh Kumar and District Registrar Upendra echoed Judge Seshamma's sentiments, emphasising the need for regular awareness programs for the public and sensitisation programmes for officials and employees. They highlighted that such measures would significantly improve the efficiency of the certificate issuance process and reduce the need for citizens to visit government offices.

The awareness programme witnessed active participation from Zonal Commissioners of Zones 1, 2, 3, and 7, Assistant Medical Officers, Statistician Officers, Sanitary Supervisors, Sanitary Inspectors, Ward Secretaries, Data Entry Operators, and other officials.

## APSSDC launches German language training centre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant initiative aimed at enhancing the employability of nursing professionals in Andhra Pradesh, the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) has launched a German language training programme linked to international placement opportunities. This initiative is conducted in collaboration with OMCAP and Indo Euro Synchronisation, under the esteemed leadership of G Ganesh Kumar, Managing Director and CEO of APSSDC.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Tuesday in the presence of G Ganesh Kumar, D Manohar, Executive Director, A Hema Chowdhary, M Satish Babu from OMCAP and Rehana Khan, AP State Nursing Skill Development Officer.

D Manohar announced that the program is open to all eligible MSc, BSc, and Post B-Sc Nursing graduates with a minimum of six months of experience.

## Electricity purchases reduced by 60 pc: Minister Gottipati



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar has announced that electricity purchases have been reduced by 60 per cent compared to the previous YSRCP government. The Minister conducted a review meeting on electricity purchases and distribution with officials at the Secretariat on Monday.

During the meeting, Minister Ravi Kumar discussed various issues related to the electricity sector and provided guidance to senior officials on strategies needed to revitalize the industry, which he described as being in crisis due to what he termed "Weird Act" by former CM Jagan Mohan Reddy. He highlighted that electricity purchases

have been curtailed significantly due to production aligning with demand.

The Minister praised the performance of GENCO, which has recently achieved record levels of electricity production, commending senior officials for their efforts. He credited the vision of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for steering the State's electricity sector back to its former glory within a short span.

Expressing optimism, he stated that long-term planning will ensure Andhra Pradesh becomes a surplus electricity State. He urged officials to prepare for the upcoming summer season, emphasising the importance of planning to meet industrial and household needs without any disruption.

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## DC calls for stringent steps to curb road accidents

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a bid to address the rising number of road accidents in the district, Visakhapatnam District Collector MN Harendra Prasad has called for stringent measures to be implemented across the region. The call came during a Road Safety Committee meeting held on Tuesday evening at the Collector's Conference Hall, attended by City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi.

The meeting saw a detailed review of fatality and injury data from road accidents in Visakhapatnam district over the past year, alongside government-provided information. Discussions also focused on the compensation provided to victims of accidents involving unidentified vehicles, with committee members facing



scrutiny over their preventative actions.

Prasad issued a series of directives aimed at improving road safety. He instructed Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) officials to prioritise the installation of speed breakers on major roads, particularly in the vicinity of schools and colleges. The need for clearly

marked zebra crossings and proper road markings on both sides of the roads was also emphasised.

"Non-functional traffic signals must be restored immediately," Prasad stated, adding that GVMC officials were to establish bus shelters in required locations and designate truck bays for parking heavy vehicles.

## After a year inauguration, Vizag food lab remains idle

State-of-the-art facility, inaugurated by PM, remains non-operational delaying crucial testing

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A state-of-the-art food laboratory, virtually inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi over a year ago in Visakhapatnam, remains non-operational, sparking widespread concern over food safety enforcement in Andhra Pradesh. The facility, intended to bolster public health and ensure the quality of food products, stands empty despite substantial financial investment and the installation of advanced equipment.

Constructed within the Peda Waltair Regional Public Health Laboratory premises, the project received approximately Rs 30 crore in funding from both the Central and State governments following the bifurcation of Andhra



Pradesh. The building was completed two years ago, and Rs 10 crore worth of sophisticated equipment was installed prior to the virtual inauguration on February 25 last year. Yet, the laboratory has remained inactive since.

The delay has drawn sharp criticism from the

Opposition leaders, who accuse the State government of neglecting crucial food safety regulations. They argue that the non-functional facility is a significant waste of public resources, including high-end instruments and costly chemicals, and demand immediate

action to activate the laboratory.

Prior to the State's bifurcation, food samples were sent to Hyderabad for testing. Now, with no operational facility in Visakhapatnam, food safety officers continue to rely on the Hyderabad laboratory, resulting in processing delays of up to a month. This extended timeframe significantly undermines the timely detection of food adulteration and hinders effective regulatory action against offenders. The laboratory, designed to conduct tests across 17 categories, including oils, food grains, dairy products, and soft drinks, boasts 30 types of advanced instruments. However, full installation remains incomplete, and the facility requires approxi-

mately 80 staff members for effective operation. The crucial recruitment process has yet to commence.

The inaction of State authorities has fuelled public outrage, with concerns mounting over wasted resources and potential risks to consumer safety. Experts are calling for the government to urgently expedite the installation of remaining equipment, recruit qualified personnel, and streamline administrative processes.

"The prolonged delay in making this vital laboratory operational is a serious dereliction of duty," said one local food safety advocate, who requested anonymity. "Consumers deserve to have confidence in the safety of the food they consume. This inaction puts public health at risk."

### TG govt plans radial road linking ORR to RRR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government has launched the construction of a Greenfield Radial Road (Ratan Tata Road), a key project which improves connectivity between the Outer Ring Road (ORR) and the Regional Ring Road (RRR). This major corridor will pass through critical development zones like Skill City and Future City facilitating seamless transportation for businesses and the public.

The Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) and the Hyderabad Growth Corridor Limited (HGCL) have been entrusted with the project, which will span 41.50 km across six mandals and 14 villages in Ranga Reddy district.

The construction will be carried out in two phases: Phase I: ORR at Raviryal (Tata Interchange) to Meerkhanpet (19.2 km) - Estimated cost: Rs 1,665 crore. Phase II: Meerkhanpet to RRR at Amangal (22.3 km) - Estimated cost: Rs2,365 crore.

# Curbing of ganja, drugs menace emphasized

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

District Collector emphasized that more stringent measures should be implemented to contain the menaces of ganja and drugs in EG district.

District Level Committee for Better Coordination in Controlling Ganja and drugs was held here on Tuesday in which Superintendent of police D Narasimha Kishore attended as coordinator.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prasanthi stated that the vigilance department of each department will have to perform effectively in the control of the Ganja and drug menaces of the district.

"In view of the complaints about the transportation of Cannabis and other drugs in buses and trains steps should be taken to prevent the same. Cases have been identified recently where people, who are using drugs without even being aware that they are taking them. A wide-ranging discussion should be held on the issue of drug consumption and its impact on society," the Collector underlined.



Collector Prashanthi opined that if parents talk openly about ill-effects of drugs at home and teachers in schools and colleges, awareness about them would increase among the students. She directed the Drug Controller to provide details of closed stores and factories which are not in their control. She ordered the officials that raids would be conducted to focus on the use of intoxicating drugs.

The Collector instructed the Enforcement Department to register cases and asked the RDOs, DRDA, MEPMA, and DWMA to participate in the upcoming meeting. They should increase surveillance in social welfare and other shelter homes, she told them.

SP Narasimha said that 2,700 KGs of ganja had been seized in the district during the year and cases had been registered against 900 people. He regretted that some incidents where the stu-

dents getting addicted to drugs at the students stage are emerging, adding that the onus lies on all to prevent the ganja menace.

The SP felt that camps should be organized on a large scale in areas like Rajahmundry, Sitanagaram, and Gokavaram in coordination with the police department to create awareness among the people. He asked that internal teams be appointed with the police, excise, and other affiliated departments to increase the level of surveillance with the aim of controlling ganja and drugs in Rajahmundry, Nidadavolu and surrounding villages.

The SP acknowledged that surveillance is being enhanced and cases are being registered against the blade batch in Rajahmundry and so far 140 cases have been registered against them.

Visakhapatnam Division NCB team members Abhijit, Rohan, Drugs Assistant Director D Nagamani, DEO K. Vasudeva Rao, Welfare Department officials M S Shobharani, K N Jyoti and B Shashanka attended the meeting.

## Collector exhorts 10<sup>th</sup> students to pass exams with 1<sup>st</sup> rank



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Chandalavada Nagarani exhorted the 10 th class students to pass the examinations with first rank. A motivation programme was organized to the 10 th class students virtually on Tuesday.

Addressing the students, Collector Nagarani said a motivational programme for class 10 students was organized through Google Meet for 13,000 students of Zilla Parishad High Schools across the district, adding that 1,500 teachers also participated in

the programme.

She said that there is nothing that cannot be achieved if students study with confidence, and a special motivational programme has been organized for students to achieve 100 percent results in the 10th class examination in the district.

The students need courage to move forward in life, the Collector said and motivated the students to remember every topic and write important topics as side headings.

Swami Sevayana of Rajahmundry Ramakrishna Mission spoke to the students

through Google Meet. He said that better teaching is done at the Government Schools with qualified teachers and the infrastructure in government schools is also well developed.

He advised to utilize the 24 hours of time properly, adding that some people allocate more time only to their favorite subject which is not correct. He told the students to allocate more time on the subject that they find difficult and ensure that all subjects are equal. RDO Mogili Venkateswarulu and DEO E Narayana were present.

## Elaborate security arrangements to regulate crowds at Pattiseema

PNS ■ ELURU

The district police are making elaborate police bandobast by deploying sufficient numbers of police personnel to regulate crowds of devotees at the famous Veereswara Swamy temple at Pattiseema on Maha Shivaratri Day on Wednesday.

Superintendent of police K. Pratap Shiva Kishore told the media here on Tuesday that as a large number of devotees are expected to gather at Sri Veereswara Swamy Temple in Pattiseema in Polavaram Mandal to have a darshan of deity on the Maha Shivaratri Day.

He said that he reviewed the security arrangements to ensure smooth and hassle-free darshan for the devotees. He conducted a briefing session for the deployed personnel, providing them with detailed instructions on their duties and responsibilities.

The SP emphasized that all personnel should perform their duties in a disciplined manner, ensuring that devotees do not face any inconvenience. He instructed the security staff to treat devotees with respect, maintain proper queue lines,



and facilitate an orderly entry into the temple. He also directed the use of drone cameras and CCTV surveillance to monitor crowd movement and take necessary precautions accordingly.

As the water flow in the Godavari River is expected to be heavy, devotees must remain cautious and avoid bathing in unauthorized areas. Holy dip should be taken only at designated locations, the SP warned the devotees.

Due to the heavy crowd, devotees should stand in proper queues and avoid pushing. Everyone should cooperate with the police personnel to ensure a smooth darshan experience, the SP mentioned. The SP asked the devotees to take care of their children and personal belongings, avoiding leaving them unattended in unknown areas.

The police department has made special arrangements for crowd management, security,

traffic control, and emergency response. Devotees are requested to follow the instructions given by the police personnel and cooperate with them, the SP acknowledged.

Joint Collector Dhatri Reddy, along with officials from the Endowments Department, Electricity Department, Irrigation Department, and Revenue Department, personally inspected the necessary precautionary measures at the temple premises on Tuesday.

## Tuskers trample 3 devotees to death



PNS ■ KADAPA

Three devotees were trampled to death by a herd of elephants and two were injured at Y Kota village in Obulavaripalli mandal in Annamaya in the wee hours on Tuesday district when they were going to the famous Shiva temple, located at Kona village.

Police said that about 30 devotees, belonging to the Kannegunta colony at Y-Koda village, were going to the famous Siddeswara Swamy temple to worship Lord Shiva on Maha Shivaratri day.

When the devotees were going through the forest area, a herd of elephants attacked them and trampled three of them in the wee hours. Two devotees suffered injuries in the incident and they were admitted to the GGH in Railway Kodur where their condition was said to be critical.

The deceased were identified as Vankayala Dinesh, Tupakula Manemma and Changa

**When the devotees were going through the forest area, a herd of elephants attacked them and trampled three of them in the wee hours. Two devotees suffered injuries in the incident and they were admitted to the GGH in Railway Kodur where their condition was said to be critical**

Rayudu. The police rushed to the forest area, shifted the bodies and injured to the GGH in Railway Kodur.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock and grief over the death of three devotees. He spoke to the officials of the Annamaya district and directed them to provide better treatment to the injured. He assured of extending



## Woman, daughter ran over by lorry



PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a tragic road accident, a young woman and her teenage daughter were killed when a lorry ran over their scooter at Gorantla near Chilli's restaurant on Tuesday.

Police said that the deceased Vinjamuru Nagalakshmi (38) and Vinjamuru Charanya (14) were going on a scooter towards Advaitakallapadu. When they were crossing the road, a speeding lorry ran over their scooter killing both the women instantaneously.

The accident was so ghastly that the body of Charanya was crushed beyond recognition. The Nallapadu police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

## TTD to perform Srinivasa Kalyanam at Amaravati on March 14

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer J Syamala Rao said that Srinivasa Kalyanam would be solemnized at Amaravati, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh on March 14. Rao along with the Additional Executive officer Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, JEO Veerabrahmam held a review with the officials at the Administrative Building of TTD here on Tuesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the EO said that the TTD Sri Venkateswara Temple in Venkatapalem near Amaravati will conduct a grand Srinivasa Kalyanam. The officials were directed to complete the necessary arrangements for Srinivasa Kalyanam in a prestigious manner. As the deadline of just two weeks is left, the TTD officials are being given



several instructions to complete the arrangements at the field level. As Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu will participate, the EO ordered the concerned officials to make necessary arrangements of security, erection of queue lines for devotees and many more.

Rao instructed the TTD sleuths to coordinate with the concerned district authorities so that the campaign can be carried out in the surrounding areas of Amaravati as well. He also reviewed devotional dance troupes, illumination, flower decorations and Annaprasadam activities.

## SP warns of stringent action if obscene dances performed

PNS ■ BAPATLA

Superintendent of police Tushar Dudi warned of stringent action, if obscene dances were performed anywhere in the district on the occasion Maha Shivaratri.

The SP on Tuesday visited the Sri Rama Koteswara Swamy temple at Sopirala village and Balakoteswara Swamy temple at Kothapalem village and inspected the security arrangements to regulate crowds. The SP inspected the security arrangements, the management of queue lines, arrangements of barricades, and the routes for devotees to enter and exit temples. Speaking on the occasion, the SP warned of taking stringent action if obscene dances are performed in the district to celebrate Maha Shivaratri.

Appropriate security measures should be taken to prevent devotees and children



from going near the current wires of electric lights and decorative lighting in places where they are installed, he ordered the police officials. The SP said that in view of the Mahashivaratri festival, tight security has been put in place at Shiva temples across the district.

"It is estimated that around 80,000 devotees will throng to the Sri Rama Koteswara Swamy Temple in Sopirala village and the Sri Bala Koteswara Swamy Temple in Kothapalem village under Chinnaganjam police station limits on the occasion of Mahashivaratri," the SP informed.

The SP stated that appropriate security arrangements are being made led by Chirala DSP Moin. A total of 130 policemen are being used for security duties, he said, adding that there is a trainee DSP, three CIs and 9 SIs. They said that 30 CCTV cameras have been

installed in the areas surrounding the temples and two drones will also be used.

"All required measures have been taken and appropriate precautions have also been taken to avoid traffic snarls. Suitable places for parking vehicles are also being provided. It is estimated that about one lakh devotees will visit Sri Bala Koteswara Swamy temple in Gowanda village under Amartaluru police station limits and that about 100 policemen, including three CIs and six SIs, have been deployed under the leadership of Repalle DSP Srinivasa Rao," SP Tushar Dudi acknowledged.

The SP asserted that 50 CCTV cameras were installed in the areas surrounding the temple at Gowanda village, stating that a public addressing system is being set up at each place to issue instructions, warnings and instructions to the devotees.

## 14 students fall ill after having ragi java



PNS ■ AMALAPURAM

As many as 14 students, studying at Jaggarajupeta Government school, fell ill after having Ragi Java served to them.

Mandal Educational Officer Kiran Babu told the media that 26 school students were served ragi java in the mid-day meal on Tuesday. After having the Ragi Java, 14 of them developed vomiting and fell ill.

The school teachers admitted the students to the Government General Hospital in Amalapuram. Educational Officer Kiran Babu visited the students in the hospital and inquired with the doctors about their condition. The students were undergoing treatment and were recuperating, doctors said.

## Cong objects to Sanjay linking it with Pak

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress objected to the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, describing Congress as the Pakistan team.

TPCC Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud said that Sanjay was 'hitting below the belt'. He has been linking every issue with India and Pakistan and Hindus and Muslims. Sanjay is habituated to inciting communal hatred. It is not proper for

Sanjay to give an impression that the BJP ensured the victory of India in the Champions Trophy match between India and Pakistan at Dubai.

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that Sanjay has been speaking as he liked. "What else is there to talk for Sanjay except castes, Muslims, India and Pakistan," he added.

He said that it is the responsibility of the Centre to bring the phone-tapping culprits to



India. "But the BJP is protecting them. The ED, the CBI and the IT Department are working like BJP activists," the MP

said and asked the Centre to explain why the Enforcement Directorate did not arrest the culprits involved in the e-car racing scam.

Government Whip Adi Srinivas said that Sanjay has been 'encouraging communalism' to gain ground in the MLC elections. "Is it right for Sanjay to speak using the religion factor as a Union Minister? Sanjay should feel ashamed to compare the Congress to Pakistan," he said.

ACROSS THE STATES

# Assam to play key role in India's growth story: PM

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said East and Northeast India are embarking on a new journey toward the future with Advantage Assam, connecting the state's incredible potential with global opportunities.

"History is witness to the major role played by eastern India in India's prosperity. Today, as we progress towards Viksit Bharat, these regions will display their true potential," the PM said while inaugurating the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit here.

"Despite global instability, experts unanimously agree on one certainty: India's rapid growth," he added.

He emphasised that today's India is working with a long-term vision for the next 25 years of this century. "The world has immense trust in India's youth, who are rapidly becoming skilled and innovative," he added. He asserted the growing confidence in India's new middle class, which is emerging from poverty with fresh aspirations.

"India is bolstering its local supply chains and entering free-trade agreements with various global regions," he said.



"History is witness to the major role played by eastern India in India's prosperity. Today, as we progress towards Viksit Bharat, these regions will display their true potential," the PM said while inaugurating the Advantage Assam 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit here

He said India's robust connectivity with East Asia and the newly launched India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor is opening up new opportunities.

"Assam's contribution to the country's growth is increasing and it now boasts an economy of around Rs 6 lakh crore," he added.

The Assam government, he noted, is focusing on education, skill development, and fostering a better investment environment.

"In 2014, there were three bridges over the Brahmaputra,

built over 70 years. In the past 10 years, four new bridges have been constructed and one of them is named after Bharat Ratna Bhupen Hazarika," Modi said.

"Between 2009 and 2014, Assam received an average rail budget of Rs 2,100 crore. However, the current government has increased Assam's railway budget more than four times, to Rs 10,000 crore," he added.

Modi said more than 60 railway stations in the state are being upgraded and the first semi-high-speed train in the

Northeast runs between Guwahati and New Jalpaiguri.

On air connectivity in Assam, the PM said until 2014, flights operated on seven routes. Now, nearly 30 routes are operational, he added.

"India is undergoing significant reforms across all sectors and levels of the economy. Continuous efforts have been made to enhance the ease of doing business, and a comprehensive ecosystem has been established to promote industry and a culture of innovation," he said.

## NEW RULES FOR KOTA HOSTELS Security fee waiver, installation of anti-suicide ceiling fans

PNS ■ KOTA (RAJASTHAN)

Ahead of the upcoming academic session 2025-26, the district administration has released new guidelines for coaching centres and hostels under the Kota Cares Campaign, officials said on Tuesday.

The aim of the campaign is to reduce the cost of living for the students coming to Kota to prepare for the competitive exams.

The key features of the new guidelines include the elimination of security and caution money in all the 4,000 hostels in the city. Earlier, the hostels would charge the amount and refund it by the end of the year.

Following a meeting with the stakeholders of the coaching industry, Kota District Collector Dr Ravindra Goswami announced that hostels can charge of maintenance fee of Rs 2,000. They will also be provided with anti-suicide ceiling fans and mandatory gatekeeper training for hostel staff, the statement said.

The students will be provided free entry to Chambal Riverfront and Oxygen Zone Park on a one-time pass basis. A Kota Cares helpdesk will be set up at the railway station and bus stand, and functional CCTV and biometric systems will be installed in the hostels, the statement read.

The hostel staff will be required to maintain manual



attendance at night. The accommodation will have recreation areas and parents will be provided with receipts of all payments.

Dr. Goswami said, "Under the Kota Cares campaign, efforts are being made to provide students with better facilities and an improved environment. With the growing number of students in Kota, excellent infrastructure has been developed. Better accommodations and care facilities can now be offered to students in different areas of the city, and issues that previously existed have been resolved. We are confident that students in Kota will receive the best coaching along with excellent housing and an ideal environment."

"This comes as the number of students coming to Kota for the preparation of competitive exams saw a sharp decline from over 2 lakh to over 1.24 lakh in 2024-25. This caused a revenue loss of around 50 per cent, leaving many hostels with less than 40 per cent occupancy.



## '73 pc waste pickers lost income during COVID'

More than 73 per cent of Delhi's waste pickers suffered severe income loss during the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing many into debt and extreme financial distress, said a report released on Tuesday. The report, "A Governance Landfill: The Tragic Story of Capital's Waste-Picking Community During the Pandemic", was published by the People's Commission and Public Inquiry Committee (PC-PIC). The report also found that 56.5 per cent of waste pickers faced harassment from municipal authorities, while 52 per cent had to borrow money for basic healthcare, an official statement of PC-PIC said. According to the statement, the findings based on field research, public hearings and testimonies, paints a stark picture of how the pandemic's economic fallout, coupled with government neglect and increasing privatization of waste management, pushed waste pickers further into precarity. At the report's release event, waste pickers shared firsthand accounts of their struggles.



## DRDO recruitment scam: CBI registers FIR

The CBI has registered an FIR to probe a fraudulent recruitment racket, which allegedly cheated unemployed youths by making fake promises of ensuring employment in the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), officials said on Tuesday. The case registered against unidentified suspects alleged that racketeers offered jobs on various posts like Peon, Cleaner, Multi-Tasking Staff (MTS) and Lower Division Clerk (LDC) in the DRDO, they said. The gang charged Rs 5-10 lakh from the candidates promising the jobs, the officials said. The racketeers even conducted medical examination at a purported DRDO-affiliated facility located in New Delhi after extracting payments from the aspirants, they said. "Subsequently, the job aspirants were issued fake appointment letters and were directed to report for a three-month training session in a fake DRDO office at Jaipur.



## CRPF personnel destroy 2 Maoist camps in Jharkhand

Security personnel destroyed two camps of a proscribed Maoist outfit and recovered a large quantity of arms and ammunition from West Singhbhum district, a senior police officer said on Tuesday. The incident happened in the forested areas of Tonto under the jurisdiction of the Tonto police station in the district, the police officer said. Acting on intelligence input that the members of the banned outfit CPI (Maoists) have kept hidden a large quantity of arms and ammunition in the forests, the security personnel comprising CRPF and district police force conducted a search operation in the villages of Sarjamburu, Tumbahaka, Purty Tola and Jimkiekir villages located close to the forested areas on Monday, the Superintendent of Police, Ashutosh Shekhar, said during a press meet here. In the course of the operation, the personnel of the law enforcing agencies stumbled upon two Maoist camps in the Jimkiekir forest, which were destroyed, the SP said.

## YAMUNA POLLUTION

# 'Changed situation' may see better implementation of plans

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that there might be better implementation of plans, such as cleaning of Yamuna river, in view of the "changed circumstances".

The observation by a bench of Justices B R Gavi and Augustine George Masih assumes significance in the wake of the BJP unseating the Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi in the recently-concluded assembly elections.

The apex court is hearing a suo motu case titled 'Remediation of polluted rivers' in which it is dealing with the issue of contamination of Yamuna river.

"I think with the changed circumstances now, there may be better implementation of plans," Justice Gavi said during the hearing.

Senior advocate Meenakshi Arora, who's assisting the apex court as an amicus curiae, said earlier that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) was monitoring the issue concerning Yamuna river through a committee.



She said after the top court took suo motu cognisance of the matter in January 2021, the tribunal disbanded the committee.

The bench observed that it appeared there were some other petitions concerning pollution in Yamuna river, which were pending before another bench of the apex court.

It asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, who appeared for the Centre, to find out from the authorities as to whether there were any other petitions pending with regard to the same issue.

The bench posted the matter for hearing after the Holi

vacation.

The amicus said the NGT had passed several orders, giving directions from time to time regarding various compliances to be met with regard to Yamuna river.

She said the monitoring committee constituted by the tribunal was supervising what was being done between Haryana and Delhi regarding the setting up of sewage treatment plants and common effluent treatment plants.

"Should we send it back to the NGT," the bench asked.

The amicus suggested this might be better monitored by the NGT.



## Varanasi gears up for Mahashivratri

PNS ■ VARANASI

With an increased influx of devotees from the Maha Kumbh, Varanasi is all set to celebrate Mahashivratri with grandeur, officials said here on Tuesday.

Various Akharas, along with a large number of saints and Naga sadhus, will take out a grand procession before offering prayers at the revered Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple on Wednesday.

The district administration and the Kashi Vishwanath Temple management have completed preparations for the celebrations, Commissioner Kaushal Raj

Sharma said on Tuesday.

Discussions have been held with the heads of Akharas and other saints who have arrived from the Mahakumbh regarding their scheduled visit to the temple, he said.

According to Sharma, the saints and Akhara members will be allowed to offer prayers at the temple from 6 am to 9 am.

In the evening, at 5:30 pm, a grand procession will commence from Hanuman Ghat and Harishchandra Ghat, proceeding towards Godaulia.

From there, the saints and Akhara heads will walk to the temple and enter through Gate No. 4 for darshan, he said.

## LAND-FOR-JOBS 'SCAM'

# Delhi court summons Lalu, family members

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Tuesday summoned former rail minister Lalu Prasad and some of his family members, including his wife, two sons and two daughters, in connection with the land-for-jobs 'scam'.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne summoned the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) supreme wife and former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, two sons -- ex-Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Prasad Yadav and former state minister Tej Pratap Yadav -- and



daughters Misha Bharti, a member of Parliament, and Hema Yadav, in connection with the case.

The accused have been directed

to appear before the court on March 11.

The judge said the allegations and material cited in the chargesheet with respect to the

role of Lalu Prasad Yadav, "with the active participation of his aides Bhola Yadav and R K Mahajan, the transfer of parcels of land in favour of Lalu Prasad's family members -- Rabri Devi, Hema Yadav and Tej Pratap Yadav -- and the appointment of candidates, who were also arrayed as accused, upon the recommendation of railway officials, also named as accused in the chargesheet, form cogent prima-facie indication of the role of all 76 accused persons in the allegations crystallised in the concluding chargesheet".

## 'Leftist forces true third alternative in Bengal'

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Asserting that the Leftist forces are the "true third alternative" in West Bengal, CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat on Tuesday said that the party will fight both the Trinamool Congress and the BJP tooth and nail.

He said that neither the BJP can be an alternative to the TMC, nor can the latter be an alternative to the saffron party in West Bengal.

"The Leftists are the true third alternative in the state," Karat said, addressing a public meeting at Dankuni in Hooghly district on the completion of a four-day West Bengal state conference of the CPI(M). Karat, who is the coordinator of CPI(M)'s central committee, claimed that the RSS has plans to make West Bengal a hub for "Hindu fanaticism" in eastern India.

Stating that RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat recently made a 10-day visit to West Bengal, the CPI(M) leader said, "He had come to chalk out a strategy to strengthen the RSS in the state."

Karat said that the CPI(M) has decided in its just-concluded state conference that any act that will create differences among people in West Bengal will be defeated by the Marxists.

"We have decided to fight against both the TMC and the



BJP-RSS tooth and nail," he said. "No communal force, either Hindu or Muslim, were given any chance to gain ground in West Bengal during the Marxist rule in the state," he said.

The CPI(M), which led the Left Front in West Bengal to run the state for 34 years till 2011, could not win any seat in the 2021 assembly elections in the state. It could not win any seat out of 42 Lok Sabha constituencies in the state in 2019 and 2024 parliamentary polls.

The ruling Trinamool Congress and the opposition BJP have cornered almost all seats in the state assembly and the Lok Sabha from West Bengal.

Karat claimed that CPI(M) workers have faced atrocities at the hands of the ruling TMC in West Bengal, but have taken up such challenges bravely.

# India, Japan kickstart two-week mega wargame

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Armies of India and Japan have kickstarted a mega two-week wargame at a Japanese military base in the foothills of Mount Fuji in line with the overall aim to bolster bilateral defence ties.

The sixth edition of the 'Dharma Guardian' exercise that began on Monday is set to include an "expanded" range of activities that will reflect the growing defence cooperation between India and Japan, the Indian Army said.

The wargame at the East Fuji training area is taking place amid mounting concerns in

India and Japan over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific region.

This significant exercise marks a "major milestone" as it is being conducted at an enhanced scale, with the participation of troops expanded to a company-strength level for the first time, the Indian Army said in a statement.

The opening ceremony of the wargame was graced by India's Ambassador to Japan Sibi George, and Lt Gen Toriumi Seiji, the Commanding General of the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force's First Division.



The sixth edition of the 'Dharma Guardian' exercise that began on Monday is set to include an "expanded" range of activities that will reflect the growing defence cooperation between India and Japan, the Indian Army said

The joint drills will involve counter-terror operations in urban terrain, a critical area of operational focus given the

contemporary security landscape, the statement said.

It said the troops will also rehearse activities conducted

during United Nations peace-keeping operations, simulating real-world situations where multinational forces must col-

laborate effectively in complex environments.

This collaboration aims to improve both forces' ability to respond swiftly and effectively during operations, the Indian Army said.

"As the exercise progresses, the participating forces will engage in a series of tactical drills, exchanging knowledge and expertise, while building lasting ties of friendship and trust," it said.

"The culmination of the exercise will see the two armies further solidifying their commitment to peace, security, and stability in the region," it added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Liberty is sacrosanct

The Supreme Court's directive affirming bail as the norm and emphasising liberty is a welcome step

The Supreme Court in a recent ruling and observation made a very pertinent precedence that could have far-reaching implications in the functioning of the democracy. The Supreme Court in the case of Kailash Kumar vs State of Himachal Pradesh wherein it set aside a High Court order cancelling the bail of an accused has rooted for individual's liberty. This ruling underscore the judiciary's commitment to protect personal liberty and ensuring that courts do not meddle with individual's right to freedom. Liberty is a cornerstone of the Indian Constitution, protected under Article 21, which states that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law. Bail, in this context, serves as a safeguard against arbitrary detention and ensures that an accused remains free unless proven guilty. The Supreme Court has consistently held that bail should be the norm and jail the exception, especially when the accused does not pose a threat to the legal process. The Supreme Court, while overturning the High Court's decision, made critical observations regarding the protection of personal liberty.

The Supreme Court's ruling aligns with a broader judicial philosophy that bail is a right and should not be treated as a privilege granted at the discretion of the courts. The idea is that pre-trial detention should not be punitive but rather a measure to ensure the accused's presence at trial. In numerous judgements, the Court has clarified that unless there is compelling evidence of misconduct, denying bail would violate an individual's fundamental rights. However, courts must balance the rights of the accused with the interests of justice and the safety of society. The Supreme Court's reaffirmation that bail is a fundamental right serves as a significant reminder to lower courts to uphold personal liberty. The judiciary must ensure that bail decisions are guided by legal principles rather than subjective interpretations of the accused's culpability. This observation is likely to have far-reaching implications and may pave the way for several undertrials, especially political activist who are languishing in the jails. For instance as of February 2025, several individuals accused in connection with the 2020 Delhi riots continue to await bail, leading to prolonged incarceration without trial. Notable among them are activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, as well as a politician Tahir Hussain. Despite multiple bail applications, courts have consistently denied them relief. As of October 2024, Khalid had spent over four years in jail without trial, highlighting concerns about prolonged pre-trial detention. The prolonged detention of these individuals have sparked debates about the use of stringent laws like the UAPA and the rights of undertrials in India. These cases exemplify the challenges within the Indian judicial system regarding prolonged pre-trial detention and the balance between ensuring justice and upholding individual rights.



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## PICTALK



A sadhu performs a yogasana at a Ganga ghat, in Varanasi

## The growing threat of radicalisation of Central Asia



NISHAKANT OJHA

The rise of extremist ideologies among Central Asian youth has become a critical security concern, exacerbated by economic hardship and geopolitical conflicts

In recent years, the increasing attraction of Central Asian youth to extremist and Takfiri groups has become a significant security concern for regional governments and international experts. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has only intensified these concerns, with reports indicating that young migrant workers are being recruited for extremist activities, a pattern reminiscent of the recruitment seen during the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The emergence of the Turan Battalion, a group of Turkic-speaking Central Asians fighting alongside Ukrainian forces against Russia, highlights the pressing need to address radicalisation among young people. At the same time, extremist propaganda spread by figures such as Idas Sadegh has contributed to the rising tide of radicalism, further complicating the region's security landscape. The radicalisation of Central Asian youth stems from a combination of social, economic and political factors that make them vulnerable to extremist narratives. Economic hardship is one of the most significant drivers, particularly in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where persistent poverty, high unemployment, and limited socio-economic opportunities push young people toward alternative ideologies. Over three decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan has experienced multiple coups, widespread corruption, and growing dissatisfaction with the secular governance model. Many young people, disillusioned with their governments, seek a sense of purpose and community in extremist ideologies that not only provide identity but often come with financial incentives. Migration also plays a critical role in this radicalisation process. Millions of Central Asians migrate to Russia for work, where they frequently face exploitation, legal difficulties and social alienation. The absence of integration programs and social support leaves them vulnerable to extremist recruiters who exploit their grievances and isolation. These recruiters present extremist ideology as a means of empowerment and justice, a dangerous proposition that finds traction



among individuals struggling to navigate foreign environments with little institutional support. Religious education, or the lack thereof, is another crucial factor in the rise of extremism. In countries like Tajikistan, where Islamic teachings are heavily restricted and even prohibited for individuals under 18, a significant knowledge vacuum has emerged. This vacuum is quickly filled by extremist propaganda, often disseminated via social media. Many young Tajik migrant workers in Russia rely on online content to shape their religious understanding, unknowingly consuming distorted interpretations of Islam that align with extremist beliefs. This unchecked exposure to radical ideologies fuels the rapid spread of extremist sentiment within vulnerable communities. Kazakhstan presents a unique case where extremist ideologies have infiltrated even the highest levels of power. Salafi groups, for instance, gained traction with backing from influential figures such as General Kairat Satybaldy, making the fight against radicalisation more challenging. The entrenchment of these ideologies within powerful circles emboldens extremist sympathisers and complicates government efforts to dismantle radical networks. The rise of social media has dramatically accelerated the spread of extremist propa-



THIS UNCHECKED EXPOSURE TO RADICAL IDEOLOGIES FUELS THE RAPID SPREAD OF EXTREMIST SENTIMENT WITHIN VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES. KAZAKHSTAN PRESENTS A UNIQUE CASE WHERE EXTREMIST IDEOLOGIES HAVE INFILTRATED EVEN THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF POWER

ganda. Extremist groups have mastered the use of digital platforms to reach and recruit young people, leveraging engaging content that is often more accessible and persuasive than state-backed religious teachings. Many of these online materials promise a sense of belonging, purpose, and spiritual rewards, making the path to radicalisation dangerously appealing. Experts emphasise that without a strong digital counter-narrative, governments and moderate religious leaders will continue to struggle in preventing the indoctrination of young minds. The psychological manipulation employed by extremist groups goes beyond simple recruitment, leading some individuals to commit acts of violence, including suicide attacks. The belief that martyrdom ensures a direct path to heaven is a powerful motivator, and extremist groups exploit feelings of injustice, social exclusion, and spiritual ignorance to persuade young people to sacrifice themselves for a perceived greater cause. By manipulating these vulnerabilities, these groups create a mindset in which violence is not only justified but seen as a divine mission. Governments in Central Asia have responded to this growing threat with various strategies, though with mixed success. Initial measures included mass arrests and harsh prison sentences, particularly in

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, this approach has often backfired, as prisons have become breeding grounds for further radicalisation. Inmates exposed to extremist ideologies behind bars frequently emerge more radicalised than before, exacerbating the problem rather than solving it. Recognising the limitations of purely repressive measures, some governments have turned to religious reforms as a more effective means of combating extremism. Uzbekistan, for example, has eased restrictions on religious practices, allowing the call to prayer from loudspeakers and providing greater freedom for Islamic education. These initiatives have had a noticeable impact, significantly reducing extremist recruitment within the country by offering legitimate avenues for religious expression. Education is widely regarded as one of the most effective tools in preventing radicalisation. Experts stress the importance of integrating religious education into school curricula to provide young people with a correct understanding of Islamic principles. Only through a holistic and sustained effort can Central Asian nations protect their youth from extremist influences and work toward a more stable and peaceful future.

(The writer is expert in national security, radicalization, and counterterrorism; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## RIGHT IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT

Madam — The editorial, 'Right is Raising' (24-2-25), presents a balanced fact. The fact is that the Right will collapse due to its own weight and internal contradictions but will manage to overcome the setback for some time. The great economic depression of 1930s, which was saved by applying Keynes theory of equipping the mass with more purchase power. The worst recession in 2008, which marked the collapse of the capitalist order, had to be restored by huge spending of people's money to save the insolvent institutions. The countries are still in the recovery process. But the division Right creates in the society with its unquenching thirst for more and more profits and the avaricious attitude will reach its unbearable stage, compelling the victims to raise their voices for justice and their justified place in the society. This trend is already gaining momentum. The victims are on an active search for an alternate. In some countries, like Sri Lanka, the victims could identify the Left as the right alternate. The process of bringing in a new alternative is too difficult but is still going on. In India, the BJP is given power purely because of the nonavailability of such an alternate national party and not because of the party's communal or far-right policies, as reflected in the last election that denied the party an absolute power. It is inevitable that when the Right reaches its peak it forces the majority to accept Left to be the right choice.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

## KOHLI HITS 51ST CENTURY

Madam— Kohli came out sensational and passed out in the acid test to prove that he is 'King Kohli' for his brilliant tonne against Pakistan in the Champions Trophy at Dubai. What the experience can deliver during the personal crisis for oneself was Kohli's class act when he hit his 51st ODI tonne with 7 fours to his credit in his century and paved the way for Team India's win. One can observe that this is the innings rated much higher in character because this calls for great perseverance to

## BSNL turns profitable after 17 years



In its remarkable comeback, the state-run telecom BSNL has posted a Rs 262 crore profit in the quarter ending December 2024. This is the first profitable quarter since 2007. The company's renewed focus on profitability and its future growth strategy have ultimately led it to profit for the first time in the last 17 years. In a cutthroat competition with private players like Airtel and Jio, the revival of chronically ailing BSNL was not

an easy task. But the government kept its trust in its capabilities and announced a Rs 89,047-crore revival package in 2023. Finance and market gurus termed it a waste of taxpayer money and raised doubts on the wisdom of the government. But the company's efforts on network expansion, cost optimisation and customer-centric service enhancements have now borne fruit.

BSNL has successfully reduced its finance costs and overall expenditure, leading to a decline in losses by over Rs 1,800 crore compared to the previous year. The government should be given credit for this achievement of BSNL, which not only allocated spectrum but also granted funds for strengthening network infrastructure.

Manoj Parashar | Ujjain

stay at the wicket with the will to kill to succeed in his important comeback game. When at the time skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill were dismissed, it is Virat's a kind of vengeful vigour and Shreyas Iyer's sensible batting put team India on top to cross Pakistan's target of 242 by six wickets victory. Pakistan's leg spinner Abrar Ahmed was spectacular when he gave the timely breakthrough but Kohli was completely defensive by not scoring a single boundary against the spinners. He showed his shrewd way to play them with a clear focus that he must prove a 'king is always a king' by his historic tonne to help the Indian flag fly high in the stadium.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

## MELONI EXPOSES GLOBAL HYPOCRISY

Madam — The battle of ideologies has always been a part of the global political stage. But when those who preach neutrality themselves fall into the trap of bias, questions are bound to arise. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni recently made a striking remark on this hypocrisy. She

accurately pointed out - "When I, Trump, and Modi engage in discussions, it is labeled a threat to democracy. But when leftist leaders unite, it is considered a symbol of progress!" This statement is not just an opinion; it exposes the harsh reality of global politics. Why this double standard? Does democracy only mean the acceptance of a single ideology?

Do leaders with differing views not have the right to dialogue and cooperation? If democracy belongs to everyone, then why this discriminatory wall? In today's multipolar world, it is essential to give all perspectives an equal platform. Leaders like Modi, Trump, and Meloni represent the mandates of their respective nations. Ironically, those who claim their dialogue is a threat to democracy are the same people who applaud the alliances of their own ideological counterparts. It is time to recognise this hypocrisy. Democracy is not just for one group-it is for all.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Caught in the middle: The great generational balancing act

Our generation's greatest contribution might be our ability to bridge opposing worldviews. We're creating a new paradigm of family dynamics, blending the two

Remember when we trembled at the sound of our father clearing his throat? When "because I said so" was an unassailable argument, and questioning authority was as foreign as the smartphones that would one day rule our lives? We, the Generation X, find ourselves in an extraordinary position today - delicately balanced between reverential traditions and revolutionary change, between "yes, papa" and "ok, dude." Our generation has witnessed perhaps the most dramatic transformation in human history. We are the last ones who know what it feels like to run home to catch a TV show, to memorise phone numbers, to write letters that took weeks to reach their destination. We're also the first to navigate the brave new world of social media, digital parenting and a workplace that transforms faster than we can update our LinkedIn profiles.



from dinner choices to vacation plans. We find ourselves caught in an amusing dance - instinctively reaching for the authoritarian patterns we inherited, then quickly pivoting to accommodate the more egalitarian expectations of modern parenting. This balancing act becomes even more complex as we care for our aging parents while raising our children. Our parents, products of an era where respect was non-negotiable and tradition was sacrosanct, often struggle to understand why their grandchildren question everything, from religious practices to gender roles. We become translators of sorts, explaining to our parents why their grandchildren need mental health days, while simultaneously trying to teach our children why touching their grandmother's

feet isn't just an empty ritual. The technological revolution has added another layer to this generational sandwich. While we pride ourselves on mastering email and Facebook, our children roll their eyes at our confused attempts to understand TikTok algorithms or cryptocurrency. Meanwhile, we spend weekends teaching our parents how to make video calls or use digital payment apps. We are the bridge generation, fluent in both analog and digital, traditional and modern, hierarchy and equality.

Our generation has had to rewrite the rulebook of life multiple times. The career advice we received - "join a good company and stay loyal" - seems quaint in an age where our children talk about side hustles and personal branding. The values we were taught - sacrifice, stability, saving for tomorrow - clash with the modern emphasis on self-care, work-life balance, and living in the moment. Perhaps the most challenging aspect is managing the emotional landscape. We were raised to believe that mental health issues were character

flaws, that anxiety was just weakness, and that depression could be cured by "going out for a walk." Now, we find ourselves unlearning these notions, supporting our children's therapy journeys, while also gently helping our parents understand that their grandchildren's panic attacks are not just "attention-seeking behaviour."

The irony isn't lost on us. The same generation that was told "log kya kahenge" (what will people say) now has to defend their children's right to be themselves, regardless of what people say. We who learned to suppress our emotions now have to validate our children's feelings while managing our parents' disapproval of this "oversensitive" approach. Yet, there's a unique strength in being this sandwich generation. We understand both worlds intimately. We can appreciate our parents' wisdom while embracing our children's progressive ideas. We can see how tradition provides roots while change enables growth.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



## FIRST COLUMN

## SHIVARATRI: THE NIGHT OF SHIVA AND SHAKTI

On this sacred night, one can ignite the power of Shiv and Shakti within



ASHWANI GURUJI

Shivratri is the night of Shiv and Shakti, the night of merger, the night of completeness - Understanding this is a sadhana... which can span lifetimes or be accomplished in a moment just, a beautiful journey bestowing myriad siddhis en route... Shiv is an experience. This experience begins at the feet of the Guru and unfolds as per the capacity of the sadhak. Ravan composed the Shiv Tandav Stotram to describe it. Adi Shankaracharya said 'na paapam, na punyam, na saukham, na daukham...' to describe what it's not. These were the Shiv sadhaks of finest quality, a rare phenomenon. What they described was their experience of Shiv; Shiv however is beyond description, for what is limitless cannot be bound in words and meanings. So no amount of reading and writing can grant you the experience, to get that experience you need to tread the path of sadhana, under a Guru.

The first experience of Shiv is the Shakti of Guru. As you walk the path shown by Guru, something that you want manifests in your life. It could be health, relationship, job etc. That becomes your experience of the Shiv tatva - that which has manifested the un-manifested. There are as many examples of such manifestations at Dhyan Ashram in present times as there are narratives from the past of sadhaks who were able to get the boon they desired.

That 'boon' or manifested desire, however, is only an aspect of Shiv. 90 per cent of the people were satisfied with the experience and their focus shifted from Shiv to that 'thing' that they wanted. So the experience of Shiv for them gets limited to that. A thousand names of Shiv, stem from here. Those who don't let their focus shift, move further into the dimension of Shiv. Next, the subtler siddhis of yog start manifesting - clairvoyance, clairaudience, premonition, extrasensory perceptions etc. Many take this to be the ultimate and end their experience here. They immerse themselves in the siddhis and powers so acquired and forget that this too is just an aspect.



The finer sadhaks progress ahead where they start interacting with the energies that run creation, aiding and assisting them in the process of Creation. Mentioned above are just some siddhis, the domain of Shiv however is endless. The key to accessing it is vairagya (detachment). The moment one gets attached to any aspect of Shiv or Siddhi that it bestows, the upward progression stops. Vairagya is possible only when one has the gyan of reality and gyan is possible only when one can sit in dhyan. Dhyan happens only when one has accumulated good karmas, which are acquired from seva or service. Seva is the first step. It is through seva that one increases the size of their container or the experience of Shiv that one can hold.

This Shivratri, embark on the journey to increasing the size of your container... to experience Shiv. Shiv is real, not a myth. Shiv is all-encompassing. All are accepted in the abode of Shiv - bhoot, pret, pisach, yaksh, kinnar, naag, dev, danav and humans. You don't have to be of a special caste to experience the various dimensions of Shiv. Shivratri is the night of Shiv and Shakti, the night of merger, the night of completeness. Guru, on the night of Shivratri, awakens the power of Shiv and Shakti in each and everyone who follows the path shown, without exceptions. In my journey of 25 years,

I have yet to come across a sadhak who under Guru Sanidhya has not experienced Shiv. The seva and sadhana performed on this night grant one the experiences and siddhis of many lifetimes, in just one night. It is a 100 per cent science, not a religion. Try and test it for yourself.

(The writer is a spiritual guru; views are personal)

## Women pioneering change in Indian higher education



SUJATHA KSHIRSAGAR

Women academic leaders and entrepreneurs are not only shaping institutions but also fueling India's socio-economic growth with their grit and determination

Women are leading from the front today - in academics or education, media, healthcare, armed forces and many other fields. The country is witnessing a pivotal shift in how women leaders were perceived before. Indian higher education landscape is also being driven by a strong women-led force, laying the foundation of the nation's progress, unlocking opportunities for socio-economic growth, self-reliance and an improved quality of life. Needless to say, education is essential for women's empowerment in the journey to Viksit Bharat. Educated women drive change, uplift families, strengthen communities and fuel national progress, creating a lasting impact for future generations.

## The current scenario and notable mentions

Indian higher education remains male-dominated when it comes to leadership, even as women are playing a significant role, data suggests. In 2021, women headed just 9.55 per cent of Indian higher educational institutions, whereas men headed 89.57 per cent. This makes more inclusive representation of females in academic leadership extremely important. If we compare India with the international landscape, it still has a huge gap to fill. Internationally, 25 per cent of leadership positions in the top 200 universities globally are occupied by women.

The good news is that the picture is drastically changing, especially over the last few years. Even in the past, the country has seen visionary women leaders like Savitribai Phule, a pioneering social reformer who, alongside her husband Jyotirao Phule, established India's first school for girls in 1848, championing women's education and social justice.

Other notable and pragmatic women leaders who are marking a significant shift in higher education include Ms Rashmi Mittal, Pro-Chancellor, of Lovely Professional University, and Dr Uma Bhardwaj, Vice-Chancellor, of Noida International University. Other honourable mentions include Dr Madhu Chitkara, Pro-Chancellor at Chitkara University and a Higher Education entrepreneur with a vast experience of 42 years, who has built a successful university from scratch; Dr. Ananya Mukherjee, Vice-Chancellor of Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR, recognised as an Institution of Eminence.

Apart from that, women leaders in business and entrepreneurial space have also inspired aspiring Indian youth. Notable mentions include Kiran Mazumdar Shaw and Indra Nooyi. Women leaders are transforming Indian higher education through inclusive environments and innovation. More women in leadership positions increase diversity and bring new perspectives to academia. Through their efforts, they are paving the way for future generations to have a more progressive and equitable educational landscape in India.

## The Challenges Faced by Women Leaders in Academia

The challenges for women leaders include social stereotypes at one end and the barriers of an institution at the other. Several women are even still facing serious prejudices against them regarding their potential as leaders, especially in traditional fields. Women lack opportunities to get mentors and network for their professional advancement.

The chief issues for women leaders world-



APART FROM THAT, WOMEN LEADERS IN BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SPACE HAVE ALSO INSPIRED ASPIRING INDIAN YOUTH. NOTABLE MENTIONS INCLUDE KIRAN MAZUMDAR SHAW AND INDRA NOOYI. WOMEN LEADERS ARE TRANSFORMING INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND INNOVATION

wide relate to work-life balance and insufficient presence in senior leadership positions. India has taken a holistic approach to orient and train women faculty across the country through the University Grants Commission (UGC).

These initiatives are designed to prepare women for leadership roles, equipping them with the right skills and knowledge. Other countries have programs that focus on leadership training and inclusivity to break barriers for women in academia. Some countries have witnessed an impressive increase in the number of women represented in academia, but the world still has a long way to go, including India.

Women as Educators and Leaders Empowerment in education is not merely a question of access; it involves equipping women with the role of teachers, leaders, and models. An increased number of women in schools and colleges has acted as a motivating force for girls to achieve excellence in academics. Diverse viewpoints among women in higher education leadership institutions create an inclusive and innovative atmosphere.

Female professors have formed the backbone for progressive educational policy and research quality. Many critical departments and significant research initiatives now have women running them, evidence of their burgeoning influence in university life.

Programmes and fellowships dedicated to providing opportunities for girls and women, especially in these STEM fields, have helped a culture of creativity and excellence flourish within these disciplines. At present, there are some of India's most high-profile universities and institutions, with women at the helm, spearheading the trend of making education more accessible and equitable. Women leaders are

playing an important role in academics.

For instance, women-led institutions, like competitive exam coaching institutions, have been responsible for guiding thousands of students in shaping their aspirations. Thus, it is clear that women leaders can bring transformational change in education and can be great change managers.

## Women as Catalysts or Agents of Change

Women are educators and agents of change. They are innovators who are good leaders in filling knowledge gaps, fostering inclusivity, and empowering communities. Their contribution to a forceful, solution-focused, and responsive workforce is particularly indispensable for the simple reason that it is tantamount to ensuring not only economic prosperity but also social justice.

The most deep-seated effect of women in education has been in adult literacy and skill development. Women educators have led the process of increasing rural and marginalised communities' literacy rates, greatly improving their socio-economic conditions. Female entrepreneurs also are revolutionising education delivery by coming up with innovative solutions for diverse learners across India.

EdTech platforms of female founders have promoted flexible models, digital classroom applications, and AI-based analytics with their introduction; thereby, performance from students at high-quality education gets scaled up because access to more is also made easily feasible. Social development and the tech revolution are mutually supporting each other here.

The Future of Women's Leadership in Higher Education Increasing the number of women

leaders in higher education is not only about gender equality; it is a strategic imperative for India's progress.

Women leaders in higher education institutions bring diverse perspectives and transformative decision-making into academic administration, which drives innovation and excellence. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has recognised the importance of women's participation in academia and thus proposed reforms, to ensure gender inclusivity. Through the incorporation of leadership training under the framework of higher education and initiating mentorship opportunities, India can usher in an optimum pipeline of women academic leaders. Furthermore, the vision of Viksit Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat is in line with the very need to absorb India's demographic dividend. Education is at the heart of this vision, and empowering women as educators and leaders would be crucial in realising India's aspiration to become Vishwaguru—that is, a global leader in innovation and knowledge.

## Conclusion

Women leaders are undeniably shaping the future of Indian higher education. Despite all existing challenges, their excellence is bringing innumerable positive transformations within the present academia, which will lead to a more inclusive, progressive, and innovative educational landscape. The overall transformation of Indian education and the socio-economic liberalization of India can be achieved by removing all barriers to leadership, implementing supportive policies, and championing women's participation in higher education.

(The writer is President at Career Launcher; views are personal)

## Maha Kumbh 2025: A grand confluence of tradition, technology and transformation

IIT Kanpur research highlights how government initiatives are shaping the Mela—blending ancient traditions with modern infrastructure to enhance accessibility and efficiency

The Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj draws millions of pilgrims worldwide to the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. As this grand spiritual event unfolds, an ongoing IIT Kanpur study provides real-time insights into stakeholder experiences. This research examines how government initiatives shape pilgrim experiences, blending ancient traditions with modern technology.

For devotees, the Mela remains a deeply spiritual journey, with bathing in the Triveni Sangam seen as a path to salvation. While age-old rituals and processions inspire awe, an extensive logistical network operates behind the scenes to manage massive crowds. A key focus of the study is



PRADIP SWARNAKAR

transportation. With pilgrims arriving from across India and abroad, the government's commitment to improving accessibility is evident. Nearly 40 per cent of attendees rely on public transportation, primarily trains and buses. Despite expanded shuttle services and improved parking facilities, feedback is mixed. While most find transportation satisfacto-

ry, some report overcrowding and delays during peak hours. A hallmark of Maha Kumbh 2025 is its technological integration, earning it the title "Digital Maha Kumbh." Mobile apps, e-wallets, and real-time crowd monitoring enhance the experience for pilgrims and organisers. Many appreciate online registration, virtual darshan booking, and real-time updates on crowd density, transport, and amenities.

These tools streamline accessibility, particularly for international visitors and those from remote areas. However, bridging the digital divide remains a challenge. While tech-savvy pilgrims adapt easily, older attendees and those from rural regions often struggle with digital platforms.

Some report difficulties using smartphones or accessing the internet, highlighting the need for alternative engagement methods. Feedback underscores the importance of inclusive communication strategies blending digital and traditional approaches.

Security and crowd management are also key concerns. Managing millions of attendees in Kumbh Mela is a massive undertaking. The government has deployed extensive security personnel, CCTV surveillance, and designated safe zones, including lifeguard-staffed bathing areas. Nearly 93 per cent of respondents feel secure within the Mela's vast grounds, affirming these measures' effectiveness. However, congestion near ghats causes anxiety among some pilgrims,



emphasizing the need for refined crowd management as the event progresses.

Health and sanitation remain top priorities. Overall, 81 per cent of respondents find sanitation facilities adequate, reflecting high satisfaction with cleanliness. Temporary medical camps and mobile health units ensure pilgrims' wellbeing, yet restroom overcrowding persists during peak

hours. Despite thousands of cleaning staff and waste management facilities, additional measures are needed to maintain hygiene during busy periods. These findings highlight commendable efforts while emphasising the need for continued improvements.

Inclusivity is also a focus, with the government enhancing accessibility for differently-abled individuals and senior citizens. Dedicated pathways, toilets, and designated spaces reflect a commitment to inclusive participation. The widely appreciated 'Lost and Found' services further ease concerns, helping separated families navigate the crowd more efficiently. Environmental impact remains a major concern. The government has introduced eco-friendly initiatives, includ-

ing waste segregation, solar-powered lighting and over 25,000 trash bins to reduce the ecological footprint.

Despite these efforts, concerns persist over plastic use and non-biodegradable waste. While 62 per cent of respondents recognise sustainability progress, stronger awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement of eco-friendly practices are needed.

The ongoing study suggests green initiatives must be reinforced through greater public education on waste management and sustainability. As the IIT Kanpur study continues to document stakeholder experiences, the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is a testament to the evolving nature of large-scale spiritual events. Government initiatives have improved effi-

ciency, security, and inclusivity. Stakeholder feedback highlights the need to refine transportation, expand digital inclusion, enhance crowd management, and address environmental concerns.

The success of the Mela hinges not only on preserving spiritual traditions but also on integrating modern infrastructure, technology, and inclusive governance. More than a massive gathering, the Maha Kumbh exemplifies how government initiatives can transform spiritual events into safer, more efficient, and enriching experiences. As it unfolds, it remains a dynamic confluence of tradition, technology and transformation.

(The author is a professor of Sociology at IIT Kanpur. Views expressed are personal)

## IN BRIEF



### Gold jumps Rs 250 to Rs 89,350

Gold prices jumped by Rs 250 to Rs 89,350 per 10 grams on Tuesday extending gains for the second day amid depreciation in rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose by Rs 250 to Rs 88,950 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,700 per 10 grams. On February 20, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity hit all-time highs of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams, respectively. However, silver prices slipped below the Rs 1 lakh mark, falling by Rs 500 to Rs 99,500 per kg. "Silver fell due to weakness in the industrial metals and rebound in the dollar index. Global equity markets are also struggling due to Trump's tariff fears and pressure on industrial metals but reversal in the US Treasury yields could support silver prices at lower levels," Rahul Kalantri, VP Commodities at Mehta Equities Ltd, said. On Tuesday, the rupee fell sharply by 51 paise to settle at 87.23 (provisional) against the US dollar due to month-end dollar demand by importers amid uncertainty over US trade tariffs.



### Karnataka to host GAFX 2025 from tomorrow

Bengaluru GAFX, India's premier AVGC-XR Conference—a platform for the Animation, VFX, Gaming, and Comics communities—organised by the ITBT department of the Karnataka Government, will kick off on February 27, officials said on Tuesday. The AVGC-XR Conference (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality), scheduled from February 27 to March 1, aims to foster innovation, facilitate knowledge-sharing, and encourage strategic collaborations, they said. According to an official statement, with an anticipated attendance of over 20,000—double that of past editions—this year's event is poised to be the most influential gathering for creators, developers, investors, studios, and enthusiasts from across the AVGC-XR ecosystem. The theme for GAFX 2025 is "The Future of Immersion: Experience. Explore. Disrupt". The Government of Karnataka acts as an enabler for the digital media industry, fostering the full spectrum from skills and education to studios, from startups to global leaders, all of whom leverage the state's innovation ecosystem.



### GEG eyes Rs 2,000 cr revenue from energy solutions biz

Godrej Enterprises Group (GEG) is eyeing revenue of Rs 2,000 crore from its energy solutions business over the next three years on the back of data centre growth and other factors, the company said on Tuesday. According to GEG, the order book for the current year stands at over Rs 2,400 crore for reinforcing its leadership in clean energy power transmission, particularly in the 400kV and 765kV segments. India is witnessing a rapid transformation in its energy and digital infrastructure, said GEG, with data centre capacity projected to grow 30 per cent annually across major cities and a strong national focus on sustainable energy solutions. "India's energy landscape is undergoing a historic transformation, driven by the urgent need for sustainability and self-reliance. As a homegrown conglomerate committed to nation-building, we are strengthening the country's power infrastructure with high-capacity transmission solutions," said Raghavendra Mirji, Executive vice president of GEG.

## 'India has lower exposure to US tariffs than APAC peers'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Ratings on Tuesday said India has a lower overall exposure to the US relative to others in the APAC region, although certain sectors such as food, textiles and pharmaceutical products face risks.

Moody's said most companies in its rated portfolio are domestic-focused with limited exposure to the US market.

To mitigate pressure from reciprocal tariffs, the US and India are reportedly engaged in talks to lower import tariffs on select US products, increase market access for US farm products and increase US energy purchases, while seeking to initiate a trade deal by the fall of 2025.

Across APAC, developing countries like India, Vietnam and Thailand have among the widest rate differentials relative to the US, Moody's said.

It said electronics, motor vehicles, food and textiles are the most exposed sectors. In addition to the hit from lower export demand, a key risk facing emerging economies in the region is that those aiming to nurture an export-led growth model similar to



To mitigate pressure from reciprocal tariffs, the US and India are reportedly engaged in talks to lower import tariffs on select US products, increase market access for US farm products and increase US energy purchases, while seeking to initiate a trade deal by the fall of 2025

China and other advanced APAC economies will find it difficult to compete in an increasingly interventionist trade environment.

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

The new US administration has already enacted additional 10 per cent tariffs on imports from China and 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminium.

Moody's said while the US is an overall net exporter of food, feeds and industrial supplies to APAC, it is a net importer of capital goods,

automotive vehicles and parts and consumer goods.

Reciprocal tariffs will have an impact on a number of key sectors in APAC with exposure to US final demand, such as computer and electronic products, chemicals, motor vehicles, as well as food, textiles and wood products.

"India has a lower overall exposure relative to most others in the region, although certain sectors such as food and textiles as well as pharmaceutical products face risks," Moody's Ratings said.

The rating agency said APAC's overall policy response will be crucial in

determining the full impact on credit strength.

"We expect governments will likely act pragmatically, aiming to avoid escalation with the US, preferring to negotiate on a bilateral basis, as shown by recent developments," Moody's said.

Given a more restrictive trading environment, currencies of targeted APAC economies could face continued downward pressure given potentially higher capital outflows and a likely stronger US dollar, with regional central banks having a much narrower window for easing domestic monetary policies to support economic growth.

## ADVANTAGE ASSAM SUMMIT

### Investment proposals worth over Rs 90,000 signed

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Investment proposals worth over Rs 90,000 crore were signed on the first day of the Advantage Assam business summit on Tuesday, with the figure expected to increase substantially by the end of the two-day meet, a senior official said.

The MoUs pledging investment in the north-eastern state have been signed with several top PSUs and private companies, while non-financial MoUs have been inked with foreign entities.

The agreements signed so far include a Rs 30,000 crore-pact with Tata Power, Rs 7,000 crore one with JSW Group, Rs 5,850 crore with Greenko Energies Pvt Ltd, Rs 5,000 crore MoU with Adani Total Gas Ltd, Rs 3,000 crore with PNB Investment Services Ltd and Rs 2,100 crore pact with Essar Group, he said.

Among the PSUs that signed

major MoUs during the day are OIL, pledging investment of Rs 23,300 crore, and an investment proposal of Rs 10,711 crore by the Numaligarh Refinery, he said.

"More than 30 MoUs have been signed so far and many more are likely to be signed in the next few hours. There are some major announcements



tomorrow as well," the state government official said.

He said that private companies have signed agreements worth more than Rs 53,000 crore, while the state-run entities have inked pledges for pumping in over Rs 35,000 crore in Assam

### Create ecosystem for banks to offer equity support to startups: Setty

PNS ■ MUMBAI

SBI Chairman C S Setty on Tuesday pitched for creating an "ecosystem" where banks can offer "equity support" to startups in the country.

He said the government is also looking at a guarantee scheme where support for loans up to Rs 100 crore will be provided to the startups.

"We need to work out an ecosystem where the equity support from the banking system is also available to the startups," Setty said, speaking at the annual NTLF event organized by tech industry lobby grouping Nasscom here.

Banks are not allowed to offer equity support to startups at present, and can only offer debt support.

Setty said the country's largest lender has been active on the debt support front when it comes to startups, pointing out that it lends directly to such enterprises or through dedicated funds.

It also has seven dedicated branches across the country which offer dedicated banking

support and loans to the start-up ecosystem, which is the third largest globally.

Setty said the fledgling fintechs of the country are not able to handle the traffic which is generated by SBI, pointing out that the "standards of operations" are not the same when the traffic grows.

SBI's engagement with the fintechs is one of the largest, he said, adding that it has 33 partnerships for the Yono app alone.

Meanwhile, Setty said SBI is "working very seriously" to improve its agril loan vertical, where it will be using satellite data and other structured and unstructured data sets to better serve the farmers. The solution will also go into crop pattern data for a particular region in its analysis, he added.

Speaking to the technology industry leaders, Setty said SBI has been the first lender in the country to set up a resilience operations centre (ROC) along the lines of security ops centre, and hinted that the RBI is planning to make a ROC an industry-wide practice.



### EPFO net members addition grows to 16.05 lakh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO added 16.05 lakh net new members in December, which is 9.69 per cent higher compared to November 2024, as per the payroll data released on Tuesday.

Further, a labour ministry statement said there was a growth of 2.74 per cent in net payroll additions compared to December 2023.

The Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) has released provisional payroll data for December 2024, showing a net addition of 16.05 lakh members.

An increase of 9.69 per cent was registered in net payroll addition during December 2024 as compared to the previous month.

The data showed that EPFO enrolled around 8.47 lakh new subscribers in December 2024. The new subscribers' addition shows growth of 0.73 per cent from December 2023, the ministry said.

This surge in new subscribers can be attributed to growing employment opportunities, increased awareness of employee benefits, and EPFO's successful outreach programmes.

### Sensex bounces back after 5-day slump

Nifty ends marginally lower

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex recovered 147 points in a range-bound trade on Tuesday, ending its five-day slide on the back of buying in financial and FMCG shares.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.71 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 74,602.12 with 17 of its constituents ending higher and 13 lower. During the day, it rallied 330.67 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,785.08.

The broader Nifty of NSE, however, fell for the sixth day slipping by 5.80 points or 0.03 per cent to finish at 22,547.55 due to fag-end selling in pharma, metal and IT shares.

Weak Asian and US markets along with foreign fund outflows made investors risk-averse, analysts said.

Among Sensex shares, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Zomato, Nestle, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti and Titan were the biggest gainers.

Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

In the last five trading ses-



ahead of expiry this week," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.13 per cent to USD 74.68 a barrel.

"The domestic market experienced a range-bound trading session in anticipation of key economic data releases this week, alongside the monthly expiry.

"Concerns over high valuations led to continued declines in small and midcap stocks. Market sentiment is expected to remain cautious in the near term due to persistent pressure on the INR, ongoing FII outflows, and tariff-related developments," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Key macroeconomic indicators, including the US Core PCE and GDP data for both the US and India, will be instrumental in shaping expectations for the central bank's future monetary policy, Nair added.

The Sensex had tanked 856.65 points, or 1.14 per cent, to settle at 74,544.41 on Monday while the Nifty declined 242.55 points, or 1.06 per cent, to 22,553.35.

### Centre: Set up skill centres in-house

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Centre has urged the corporate sector to set up skill centres in-house so that the employability of graduating youth is improved and the overall hiring scenario is boosted, an official said on Tuesday.

Ministry of Corporate Affairs Secretary Deepthi Gaur Mukherjee said that there is a need to upscale the numbers of skilled youth in society.

Under the Prime Minister Internship Scheme (PMIS) launched in 2024, the target is to provide skills to 1.25 lakh youth in the pilot phase and one crore over the next five years.

Speaking at an event organised by CII here, Mukherjee said, "The response from companies is very encouraging and



there is a need to upscale the numbers. The companies should set up skilling cells in-house so that the quantum of the employable workforce increases."

The internship programme under PMIS has been made a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) with the view

to provide flexibility.

"This internship programme is a part of CSR and not a normal HR function. This will provide flexibility to the programme. Under the scheme, the industry will benefit from getting employable workforce which will contribute to the society," she said.

Mukherjee said that 50 per cent of the population in India is below the age of 28 years.

"This is a huge demographic dividend. If the youth of the country are not skilled, the demographic dividend will turn into a demographic nightmare," the official said.

She said the internship programme will help the youth learn teamwork and improve communication skills.

### 'MP gets Rs 30.77 lakh cr investment commitments'

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh has received investment commitments for a record Rs 30.77 lakh crore at the end of its two-day investor summit, chief minister Mohan Yadav said on Tuesday at the 8th edition of Invest Madhya Pradesh Summit aimed at attracting investments to the state and promoting its industrial growth.

This summit served as a platform to showcase the state's potential for business and investment, highlighting its strategic advantages, economic opportunities, and industrial capabilities.

"Till now we have signed MoUs for Rs 30.77 lakh crore," he said at the valedictory session of the event here.

The primary objective of the summit is to promote Madhya Pradesh as a top destination for investments across various sectors, including manufacturing, infrastructure, agriculture, renewable energy, technology, and services. And it did get commitments from big players.

On Monday, the MP Global Investors Summit began with big-ticket announcements -- with the state going all out to

woo global investors and large business houses to invest in the MP's limitless potential.

Over a dozen companies including billionaire Gautam Adani's group, Reliance Industries and state-owned power producer NTPC committed to invest about Rs 4 lakh crore across businesses in Madhya Pradesh.

While Adani promised Rs 1.10 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.

NTPC-NGEL (NTPC Green Energy Ltd) and M P P G C L (Madhya Pradesh Power



Generation Company Ltd) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for 20 GW worth of renewable power generation in the state, with an intent to invest Rs 1,20,000 crore in the energy sector.

Renewable energy player Avaada plans to invest Rs 50,000 crore in setting up solar, wind, and pump hydro storage and battery storage projects and solar photovoltaic module manufacturing facility, its MD Vineet Mittal said.

## 'India, UK trade agreement 'genuinely beneficial' for both'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the United Kingdom is "genuinely beneficial" to both countries as it would help boost bilateral trade and investments, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds said on Tuesday.

India and the UK on Monday announced resumption of negotiations for the FTA, which is expected to double or even triple bilateral trade from the current USD 20 billion in the next 10 years.

Reynolds met Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to discuss about the agreement.

After concluding the two-day talks with the Indian minister, Reynolds said: "This is about an agreement which is genuinely beneficial to both countries. That is possible. That's the prize. Getting it right is what we are here to do, and that's what we are working very hard towards".

Terming it a "substantial" agreement, he said these pacts make a "real difference if you" get them right.

The negotiations are resum-



ing after a gap of over eight months. The talks are happening following the UK general elections, which resulted in the Labour Party coming to power. The talks were launched on

January 13, 2022.

"I am very encouraged by the progress we have been able to make," Reynolds told PTI.

The two countries are actively negotiating at three

different fronts - FTA, bilateral investment treaty (BIT), and a Double Contribution Convention Agreement.

"I gave assurances about the strengths of our commitment to the FTA and the investment treaty..." the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade added.

Further, he noted that the two economies are complementary in terms of services, and goods.

"This (India) is such an important market for UK goods," he said adding huge demand is also there in the UK for Indian goods and services.



# what's brewing?

## JOHN ABRAHAM ON BEING OBJECTIFIED FOR HIS PHYSIQUE

With over two decades in the film industry, John Abraham has carved a niche for himself with his remarkable body transformations, exceptional physique, and signature eight-pack abs. From *Jism* and *Dostana* to his role in *Pathaan*, the actor has consistently impressed audiences. However, John has now opened up about feeling objectified for his body and how he navigated this by choosing scripts that emphasized strong storytelling.

In a latest interview, John candidly shared his thoughts on being perceived primarily for his looks. "I did feel objectified. In fact, I was often told, 'John, you are probably the only man who can be objectified by women.' In a strange way, I didn't feel bad about it—I took it as a compliment. But we are constantly battling the idea that appearance matters more than performance," he admitted.

Recognising the importance of striking a balance between his on-screen image and meaningful narratives, John consciously picked projects that focused on strong writing. He cited films like *Madras Cafe*, *Kabul Express*, *Taxi No. 9211* and *No Smoking* as examples of projects that allowed him to showcase his acting skills beyond his physical appeal.

John also spoke about his evolving approach to filmmaking and his emphasis on good writing. Addressing whether his upcoming film *The Diplomat* aligns with this shift, he explained, "For any film I produce or act in, I prioritise writing because that is the foundation of a great film. Once the script is well-structured, delivering impactful performances becomes natural. Initially, my career revolved around physique and body image. Does an audience for that still exist? Absolutely! A large section of viewers still enjoys that, and I love doing it too. But there's also a growing audience that values strong content, and I respect that."

John's next film, *The Diplomat*, sees him stepping into the shoes of real-life Indian diplomat J.P. Singh. The film, which promises to be a gripping political thriller, is set to hit theatres on March 7.



## Govinda and Sunita Ahuja's marriage under scrutiny Separation rumours or just gossip?

Bollywood veteran Govinda and his wife Sunita Ahuja have been together for nearly 37 years, but the on-going speculation suggests trouble in paradise. Reports claim the couple has been living separately for some time, fuelling rumours of an impending split. However, neither Govinda nor Sunita has made any official statements regarding the matter. Meanwhile, Govinda's secretary has stepped forward to deny the claims, calling them exaggerated and baseless.

According to reports, one of the speculated reasons behind the alleged distance between Govinda and Sunita is the actor's rumoured association with a 30-year-old Marathi actress. While no names have been revealed, sources suggest that this connection could be adding to the growing whispers of discord in their marriage.

Addressing the speculation, Govinda's secretary Shashi Sinha firmly dismissed the reports stating, "There is no truth to these rumours. I am always with Govinda Ji and nothing of this sort is happening. Sunita Ji must have said something in an interview that was blown out of proportion, leading to unnecessary gossip." Previously, in an interview, Sunita Ahuja had spoken about their living situation, mentioning that they own two homes—her bungalow is located directly opposite Govinda's flat. She explained that due to his busy work schedule, the actor often stays out late, which has led to their separate living arrangements.

Following the surge in speculation, Sunita addressed the rumours once again, firmly denying any talk of separation. Sharing her perspective on



marriage, Sunita humorously likened men to the game of cricket, saying, "Sometimes unpredictable, but always worth nurturing." She further joked, "If you can't hold them, hit them!"—a playful nod to her firm yet affectionate approach to their long-standing marriage.

Previously, addressing these rumours during a visit to Shirdi, Sunita clarified her stance stating, "Nobody can separate us. I have a lot of fun with him. There are people who try to break homes, sometimes more than outsiders. But I won't let anyone do that."

## Dil Dosti Aur Dogs highlights the transformative power of canine companionship

The trailer of the upcoming streaming movie *Dil Dosti Aur Dogs* was unveiled on Tuesday. It promises a wholesome narrative exploring the transformative role that dogs play in our lives.

Set in the scenic locales of Goa, the film portrays the unique bond between humans and dogs, highlighting their impact on emotions and relationships.

The film stars Neena Gupta, Masumeh Makhija, Sharad Kelkar, Kunaal Roy Kapur, Keerti Kelkar, Tinu Anand, Ehan Bhat and Tridha Chaudhary.

Talking about the film, Neena Gupta said, "Playing this character was a deeply emotional experience for me. She's a woman who has suppressed her passion and distanced herself from the world, but through an unexpected companion, she learns that life still has so much to offer. It's a beautiful journey of rediscovery, and I connected with it on a personal level."

She further mentioned, "Working with Viral Shah was an absolute delight as he has such a clear vision and yet allows us the creative space to truly own our characters. The entire cast brought so much warmth to the set and it felt like a family. I especially



loved sharing the screen with my incredible co-stars, each bringing something unique to the story. I can't wait for audiences to experience this heartwarming journey and now, with *Dil Dosti Aur Dogs* premiering on JioHotstar, I couldn't be more thrilled."

The film is directed by the National Award-winning filmmaker Viral Shah, and is produced by Jyoti Deshpande, Masumeh Makhija, and Viral Shah under the production houses of Jio Studios and The Creative Tribe.

Sharad Kelkar, who essays the character of Sanjay, shared "Sharing screen space with Keerti was special, but what touched me the most was my bond with my on-screen daughter. It made me reflect on my relationship with my real daughter and brought us even closer. Working with dogs on set was such a joyful experience, it reminded me how

## PARINEETI CHOPRA TO STAR IN NETFLIX'S UPCOMING MYSTERY THRILLER SERIES

Actor Parineeti Chopra is set to star in an upcoming mystery thriller series on Netflix. The yet untitled project, to be directed by Rensil D'Silva, marks another collaboration of Parineeti with the streaming platform after her 2024 film *Amar Singh Chamkila* with Diljit Dosanjh. The series is produced by Siddharth P Malhotra and also stars Tahir Raj Bhasin, Anup Soni, Jennifer Winget and Chaitannya Choudhry. Making the announcement official, Parineeti shared the pictures of the cast and wrote the caption: "Some mysteries don't just unfold—they pull you in, keep you guessing and refuse to let go. A new mystery thriller is in the making! Can't wait for you all to see this labour of love from Team Netflix and us, when it's ready. Shooting has begun."

Siddharth and Rensil, who are also creators of the series, said in a joint statement they are thrilled to collaborate on the project. "Working with Netflix has allowed us the creative freedom to push boundaries and bring a unique narrative to life. With a cast as talented as this and Parineeti choosing to foray into series with our production, we are excited for what lies ahead and cannot wait for the world to watch the mystery unfold," their statement read.



## Preity Zinta slams loan allegations, calls them 'completely untrue'

Bollywood actress Preity Zinta has expressed her fury over recent allegations linking her to a Rs. 18 crore loan write-off by the New India Cooperative Bank. The actress took to X (formerly Twitter) to vehemently deny the claims, calling them "completely untrue." Preity made it clear that no loan had been written off under her name by the troubled bank.

In a series of tweets, Preity Zinta reacted to the misinformation circulating about her. She shared her frustration over the spread of false reports, stating, "So much misinformation is going around but thank God for social media and thank God for X!" She also pointed out how, throughout her career, respected journalists have often reported incorrect stories without any follow-up or corrections. Zinta revealed that she had even gone to court multiple times to fight such false allegations.

"I have spent a tonne of money fighting cases that drag on and on," she wrote. The actress further emphasised the importance of holding journalists accountable for their actions, noting that she will no longer remain silent. "I'm definitely going to start naming all these



journalists that write articles without following up or investigating the stories," she stated. She specifically called out journalist Suchetadala, urging them to contact her directly before mentioning her name in such reports.

Preity Zinta firmly rejected the claims that the New India Cooperative Bank had written off an Rs. 18 crore loan under her name. "No one wrote off anything

or any loan for me," she said in her tweet. Zinta also pointed out the role of misinformation being spread by certain political parties or their representatives, accusing them of using her name for clickbait and vile gossip.

For further clarity, she added that the loan in question had been taken and fully paid back over 10 years ago. "I'm shocked that a political party or their representative is promoting fake news & indulging in vile gossip using my name and images," Zinta concluded.

On a personal note, Preity Zinta recently shared her experience at the Maha Kumbh, a spiritual event in India. Posting pictures from the event, the actress expressed her reverence for the occasion with the caption, "All roads lead to the Maha Kumbh. Satyam Shivam Sundaram."

On the professional front, Preity Zinta is making headlines as she prepares for her much-anticipated return to Bollywood. She is set to star in Rajkumar Santoshi's *Lahore 1947*, which has generated excitement among fans awaiting her comeback to the silver screen after a hiatus.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



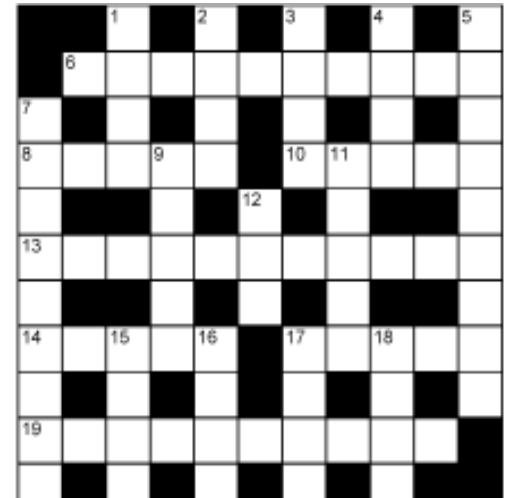
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU

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

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

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

- 6 A flying machine
- 8 Light a fire with this
- 10 Our planet
- 13 In a coma
- 14 A feeling of rage
- 17 Less
- 19 Carrying on
- 11 Living
- 12 Donkey
- 15 Firearms
- 16 Wet weather
- 17 The number in a quartet
- 18 A drink made from grape juice

#### DOWN

- 1 Remaining
- 2 Wealthy
- 3 Sleep lightly
- 4 Mix with a spoon
- 5 A large group of musicians
- 7 An emergency vehicle
- 9 Nearby



## Leading charge in global health and wellness

**A** change on a global scale is underway. As a leader in responsible nutrition innovation, Nutrifly Today celebrates five years of revolutionising the global nutraceutical market with innovative AI-driven product development, industry-first projects and a steadfast dedication to sustainable and ethical nutrition. With the opening of its office in Somerset, New Jersey, it is also making its US debut, further solidifying its position as a major player in the North American market and demonstrating its ambitious global expansion. With its exclusive AI-powered platform, NutriflyGenie, it has been transforming the production of nutraceutical products since its founding in 2020. The company has made India a global leader in health solutions by empowering companies all over the world to design and introduce scientifically proven, legally compliant nutrition products with previously unheard-of efficiency. Beyond innovations in technology, it has inspired audience with a vision and influence, helping to shape the future of responsible nutrition. It has brought together industry executives, regulators and policymakers through its flagship C-Suite Sumflex project to promote meaningful conversations on sustainability, ethical product creation and global nutrition standards. Policies that strike a balance between responsible innovation and corporate expansion have been shaped in large part by this program. The academy has become a leading platform for upskilling experts in the nutraceutical industry, thereby enhancing industry capacity. It provides a variety of training courses and programs with an emphasis on scientific rigour, compliance and expertise. It is fostering the next wave of creative thinkers dedicated to excellence and moral accountability in the sector. These last five years are only the beginning for Nutrifly Today. Redefining global health, raising industry standards and leaving a lasting legacy in responsible nutrition innovation are all priorities. In the upcoming years, it hopes to make a big difference in human health and wellness, maintain its position as an industry leader and broaden its global presence. For the same, here is an exclusive interview with the Founder and Chief Catalyst Amit Srivastava!

Excerpts from the interview:



PNS|HYDERABAD

**How can you make sure AI is a force for integrity rather than efficiency in an industry that is frequently criticised for overstated claims and regulatory gaps?**

The AI of today is a unique precision system in the market. It is based on six years of well selected data rather than open or unstructured sources. Ingredients, biochemistry, pharmacology, toxicity and regulatory systems are all covered by this data, which comprises 3.6 million structured data points from 12 nations. The dataset is kept on specialised servers in Bangalore, Visakhapatnam and New Jersey, guaranteeing security and dependability, which emphasises the system's uniqueness even more. Nutrifly Genie uses retrieval-augmented generation (RAG) AI modeling to process commercial, logistical, regulatory and scientific data all at once. It anticipates long-term safety issues, assesses the toxicity, synergy and modes of action of substances and predicts cellular-level interactions between compounds and receptors. To maximise bioavailability, the system also examines quantum tunneling. Along with ensuring regulatory label compliance for 12 countries, it also creates hypothetical bills of materials and supply chain mappings. Every result is guaranteed to be commercially viable, scientifically proven and compliant with international regulatory standards thanks to this methodical methodology.

**The nutraceutical sector in North America is quite competitive and profitable. What particular difficulties do you foresee?**

The move to the United States, where we now have an office in Somerset, New Jersey, is a proactive move to use it to address issues in the ethical nutraceutical sector. In addition,



tion to solving problems, this endeavour aims to create possibilities. With scientifically differentiated goods supported by rigorous scientific validation, it aims to democratise audited supply chains and allow branded formulation companies to reach the market 200% faster. We connect supply and demand based on merit rather than personal ties, giving even tiny businesses the chance to prosper on our platform thanks to our access to 2,300 verified supply chain partners. Through our proactive activities, we are influencing the industry rather than merely responding to it. We have created our own data infrastructure, in contrast to a large portion of the sector that depends on public data and servers. We have taken steps to reduce the dangers of data theft and unauthorised access since we are aware of the difficulties that may arise while managing health data and intellectual property.

**What are the most important problems that the nutraceutical business is now facing?**

We encourage moral and responsible development in commerce and nutrition at Nutrifly Today's C-Suite, Sumflex. Concerning problems include the selection of components, the reasoning behind mixing compounds without conducting synergy studies, the absence of toxicity research, the incomplete knowledge of mechanisms of action and the possibility of making false claims. The availability of organic land, sustainability, supply security and traceability are issues with raw materials.

With an emphasis on the expansion of trade in responsible nutrition, it brings together business owners, CEOs, investors and government representatives from India and other nations.

**What important knowledge gaps in the sector do you think require immediate attention?**

The academy aims to solve a critical issue in addition to strengthening industry capability in responsible nutrition. It is urgently necessary to close the 6,00,000 educated professionals in responsible nutraceuticals that are expected to be lacking in India alone. It is helping to solve this problem, but other organisations must step forward and help meet the changing demands of the sector. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this endeavour. The quality gap in scientific research is one of the most urgent issues. The use of traditional documentary research is dwindling as we transition to an AI-driven world and it is anticipated to disappear in the next five years. This change highlights the need of focusing on basic research! AI-driven instruments such as is capable of processing current research and handling sophisticated data, but in order to spur significant innovation in responsible nutrition, the industry must give priority to original research. The development of precision phytopharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals depends on this focus on original research.

**What obstacles does India face in its efforts to become a global leader in responsible nutrition, whether they be scientific, regulatory, or perception-based?**

Although India has a long history in pharmaceuticals, it has experienced difficulties in the production of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) and has lost a sizable portion to China. Active Nutraceutical Ingredients (ANI) are currently showing a similar trend. China is at the forefront thanks to its extensive knowledge of botanicals and biochemistry as well as its robust supply of nat-

ural and synthetic ANI alternatives. Regulatory obstacles present further difficulties. Instead of concentrating only on enforcing regulations, the Biodiversity Act poses obstacles for the business, necessitating science-aligned policies that promote responsible nutraceutical growth. The goal of Nutrifly Today is to change this environment. Through Nutrifly Genie AI, the first responsible nutraceutical design engine in the world, which was created wholly in India by specialists in toxicology, pharmacology and biochemistry, we have created and democratised audited data. India's reputation as a leader in deep-tech nutraceutical innovation has been strengthened by the publication of the AI-generated outputs in prestigious, peer-reviewed publications like Elsevier's. Global players are trying to imitate our strategy as a result of the technology's ability to improve India's standing and recognition abroad. In addition, we are making it possible for entrepreneurs from other nations to take advantage of our platform, solidifying India's position as the hub of the global deep-tech, ethical nutraceutical sector.

**In a time when "ethics" and "sustainability" are frequently employed as marketing clichés, how can you make sure that these values stay fundamental rather than performative?**

The pillars of all we do are neutrality, ethics and sustainability. This dedication has gained us credibility in the industry, both in India and internationally, despite the fact that we are still a startup. Six years of rigorous data and supply chain research, driven by science, transparency and sustainability principles, have produced our flagship technology, Nutrifly Genie AI. We perform routine audits to make sure that records are consistently accurate and up to date in order to preserve the integrity of our platform. Rather than being influenced by marketing, scientific principles and financial viability guide our product design and commercialisation operations. Nutrifly Genie AI handles every aspect of the process, from conception to commercialisation. Although toxicology is frequently disregarded in the business, it forecasts toxicological data for each formulation using pharmacology and biochemistry principles. If data already exists, we extract it; if not, the AI creates a forecast using computer-aided drug design principles.

**Do you think there are any concerns**

**associated with an over-reliance on technology in a subject that ultimately impacts human well-being, as AI becomes more and more prevalent in health and wellness?**

Human scientists have educated and continuously improved Nutrifly Genie, a precise AI engine. Scientists are still in charge of developing basic research, even though AI is essential to automating documentary creation and research. Like the mobile phone revolution of the 1990s, artificial intelligence marks a paradigm shift! Precision technologies are gradually replacing process-driven tasks due to continuous innovation. In order to properly serve the healthcare and wellness industry, AI must be further refined because human error has been shown to pose a higher risk than technology over time.

**What do you hope to leave behind in the field of responsible nutrition?**

Our goal is to become the Amazon of the nutraceutical supply chain, freeing up branded formulation firms to concentrate on product and business development. We manage commercialisation concurrently. Fortune 500 firms in the pharmaceutical, over-the-counter (OTC) and nutraceutical industries are already using our platform, demonstrating the viability of this strategy. With the help of a specially trained AI running on a private server network, we have created the largest curated database in the nutraceutical industry. By using this strategy, we have been able to democratise the supply chain, making it more efficient and accessible while working at 200% the speed of the traditional sector. One of our latest innovations is the introduction of the first instant commerce platform for nutraceuticals in the world, which is intended to empower mid-sized businesses to take on bigger competitors. Dealsphere is a game-changing technology that allows businesses to choose a formulation and bring it to market in as little as 15 days, compared to the conventional 1.5-year timeframe. Every recipe is prepared for instant licensing and comes with a scientific dossier, a Bill of Materials, clinical data, stability data, and regulatory approvals. The industry is moving toward plug-and-play models in the future. Over the course of the next five years, branded formulation companies will have the option to either create their own formulations or select from quick commerce options, with the platform handling supply chain, scientific and regulatory challenges with ease.

### MONEY MATTERS

## How early financial education can shape lifelong habits

**I**n the present time, consumption-driven world, financial literacy has become an essential life skill. Yet, most children grow up with little understanding of how money works, often learning through trial and error as adults. Early financial education serves as a compass, guiding young minds toward sound decision-making and financial independence. Teaching children how to save, budget and spend responsibly is not just about preparing them for adulthood but about empowering them to navigate life's complexities with confidence and foresight. One of the simplest yet most powerful lessons to teach children is the habit of saving. When children understand the concept of saving for something they desire, they learn to appreciate the importance of planning and patience. For instance, giving a child a piggy bank and encouraging them to save for a new toy instills a sense of responsibility and delayed gratification. Over time, these small lessons evolve into more significant financial behaviors, such as setting aside money for emergencies, investing wisely, or avoiding impulsive purchases.

#### LEARNING THROUGH REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

Practical learning often leaves a lasting impact. Allowing children to manage a small allowance can be a great way to teach budgeting. By dividing their money into categories such as spending, saving and sharing, they get a hands-on understanding of resource allocation. Parents can also involve children in household financial decisions, like comparing prices at the store or discussing how family expenses are managed. These interactions make financial concepts tangible and relatable, fostering a deeper understanding of real-world money management.

#### FINANCIAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

While parents play a critical role, schools can act as a catalyst in promoting financial literacy. Introducing financial education in the curriculum ensures that every child, regardless of their background, gains exposure to essential financial concepts. Topics such as managing loans, understanding credit scores, or the basics of taxation can prepare students for the challenges they'll face as adults. When schools integrate these lessons into subjects like mathematics or social studies, they make financial education both accessible and practical.

#### THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN FINANCIAL EDUCATION

In today's digital age, technology offers exciting opportunities to enhance financial learning. Educational apps and games can make learning about money engaging and interactive. For

example, apps that simulate real-life scenarios—such as budgeting for a virtual trip or running a small business—can teach children valuable financial skills while keeping them entertained. Parents and educators can leverage these tools to supplement traditional methods, ensuring that children develop a comprehensive understanding of financial management in a format they enjoy.

#### THE TEEN YEARS: BUILDING ADVANCED SKILLS

As children grow into teenagers, financial education should evolve to address more complex topics. Teenagers can learn about earning through part-time jobs, understanding the basics of banking and managing their expenses. Introducing the concept of credit—how it works, the importance of timely payments and the risks of debt—can prepare them to handle financial responsibilities as they step into adulthood. These lessons ensure they develop a strong foundation for managing their finances when they eventually gain financial independence.

#### BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT

A lack of financial education often leads to poor financial habits, creating a cycle of mismanagement that's hard to break. Early financial education empowers individuals to make informed decisions, reducing the likelihood of falling into debt or financial crises. When children grow up understanding the importance of budgeting, saving and investing, they are less likely to rely on high-interest loans or struggle with financial insecurity. Over time, this shift can lead to more financially stable families and communities.

#### CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF FINANCIAL AWARENESS

Financial education isn't just about individual success—it's about creating a culture that values financial awareness. When children grow up discussing money openly and learning about its impact, they contribute to a society that is better equipped to handle economic challenges. Employers, too, can play a role by providing financial wellness programs, ensuring that their employees have the tools to manage their finances effectively.

#### THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF FINANCIAL LITERACY

The benefits of financial education extend far beyond personal finances. Financially literate individuals are more likely to contribute to the economy, invest in their communities, and plan for the future. When people understand how to manage their resources effectively, they are better equipped to support their families, avoid financial stress and pursue their goals with confidence. This ripple effect strengthens not only individuals but also the broader economic fabric of society.



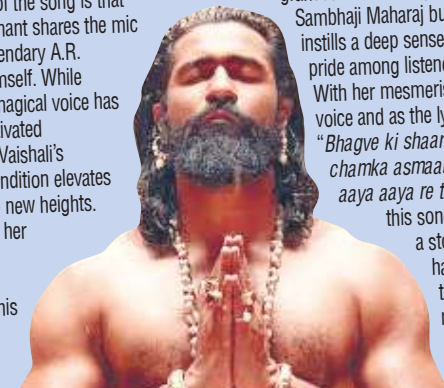
to handle life's financial challenges and opportunities. After all, when it comes to money matters, the habits we form early are the ones that stay with us for life.

(The author, Allan Andersen, is the director of Chaman Bhartiya School.)

## VAISHALI SAMANT'S AAYA RE TOOFAN FROM CHAAVA CONTINUES ITS MUSICAL STORM!

**M**arathi singer Vaishali Samant, who once ruled the charts with *Aika Dajiba*, is once again making waves with her latest song, *Aaya Re Toofan* from *Chaava*. With its powerful composition by A.R. Rahman and evocative lyrics penned by Irshad Kamil and Kshitij Patwardhan, the song has struck a chord with listeners, amassing millions of views within hours of its release on YouTube. The song is picturised on Vicky Kaushal, who plays Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, and Rashmika Mandanna, who portrays Maharani Yesubai. As soon as the track begins with Vaishali's resounding *Aao Virajo*, it sets the stage for an electrifying musical experience. Her soul-stirring voice adds a layer of depth and emotion that perfectly complements Rahman's composition. A highlight of the song is that Vaishali Samant shares the mic with the legendary A.R. Rahman himself. While Rahman's magical voice has always captivated audiences, Vaishali's powerful rendition elevates the song to new heights. Expressing her gratitude, Vaishali shared, "This song is a significant

milestone in my musical journey. It is incredibly inspiring that A.R. Rahman sir believed in my voice. The overwhelming love the song is receiving is beyond words. Performing Live with Rahman sir at the audio launch was an unforgettable experience, and I sincerely thank both him and director Laxman Utekar for this opportunity." Since its release, *Aaya Re Toofan* has been trending across platforms, garnering immense appreciation from music lovers. The song not only reflects the valour and grandeur of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj but also instills a deep sense of pride among listeners. With her mesmerising voice and as the lyrics go, "Bhagve ki shaan mein chamka asmaan, aaya aaya re toofan", this song is indeed a storm that has taken the world of music by force.



## Driving innovation, efficiency redefined!

**I**ndia's plastic manufacturing sector is adopting new processes to improve efficiency and reduce material waste. Yudo's hot runner systems are supporting this shift by streamlining injection moulding operations in automotive, packaging and consumer goods industries. Hot runner systems allow molten plastic to flow directly into mould cavities, removing the need for solidified runners. This process helps manufacturers optimise material use

and improve cycle times. With increasing demand for cost-effective production, the industry is seeing a rise in the adoption of this technology. "In manufacturing, efficiency and cost control are key factors. Yudo's hot runner technology is helping businesses meet production targets while managing material use," said Vishal Agarwal, President, Yudo India. In the automotive sector, Yudo's systems assist in the production of injection molded

parts like dashboards, bumpers and interior trims, etc. The packaging industry benefits from precise moulding, faster colour change, ensuring consistency in caps and closures weight and dimensions. Consumer goods manufacturers are using this technology to support high-volume production. India's focus on reducing plastic waste is shaping industry practices. Companies are looking for solutions that improve

production while aligning with sustainability goals and regulatory requirements. Hot runner systems support this approach by reducing excess material and optimising energy consumption. "As demand for plastic components grows, manufacturers are seeking solutions that enhance productivity. Hot runner systems are becoming a part of this change, helping companies improve operations and meet industry standards," added Agarwal.

# England, Afghanistan dream of semifinal berth

PTI ■ LAHORE

**A**battered England will hope to keep their Champions Trophy (CT) hopes alive when they face a dangerous Afghanistan in a crucial group B match here on Wednesday.

A defeat here would severely dent both the teams' dreams of a semifinal berth in the tournament, as South Africa and Australia have already notched up two points.

The days of England's white ball supremacy are far behind now, as the former world champions' creaking unit even failed to defend a 350-plus total against Australia in their tournament opener.

While England may take some comfort in posting a massive total, the reality is that it came against an Australian side missing their premier pacers — Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, and Josh Hazlewood.

The English bowlers then failed to stop an Australian line-up that did not have lead batters such as injured Mitchell Marsh and now-retired Marcus Stoinis.

So, England will need to show massive improvement against Afghanistan on both those counts.

Afghanistan's three-pronged spin attack, consisting Rashid Khan, Noor Ahmad and Mohammad Nabi, has the potential to trouble even the best, and England batters' recent outings



against slow bowlers are not confidence inspiring either.

England also suffered a setback as all-rounder Brydon Carse has been ruled out of the tournament with a toe injury. He has been replaced by leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed in an effort to strengthen their spin department.

This move will also provide Adil Rashid with proper backing, as, until

now, Liam Livingstone had been performing that role with his mixed bag of off-spin, leg-spin, and seam-up deliveries.

But England's real problem lies in the patchy form of opener Phil Salt and Harry Brook in the middle-order.

Salt's only hundred in the format was in 2022 and since then the Welshman has not really converted his starts, often getting out after a

quick 30 or 40. Brook also offers a similar tale. The Yorkshire man looked in prime form during the home ODIs against Australia last year, hammering a hundred and two fifties in a three-match series.

However, Brook has been riddled with self-doubts against spinners since the tour to India, and fell to Aussie leg-spinner Adam Zampa in

the last match.

Now, the 26-year-old will have to negate three high-quality tweakers against Afghanistan.

The Afghans, on the other hand, have their own problems to tackle. They are coming off a 107-run shellacking by South Africa in their tournament opener.

They had reached the semifinals of the T20 World Cup 2024 with almost the same set of players but the ODI format demands much more consistency in performance and execution of strategies.

Afghanistan have the required talent but they need to find a way to channelise that consistently to challenge England, even in their most vulnerable state.

**Teams (from):**

**Afghanistan:** Hashmatullah Shahidi (c), Ibrahim Zadran, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sediqullah Atal, Rahmat Shah, Ikram Alikhil, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mohammad Nabi, Rashid Khan, Nangyal Kharoti, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Farid Malik, Naveed Zadran. Reserves: Darwish Rasooli, Bilal Sami.

**England:** Jos Buttler (c), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Tom Banton, Harry Brook, Rehan Ahmed, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.



# UP Warriorz face Mumbai Indians

PTI ■ BENGALURU

**R**ejuvenated by their thrilling super-over win over RCB, UP Warriorz will look to continue their momentum when they take on an upbeat Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League here on Wednesday.

The Warriorz pulled off a stunning victory against defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Monday, with Sophie Ecclestone delivering a match-winning performance with both bat and ball.

However, they will need more from their batters to avoid finding themselves in a tight spot once again.

While Chinelle Henry led them to victory against Delhi Capitals, Ecclestone took center stage in their latest triumph. Though openers Kiran Navgire and Shweta Sehrawat have shown promise, they have not been able to capitalise on their starts.

Opener Vrinda Dinesh and skipper Deepti Sharma will have to give stability in the middle-order.

Despite a rocky start to the season, the Warriorz have bounced back from consecutive losses, registering two remarkable wins.

However, their batting — especially the openers and middle-order — has struggled to maintain consistency.

Australian all-rounder Tahlia McGrath is another match-winner in the Warriorz lineup, with her explosive power-hitting.

But she is yet to light up the tournament and against MI, the Warriorz will need McGrath to fire along with the rest of the batting unit to avoid falling into a vulnerable position once again.

"We are backing our young

Indian players to step up and perform under pressure. We want to provide them with opportunities," said Jon Lewis, the Warriorz head coach, on Monday.

On the middle-order batting, Lewis added: "It would be nice to get a few more runs, rotate the strike better, and be more consistent. If we can do that, we will be competitive across all conditions and against every team."

For Mumbai Indians, Nat Sciver-Brunt has been the standout performer. The inaugural edition champions are a formidable side, with India captain Harmanpreet Kaur also in fine form, having scored a fifty in their last match against RCB.

Mumbai's batting is a force to be reckoned with, with destructive batters like Hayley Matthews and Amelia Kerr in their ranks but both haven't really fired so far. Opener Yastika Bhatia too is in need of a substantial score.

They also have a rising star in 16-year-old G Kamalini, who brings balance to the team, while Amanjot Kaur's all-round performance that sealed their win against RCB is a good sign for MI.

Their bowling attack is spearheaded by the exceptional Shabnim Ismail and Sciver-Brunt, who are capable of dismantling any batting lineup.

**Teams (From):** Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Sanskriti Gupta, Saika Ishaque, Shabnim Ismail, Jintimani Kalita, G Kamalini, Amandeep Kaur, Amanjot Kaur, Sathyamoorthy Keerthana, Amelia Kerr, Akshita Maheshwari, Hayley Matthews, Sajeevan Sarjana, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Parunika Sisodia, Chloe Tryon.

# Amla labelled Gill as 'next big thing' in international cricket

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

**S**hashim Amla on Tuesday labelled India opener Shubman Gill, who has had an "exceptional" start to ODIs, as the "next big thing" in international cricket along with Rishabh Pant and Ryan Rickelton.

The 25-year-old Gill, named India's vice-captain for the Champions Trophy, retook the No. 1 spot in ODI rankings for batters on the opening day of the tournament after his ascent to the top for the first time in 2023.

Gill began with a match-winning century against Bangladesh and struck a vital 46 against Pakistan to steer India to two wins in as many games in Dubai.

"For India, you have got Shubham Gill; Rishabh Pant has been around for a while. For South Africa, we have Ryan Rickelton who has done really well off late," Amla, who is playing for South Africa Masters in the International Masters League, told PTI Videos in an exclusive interaction.

"Every country has about 2-3 cricketers who are going to come through and I think that's pretty normal, that you see that every five years some youngster poke in the head through international cricket, and possibly be the next best, big thing," he added.

Talking further about Gill, Amla said, "He is a brilliant player, the way he started in one-day cricket, he has been exceptional. He has been a huge part of India's success at top of the order."

"To have him and Rohit (Sharma) at the top, it's a very potent and dangerous opening partnership, and then they have got Virat (Kohli) at No 3."

Amla said playing the tri-series in Pakistan ahead of Champions Trophy would



hold South Africa in good stead, especially against spin.

"South African batters are well-equipped. They've had enough practice with the tour to Pakistan just before the Champions Trophy. They've also, by and large, had great success," he said.

"You've got Heinrich Klaasen, who's been very successful against spinners. He's in the middle order. You've got David Miller, who's been an excellent finisher and (there is) Aiden Markram as well. That middle order has been vital for South Africa's success.

"At the top, (Temba) Bavuma is a good player of spin and Rickelton has been very accomplished against spin over the last one and a half years," he added.

Amla said both India and South Africa have got a "great chance" to win the Champions Trophy title.

"India have obviously a very good chance, they have a fantastic team over the (last 15-odd years)," he said.

"South Africa have (a) great chance (too), they have fantastic batting and bowling and whole unit looks very well balanced, they have an excellent chance to make it to top four and then hopefully win it."

With South Africa making finals of the T20 World Cup last year and the World Test Championship final against Australia, Amla said the

Proteas did their best against whichever opponents they faced.

"South Africa getting into the (WTC) final has been a great achievement. Lots of people have said the different teams you (could) have played against, but that's the group that South Africa were put in," he said.

"For them to excel and win as many games as they have to get into a final, they did their part and they did their best and they are in the finals."

"It is going to be a really good final, with Australia being a very competitive team. But in a Test match, you (may) just need one or two players to stand up and yes, South Africa could be champions," he said.

Amla said he has no intention of returning to Test cricket but expressed that competitions such as the IML should be a regular affair.

"It's enjoyable, (there are) these elements of uncertainty that we haven't trained and (were) not involved in cricket for the rest of the year, or batting in nets, or playing matches, and that type of excitement, to just see how it all goes," he said.

"The amount of excitement that has been built around some of the great ex-players, it can only bode well, and who doesn't want to see a (Brian) Lara (or a) (Jacques) Kallis bat? It should be an annual event," he added.

# Atherton, Hussain praise Virat Kohli

PTI ■ LONDON

**I**n awe of Virat Kohli's formidable ODI statistics, former England captains Michael Atherton and Nasser Hussain believe that the Indian mainstay is probably the best batsman in the history of the format.

Kohli played a master-class innings of unbeaten 100, his 51st century in ODIs, to steer India to a comfortable six-wicket win over arch-rivals Pakistan in a Champions Trophy match here on Sunday.

"Virat Kohli in a run-chase in 50-over cricket, there's been nobody better in the history of the game, really. 51 century is an unbelievable number," said the 56-year-old Atherton, who captained England in 54 Test matches, on 'Sky Sports Cricket Podcast'.

En route his century in his 299th 50-over appearance, Kohli became the fastest batter to reach 14,000 ODI runs, joining the elite group of Sachin Tendulkar (18,426 in



452 innings) and Kumar Sangakkara (14,234 in 380 innings).

"I mean, he's got 51 and he's passed 14,000 runs, which only Tendulkar and Sangakkara have got past that mark in one-day cricket," Atherton continued.

"And he got them in 60-odd innings quicker than Sachin, and I think about 90-odd innings quicker than Kumar. So, I mean, ODI is probably his best. You know, he's been a great all-format player, clearly, but you'd probably say that

ODI is his absolute best format."

Echoing similar sentiments, Hussain, who led England between 1999 to 2003, remarked, "He's been an incredible player. Yeah, and you'd have to say probably the best player in ODIs of all time, really, with those stats you mentioned."

"You'd have Tendulkar in the same conversation. Kumar, you'd have AB de Villiers. They've been some great ones, but he's right at the top of the tree."

# Pakistan will struggle to beat India's B team, says Gavaskar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

**P**akistan's cricket team continued to invite scathing criticism a day after being knocked out of the Champions Trophy (CT) with the great Sunil Gavaskar saying that it would struggle to beat even a second-string Indian team.

India, the 2023 ODI World Cup finalists, defeated defending champions Pakistan by six wickets in the Champions Trophy in Dubai on Sunday, continuing their dominance over the arch-rivals.

"I think a B team (from India) certainly (can give Pakistan a run for their money). C team, I am not too sure. But a B team will be very, very hard to beat for Pakistan in their current form," Gavaskar said on 'Sports Today'.

Pakistan, hosting an ICC tournament for the first time

since 1996, were knocked out of the Champions Trophy after New Zealand beat Bangladesh in another Group A match. Pakistan are still winless in the event.

Since winning the Champions Trophy in 2017, Pakistan's cricketing fortunes have declined, with the team finishing fifth in the last two ODI World Cups.

"I think it's surprising — this lack of bench strength. Pakistan always had natural talent. Natural in the sense that they may not have always been technically correct, but they had an instinctive understanding of bat and ball," Gavaskar said.

"Look at Inzamam-ul-Haq, for example. If you look at his stance, you wouldn't recommend that to a young batter, but he had great temperament. With that kind of temperament, he made up



for any technical shortcomings."

Gavaskar also noted that despite the Pakistan Super League (PSL) and domestic white-ball tournaments, Pakistan has struggled to produce quality players.

"How has India produced so many young stars in white-ball cricket? It's because of the IPL," said the former India skipper. "Players from there have gone

on to play in the Ranji Trophy and eventually for India. That is something Pakistan cricket must analyse. They need to figure out why they no longer have the bench strength they once did."

India vs Pakistan: A one-sided contest now, Atherton

An India-Pakistan match is always a highly-anticipated event, but former England captain Michael Atherton

believes the contest has become "one-sided" and the cricket does not live up to the hype.

"Well, it was completely one-sided," Atherton said on Sky Sports Podcast.

"It looked very predictable from a long way out. An underpowered Pakistan batting line-up, as it was in that first game, actually, against New Zealand. There just seemed to lack a bit of energy and dynamism in the batting."

India and Pakistan only meet in ICC events, and their clashes are often built up as blockbuster encounters.

"There's a bit of an issue for that contest, isn't it? Because it's a highly anticipated contest for all kinds of reasons. Partly, you know, just because of the scarcity value. They only play each other in ICC events on neutral territory for obvious reasons," he said.

# Vidarbha to stake claim for Ranji Trophy title against Kerala

PTI ■ NAGPUR

**F**ormer winners Vidarbha will rely on their red-hot form to stake claim for a title that they last won over five years ago, while first-time finalists Kerala will be driven by grit when the two contrasting teams clash in the summit showdown for the 90th Ranji Trophy, starting here on Wednesday.

It has been nothing short of a stellar run for the Akshay Wadkar-led Vidarbha side this season, winning eight of their nine matches so far and drawing one which makes them the side to beat.

Vidarbha emerged from their group stage with six victories in seven matches and won each of the knockouts by heavy margins — by 198 runs against Tamil Nadu in the quarterfinal and by 80 runs against defending champions Mumbai in the semifinal.

The winners of 2017-18 and 2018-19 edition, Vidarbha are

making their fourth appearance in the final after losing in the final last year to Mumbai, displaying unmatched consistency in red-ball cricket. They had also played in the final of the Vijay Hazare Trophy this season.

Yash Rathod has been at the forefront of their batting with 933 runs in nine matches at 58.13 with five tons and three fifties — the third highest overall this season.

Not only from behind the stumps as wicketkeeper-captain, Wadkar has had a successful run with the bat, scoring 674 runs in nine matches at 48.14 with two centuries and as many fifties.

Veteran Karun Nair is not far behind with 642 runs in eight matches at 45.85, including three centuries and a fifty, while Danish Malewar (557 runs, 1x100s, 5x50s) and Dhruv Shorey (446 runs, 1x100s, 2x50s) have also pulled in their weight.



If the 24-year-old southpaw Rathod has been a revelation in batting for Vidarbha, the bowling charts have been dominated by another youngster in 22-year-old Aman when he took 68 wickets in eight matches of

the 2018-19 season. On the other hand, making their maiden appearance in the Ranji Trophy final, it hasn't been just luck that has favoured the Sachin Baby-led side from down south.

Kerala rode on their luck in

the knockout games to edge out Jammu and Kashmir by one run in the quarterfinal and Gujarat by two runs to make the final after advancing in the two contests on the basis of first-innings lead.

But even that took a lot of hard work. Kerala had to grind out with the bat on the final day of the quarterfinal against J&K to force a draw.

Salman Nizar (607 runs in eight matches at 86.71, 2x100s, 3x50s) and Mohammed Azharuddeen (601 runs in nine matches at 75.12, 1x100s and 4x50s), the two batting mainstays for the side, held their nerves to frustrate J and K in Pune and ensure their team's qualification in one of the most exciting finishes this season.

Azharuddeen's monumental 177 off 341 balls in the semifinal against Gujarat on their home turf will go down in Kerala's Ranji history as one of the finest knocks played by any player from the state which has never been so close to winning the toughest red-ball competition in India.

With 38 wickets, Jalaj Saxena has been Kerala's most successful bowler and he will

find strong support from former Vidarbha player Aditya Sarwate, who has grabbed 30 wickets to provide adequate support to the veteran spinner.

**Teams (from):** Vidarbha: Akshay Wadkar (c&wk), Atharva Taide, Aman Mokhadde, Yash Rathod, Harsh Dubey, Akshay Karnewar, Yash Kadam, Akshay Wakhare, Aditya Thakare, Darshan Nalkande, Nachiket Bhute, Siddhesh Wath (wk), Yash Thakur, Danish Malewar, Parth Rekhade, Karun Nair, Dhruv Shorey.

Kerala: Sachin Baby (c), Rohan Kunnumal, Salman Nizar, Mohammed Azharuddeen (wk), Akshay Chandran, Jalaj Saxena, Shoun Roger, Aditya Sarwate, Basil Thampi, MD Nidheesh, Nedumankuzhy Basil, Sreehari S Nair, Sharafuddeen NM, Anand Krishnan, Varun Nayanan, Eden Apple Tom, Ahamed Imran.

# WITH FUN, I WANT VALUES IN MY FILMS: THRINADHA RAO

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Director Nakkina Thrinadha Rao delivered a massive hit with *Dhamaka*, starring Ravi Teja, which grossed more than Rs 100 crores. Now, the director is working on a smaller film, *Mazaka*, starring Sundep Kishan and Rao Ramesh in lead roles. "I am comfortable with the story that I like, and I go with it," says Thrinadha Rao.

Many directors wait for years to work with a big star, but Thrinadha Rao takes a different approach. "I don't blame them for wanting to build their careers, but I follow my own methods. If I like a story, I go with it, even if it means working with new faces," he shares.

Thrinadha Rao reveals that when he was making *Dhamaka*, writer Prasanna Kumar came to him with the storyline for *Mazaka*. "He only gave me a one-line idea at first, not the whole story. After I finished *Dhamaka*, Prasanna completed the story and dialogues. There wasn't much for me to change, except for a few improvisations when we went to the sets," says the director.

He further explains that the story was initially pitched to several people before finally being brought back to Rao Ramesh. "Prasanna had written the story with Rao Ramesh in mind. When we were looking for the lead actor, Sundep Kishan agreed to take on the role, which was a great decision," Thrinadha Rao adds.

**DIRECTOR NAKKINA THRINADHA RAO, WHO IS EXCITED ABOUT THE RELEASE OF HIS LATEST FILM, MAZAKA TALKS ABOUT HIS FILM CAREER, WHAT HE SEEKS IN HIS FILMS BEYOND ENTERTAINMENT AND MORE**



When asked if the film shares any similarities with the Malayalam hit *Bro Daddy*, the director firmly denies it. "Our film is about a father and son, which may lead people to compare it to the Malayalam film. However, both stories are completely different, and there is no connection between them," he clarifies.

The film is set to release today, coinciding with the occasion of Sivaratri. Thrinadha Rao is optimistic about the film's prospects, noting that, much like the Sankranthi festival, Sivaratri also draws people to the theatres. "I believe it will have a good opening on Sivaratri day," he says. He adds that the film blends fun with emotional depth. "If you look at all my films, there is always a mix of fun and values," he explains.

In discussing *Mazaka*, Thrinadha Rao explains that the film centers on a father and son who feel they need a woman in their lives. "For every man, from youth to old age, there is always a need for a woman—whether it's a mother, wife, sister, or someone else. In this film, both the father and son seek the same," he says. Despite the film's comedic tone, the last half-hour of the film is emotional. "I personally believe that every household should have at least one woman. A festival or a celebration feels incomplete without her presence," he adds.

Anshu plays a key female role alongside Ritu Varma and Thrinadha Rao explains his choice of casting. "I wanted to cast an actress who was relatively unknown to the audience. When I saw *Manmadhudu*, I asked Prasanna about Anshu, but by then, she had already left for Hyderabad. After contacting her, we narrated the story over the phone. She had gone through my past films and agreed to take on the role," he says.

He emphasises that he made sure to be upfront with her about pairing her with Rao Ramesh in the film. "We wanted to make everything clear from the start," he explains.

Looking ahead, Thrinadha Rao says he will continue to blend entertainment and emotion in his future projects. "One producer advised me that I've been successful so far because my films haven't been rejected. I intend to continue in this direction unless I face rejection, in which case I will try to change my approach," he shares.

For his first few films, Thrinadha Rao not only directed but also contributed stories. "Prasanna joined me as a dialogue writer for Cinema Chupista Mama and we've worked together ever since. I plan to write another story in the future. Many talented new writers are emerging and I liked a story written by Srinivas," he says.

The director is also producing two films: *Chaurya Paatam*, a crime comedy and *Anakapalle*, a cult love story. Interestingly, Thrinadha Rao hails from Anakapalle, which is where the film is set. "I wrote the story nearly 15 years ago and always wanted to make it. It's a small film, so I'm producing it with a new director and fresh faces," he says.



**Jerome Flynn joins *Lucifer* sequel, *L2: Empuraan***

Malayalam actor Prithviraj Sukumaran made his directorial debut with the successful *Lucifer* in 2019. Malayalam superstar Mohanlal played the lead role, with Tovino Thomas and Manju Warrier also in key roles. Sukumaran himself also played an important role in the film. Now, the sequel to this hit film, *L2: Empuraan*, is set to hit the screens on March 27 this year.

The sequel is bigger in terms of budget, scale and cast, with high expectations already surrounding the film. Adding to the excitement, the makers have revealed that renowned Hollywood actor Jerome Flynn will play a key role, named Boris Oliver. Flynn is best known for his portrayal of Bronn in the iconic web series *Game of Thrones*. He has also appeared in films and series such as *John Wick Chapter 3*, *Soldier Soldier* and *Black Mirror*.

A teaser introducing Jerome's character was released on Tuesday and the actor expressed his excitement about working in an Indian film. "I can't quite remember how I got roped into this job, but I'm so glad I did because it was a completely different experience from what I'm used to in the UK or the USA. To be part of the Mollywood culture is really special," said Jerome.

He further added that the film holds extra significance for him because India has played an important and precious role in his personal journey. "I spent several years visiting India in my late 20s and early 30s, mostly for spiritual retreats. The experience of being in India has changed my life forever in the best possible way."

Subaskaran and Antony Perumbavoor are the producers, while Deepak Dev is the music director. The film will be released in Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Kannada.

## Amani takes the lead in *Brahmanda*



Actress Amani, known for her versatile roles in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam films, is playing the lead role in the upcoming film *Brahmanda*, directed by Rambabu. Amani, who has won several awards for her performances as a lead actress, has recently been focusing on character roles. She received accolades for her performance in the recently released *Baapu*, where she was paired opposite Brahmaji.

The first look of Amani in *Brahmanda* was released by director Chandoo Mondeti, known for *Thandel*. On this occasion, Chandoo expressed that the first look is intriguing and wished the team of *Brahmanda* great success.

Director Rambabu shared that the film has a Telangana-based storyline and highlighted that this is the first time OGGU artists, who represent a traditional Telangana folk art, are being prominently featured in the film. He also noted that the story and screenplay promise to captivate audiences with thrilling and devotional elements.

In addition to Amani, the film features actors such as Jayaram, Komaram Bunny Raj, Kanika Vadya, Jogini Shyamala and others in key roles. The music for the film is composed by Varikuppala Yadagiri. Most of the artists and technicians are from Telangana, and many are new to the industry.

## JD Chakravarthy praises *Raa Raja* for its bold experiment



Popular actor and director JD Chakravarthy has praised the film-makers of the upcoming film *Raa Raja*. Directed by B. Shiva Prasad, the film relies entirely on its story and narration, without revealing the faces of the artists. Filming without showing faces is no small feat and the *Raa Raja* team is ready to impress with this bold experiment. The film is set to release on March 7.

The film's poster was released by JD Chakravarthy and he had high praise for its making and the director. "Usually, when a girl hugs or kisses, it's portrayed as a happy moment. But in this poster, even though the girl is hugging, there's an unsettling sense of fear. The coloring, font, and tagline all suggest that the film is filled with twists and turns. It looks like a supernatural thriller," said JD.

He added, "What's even more interesting is that they aren't showing the faces of the lead pair. Creating fear without revealing any faces is no small achievement. No horror director in the world has made a film without showing faces," said JD Chakravarthy. He called it a fantastic concept and expressed hope that the movie becomes a huge hit.

## Japan emerges as a major market for Telugu films

Japan, along with China, is emerging as a major market for Telugu films. Many Telugu films have been released in these countries, and filmmakers are now looking at Japan as a potential revenue center.

In line with this trend, Jr. NTR's film *Devara* is set to release in Japan on March 28. The actor is scheduled to visit Japan on March 22 to promote the film, and before his visit, he is giving interviews to Japanese media. Directed by Koratala Siva, *Devara* has been a super success in Telugu, grossing significant revenue. This is the first part of the film, with a second part also in the works.

Jr. NTR is focusing on promoting the film aggressively in Japan, where he has a massive fan following. His earlier film *Baadshah* was released in Japan in 2014 and received a positive response. Jr. NTR aims to build on this fan base and strengthen his presence in the Japanese market.

*Devara* released last year and Jr. NTR plays dual roles in it. Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor, the daughter of the late Sridevi, plays the female lead.



## *MAD Square* promises even more fun & madness than the first

The film *MAD*, directed by Kalyan Shankar, made a huge splash at the box office after its release in 2023. Now, the makers are coming up with a sequel titled *MAD Square*. The teaser for this sequel was released on Tuesday, and it promises even more fun than the first film.

Once again helmed by Kalyan Shankar, *MAD Square* brings back our favorite mischief-makers—Narne Nithin, Sangeeth Shobhan, Ram Nithin, and Vishnu Oi (Laddu)—who redefined entertainment with their infectious energy in the first part. The teaser is a laugh riot, packed with crackling chemistry, perfect punch lines and over-the-top madness. Bheems Ceciroleo returns with a catchy and enchanting score. The film is produced by Haarika Suryadevara and Sai Soujanya and will hit the screens on March 29.

