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Centre gave Rs 5 lakh cr to TN in 10 yrs, **says Shah**

**MAJOR** PUSH TO INDIA-UK TRADE TIES

Pooja Hegde bags a whopping fee for special song in **COOLIE**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**The pioneer**  
I totally agree with Thiru Stalin and strongly support him on delimitation. You cannot penalize the Southern states for religiously implementing family planning when the nation needed it the most. To execute delimitation without considering the efforts of the southern states is not in the spirit of democracy or federalism. If the center is keen on implementing delimitation- I propose delimitation based on the fiscal contributions to the Nation

- KT Rama Rao, TG BRS MLA

P4

**DON'T MISS...**

**Minister revives Daddanala Lake**

The Daddanala Lake (Jurreeru Lift Irrigation Scheme) near Banaganapalle has been revived, bringing hope back to thousands of farmers. The Minister for Roads, Buildings, Investments and Infrastructure, BC Janardhan Reddy has personally invested his own funds to restore the project, reigniting optimism among the farming community. With his initiative, four defunct motors associated with the project have been repaired, allowing water to flow through the canals once again. This restoration has made farmers happy as the...

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**Nitish inducts 7 new ministers**

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday inducted seven new faces, all from alliance partner BJP, into his council of ministers, raising the total number to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong assembly. Governor Arif Mohammad Khan administered the oath of office to the members of the assembly in Bihar, where elections are due later this year. The also has a legislative council. The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief...

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**Worst over on India's growth trajectory**

The worst seems to be over for the Indian economy's growth trajectory, a German brokerage said on Thursday. GDP growth, which had slipped to a seven-quarter-low of 5.4 per cent in the September quarter leading to a lot of concerns over the economy's strength, is likely to rise to 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, the report by Deutsche Bank said. "We think the worst is over as far as India's growth trajectory is concerned but, even with the improvement of momentum, overall GDP growth..."

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**Indian should win Champions Trophy**

For Lalchand Rajput, it was a plunge into an unknown territory when he was appointed manager of a young Indian team for the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007. No one gave them a chance, but they still triumphed. Nearly 18 years later, the 63-year-old former player is backing an Indian team full of world beaters to not just win another prestigious ICC event, but do so convincingly. "This Indian team looks ruthless. They try to dominate and win every game. They don't want to give the opponents a chance..."

-SPORTS

**Devotees flock to Shiva temples**

**Elaborate arrangements had been made for Maha Shivaratri celebrations**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Devotees in large numbers thronged Lord Shiva temples across the State right from early morning of Wednesday on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri. The Shiva temples echoed with Shivanamasmarana by the devotees who visited the temples. The authorities had made elaborate arrangements at the famous Shiva temples across the State for the devotees' darshan. Maha Shivaratri celebrations were held on the hilltop Trikoteswara Swamy Temple on Kotappakonda. The Maha Shivaratri festival on the hilltop Kotappakonda is the State festival of Andhra Pradesh. The government offered silk robes to the deity and performed special pujas. Thousands of devotees from AP, Telangana and adjacent States visited Trikoteswara Swamy from early in the morning. Minister for Endowment Anam Ramanarayana Reddy offered silk garments to the deity on behalf of the government. The police had made extensive arrangements for security. RTC operated 565 buses from Narasaraopet, Chilikaluripeta, and Vinukonda. Special rituals began as early as 3 am, followed by allowing devotees for darshan. [Continued on Page 2](#)

**'Should stand as a role model for the nation'**

**Minister Lokesh directs officials on 100-bed hospital at Mangalagiri**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Education, RTGS, Electronics and IT, Nara Lokesh, has directed that the 100-bed hospital, which is being constructed by the government at Chinakakani near Mangalagiri, should be designed to be the best in India. The Minister held a review meeting with officials at his residence in Undavalli on Wednesday to discuss the building plans of the hospital. The officials presented the building design through a PowerPoint presentation. During this meeting, the Minister made several suggestions to the officials. He stated that the 100-bed hospital has been a dream of the Mangalagiri residents for the past 30 years. "The hospital should be equipped with modern facilities and stand as a role model for the country in the 100-bed category. It should provide an environment where doctors can work peacefully," he said and further stressed the need for the hospital to provide the best medical care to patients without causing any inconvenience to the public seeking medical services. Minister Lokesh advised the officials to design zones within the hospital for doctors, patients, and visitors. He suggested reviewing the designs of renowned hospitals and making appropriate modifications accordingly and the construction of the hospital should incorporate all kinds of modern facilities. He also recommended that the design consider future needs for parking, mortuary, and other basic amenities. G Sudhakar Reddy, Chief Engineer of



"The hospital should be equipped with modern facilities and stand as a role model for the country in the 100-bed category. It should provide an environment where doctors can work peacefully"

the Andhra Pradesh Medical Education and Infrastructure Development Corporation (APMSIDC), SE V Chittibabu, EE CV Ramana, Chief Architect of Bhargav Group, Nikhila, DEE Mhanumantha Rao Naik of APMSIDC, AE G Gopichand, AE K Shiva Satyanarayana, DGM A Shyam Kishore, Senior Engineer D Anil Kumar and others were present.



**5 youths drowned in Godavari**

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

In a tragic incident, five teenage boys were drowned in the river Godavari at Tadipudi village in Tallapudi mandal in East Godavari district. Police said that a group of 11 youths went to the river Godavari in the wee hours to take a holy dip on the occasion of devotional Mahashivaratri and five of them drowned when taking holy dip. The deceased were identified as Tirumalashetti Pawan (19), Padala Durga Prasad (19), Padala Sai Krishna (19), Anishetti Pawan (19) and Garre Akash (19). All the bodies were fished out from the river and shifted to the GGH in Kovvur for postmortem. All the deceased belonged to Tadipudi village. The NDRF teams were pressed into service to retrieve the bodies. EG district Collector P Prasanthi, DSP Dev Kumar and Kovvur RDO Rani Sushmita visited the scene of the accident. Meanwhile, a pall of gloom descended on the village with the death of five teenage boys. Four of the deceased boys were studying graduation and one was studying Intermediate. Heart wrenching scenes were witnessed at the river

**A pall of gloom descended on the village with the death of five teenage boys. Four of the deceased boys were studying graduation and one was studying Intermediate. Heart wrenching scenes were witnessed at the river as parents of the deceased boys and relatives grieved inconsolably. Villagers told the media that the sand mafia extracted sand at the river where the youths entered for a holy bath. Kovvuri MLA M Venkateswara Rao, who visited the scene of the mishap, told the media he would take the incident to the notice of the Government and ensure that required help is extended to the bereaved families.** [Continued on Page 2](#)

**SLBC TUNNEL COLLAPSE**  
**Rescue ops in final stages**  
**Multiple approaches being explored**  
**Will be completed in two days, says Uttam**

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The rescue operation at the SLBC tunnel in Nagarkurnool district has entered its final stages, with elite forces like the Indian Marine Commando Force (MARCOS) and the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) joining the mission. Irrigation and Civil Supplies Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy stated that the Telangana government has escalated efforts, deploying advanced technology and

national agencies to ensure the safe evacuation of eight trapped workers. After an extensive field assessment, Uttam Kumar Reddy confirmed that a concrete action plan had been finalized, prioritizing both the safety of the rescuers and the trapped workers. He acknowledged that the operation posed significant risks, but after thorough reviews over the past two days, strategic measures had been put in place to minimize dangers and accelerate the mission. [Continued on Page 2](#)

**US citizenship for \$5 million**  
**Trump plays a 'gold card'**

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he plans to offer a "gold card" visa with a path to citizenship for USD5 million, replacing a 35-year-old visa for investors. "They'll be wealthy and they'll be successful, and they'll be spending a lot of money and paying a lot of taxes and employing a lot of people, and we think it's going to be extremely successful," Trump said in the Oval Office. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the "Trump Gold Card" would replace EB-5 visas in two weeks. [Continued on Page 2](#)

**Speculation rife over TDP's MLC nominations**  
**Sources indicate that one of the seats is reserved for Jana Sena**

C PRADEEP KUMAR cpk007@gmail.com ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following the Election Commission of India's recent announcement regarding the MLC elections (MLA quota), discussions have intensified about potential candidates for the vacant five seats within the TDP-led NDA coalition. Sources indicate that one of these seats is reserved for the Jana Sena Party (JSP), while the remaining four are expected to be allocated to TDP leaders, taking into account caste and regional dynamics. K Naga Babu, brother of Deputy



Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, is seen as a frontrunner for the JSP seat. Despite his aspirations to contest from the Anakapalli MP seat in the general elections, the seat designated for Jana Sena was ultimately given to BJP due to coalition negotiations. With recent resignations of YSR Congress MPs, BJP has

secured one seat while TDP has received two. In light of this, Chandrababu Naidu has reportedly promised Naga Babu an MLC position and a ministerial role, effectively confirming his spot. Among the TDP candidates vying for the remaining four posts, several notable leaders are in contention are SVSN Varma (Pithapuram) is a key contender after sacrificing a winnable seat for Pawan Kalyan. His significant contributions during the campaign helped secure approximately 70,000 votes for Kalyan and Chandrababu has assured him of an MLC position in recognition of his loyalty. [Continued on Page 2](#)

**No road: Donkada's kids forced to choose fields over books**

**Nearest school is 3-4 km away, a dangerous and often impossible journey, especially during monsoon season**

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Donkada, a remote tribal village in Andhra Pradesh's Golugonda mandal, faces a dire situation due to its lack of road connectivity. Home to 110 members of the Konda tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), the village's isolation is forcing children into agricultural labour instead of attending school. The nearest school is three to four kilometres away, a dangerous and often impossible journey, especially during the monsoon season. This has resulted in widespread school dropouts, with children working in



fields for a meagre Rs 200 a day. "A proper road is essential for this village," said Asha worker T Sangeetha. She recounted a tragic incident last year where a baby died because they couldn't reach a

hospital in time, highlighting the devastating consequences of the village's inaccessibility. Sangeetha also noted that four children have completely abandoned their education, while others attend sporadically, often choosing fieldwork over school. Adding to their woes, the villagers face severe water scarcity due to a faulty borewell. Pumping water manually is a laborious and often futile task. "It takes a long time to pump even a small amount of water," the villagers explained, "and on some days, we get nothing at all." [Continued on Page 2](#)

**Visakhapatnam witnesses surge in synthetic drug trafficking**

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A significant escalation in drug trafficking and consumption has gripped Visakhapatnam, raising alarm among law enforcement and residents alike. The city has become a prime target for narcotics smuggled from neighbouring States, including Odisha, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, with traffickers employing increasingly sophisticated methods to bypass detection. Beyond the traditional influx of marijuana, Visakhapatnam is witnessing a worrying surge in the use of synthetic drugs, including cocaine, brown

**City emerges as key hub for narcotics, with traffickers using coded language and sophisticated methods to evade detection**

sugar, and MDMA powder. As the city evolves into a major cosmopolitan hub, the influx of these illicit substances is fuelling addiction and related crimes, placing it at the forefront of the region's battle against the illegal drug trade. [Continued on Page 2](#)

**AP police arrests Posani in Hyderabad**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Actor Posani Krishna Murali was detained by the Andhra Pradesh police at his residence in Gachibowli, Hyderabad, on Wednesday evening. He was taken into custody by officers from Rayachoti in Annamayya district and will be transported to Andhra Pradesh. Around 8.45 PM, the Rayachoti police arrived at Posani's home and served him a notice indicating that a case (Cr.No 65/2025) has been filed against him under sections 196, 353(2)(1) in conjunction with section 3(5) of the BNS Act, 2023, from the Obulavaripalli Police Station in Annamayya district. The charges are cognizable and non-bailable in nature. He is set to be presented before the



Additional Judicial Magistrate in Rajampet for judicial custody. Sources say that his wife mentioned that he is not in good health, but the police did not take this into consideration and behaved harshly. YSR Congress Party leader and former minister Ambati Rambabu expressed outrage over Posani's arrest, questioning the reasons behind it. He demanded that the Andhra Pradesh government explain to the public why Posani was taken away without any clear justification. "The coalition government does not even respect the law. They arrested Posani without providing any reason. It appears they are deliberately filing false cases to harass him. In Andhra Pradesh, the 'Red Book' constitution of Lokesh is in operation," Ambati criticised.

**WHERE FAITH, TRADITION, TECHNOLOGY FUSE**

**Maha Kumbh ends on note of devotion**

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The Maha Kumbh, billed to be the world's largest gathering, ended on Wednesday as it began 45 days ago - with lakhs of devotees surging towards the waters of the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati, for a dip on the auspicious day of Shivratri. The mega religious carnival wound to a close in a montage of images of the stampede that killed at least 30 people, the devout across every spectrum taking a dip in the belief it would cleanse their sins, huge crowds jostling not just at the Sangam but also stations and bus stands in north India and many a political slugfest over contested numbers and how clean the waters

were. According to the Uttar Pradesh government, 1.44 crore people took a holy dip till 6 pm on Wednesday. It said 66.21 crore

people have visited Prayagraj since January 13, a number that exceeds the populations of all countries except China and India. President Droupadi Murmu,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, top ministers and film stars were among those who went to the Kumbh. "From January 13, when the Maha Kumbh began on Paush

Purnima, till today on the occasion of Mahashivratri... in 45 days, more than 66 crore 21 lakh devotees have taken a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam. This is unprecedented in world history and truly unforgettable," Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in a post in Hindi on X. It was a gathering of the faithful and believers but also of those driven by the interest in the fabled Kumbh, where religion meets culture, where spirituality and tradition fuse, and where AI and modern-day technology this time blended with ancient stories of gods and miracles. The stars were aligned too with seers claiming that celestial permutations and combinations during the event took place after 144 years.





# Min Janardhan Reddy revives Daddanala Lake project

PNS ■ BANAGANAPALLE

The Daddanala Lake (Jurreeru Lift Irrigation Scheme) near Banaganapalle has been revived, bringing hope back to thousands of farmers. The Minister for Roads, Buildings, Investments and Infrastructure, BC Janardhan Reddy has personally invested his own funds to restore the project, reigniting optimism among the farming community.

With his initiative, four defunct motors associated with the project have been repaired, allowing water to flow through the canals once again. This restoration has made farmers happy as the irrigation scheme becomes operational. Despite the State's financial constraints, Minister Reddy allocated approximately ₹25.75 lakh from his own resources for the motor repairs, resulting in widespread happiness among local residents and farmers.

In 2018, during the tenure of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Minister Reddy had inaugurated

## Four defunct motors have been repaired



the Daddanala Lift Irrigation Scheme with a significant investment of around ₹21 crore. The project was designed to lift water from the SORB canal, located 13 kilometres away, to fill the Daddanala Lake, which had a water flow of 227.18 m. The scheme successfully transported water to the lake in its initial year, much to the delight of local residents and farmers. However, subsequent governance by the YSRCP led to neglect of the project, significantly diminishing its effectiveness. Over the past five years, the YSRCP govern-

ment has reportedly sidelined the project, resulting in the complete disrepair of the four motors needed for water lifting.

As the water level in Daddanala Lake continued to decline, surrounding agricultural fields also suffered from water shortages, preventing farmers from planting crops. Following Minister Reddy's recent efforts, the project has regained its past glory, bringing water back to Daddanala Lake and restoring hope among farmers. With the successful repair of the four motors, which have a capacity of

250 HP, the scheme is expected to release 17.74 cubic meters of water, benefiting villages such as Jolapuram, Sadakottam, Pathapadu, Meerapuram, Madasupalle, Yagantipalle, and Banaganapalle.

This revival will provide irrigation support to approximately 1,514 acres of land, benefiting around 500 farmers and over 7,000 residents from 10-15 villages.

The project will significantly enhance the local economy, especially for farmers growing crops like rice, maize, and cotton.

# Jagan dedicates YS Raja Reddy Eye Hospital to people

## HOSPITAL WAS UPGRADED AT A COST OF RS10 CRORE

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy dedicated the modernised YS Raja Reddy Eye Hospital to the public. The hospital, upgraded at a cost of Rs. 10 crore, was handed over to the people of Pulivendula. Following the inauguration, Jagan toured the facility, inspected the newly installed arrangements, and even underwent an eye examination himself.

The YS Raja Reddy Hospital has been a cornerstone of health-care in Pulivendula for decades. It holds historical significance as the workplace of the late Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy, a revered



leader who earned the title of the "One Rupee Doctor" for his accessible medical services. The hospital has now been

transformed into a state-of-the-art facility equipped with modern infrastructure and advanced technology to provide

cutting-edge eye care services. The YS Raja Reddy Eye Hospital's modernisation was made possible through the efforts of the YSR Foundation, which provided the land and invested approximately Rs. 10 crore to construct a new building. In collaboration with the renowned LV Prasad Eye Institute, the facility has been equipped to deliver high-quality eye care at affordable rates.

The hospital now boasts advanced equipment capable of performing up to 5,000 eye surgeries daily, ensuring that the people of Pulivendula and surrounding areas have access to world-class medical services at minimal cost.

## 'Get battle ready for assembly polls'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress has called a meeting here of its senior leaders from Assam and Kerala this week in which the status of the organisation and preparations for the assembly elections to be held next year will be discussed, sources said on Wednesday.

The meeting of Kerala leaders on Friday comes amid a row over Congress' Thiruvananthapuram MP Shashi Tharoor's recent article in a newspaper that drew criticism from some Congress leaders in Kerala for his perceived praise of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the state for boosting the investment climate.

In Assam, the Congress has opened a front against the BJP government and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sharma on the issue of alleged corruption.

## Govt suppressing Opposition's voice: Appi Reddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP MLC Lella Appi Reddy has criticised the coalition government for its authoritarian stance in denying YSRCP principal Opposition status in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly. Speaking to the media, he accused the government of suppressing the Opposition's voice and undermining democracy by refusing to recognise the YSRCP as the principal Opposition, calling it a blatant disregard for democratic norms.

He stressed that principal Opposition status is a responsibility, not a privilege, ensuring time to address public issues in the Assembly. Condemning the coalition's "venomous propaganda" for misrepresenting this role, he cited the Parliament Act of 1977, which mandates recognising the principal Opposition regardless of seat count. With three of four Assembly parties in the ruling coalition, he argued that the YSRCP, as the

## Denial of principal Opposition status is blatant disregard for democratic norms



sole remaining party, deserves the status.

Appi Reddy accused the government of lying in the Assembly and blocking discussion on public grievances, fearing YSRCP's scrutiny amid rising discontent over unfulfilled promises, Group-2 unemployment issues, chili farmers' struggles, and electricity charge hikes. He linked the denial of status to the coalition's inability to answer questions and hide governance failures.

Noting the YSRCP's effective Opposition role in the Legislative

Council -- raising issues like vice-chancellors' forced resignations and falsehoods in the Government's address -- he said the government is rattled. He emphasised the Opposition's vital democratic role, warning that unilateral governance without accountability is dictatorial. Challenging the coalition's numerical excuse, he suggested that the Jana Sena Party exit the coalition if numbers were the criterion. He concluded that the YSRCP's fight is to uphold democracy and ensure that people's voices are heard.

## 5 youths...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Rajahmundry MP and BJP State President Daggubati Purandeswari expressed shock and grief over the drowning of five youths in the river Godavari while taking a holy dip.

In a statement here on Wednesday, she said that it is unfortunate that five youths drowned in the river. She conveyed sympathies to the bereaved families. She spoke to the East Godavari Collector over phone and knew the details.

She suggested to the officials that more precautionary measures should be taken to ensure that such incidents do not recur. She promised to take the incident to the notice of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and do justice to the bereaved families.

## Kollu Ravindra extends wishes to people

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, Minister for Mines and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, extended greetings to the people across the State. He performed a holy bath in River Krishna at Durga Ghat in Vijayawada and conducted tarpanam (ritual offerings) for his ancestors. Following this, he participated in the abhishekam (ritual worship) at the Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple in Mutyalampadu.

Speaking to the media persons later, he expressed his wish for everyone in the State to receive the blessings of Lord Shiva. He noted that on this auspicious day, people rise early to



take sacred baths along riverbanks and perform tarpanam for their ancestors. He mentioned that devotees observe fasting and engage in worship of Parameshwara from the time of Linga Udbhava (the emergence of the Shiva Lingam). Kollu Ravindra stressed his hope that the grace of

Parameshwara would be upon all the people of the State. He prayed for divine blessings for the State's development and wished everyone a happy Maha Shivaratri. Telugu Desam Party State secretary K Nagendra Kumar and other party leaders including Watapalli Ramakrishna were present on the occasion.

## No road...

Continued from Page 1

The already difficult path to Donkada becomes treacherous during the monsoon. "Travelling becomes extremely difficult," they said. "The path is full of pits and sharp rocks, which we cannot see when it rains. Still, we have no choice but to continue commuting."

Despite these hardships, there is a glimmer of hope. In 2023, the Department of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development approved Government Order Route Number 726, sanctioning a 1.5-kilometre road from Karaka to Donkada at an estimated cost of Rs 1.35 crore.

"We hope the road work starts soon," a villager commented. "Road work for other villages like Chalisingam has already begun, so we remain hopeful that ours will commence as well. Once the road is built, many of our problems will be resolved automatically." The villagers are relying on this long-awaited infrastructure project to improve their lives and provide their children with access to education, breaking the cycle of poverty.

## Visakhapatnam witnesses...

Continued from Page 1

Despite intensified police surveillance, traffickers continue to employ covert strategies for transporting narcotics. Drugs are frequently smuggled via buses and trains, cleverly concealed in luggage and personal belongings. Furthermore, traffickers utilise encrypted communication and coded identification methods, making it increasingly difficult for law enforcement to track and dismantle their networks.

"Smugglers employ coded systems, ensuring anonymity between importers and local suppliers," stated a senior police official.

Intermediaries remain unaware of recipients until transactions occur. Couriers follow specific instructions, meeting buyers at designated locations identified through dress codes or other markers. Buyers also adhere to these covert identification processes.

Specific coded phrases, such as 'K' for cocaine and 'B' for brown sugar, further complicate efforts to trace suppliers. The drugs are frequently smuggled via buses and trains, cleverly concealed in luggage and personal belongings.

## Devotees flock...

Continued from Page 1

Twenty-three large Prabhulu (chariots) with electric lights and smaller ones decorated the festival grounds, creating a mesmerising atmosphere, while the entire temple premises were uniquely illuminated by electric lights.

The chariots from 80-100 feet in height adorned with bamboo structures and thousands of bulbs, sparkle majestically on Shivaratri night. The chariots from various villages such as Purushottapatnam, Kavour, Maddirala, Yadavalli, Komatinenipalem, Amin Sahib Palem, Kammapuram, Avishayapalem, Kesanapalli and Appapuram arrived at Kotappakonda, while others were constructed locally.

Union Minister P Chandrasekhar, Tiruvuru MLA Kolikapudi Srinivasa Rao, Chilikaluripeta MLA Prathipati Pulla Rao, Government Chief Whip GV Anjaneyulu, and Leelavathi couples performed special worship for the deity. Narasaraopet MLA Dr Chadalawada Aravind, along with his family, visited Kotappakonda Trikotswara Temple where priests welcomed them with a ceremonial water blessing, followed by the distribution of the sacred prasadam.

Former MLA Makkena Mallikarjun Rao, BJP leader Yarlagadda Lenin, and others also performed special worship for the deity.

sonal belongings. Recent law enforcement actions underscore the severity of the issue. In one instance, a youth named Ranki was apprehended at Rama Talkies with 24.5 grams of cocaine, allegedly sourced from Goa and Bengaluru.

Another arrest involved a Chennai-based individual caught in Rushikonda selling MDMA powder and LSD chips. Similarly, an Odisha native was apprehended in Sagarnagar attempting to deliver two grams of brown sugar.

"A recent arrest of an Odisha-based individual dealing in brown sugar highlights the severity of the issue," a police spokesperson said. Despite these successes, officials acknowledge that numerous traffickers remain active, operating within intricate networks that require continuous monitoring.

To combat this escalating crisis, law enforcement has enhanced anti-drug operations, implementing specialised intelligence systems in all police stations to swiftly act on drug-related leads. However, with the persistent flow of synthetic drugs, stricter enforcement and sustained vigilance are deemed essential.

## Rescue ops in final...

Continued from Page 1

He asserted that the rescue would be completed within two days and that multiple approaches were being explored, including alternative access routes from the side and main exit, to expedite efforts. He emphasized that every possible avenue was being considered to reach the trapped workers as quickly as possible.

At a high-level review meeting held at the incident site, Uttam Kumar Reddy, along with Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy, MP Mallu Ravi, Jachchela MLA Anirudh Reddy, Setwin Chairman Giridhar Reddy, Special Chief Secretary for Disaster Management Arvind Kumar, Nagarkurnool Collector Badavath Santosh, SP Gaikwad Raghunath, and TSSPDCL CMD Musharrif Ali, assessed the ongoing rescue operations. Senior officials from the Army, Navy, NDRF, SDRF, Rat Miners, and tunnel rescue experts participated in the discussions to formulate the next phase of interventions.

Specialized teams from 11 agencies, including MARCOS, BRO, the Navy, Army, NDRF, SDRF, and Rat Miners, have been mobilized to reach the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM),

where the workers remain trapped. Uttam Kumar Reddy reiterated that the government was leaving no stone unturned, deploying top experts, modern technology, and global rescue strategies to complete the mission.

A major challenge in the operation has been the accumulation of muddy water obstructing access to the TBM. To tackle this, dewatering operations have been intensified using advanced machinery to remove the water at a faster pace. Real-time monitoring of tunnel conditions is being carried out using high-tech imaging systems, and structural stability assessments are ensuring that rescue teams proceed without unnecessary risks. Uttam Kumar Reddy confirmed that Telangana was working in close coordination with central agencies, with MARCOS and BRO now providing additional expertise. A high-level strategy meeting was also held with representatives from the Navy, Army, Rat Miners, and disaster response teams to refine the rescue approach further. Senior officials, including Army Colonel Blacksmith Mehra, Lieutenant Colonel Harpal, Navy officer V K Prasad, Glen from Robin, Rat Miners representative Firoz Qureshi, NDRF DIG Mohsin Shahadi, and Commandant Prasanna, participated in the review

## Confusion, controversy cloud AU's TDR Hub admissions

### Conflicting government directives leave students and faculty in a spot

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A cloud of confusion continues to loom over the admissions process at Andhra University's Transdisciplinary Research (TDR) Hub, following conflicting directives from the Higher Education Department. What began as an inquiry into alleged irregularities has now left students, faculty, and university officials in a state of uncertainty.

The TDR Hub, intended to foster interdisciplinary research, has become a hotbed of controversy amid allegations of hundreds of PhD candidates being admitted outside standard procedures. Initially, the university was ordered to proceed with pre-PhD exams and viva. However, a sudden intervention by government officials last month halted the process, demanding an investigation into alleged admission irregularities.

Many anticipated that the inquiry would reveal significant discrepancies, especially given reports linking a former senior official's associate to the controversial admissions. Yet, in a surprising turn, the university received verbal instructions just four days ago to resume the halt admissions. This abrupt reversal, within a mere four weeks, has deepened uncertainty and fuelled concerns about transparency.



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"The situation is incredibly perplexing," a professor stated. "We were asked to investigate, and now we're being told to proceed as if nothing happened. It undermines the entire process." The TDR Hub has faced more allegations of impropriety than any other department, with claims that standard procedures were bypassed for numerous admissions. Many believed the investigation should have concluded before further action.

Following the latest directives, university officials are now preparing to move forward with the admissions process for 685 candidates admitted through the Andhra Pradesh Research Common Entrance Test (APRSET). These candidates will be allocated to their respective departments, where the eligibility of their research guides

will be reviewed. Any ineligible guides will be replaced before pre-PhD exams and viva proceed.

University officials confirm that this process is underway. However, uncertainty persists regarding those admitted through the Research Common Entrance Test (RCET). Speaking to The Pioneer, Registrar Prof. EN Dhananjaya Rao assured that all future actions will be in strict accordance with the Higher Education Department's instructions, once the new Vice-Chancellor takes office. The university now awaits the new leader to provide clarity.

The sudden shifts in policy have raised questions about the oversight of higher education in the region, and whether external pressures are influencing academic decisions.

## US citizenship...

Continued from Page 1

EB-5s were created by Congress in 1990 to generate foreign investment and are available to people who spend about USD1 million on a company that employs at least 10 people.

Lutnick said the gold card — actually a green card, or permanent legal residency — would raise the price of admission for investors and do away with fraud and "nonsense" that he said characterized the EB-5 program. Like other green cards, it would include a path to citizenship.

About 8,000 people obtained investor visas in the 12-month period ending Sept. 30, 2022, according to the Homeland Security Department's most recent Yearbook of Immigration Statistics. The Congressional Research Service reported in 2021 that EB-5 visas pose risks of fraud, including verification that funds were obtained legally. Investors' visas are common around the world. Henley & Partners, an advisory firm.

## Speculation rife over...

Continued from Page 1

Vangaveeti Radha has a strong chance this time around. He has consistently supported the party and was previously considered for a ticket, but missed out due to competing allocations. His efforts have been vital in maintaining the Kapu vote bank, positioning him as an essential asset for the TDP.

Mopidevi Venkataramana, a prominent leader among the BC community, resigned from his MP position in Jagan's party to join the TDP. His departure aligns with expectations that Naidu will reward his loyalty with an MLC seat.

Kimidi Nagarjuna, also representing the BC community, sacrificed the Cheepurupalli seat as per party directives. Currently serving as the district party president, he has worked diligently for the party's success in recent elections.

KS Jawahar, a senior leader and former minister from the SC community, is another potential candidate. Although

he has given up his seat, discussions about granting him an MLC position are ongoing, as he has yet to receive any nominated posts.

BT Naidu, the current MLC, is expected to be re-elected given his loyalty and long-standing dedication to the party, particularly during the recent elections.

Devineni Uma Maheswararao, a former minister, may also be in line for an MLC role after sacrificing the Mylavaram seat for Vasanth Krishna Prasad in the general elections. His loyalty and active role in the campaign have not gone unnoticed by Chandrababu.

While senior TDP leader Yanamala Ramakrishnu has been mentioned as a candidate, his prospects appear slim due to familial allocations during the elections.

This evolving political landscape highlights the dynamics within TDP as it navigates the upcoming MLC elections and seeks to balance various interests and loyalties among its members.



# Maha Shivaratri celebrated with religious fervour

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A large number of devotees gathered in the NTR and Krishna districts to celebrate Maha Shivaratri on Wednesday. The atmosphere in the temples was filled with sacred chants of "Om Namah Shiva," accompanied by special pujas and abhishekams.

Beginning early in the morning, many devotees took holy baths at various ghats along the Krishna River, including Durga Ghat, Bhavani Ghat, Punnami Ghat, and Pavitra Sangamam in Vijayawada. Celebrations also took place in Vedadri, Muktyala, and other locations in NTR district.

After their sacred dips in Krishna River, devotees proceeded to nearby Shiva temples, carrying river water for the abhishekam ritual. Special pujas were conducted for cows at several Gausshalas. A multitude of devotees sought the darshan of Malleeswara Swami at the Kanaka Durga Temple situated on Indrakeeladri. Among the many bustling temples in the city were the Sri Malleeswara Swamy Temple within the Kanaka Durga Temple complex, the his-

Lakhs of devotees take holy dip in Krishna, visit Shiva temples to perform special pujas



toric Shivalayam in I-Town, and the Shiva temples at Christurajapuram and Mutyalampadu.

The Sri Durga Malleeswara Swamy Temple organised a Shiva-Parvati Kalyanam, along with a mass abhishekam for Lord Shiva at the Maha Mandapam.

According to Executive Officer K. Ramachandra Mohan, the Markandeya Trust from Mangalagiri provided new garments for the Shiva-Parvati Kalyanam. The Maha Shivaratri festival was celebrated with great enthusiasm at the Sri Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple

1 Devotees taking holy dip in River Krishna on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri in Vijayawada on Wednesday

2 Sri Kasi Visweswara Swamy Temple Chief Priest Dr Mamillapalli Phanikumar presenting Rudraksha to kids at Nunna near Vijayawada on Wednesday

3 Devotees performing puja at a Shivalayam on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri in Vijayawada on Wednesday (Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar)

in Yanamalakuduru, located in the Krishna district. Numerous public representatives visited the temple to participate in special pujas. Thousands of devotees patiently waited for darshan at the temple from the early hours, prompting police to divert traffic for the convenience of attendees. The Prabha Mahotsavam at the Yanamalakuduru Shiva Temple provided a captivating experience for attendees and has been a highlight of the celebrations for many years. A total of 10 processions from surrounding villages arrived at the temple to commemorate the Lingodbhava event. Additionally, Maha Shivaratri was also observed in Thotlavalluru, Pedana, Krithivenu, Challapalli, Nagayalanka, and more.

On the occasion, a special puja was performed at the Sri Kasi Visweswara Swamy Temple in Nunna, near Vijayawada, using 10,000 Rudrakshas. The Shiva Lingam was decorated with these Rudrakshas and later distributed to students. The temple's Chief Priest, Dr. Mamillapalli Phanikumar, and Power Grid Senior General Manager K. Naga Mohana Rao were in attendance.

## Graduates' MLC election today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Election officials in the NTR and Krishna districts have completed the distribution of ballot boxes, papers, and other materials in preparation for the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' MLC election, which is scheduled for Thursday. The polling will be conducted from 8 AM to 4 PM.

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha and Krishna District Collector D.K. Balaji oversaw the distribution process at various centres, ensuring that all necessary security measures were in place to facilitate a smooth and incident-free polling. As many as 1,41,177 graduate voters will exercise their franchise at 189 polling stations.

In the NTR district, there are 78,063 graduate voters, and the district administration has arranged for 112 polling stations. Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers, and other polling staff received ballot boxes, papers, and other materials from the distribution centres in Vijayawada, Tiruvuru, and Nandigama on Wednesday. District Collector Dr. Lakshminsha personally inspected these processes and offered appropriate suggestions to the polling staff.

While addressing the media at the Vijayawada Sub Collector's Office, Collector Lakshminsha stated that the district is fully prepared for the Graduates' MLC election and



NTR District Collector Dr Lakshminsha inspecting election materials at a distribution point at the Sub Collectorate Office in Vijayawada on Wednesday (Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar)

that voters can cast their ballots freely in a peaceful atmosphere. He mentioned that around 450 police officials have been deployed for security purposes. The entire polling process will be recorded.

Additionally, to monitor the

polling process, the district administration has appointed Micro Observers for all polling stations. They established 18 routes for distributing polling materials and sending staff to their respective polling stations.



Krishna District Collector DK Balaji inspecting the ballot boxes at a polling material distribution centre on Wednesday

In the Krishna district, 63,114 graduate voters will cast their votes at 77 polling stations across 31 areas. The district administration has appointed 94 Presiding Officers, 92 Assistant Presiding Officers, 199 Other

Polling Officers, and 92 Micro Observers, as stated by Krishna District Collector D.K. Balaji. He inspected the distribution of polling materials at the distribution centres in Gudivada, Machilipatnam, and Vuyyuru.

## Minister Anitha meets Lokesh

Seeks Skill Development Centre in her constituency

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha met IT and Education Minister Nara Lokesh at his residence in Undavalli on Wednesday. She extended her best wishes on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, hoping that the blessings of Lord Siva would always be upon him. During the meeting, she submitted a memorandum requesting the establishment of a Skill Development Centre in her constituency of Payakaraopeta. She stressed the need for training programmes to equip the youth for industries due to the opportunities presented by the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor and Bulk Drug Park in Nakkapalli.

Anitha also submitted another request for a dedicated Junior College for girls in S Rayavaram, stressing the importance of education for families that primarily depend on agriculture. She pointed out that many parents wish to educate their daughters and establishing a girls' college will help eliminate financial and logistical barriers, thereby benefiting numerous girls in the area.

In a separate meeting at the



Home Minister's camp office in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh Forensic Lab Director G Pala Raju met with Minister Anitha. They discussed the progress of the Forensic Science Laboratory being constructed on a five-acre site in Thullur, which had an estimated cost of ₹400 crore approved by the previous Telugu Desam government in 2017. Pala Raju reported that 90 per cent of the construction work has been completed in just six months since the new government came to power and laborato-

ry activities are proceeding actively. On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, Anitha conducted special prayers at Kanaka Durga Temple in Indrakeeladri, Vijayawada, and also visited the Shiva Temple to offer her respects. The temple priests blessed her with Vedic mantras and presented her with the sacred offerings. Engaging with the large number of devotees present for the festival, she enquired about the arrangements made at the temple.

## TDP chief rejects Jagan's demand for Opposition Leader status

Urges focus on legislative duties over procedural disputes



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) State president Palla Srinivasa Rao has strongly opposed former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's insistence on being officially recognised as the Leader of the Opposition. Addressing the media on Wednesday, Rao dismissed Jagan's demands, stating that the distinction between an Opposition Leader and a regular party leader is largely symbolic—offering little more than certain travel privileges, while all other allowances remain the same.

Rao highlighted a recent Assembly session where Jagan refused to participate unless his demand was met. The former Chief Minister's brief protest, lasting just 10 minutes before he exited the Assembly, was

ridiculed by the TDP leader. "If the people have already rejected his claim to this position, he should address those who denied him, not seek validation within the Assembly," Rao asserted.

Reaffirming democratic principles, Rao insisted that the Assembly's primary function is to represent the people's voice, regardless of formal Opposition status. He urged political leaders to focus on their legislative duties instead of engaging in procedural disputes. Drawing a historical comparison, Rao referred to the early years of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), when it held just two seats in Parliament. He praised former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for effectively voicing the party's concerns without demanding official Opposition status.

The TDP leader further emphasised that the role of the Opposition is not dependent on formal recognition, but rather on a politician's ability to challenge and scrutinise government policies. Suggesting that Jagan's insistence may be driven more by a desire for flight ticket privileges than genuine concerns about opposition rights, Rao questioned whether the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) chief would continue boycotting the Assembly if his demand remained unmet.

Rao urged Jagan to move beyond procedural disputes and focus on meaningful legislative engagement. "Rather than fixating on titles, he should participate in the Assembly, oppose policies that harm the people, and fulfil his responsibilities as a leader," he said.

## Pass resolution opposing UGC proposal: SFI

SFI writes to CM that move could compromise autonomy of State universities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Student Federation of India (SFI) State president K Prasanna Kumar and general secretary A Ashok have written to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, urging him to pass a resolution in the Legislative Assembly opposing the University Grants Commission's (UGC) draft proposal concerning the appointment of vice-chancellors in universities.

The leaders articulated that the UGC's draft proposal seeks to standardise the selection process for VCs across Indian universities by introducing specific eligibility criteria and a uniform appointment procedure. However, they raised concerns that this initiative could compromise the autonomy of State universities and centralise authority, thereby restricting the involvement of State governments in the administration of higher education.

In their correspondence, Kumar and Ashok highlighted the necessity of safeguarding the independence of educational institutions. They called upon the Chief Minister to take a decisive stance against the proposal by enacting a formal resolution in the State legislature. They

believe that such a resolution would convey a robust message to the UGC and the Central government regarding the State's dedication to maintaining oversight of its educational matters. Additionally, they criticised the UGC for neglecting the principle of reservation in the new proposal. They pointed out that the proposal permits candidates who have completed a Master's Degree with a minimum of 55 per cent but have not qualified for the UGC NET to be appointed as Assistant Professors in their respective fields.

They expressed apprehension that the teaching standards might decline as a result of this proposal. The draft is perceived as a move towards the centralisation and privatisation of universities, which they argue would undermine the educational and decision-making systems currently under the jurisdiction of the State government.

Additionally, it was stated that States including Telangana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and others are expressing their opposition to the draft proposal and have adopted resolutions in their respective legislative assemblies.

## National Science Day celebrations at IISER

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

IISER Tirupati is set to celebrate National Science Day with enthusiasm on February 28. This year's theme, "Empowering Indian Youth for Global Leadership in Science and Innovation for Viksit Bharat," highlights the importance of fostering scientific curiosity among the younger generation. A major attraction will be a six-foot model of a python, designed to engage and educate visitors.

The IISER Tirupati Registrar Prof Vijayamohan Pillai, in a release on Wednesday, stated that the celebration will feature a variety of engaging talks and demonstrations, a tradition at IISER Tirupati. Faculty members, student clubs, various departments and research scholars have collaborated to create a diverse range of science exhibits. Over 700 school children and other visitors are expected to attend this mega event,

emphasising the spirit of scientific inquiry. Experiments are central to nurturing curiosity and critical thinking in young minds. IISER Tirupati will showcase innovative experiments across multiple disciplines, including Biology, Chemistry, Earth Sciences, Mathematics, and Physics. These activities will cover fundamental concepts as well as advanced innovations in cutting-edge science.

Highlights of the event will include, Topics such as Neurotomy, Illusions, Genetics, Evolution and Climate Crisis. Participants can engage in activities like creating a Lava Lamp, Chemiluminescence, and exploring the Seebeck effect. Displays on Waste Management, Snakes Museum, Forest Fires, Volcanoes and Fibonacci Series besides presentations on Quantum Dots, Smart Polymers and the Meissner Effect. Light Ray games, Mini Planetarium experiences and the Tesla Coil demonstration.

## Liquor racket busted, 2 held

Illicit liquor is believed to be intended for distribution during MLC elections

PNS ■ NARSAPURAM

In a pre-election operation, authorities have dismantled an illegal liquor racket in Narsapuram, resulting in the seizure of a substantial quantity of illicit liquor believed to be intended for distribution during the MLC elections.

The operation, led by local law enforcement, culminated in the arrest of two individuals, Gollamandala Rajababu (35) from Kopparru village and Barre Jayaraju (42) from Narsapuram Town. The investigation began when officers seized two bottles of liquor (180ml) during a routine check, leading to the discovery of

approximately 4,500 bottles of suspected spurious liquor hidden in an aqua farm nearby. Authorities suspect that the liquor was part of a scheme to sway voters and investigations have linked the operation to Barre Venkataramana, Chairperson of Narsapuram municipality. It is alleged that Venkataramana, through her husband Jayaraju, procured substantial quantities of liquor for election purposes, with left-over stock being sold illegally.

Dr Kumareswaran, the West Godavari District Prohibition and Excise Officer, stressed that no one will be above the law, regardless of their influence. The raid was conducted

under the supervision of SHO Rambabu, with support from Assistant Commissioner Prabhu Kumar and Assistant Excise Superintendent Prasad Reddy. Enforcement Director Rahul Dev Sharma and Deputy Commissioner Sreelatha closely monitored the operation.

In a related development, a high-level review meeting was held to assess revenue mobilisation and crime control strategies. Commissioner Nishanth Kumar and Rahul Dev Sharma urged officials to remain vigilant against illicit activities that could compromise the integrity of the elections.



### Siblings drown in Tammileru rivulet, bodies fished out

PNS ■ ELURU

Taking a holy dip on the occasion of Mahashivaratri turned to be fatal to the two siblings as they drowned in the Tammileru rivulet at Balivedu village in Pedavegi mandal on Wednesday. Police said that the deceased siblings Pericharla Muniiah (25) and his younger brother Pericharla Murali (22) went to the Tammileru to take holy dip and to perform Pinda Pradanam to their deceased parents. They entered the rivulet to have a holy dip but they drowned. The NDRF teams fished out the bodies. The deceased siblings belonged to Tummalapalem village. Poignant scenes were witnessed at the rivulet with wailing family members. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to the GGH for postmortem.

## All arrangements made for MLC polls in WG, EG dists

PNS ■ ELURU

All arrangements have been made to conduct MLC graduates constituency elections in West Godavari and East Godavari districts on Thursday. Election Returning Officer and District Collector K Vetri Selvi told the media here Wednesday that 66 polling stations have been set up in the combined West Godavari district for the MLC elections. She said that there are 42,282 voters in Eluru district out of them 24,704 are men, 17,571 are women and 7 are trans-genders. She informed that 66 polling stations have been set up in the district. She inspected the arrangements and made suggestions to the officials. She directed the officials to ensure that the MLC elec-



tions are held in a peaceful atmosphere. In the combined East Godavari district, there are 62,970 voters out of which 36,361 are male voters and 26,606 female voters. As many as 92 polling stations have been set up across the district.

## Godavari Pushkar ghats will be made safe for pilgrims: Durgesh

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh has stated that all the Pushkar Ghats of the river Godavari will be made safe for pilgrims to take a holy dip during ensuing Godavari Pushkarams. The Minister expressed shock and grief over the drowning of five youths in the river Godavari at Tadipudi village while taking a holy dip on the occasion of Mahashivaratri on Wednesday. The Minister visited the bodies in the Government hospital in Kovvur on Wednesday. The Tourism Minister expressed his grief over the ghastly incident taking place on the Mahashivaratri festival. Talking to the media, the Minister said that he was told that the deceased youths had taken the Jana Sena party membership. If the deceased youths had taken the JSP membership, the bereaved families would be extended Rs 5 lakh ex gratia on



behalf of the JSP, he announced. "It is heartening to know that all the deceased were below 20 years old and college students. I have personally seen the bodies in the GGH and saddened at the tragic incident," Minister Kandula Durgesh noted. The Tourism Minister also promised that he would take the issue to the notice of the Government and ensure that the bereaved families would be extended ex gratia. "All the pre-

cautionary measures are being taken at the bathing ghats of the river Godavari for the 2027 Godavari pushkarams. Steps will also be taken to ensure that such drowning incidents do not recur in the future," Minister Durgesh said and directed the officials concerned to focus on safety measures at the bathing ghats of the river Godavari. The NDRF and rescue teams retrieved all the five bodies from the river.

## Mahashivratri celebrated at TTD-run Kapileswara Swamy temple

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

As part of the ongoing annual Brahmotsavam of Sri Kapileswara Swamy in Tirupati, the Mahashivratri festival was celebrated with utmost religious fervour on Wednesday. Keeping in view the devout rush, special queues, cool roofs, and parking areas have been arranged. Sarvadarshan commenced at 6 am for the devotees in the temple. As part of Brahmotsavam, the Bhogiteru procession was held at 7 am. Rathotsavam was conducted in the city streets amidst the jubilant performance by bhajan mandals and other artists. After that, from 11 am to 12 noon, the priests performed

Snapana Tirumanjanam. Sri Soma Skandamurthy and Sri Kamakshi Devi were offered Abhishekam with milk, curd, honey, Panchamritam and sandalwood. As part of the Brahmotsavam of Sri Kamakshi sametha Sri Kapileswara Swamy, the Kalyana Mahotsavam of Lord Shiva and Parvathi will be held on Thursday, the day after Mahashivratri. The Kalyanotsavam on February 27 will be held from 6 pm to 7 pm. Temple Deputy Executive Officer Devendra Babu and temple priests participated. Meanwhile, Special Abhishekam was performed to Kshetrapalaka Rudra, a form of Lord Shiva located near

Gogarbham on the occasion of Mahashivratri here on Wednesday. It is customary to perform this special abhishekam every year on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri to Lord Rudra who is the Guardian of Tirumala. On this occasion, officials and priests from Tirumala temple reached the Kshetrapalaka Shila with temple etiquette. Abhishekam was performed with milk, curd, ghee, sandal paste, coconut water etc. After that Naivedyam offerings were made. Later Prasadam was distributed. Srivari Temple Parupattar Himmat Giri, temple Inspector Parthasaradhi and a large number of devotees participated in this holy program.



## Thousands throng Srisailem, Srikalahasti on Shivaratri

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Thousands of devotees thronged Shiva temples including the famous Srikalahasti, Srisailem and Kotappakonda to have darshan of Lord Shiva on the occasion of devotional Mahashivaratri on Wednesday. Official sources said that over one lakh devotees had darshan of Lord Shiva at Srikalahasti temple. Popular Telugu film actors M Mohan Babu, Manchu Vishnu, Prabhudeva, Balaji, MLA Bojjala Sudheer Reddy and BJP state secretary Kola Anand were among those who worshipped Lord Shiva in the Srikalahasti temple on Wednesday. Talking to the media on the occasion, Manchu Vishnu said that they are producing the mythological movie 'Bakta Kannapa' and the movie would be released on April 27. He said that his daughters sang a song for the film which would be released on March 19 on the occasion of Manchu Mohan Babu's birthday. At the famous hill shrine Srisailem, over one lakh devotees thronged the temple on Wednesday. The devotees started forming long queues after midnight to have darshan of Lord Shiva. All the 12 compartments were full with devotees. All the roads leading to the temple in Srisailem were overcrowded with devotees. Over ten thousand Shiva Swamies who embraced Shiva Deeksha also thronged the temple today. It took over five hours for the devotees to have darshan of



Lord Shiva and three hours for devotees to wait in the special darshan queue. A large number of devotees came from neighboring states including Karnataka and Telangana states. The temple authorities made arrangements for 10,000 devotees to have the spiritual event of adorning a turban to the deity which would be solemnized at 10 pm today at the temple. Meanwhile, the devotees expressed their anger over the officials for lack of facilities. "The temple authorities did not provide drinking water facilities outside of the temple. They collect money from those who embraced Shiva Deeksha," some devotees alleged. Since the officials failed to provide accommodation to the devotees at Srisailem temple, they were seen sleeping on the roadsides. However, the officials heaved a sigh of relief as the Mahashivaratri passed off peacefully without any untoward incident. At the famous hill shrine Kotappakonda in Palnadu district, over one and half lakh

lakh devotees thronged the temple today and the devotees were allowed to have darshan till 10 pm. The APSRTC operated 550 special buses to Kotappakonda today from various places. MLA Chadalavada Aravinda Babu worshipped Lord Shiva at the Kotappakonda temple today. He told the media that it was expected that over 2.5 lakh devotees would throng the temple today and arrangements were made accordingly. The MLA highlighted that deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan had released Rs 4 crore for the development of Kotappakonda temple. Over ten thousand devotees had darshan of Lord Shiva in the Amaralingeswara Swamy temple at Daida village in Gurazala mandal. MLA Yarasathini Srinivas Rao among those who had darshan in the morning. Thousands of devotees had a darshan of Lord Shiva at famous Pancharama Kshetras located in Palakollu and Bhimavaram. The temples were spruced up on the occasion of Mahashivaratri.

## Vizag's Swachh Survekshan rank at risk

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam's impressive streak in the national Swachh Survekshan competition is under severe threat, as a leadership vacuum and a noticeable decline in sanitation standards raise concerns among residents and GVMC officials. The city, which secured a commendable fourth position in the last two years, now faces a daunting challenge to maintain its ranking. The primary cause of this predicament is the absence of a full-time Municipal Commissioner. Following the transfer of Sampath Kumar last month, the position remains vacant, leaving District Collector M.N. Harendhira Prasad to shoulder the additional responsibilities. However, his existing workload has limited his ability to effectively address the GVMC's pressing needs, leading to a palpable impact on city cleanliness. Residents report a stark decline in sanitation management, with garbage piling up and the single-use plastic ban being blatantly ignored. The once-regular field visits by the Commissioner, which ensured swift grievance redressal and effective implementation of cleanliness initiatives, have ceased. "The difference is stark," a local resident stated, highlighting the lack of visible authority and the resulting negligence. This leadership gap has led to increased laxity among lower-level staff, with enforcement of sanitation norms and the plastic ban virtually aban-

done. Previously, GVMC actively imposed fines for violations, a measure that has now lapsed. The accumulation of garbage, particularly around commercial establishments, is a testament to this decline. Visakhapatnam's Swachh Survekshan performance has seen significant fluctuations over the years, ranging from a dismal 237th in 2015 to its recent high of fourth. While officials had hoped for further improvement, the current state of affairs threatens to reverse this progress. With the Swachh Survekshan-2024 team scheduled to arrive in early March, anxieties are running high. The survey, postponed from last year due to general elections, has been underway since February. GVMC officials fear that the city's current condition will lead to a substantial drop in its ranking. "We acknowledge that if the Central teams conduct inspections under these circumstances, our ranking will suffer," a senior GVMC official admitted.



## 4000 liquor bottles seized, 4 held

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

The police and excise officials conducted a raid and seized over 4,000 liquor bottles at Kopparru village in Narasapuram mandal and held four persons, including the husband of Narasapuram municipal chairman. CI S Rambabu said that on a tip off that a huge quantity of liquor was hoarded at a fish pond at the village, a team comprising police and excise personnel conducted a raid

and seized 4000 liquor bottles. The liquor bottles were brought illegally from Goa to sell here. Interestingly, one of the arrested persons, Barre Jayaraj, is the councillor of 8th ward and the husband of Narasapuram municipal chairman Barre Venkataraman. The other three arrested persons were Yedla Ramakrishna, Gollamandala Rajababu and Kattimanda Jayababu. The excise police registered a case.

## Schools in 24 TG districts to remain closed today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The State government has announced a holiday on February 27 for schools in 24 districts of the State, ahead of the upcoming Telangana Legislative Council (MLC) polls to ensure the smooth conduct of elections. Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari announced that schools in these districts will be closed to ensure law and order on election day. The move is meant to avoid causing any hassle for students, teachers and parents since elections take place in these districts. The districts to observe the holiday on February 27 are Hyderabad, Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Medchal - Malkajgiri, Rangareddy, Mahabubnagar, Sangareddy, Adilabad, Peddapalli, Jagtial, Jagtial, Sircilla, Nirmal, Mancherial, Jayashankar Bhupalpally.

## 12 red sander logs seized, 4 smugglers arrested

PNS ■ NELLORE

The Red Sanders Anti Task Force (RSATF) personnel seized 12 red sander logs and arrested four smugglers in Marlapudi forest in Rapuru mandal. DSP Srinivas Reddy told the media that on the directions of RSATF chief L Suba Raidu, a task force team led by RI Krupanand and RSI Raghavendra conducted combing in the forest. The task force personnel noticed two persons standing beside two motorcycles at Bandarupalli village in Jamuna

Rapuru mandal. When the task force personnel were approaching the two men, they started fleeing into the forest. The Task force personnel chased and apprehended them. On the information provided by the two arrested persons, the task force team seized 12 red sander logs and arrested another two smugglers. The police shifted the 12 red sander logs and four smugglers to the Tirupati task force police station. SI Rafi registered a case and began investigation, DSP Srinivas Reddy added.



## Alakananda kidney racket worsens recipient's health

DEEPIKA PASHAM deepikapasham2015@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

The illegal kidney transplantation racket exposed at Alakananda Hospital, Saroornagar, has had severe consequences for a recipient, leading to critical health complications. Bhat Prabha, also known as Krupalatha, a nurse from Mangalore, had travelled to Hyderabad for a kidney transplant. However, following the bust of the illegal racket, she experienced kidney rejection and required specialised treatment at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) before being discharged. Prabha had been undergoing dialysis and was advised by doctors in Mangalore to undergo a kidney transplant. According to sources, adherence to prescribed medications is crucial for organ transplant recipients, as the body may reject a transplanted organ, considering it a foreign entity, much like the need for blood type compatibility in transfusions. Even kidneys donated by family members can sometimes face rejection. Following the exposure of the racket, Prabha was taken to Gandhi Hospital.

However, due to the hospital's limited experience with high-risk transplants, she sought better care. Additionally, she was reportedly made to wait at a police station for hours, during which she missed critical medication and treatment. Given her financial constraints, she sought treatment at a government hospital and was eventually transferred to NIMS. Upon admission, her husband was in distress, and doctors discovered an infection around the transplanted kidney, leading to its rejection. At NIMS, specialised procedures such as a kidney biopsy and nuclear scan were conducted to assess the organ's condition. Through intensive medical intervention, the transplanted kidney was gradually stabilised, and within 15 days, her body began to accept it. She was later discharged. Despite spending Rs 50 lakh on the transplant, the family had to bear additional expenses of approximately Rs 1 lakh at NIMS for further treatment. They expressed gratitude to NIMS for providing advanced care, which would have been costlier at private hospitals. Without immediate intervention, Prabha could have lost her transplanted kidney entirely.

## 'Gross injustice to the Southern States'

KTR supports Stalin's statements on delimitation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS working president K T Rama Rao has raised serious concerns over the proposed delimitation of constituencies, calling it a major injustice to southern states. He warned that the Centre's plan to redraw constituencies based purely on population figures would be a curse for states like Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Kerala. Supporting Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin's objections, K T Rama Rao questioned whether the Modi government was punishing southern states for their success in population control. He criticized the move, stating that redrawing constituencies without factoring in the contributions of southern states

was against the principles of democracy and federalism. He pointed out that in 1951, southern states accounted for 26.2 percent of India's population, which declined to 19.8 percent by 2022, while northern states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan saw their population share increase from 39.1 percent to 43.2 percent. If Lok Sabha seats are allocated based on the latest census, he explained, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar alone would have 222 seats, while all five southern states together would get only 165. Emphasizing that southern states have consistently outperformed northern states in economic growth, human development, and population control, K T Rama Rao said it was

unfair to penalize performing states while rewarding those lagging. Instead of using population as the sole criterion, he suggested that economic contribution should be a major factor in the delimitation process. Telangana, he said, accounts for only 2.8 percent of the country's population but contributes over 5.2 percent to India's GDP. The same is true for other southern states, and this should be taken into account before redrawing constituencies. He warned that any attempt to reduce the political representation of southern states would not go unchallenged. "If southern states face injustice under the guise of constituency delimitation, we will not sit silently and watch," he asserted.



ACROSS THE STATES



Rio bats for Naga tribal court for timely justice

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Wednesday stressed the need for the promotion of traditional laws and the establishment of an apex tribal court for timely delivery of justice. Rio made the remarks during an address at the 'Sekrenyi festival-cum-Mini Hornbill' of the Angami Naga tribe in Kisama. He said the special protection and privileges accorded to Naga traditions and customs should be safeguarded and preserved. The chief minister said resolving internal disputes among the Nagas through tribal courts would prevent the need to approach the modern judiciary system and be economical, too. Expressing optimism that upholding customary practices would foster unity and harmony among people, Rio called on tribal bodies to cooperate with the state government in creating an apex court in the state. Rio said the Nagaland government intends to promote customary laws. The Nagaland government has already enacted the Village and Tribal Council Act, replacing the erstwhile Act, which will be implemented soon, he said.



ONOE will bring economic efficiency: Tripura CM

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday said 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) is the need of the hour for improving the country's administrative and economic efficiency. Speaking at an event here, Saha said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi made efforts to implement ONOE in 2019, but was unsuccessful. However, last year the PM was able to get the Bills tabled in the Lok Sabha. If passed, it will strengthen administrative efficiency." Saha said holding elections for Lok Sabha, assemblies and civic bodies have become increasingly expensive. "More than Rs 60,000 crore was spent on the 2019 general elections. This rose to around Rs 1.35 lakh crore in 2024. Political parties also huge amounts to win elections. If this money is saved through simultaneous elections, the country's GDP will grow," he said. Saha asserted that the BJP had promised to implement ONOE in its 1984 election manifesto.



KVS suspends teacher for derogatory remarks

The Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) has suspended a probationary teacher for making derogatory remarks against Bihar and its people following her posting in Jehanabad district. A primary teacher on probation, posted at Kendriya Vidyalaya in Jehanabad, landed in trouble after a purported video went viral on social media in which she was reportedly seen making those remarks. The authenticity of the video could not be independently verified by PTI. According to a statement issued by the KVS regional office in Patna, "As per provisions of rule 10 of the Central Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules, 1965, Deepali, the primary teacher on probation, posted at KVS (Jehanabad), is suspended with immediate effect. She will report to KVS, Masrahkh, in Saran district." The Jehanabad district administration also issued a statement regarding this. In the purported video, she said, "I don't know what mistake I committed.... I am ready to go places like Kolkata, Odisha, Himachal Pradesh or even Ladakh, but not Bihar."

Centre gave Rs 5 lakh cr to TN in 10 yrs, says Shah

PNS ■ COIMBATORE  
TAMIL NAIDU

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday denied any injustice to Tamil Nadu by the Centre as claimed by M K Stalin over fund allocation and described as diversionary attempts, the Chief Minister raking up the delimitation issue. Refuting Stalin's claims, Shah said the Narendra Modi government has provided Rs 5,08,337 lakh crore to the state during the 2014-24 period.

Also, he accused Stalin of spreading a misinformation campaign on the delimitation exercise. Seeking to put to rest speculation on the subject, he asserted no southern state including Tamil Nadu would see a reduction in the Parliamentary representation when delimitation will be done on pro-rata basis.

Stalin has said the delimitation exercise will impact the southern states, especially Tamil Nadu in the wake of them successfully implementing the family planning programme. He has claimed Tamil Nadu stands to lose 8 out of the 39 Lok Sabha seats due to

Slams Stalin over central funds, delimitation



delimitation and has convened an all-party meeting on March 5 to discuss the matter.

Lashing out at the ruling DMK dispensation on the 'failure' of law and order in the state, Shah, speaking after inaugurating the BJP party office here, said "the anti-national tendency is at all-time high in Tamil Nadu."

"Tamil Nadu government provided security during the last

journey of 1998 bomb blast accused and mastermind (SA Basha)," the Home Minister said.

He claimed the drug mafia enjoyed a free hand in selling drugs in the state and that illegal mining mafia was making politics corrupt here. Tamil Nadu has the worst law and order situation in the country. "All the leaders of DMK

have got Master's degree in corruption. One leader is involved in a cash-for-job scam, another in money laundering case, third in a disproportionate wealth case, fourth in coal scam and the fifth was involved in Rs 6,000 crore CRIDP scam. It seems the DMK has selected the corrupt through the party's members drive," he charged at the event.

Centre should spell out its stand on Mekedatu

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Wednesday asked the Centre to spell out its stand on the Mekedatu balancing reservoir across the Cauvery River in the state.



Shivakumar, who holds the Water Resources portfolio, said he raised the issue of Mekedatu with Union Minister C R Patil and his deputy, V Somanna, during his visit to Delhi on Tuesday.

The meeting focused on discussing and securing approvals for several pending irrigation projects.

"I asked the Centre, 'What is your stand on the Mekedatu issue?' We may be pushing for it, or they may be opposing it, or they may say no—but they must clarify their position," Shivakumar told reporters.

"The Deputy Chief Minister said Patil is in a position to ensure justice and should explain the feasibility of the proposal.

"We presented a proposal

for the Mekedatu balancing reservoir because we don't want any further delays. We asked the Union Minister for a clear statement on the Centre's stance," he said.

Shivakumar emphasised that Karnataka wants the Centre to inform the Supreme Court about its position on the Mekedatu issue so that both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu can benefit from it.

The Deputy CM pointed out that the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu -- an ally of his party Congress, was opposing the project due to political reasons.

"They (Tamil Nadu) fear that we will create problems for them if the Mekedatu reservoir is built, which is not the case," he added.

Actor Vijay ridicules BJP-DMK's clash over Hindi Likens it to kindergarten fight

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Actor-politician Vijay, founder of Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, on Wednesday ridiculed the BJP and DMK for waging a hashtag war on social media 'X' and said the two parties were fighting like kindergarten kids, trivialising the serious issue of language row.

Speaking at TVK's first anniversary celebrations at Mamallapuram near here Vijay said the BJP countered the DMK's "#Get out Modi" with "#Get out Stalin" on the trilingual policy, "just like LKG and UKG students fight."

"It's the Centre's duty to provide funds and its the state's rights to receive funds. But both the fascism and 'payasam' (the word TVK uses to ridicule DMK's anti fascism rhetoric), our political and ideological enemies, are playing with hashtags on social media. What's happening here? Both are pretending to fight and expect us to believe? What bro, its wrong bro," he said evoking laughter among his party cadres.

He said the TVK respected all languages but would not give up its self respect for another language. "As an individual anyone can learn any language but violating the cooperative federalism and state autonomy, and leaving a question mark on the state language by thrusting another language and imposing it



politically is unacceptable," he said at the well attended gathering. Vijay's remark, however, evoked spontaneous criticism from BJP state chief K Annamalai, who had launched the hashtag campaign against the Chief Minister.

He accused Vijay of "double standards" on trilingual policy and said, "what bro preach what you practise bro. Why tell lies bro?"

Speaking to reporters in Coimbatore, Annamalai sought to know why election strategist and founder of Jan Suraaj Party Prashant Kishore helped the DMK to win in 2021 and was now voicing against that party.

Incidentally, the popular actor launched a #Get Out campaign on the occasion to protest against the New Education Policy. Though Vijay initiated the signature campaign, Prashant Kishore declined to sign.

Later, addressing the gathering, Kishore said every state had its own share of problems, and share of legacies. India was forced to accept the Gujarat model as the best in the country.

Kejriwal has big responsibility, won't go to RS from Punjab: AAP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal has a big responsibility for the party's pan India expansion and he will not become a Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab, party leaders said on Wednesday.

The buzz over Kejriwal going to the Rajya Sabha inten-

sified with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) declaring sitting MP of the upper house from Punjab, Sanjeev Arora, as its candidate for the bypoll in Ludhiana West Assembly seat.

Kejriwal, the former three term chief minister of Delhi, was defeated in the recent assembly polls from the New Delhi seat by BJP's Parvesh

ILLEGAL US IMMIGRATION

ED raids visa firms in Punjab, Chandigarh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said it raided three visa consultant firms in Ludhiana and Chandigarh as part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged fraud in providing immigration services to aspirants who wish to go to the US.

The case emerges from FIRs filed by Punjab and Delhi police on the complaint by the office of the Overseas Criminal Investigations, US Embassy in Delhi.

This complaint stated that "fraudulent" activities were perpetrated by companies like Red Leaf Immigration Private Limited, Overseas



Partner Education Consultants and some others. In a statement, the federal agency said searches were carried out on Tuesday at five business and residential premises in Ludhiana, Punjab and Chandigarh of the two companies apart from a third firm -- Infowiz Software Solution -- and some others.

Incriminating documents, digital devices and Rs 19 lakh in cash were seized during the searches, it said.

The accused entities and people running them had "forged" the education certificates/experience letters of "ineligible" visa applicants who were aspiring to study or work in the United States of America.

They transferred funds to the accounts of the visa applicants to show a "minimum" account balance for visa application and they "wrongfully" helped such persons to show their eligibility for obtaining a visa for the United States of America by "manipulating" their facts and circumstances, the ED found.

The accused charged commission from the aspirants for this job, it said.

The accused entities charged "hefty" amounts from visa applicants and proceeds of crime were generated through such criminal activities. These funds were further invested for the purchase of movable and immovable properties and "diverted" into various bank accounts, according to the agency.

The issue of illegal immigration and human trafficking made headlines again recently after the US deported several Indians on their military planes according to the new policy declared by President Donald Trump.

Gang of robbers posing as commandos held

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Police on Wednesday arrested a gang of robbers who were posing as police commandos to loot trucks during night in the outskirts of the city here, police said.

Chanchal Singh, hailing from Haryana, filed a complaint on February 22 at Shalteng police station alleging that some unidentified gunmen stopped his vehicle and robbed him of cash and valuables at Maloora on Srinagar-Bandipora road, a police spokesperson said.

Nitish inducts seven new ministers, all from BJP

PNS ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday inducted seven new faces, all from alliance partner BJP, into his council of ministers, raising the total number to 36, the maximum permissible in the state with a 243-strong assembly.

Governor Arif Mohammad Khan administered the oath of office to the members of the assembly in Bihar, where elections are due later this year. The also has a legislative council.

The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief minister abruptly quit the NDA, accusing the BJP of trying to "break" his JD(U).

Other inductees are Sanjay Sarangi, a fifth term MLA from Darbhanga, and Sunil Kumar, who represents Bihar Sharif, in the CM's pocket borough Nalanda, for as many times, thrice on a JD(U) ticket before crossing over to the BJP in 2015.

Another former JD(U) face was Raju Kumar Singh, the MLA from Sahebganj in



**The new ministers include Jibesh Kumar, who was a member of the state Cabinet till August 2022, when the chief minister abruptly quit the NDA, accusing the BJP of trying to "break" his JD(U)**

Muzaffarpur, who had won the seat in 2020 on a ticket of Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP), floated by former Bollywood set designer Mukesh Sahni.

The VIP had won altogether three seats but all the MLAs joined BJP two years ago after Sahni burnt his bridges with the saffron party, losing his cabinet berth in the bargain.

Another notable face was Krishna Kumar Mantu, the

MLA from Amnour in Saran district, who was recently in the news for organising a "Kurmi Chetna Rally" in Patna, with a view to reaching out to the powerful OBC community to which the JD(U) supreme belongs.

The remaining two inductees were Vijay Kumar Mandal, who represents Sikti in Araria district and Moti Lal Prasad, the MLA from Riga in Sitamarhi.

A careful calculation of the BJP's support base seems to have been at work in the cabinet expansion that took place a day after the party's national president chaired a meeting of the "core group" here.

Two of the new ministers, Jibesh Kumar (Bhumihar) and Raju Kumar Singh (Rajput), belong to the upper castes, which make for a little over 10 per cent of the population in Bihar, but have been the BJP's most loyal voters over decades.

Besides, with the exception of Sunil Kumar, all hail from the region north of the Ganges, where the NDA has been performing better than the rival RJD, Congress and Left combine.

Ayodhya witnesses massive influx of devotees on Maha Shivratri

PNS ■ AYODHYA (UP)

The holy city of Ayodhya witnessed a massive influx of devotees on Maha Shivratri as thousands gathered to offer prayers at Shiva temples across the city, chanting "Har Har Mahadev" in devotion.

Devotees celebrate the wedding of Lord Shiva with Goddess Parvati on Maha Shivratri. The temple town in Uttar Pradesh was adorned for the occasion, with major Shiva temples illuminated and decorated for the festival.

A surge of devotees from nearby districts descended on Ayodhya to perform the sacred 'Jalabhishek', offering water and

milk to Lord Shiva. Officials estimated that around 1.5 million devotees had reached Ayodhya by Tuesday, with the crowds swelling further on Wednesday.

At the ancient Nageshwar Nath Temple located at Ram Ki Paidi, the doors opened in the early hours to accommodate the throngs of worshippers. Temple administrator Sabhapati Tiwari said Lord Shiva was grandly adorned on Tuesday and rituals were completed ahead of the main celebration.

"On Wednesday night, a grand procession will take place from the temple, followed by the ceremonial wedding of Lord Shiva, which will be celebrated with great pomp," Tiwari said.



**A surge of devotees from nearby districts descended on Ayodhya to perform the sacred 'Jalabhishek', offering water and milk to Lord Shiva. Officials estimated that around 1.5 million devotees had reached Ayodhya by Tuesday, with the crowds swelling further on Wednesday**

After offering prayers at the Shiva temples, many devotees proceeded to the Ram Temple for 'darshan'. The temple opened at 5 am and will remain accessible to worshippers until midnight.

With the rising number of visitors at both the Nageshwar Nath Temple and Ram Janmabhoomi, authorities have taken measures to regulate crowd movement.

Circle Officer (CO) Ashutosh

Tiwari said discussions with temple management resulted in a decision to hold the Shiva procession late at night when footfall on Rampath is lower. Additionally, the return route of the procession has been short-

Arunachal has potential to generate 50,000 mw of hydropower: Dhankhar

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh has the potential to generate 50,000 MW of hydropower, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Wednesday, maintaining that the state holds the key to India's energy future.

Dhankhar, who is on a daylong visit to the state, attended the Nyokum Yullo festivals of the Nyishi tribe at Boasimla in Kamle district. Addressing a function there,

he underscored the importance of festivals in preserving the cultural heritage of the tribal communities.

Dhankhar hailed India as the fastest-growing country in the world, citing remarkable strides in economic growth, infrastructure, and social welfare.

Speaking on Arunachal Pradesh's vast hydropower capabilities, he said the sector holds an investment potential of Rs 5 lakh crore.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Disparities rising

One billion Indians have minimal purchasing power despite rapid growth says a Blume Ventures and Marcellus report

In a startling revelation about the state of the Indian economy, recent findings of a study highlight that nearly one billion Indians possess little to no spending power. According to a report by Blume Ventures—supported by insights from Marcellus Investment Managers—India's consumer market is undergoing profound structural changes, marked by deepening disparities and a shifting focus towards premium products for the wealthy. At the heart of the report is the disconcerting revelation that India's true "consuming class" is far smaller than what many might assume. The report identifies only about 130–140 million people as part of this active consumer base—roughly equivalent to the entire market of a country like Mexico. In addition, an extra 300 million Indians are categorised as 'emerging' or 'aspirant' consumers. The report underscores that India's consumer market is not broadening by adding new entrants into the wealthy segment; instead, it is deepening. In practical terms, while the overall size of the affluent population remains relatively stagnant, the existing wealthy are growing even wealthier.



This trend of 'premiumisation' has seen brands pivot towards offering high-end, upgraded products that cater specifically to the rich. For example, ultra-luxury housing and premium smartphones are experiencing surging sales. In contrast, lower-priced alternatives are struggling. Affordable homes now represent a mere 18 per cent of the overall market. Moreover, the booming 'experience economy'—evident in the rapid sell-out of high-priced concert tickets for international artists like Coldplay—further illustrates the evolving consumption pattern that favours upscale offerings over mass-market products.

A critical dimension of the report is its analysis of income inequality in India. The long-term trend of widening disparities has been stark. The top 10 per cent of Indians now control 57.7 per cent of the national income—a dramatic increase from 34 per cent in 1990. Conversely, the bottom 50 per cent have seen their share decline from 22.2 per cent to just 15 per cent. The affluent continue to prosper, while the majority of the population grapples with stagnant incomes, diminished savings, and mounting debt. The situation is particularly alarming for India's middle class. The report reveals that the middle 50 per cent of India's tax-paying population has experienced income stagnation over the past decade. The situation is alarming as financial savings are nearing a 50-year low. The insights from the report paint a sobering picture of the Indian economy. While the nation boasts rapid growth in certain sectors and an expanding base of emerging consumers, the benefits of this growth are unevenly distributed. The government must focus on strategies that not only promote growth but also ensure that economic gains are more broadly shared. Investments in education, upskilling and initiatives to revive the middle class's purchasing power will be crucial in steering India towards a more balanced and inclusive economic future.

## PICTALK



Vendors display earthen pots for sale, on the outskirts of Ahmedabad

## Allahbadia's remarks: Digital decency under fire



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Ranveer Allahbadia's remarks underscore growing concerns over declining entertainment standards and highlight the urgent need for stricter regulations

The recent uproar over content creator Ranveer Allahbadia's controversial remark on comedian Samay Raina's show, India's Got Latent, has sparked widespread condemnation across political, social and cultural spectrums. The backlash began with netizens expressing outrage and quickly escalated into a national debate, drawing criticism from political leaders, women's rights organisations and public figures, so much so that Shiv Sena MP Naresh Ganpat Mhaske even raised the matter in Parliament. Veteran artist Raza Murad and singer B Praak expressed their dismay at the decline in the quality of entertainment, questioning how obscenity could be passed off as humour.

Moreover, the joke in question had been lifted from a previous 'Western' online video, reinforcing concerns about not just the vulgarity in digital content but also its lack of originality. Social media swiftly linked the question to Truth or Drink, a comedy show from Australia hosted by Sammy Walsh. In the original episode, Walsh presented the same bizarre hypothetical to comedian Alan Fang.

The controversy surrounding Ranveer Allahbadia, also brings to the forefront, a critical constitutional debate—where do we draw the line between freedom of speech and responsibility in content creation? Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution guarantees the Fundamental Right to 'Freedom of Speech and Expression', but it comes with reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), including public decency and morality. The focus must shift from merely advocating Fundamental Rights to instilling a deeper commitment to Fundamental Duties.

Article 51A of the Indian Constitution enshrines these duties, urging citizens to uphold the dignity of women, respect India's rich cultural heritage and foster a spirit of scientific temper and humanism. In today's digital age, where content creation holds immense power, social media influencers must be more aware of these responsibilities. The recent incident—among many others in the past, though



none as brazen—reflects a troubling cultural decline. The relentless pursuit of profit and popularity has overshadowed the essence of responsible communication. Merely imitating Western trends for the sake of TRPs not only erodes societal values but also exposes influencers to unintended consequences. Upholding decency and cultural integrity in digital spaces is not just a moral obligation but a necessity for preserving the ethos of our nation.

## The Historical Context of Drama

This discussion further leads to the historical context of artistic responsibility, as encapsulated in the 'Natyashastra', an ancient Indian treatise on drama and performance. Authored by sage Bharata between 200 BCE and 200 CE, 'Natyashastra' is the cornerstone of Indian performing arts. While advocating ethical storytelling, it stresses discipline, humility and cultural integrity in performances. The text warns against arrogance and artistic misuse, highlighting the role of art in societal upliftment and moral education. If lessons of 'Natyashastra' were to be imbibed by content creators, they would recognise the power of their platforms and exercise restraint in their expression. Historically, India has also had a vibrant tradition of live performance and satire in the form of 'Bahurupias', a community of street performers



ARTICLE 19(1)(A) OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO 'FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND EXPRESSION', BUT IT COMES WITH REASONABLE RESTRICTIONS UNDER ARTICLE 19(2), INCLUDING PUBLIC DECENCY AND MORALITY.

who entertained audiences through mimicry, storytelling, and political satire. Unlike today's digital comedians, 'Bahurupias' adhered to ethical storytelling, ensuring their humour remained socially constructive rather than destructive.

Offending sensibilities in their era could lead to stringent punishments, yet they managed to craft thought-provoking and respectful humour. The 'Bahurupias', named after Sanskrit "bahū" (many) and "roop" (form), are traditional impressionists known for their ability to assume multiple identities depicting their art that required deep cultural understanding. Dhirubhai Thakar, the renowned Gujarati literary historian, highlighted the significance of folk traditions like Bahurupias, stating, "The Bahurupia tradition is a testament to how humour, when wielded responsibly, can be both entertaining and enlightening."

**Setting Norms**  
In the face of rising controversial digital content, a structured ethical framework is essential to balance creative freedom with social responsibility. Indian knowledge systems have long emphasised a two-fold approach—one for creators and another for consumers, much like Master Abhinavagupta's (an illustrious Spiritual Master who injected new meaning into the Shaiva Philosophy, which 1,000 years later became more

popularly known as Kashmir Shaivism)—the distinction between 'Nata' (performer) and 'Rasika' (audience). Digital creators should be trained in ethical communication, while audiences must develop discernment. Social media influencers, given their reach, need structured value-based training, akin to traditional performers, with a self-regulatory body overseeing content. Strengthening community guidelines on platforms like YouTube and Instagram to align with Indian cultural and legal norms can curb harmful content. Additionally, inspired by 'Natyashastra's' role in guiding performers, public awareness campaigns can foster responsible digital consumption beyond punitive measures. In On Liberty (1859), John Stuart Mill emphasises the ethical boundaries of personal freedom, asserting that individual liberty must be limited when it infringes upon others. He says, "The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people."

The Ranveer Allahbadia controversy is not an isolated incident but a reflection of a larger societal issue—the gradual erosion of ethical entertainment. The challenge lies not just in regulating social media but in fostering a culture of conscious content creation and consumption.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## STALIN DEFIES CENTRE ON LANGUAGE

Madam—This refers to the report "Stalin accuses Centre fuelling language war" (February 26). The anguish, resentment and objection being raised by TN Chief Minister MK Stalin are not without reason. Though the present three-language policy (Hindi, mother tongue and English) is convenient, effective and acceptable to everybody, the Centre has always been unnecessarily trying to impose Hindi on the people in the southern belt. The blind love for Hindi not only constrains the government to spurn regional languages but also opposes English, which is a living, dynamic and wonderful language that helps to unite the people across the globe. The work being done in English will not be as effective and feasible, if done in Hindi or any other Indian language. In fact, most Indians, including politicians, are crazy to learn and speak in English, and they prefer to educate their children in English medium schools. It is a naked truth that those who are fluent in English have a better chance to gain lucrative jobs in India and abroad. For the common people, the mother tongue is the first option, while the second choice is English and not Hindi. Hence, the government must adhere to the present three-language formula and avoid undesirable conflict and confrontation between the Centre and the southern states by thrusting Hindi on them.

T T Sakaria | Delhi

to meet future demands. Creating and sustaining such an institution is a collaborative effort. Leadership, faculty, students, and alumni all contribute to a culture that values excellence, innovation, and independent thought. As industries and technologies evolve, BIT Mesra's role expands from merely imparting education to equipping individuals to navigate change, lead advancements and contribute meaningfully to society. Fostering interdisciplinary research, nurturing entrepreneurship and promoting inclusive education are essential strategies for ensuring its continued relevance. With seventy years of legacy behind it, BIT Mesra remains both a guardian of its proud traditions and a dynamic force for future progress. Its ongoing mission is to build on its storied past while relentlessly pushing the boundaries of knowledge, research, and education in an ever-changing world.

(The writer is a staffer with the Pioneer; views are personal)

## Judiciary: The beacon of hope



The editorial, 'Liberty is sacrosanct' (February 26), is appropriate as it calls for a 'balance between ensuring justice and upholding individual rights'. By and large, the judiciary in India has played its role very well in protecting the constitution, safeguarding the liberties of citizens, and upholding the democratic values in the country. The Supreme Court has repeatedly decided

and declared that bail should be the rule and jail the exception. The Supreme Court is right in deciding that bail should be treated as a right and not as a privilege. If an accused is cooperative in the investigation and trial, he should not be detained unnecessarily. Pre-trial detention should be used rarely and not commonly. In the recent past, the Supreme Court gave relief to AAP leaders Kejriwal and Sisodia and freed them before the Delhi assembly elections so that all parties have a level playing field. The editorial is right in emphasising that pre-trial detention should not be prolonged. In the atmosphere of despair, intrigue, and revenge, the judiciary is the only beacon of hope and protector of individual liberty.

Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt

excesses. Opposition rules state governments have genuine fears as every voice of dissent is being muted by systematic destruction of federal structure as envisaged in our great constitution. Academics hold so much importance for the future of the country. If it is also muddled with political appointments who would definitely give priority to their high command orders over academic excellence, then we are really running short of time for reversing this trend. Opposition needs to unite and take a collective stand against these draft guidelines and make sure that these guidelines don't turn into law.

Deepak Sharma | Panchkula

## ENSURE WOMEN SAFETY

Madam—Crimes against women underscore the urgent need for collective action. The incident of Nirbhaya's gang rape in Delhi and the Kathua rape case highlight the grim reality of women's safety in India. We must create a society where women feel safe and secure. Formulating deterrent laws and ensuring swift justice is crucial. The government's efforts to strengthen laws and

increase punishment for crimes against women are a step in the right direction. However, more needs to be done to ensure that women feel safe in their daily lives. We must unify our efforts to promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal norms, and support survivors of violence. By working together, we can build a more just and equitable society where women thrive. For instance, the "Pink Saris" initiative in Uttar Pradesh, where women vigilantes wear pink saris to protect themselves and others from violence, is a testament to the power of collective action. Similarly, the "Nirbhaya Squad" in Delhi, a team of police officers dedicated to ensuring women's safety, is another example of efforts being made to address this issue. Together, we can make a meaningful difference and create a brighter future for women. Let's work together to build a society that values and respects women's rights and safety.

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## A legacy of visionary education and unyielding innovation

BIT Mesra not only honours its storied past but also paves the way for future innovations in areas like AI, rocket science and STEM empowerment

Education is the cornerstone of societal transformation, shaping individuals who drive progress and innovation. BIT Mesra, celebrating seventy years of excellence, exemplifies how a visionary commitment to learning can create enduring impact. Founded in 1955 by industrialist B M Birla at a time when India was laying the groundwork for its technological future, BIT Mesra quickly emerged as a prestigious centre for innovation. Originally established to foster technological growth, it has expanded over the decades to offer diverse programmes in engineering, science, management, architecture, and space research. Today, a dedicated faculty of 600 and a vibrant student body of over 10,000 continue to make the institution a hub for knowledge and creativity. The Platinum Jubilee celebrations underscored both the rich legacy and forward-thinking vision of BIT Mesra. Dignitaries, including President Droupadi Murmu, attended the event, where discussions highlighted the



institute's contributions to advancing technology—particularly in artificial intelligence and machine learning—and recognised the increasing participation of women in STEM fields. These milestones not only celebrate past achievements but also pave the way for future innovations. BIT Mesra's impact on India's technological journey is profound. The establishment of the country's first Department of Space Engineering and Rocketry in 1964 set a precedent for pioneering research, while collaborations with organisations like ISRO keep its

academic community at the forefront of scientific development. Moreover, a vast and active alumni network reinforces the strength of its academic foundation and continues to drive advancements across various industries. Beyond classroom learning, BIT Mesra emphasises inquiry, critical thinking, and the practical application of knowledge to solve real-world challenges. Commemorative symbols such as the silver medal, stamp and envelope released during the Jubilee serve as tangible reminders of the institute's role in molding innovative minds prepared



SAKSHI PRIYA





## FIRST COLUMN

## OUR REAL WEALTH: RELATIONSHIPS

In the relentless pursuit of material success, we often overlook the true wealth in our lives—our relationships



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Our lives revolve around the relationships that we have inherited by birth as well as the ones that we made after birth and also they continue after we rest in peace i.e. death. Isn't it so ironic that throughout our lives we struggle hard to maintain our relationships and yet we cannot achieve that perfect balance in our relations, be it personal or professional?

The reasons for this may be numerous, however, to make the long story short one would find that most of the reasons are so common and at times quite foolish on our part that we find it funny when we sit down and think about those silly reasons which become the very cause for turning our relationships sour. It's a fact that all of us are living a fast-paced life where we get extremely busy accumulating financial assets and physical comforts. So lost have we got in this race to achieve something, that we hardly find time to sit back and think as to where our relationships are heading to.

Our craze for materialism has made us forget that material belongings are devoid of meaning if there is no peace or happiness within. Today we have reached a stage where instead of humans, we have made smart gadgets, material belongings and social status as our companions. We are gradually getting transformed into machines with no heart, feelings or emotions. As a result, our relationships have become strained. So, always nurture your relationships and handle them with utmost care



because it's too painful an experience when a person we know suddenly becomes a person we know. There is a well-known saying that 'we see things not as they are but as we are.' While our physical eyes see everything and everyone the same way, it is the thoughts and feelings that accompany the act of seeing that form an impression in the mind about what we are seeing.

On the other hand, if we are in a negative frame of mind, we might perceive things negatively. We all fail to understand the fact that whether it's friendship or relationship, all bonds are built on trust, without it we won't achieve anything. Hence we should try our best to remain safe from a dreadful habit called assumption which creates mistrust leading to suspicion, anger, enmity and finally separation. We should also refrain from playing the blame game that's the biggest hindrance to maintaining good relations. It's normal for all of us to blame the opposite party in case of a failed relationship, because nobody would ever take responsibility on the self, however, we should remember that when we point one finger at someone, the other three are pointing at us, so it is always better to take personal responsibility and accept our folly rather than create an environment of hatred for each other.

A relationship is like a house. When a light bulb burns out, do we go and buy a new house? Not really, we fix the bulb and move on. The same applies to our relationships too, we keep on nursing our egos to such an extent that it leads to misunderstanding, creating a heavy atmosphere. Hence we should realize that having an easy and cooperative nature towards everyone would help us to be flexible and humble. We should always give value to our relationships and should make an effort to nurture them, rather than lose them on trivial matters. Supreme Almighty can fulfil all relationships with us. Hence, when we experience the relations of father, teacher, preceptor, companion and friend with HIM, then it becomes easy to give love to all other human beings and leads us to the understanding that we are all children of the same father and need to take care of everyone around us. Lastly, we should not forget that a real relationship has trust, faith, tears, fights, pain, arguments, patience, secrets, jealousy and overall - LOVE. So, love all and get loved in return by all. This is the key to positive & peaceful living.

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

# Future-proofing employability: The skills will set you apart



DIENSH SOOD

The future belongs to those who embrace continuous learning, adapt to emerging trends and cultivate a blend of technical and soft skills



The rapidly evolving global landscape of the job market presents exciting opportunities and formidable challenges. With technological advancements reshaping industries and global hiring trends influenced by economic shifts, the most valuable asset for professionals will be their skills. Understanding market demands and proactively adapting will be crucial for those considering a career transition.

## The Demand for Skills in a Rapidly Evolving Market

According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2023 report, the most demanded skills by 2027 will include artificial intelligence (AI), enormous data competency, creative and analytical thinking, leadership, social influence, and continuous learning. However, only 50 per cent of employees today have access to adequate learning opportunities and six out of ten will need upskilling within the next few years. This widening skills gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity for professionals to invest in their development and distinguish themselves in a competitive job market. Businesses, too, are grappling with the rapid pace of technological change. By 2027, nearly 44 per cent of workers' core skills will be impacted, creating an urgent need for companies and employees to embrace continuous learning. Those who adapt swiftly will find themselves in high-growth sectors with ample career opportunities.

## Bridging the Skills Gap

By 2025, an estimated 97 million new jobs will be created globally, driven by AI, the Internet of Things (IoT), and robotics. Yet, many of these positions may remain unfilled due to a shortage of skilled professionals. In India, AI adoption has already reached 48 per cent across industries, with banking and financial services leading at 68 per cent, followed by technology at 60-65 per cent. However, the lack of qualified tal-



IN INDIA, AI ADOPTION HAS ALREADY REACHED 48 PER CENT ACROSS INDUSTRIES, WITH BANKING AND FINANCIAL SERVICES LEADING AT 68 PER CENT, FOLLOWED BY TECHNOLOGY AT 60-65 PER CENT. HOWEVER, THE LACK OF QUALIFIED TALENT THREATENS TO SLOW THIS PROGRESS

ent threatens to slow this progress. India produces 1.5 million engineering graduates annually, yet only 45 per cent meet industry standards, and just 10 per cent secure jobs, according to Team Lease Digital. The challenge extends beyond technical expertise—employers are also looking for strong communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, often overlooked in traditional education.

## The Changing Nature of Work

The rise of automation, AI, and robotics is shifting job requirements. The McKinsey Global Institute highlights that social, emotional, and higher cognitive abilities are becoming more critical while manual and basic cognitive skills are declining. For example, cyber security is experiencing an unprecedented demand, with 3.5 million positions currently unfilled across technology, telecom, and manufacturing. These roles require technical expertise, strategic thinking, and leadership capabilities. Similarly, industries such as 5G equipment manufacturing, climate technology, and renewable energy are booming. Professionals with hybrid skill sets—combining technical knowledge with business acumen—are increasingly sought after.

## The Education System's Role in Workforce Readiness

To meet the demands of Industry 4.0, education must evolve. Despite India's extensive network of over 40,000 institutions and nearly 1,000 universities, there remains a disconnect between academic learning and industry requirements. According to NASSCOM, India's technology sector will need over

one million engineers with AI and emerging technology expertise within 2-3 years. However, the digital skills gap will increase from 25 per cent to 30 per cent by 2028, underscoring the urgency for a job-ready workforce.

## Closing the Gap Through Collaboration

A key solution lies in stronger collaboration between universities and online learning platforms. Real-world, industry-aligned education can significantly enhance employability. A recent Hire-Pro report revealed a stark disconnect in perception: while 70 per cent of colleges believe their graduates are job-ready, only 16 per cent of employers agree. With Gen Z set to make up 27 per cent of the global workforce by 2025, bridging this gap is critical.

## The Role of Technology in Job Creation

The digital revolution continues to transform industries. Cloud computing, AI, and machine learning are driving innovation, with 59 per cent of IT professionals in large companies having already deployed AI solutions, according to the IBM Global AI Adoption Index 2023. By 2026, India's IT sector alone is projected to contribute \$350 billion to the GDP. However, workforce readiness remains challenging, highlighting the need for urgent action to close the skills gap.

## The Power of Continuous Learning

Success in today's workplace is no longer defined solely by a degree. Employers increasingly prioritise skills over formal education, making continuous learning essential for career advancement. Upskilling

through workshops, online courses, and certifications is now a necessity rather than an option. Many companies partner with e-learning platforms to provide tailored training programmes, ensuring employees acquire technical and soft skills. This investment in learning and development benefits individuals and strengthens businesses in the long run.

## The Growing Value of Soft Skills

While technical expertise is critical, soft skills such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability are equally valuable. In a dynamic and fast-changing work environment, professionals with strong interpersonal skills will have a competitive edge, enabling them to lead teams, collaborate effectively, and manage complex projects.

## The Future: Adaptability is Key

The workforce of the future will belong to those who embrace skill development and lifelong learning. Whether you're a fresh graduate or an experienced professional, adaptability will be the key to long-term success. Educational institutions and online platforms must work together to equip professionals with the right mix of technical and interpersonal skills. In a world where change is the only constant, staying ahead requires a commitment to growth and a willingness to evolve with the times.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member, of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of GOI; views express are personal)

# How antibiotic-free poultry empowered a mother and her community

By raising chickens with natural remedies instead of antibiotics, women in Uttar Pradesh are safeguarding their health and boosting their incomes

Four-month-old Angel Singh is a post-term baby. Having been born after a ten-month pregnancy, many of her family members were afraid she would be weak and sickly. But Pinky always knew her child would be healthy despite being born a month after what is considered a normal nine-month pregnancy period.

Angel's weight and other health indicators at birth proved her mother right. Much of Pinky's confidence stemmed from the fact that she was regular with her antenatal checkups (ANC). She also focused on a nutritious diet of leafy greens which she sourced from her small vegetable patch at the back of her house in Uttar Pradesh's Samsa Tarhar village in Bahraich, the second

most backward district in India. As her pregnancy progressed, Pinky, a small poultry farmer, diversified her diet to include antibiotic-free eggs and poultry. This was to be a smart move.

Not only because it helped her stay healthy and increase her weight and haemoglobin levels, but more importantly, thanks to her poultry training, she was able to ensure whatever she ate was free of antibiotics. By using natural feed and herbal remedies while raising her chickens, she was able to cut the risk of developing antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a condition arising from the consumption of meat and eggs of poultry fed with antibiotics to promote quick growth and prevent diseases. Just how critical this practice



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

was can be gauged from the worrying fact that, in 2019, over 297,000 deaths in India were directly attributed to AMR. Moreover, the poultry environment has been a reservoir of multi-drug resistant bacteria according to the most recent study of four poultry farms in Uttar Pradesh by the Centre for Science and Environment which found rampant use of antibiotics for

growth promotion and disease prevention. The WHO recognizes the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in feed and water in food-producing animals to contribute to the development of AMR in humans. Pinky realised this was possible only after she joined the backyard poultry (BYP) farming initiative to empower women and enhance food security and incomes implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) under their aspirational district programme. After being trained by them in poultry farming techniques, biosecurity, and disease management using proven herbal and natural formulations to prevent the development of antibiotic resistance, Pinky, then in her second trimester of pregnancy, understood that the benefits of being a poultry entrepreneur were more than just being economically empowered. "It was an opportunity to take charge of my own health and destiny and that of my unborn child," says Pinky. It is not just Pinky who is bringing change.



Like her, 60 women from marginalised communities in 120 villages in four blocks in Bahraich trained as poultry farmers by AKF are making a

difference in their lives and communities through sustainable and ethical poultry farming practices after each was given 50 pre-vaccinated 21-day-old Sonali breed chicks free along with support for feeding and constructing chicken coups.

It was the AKF strategy to impart rigorous, yet easy-to-understand hands-on demonstration and training on using commonly found medicinal plants and herbs as alternatives to antibiotics that helped the women, mostly uneducated, understand the importance of adopting ethnoveterinary methods or traditional practices for treating animal health and illness. "I used to give antibiotics to keep my poultry healthy before I met the AKF team. Yet, many died.

After joining their programme, I gave a health tonic of turmeric water mixed with jaggery, chitrata for deworming and azola, a protein rich fern, to boost their immunity. None of my chicken fell ill," shares a Rambha Devi, a poultry farmer in village Samroha. Raghendra Singh, AKF district coordinator, skill development, who is closely associated with the BYP programme, contends the 10 per cent mortality rate normally associated with chicks has come down to 4.5 per cent among the 3000 chicks given to AKF poultry farmers because of their use of natural feed and traditional herbal remedies. Consequently, almost 90 per cent of their chicken was sold and the remaining was used for home consumption. The

health of families, especially children, consuming these antibiotic-free poultry and eggs, has improved say frontline health workers working in these villages. Further, an AKF evaluation shows that each poultry farmer made a profit ranging between Rs 10,000-14,000. This success has prompted the women to invest in another 50 chicks even if it means taking a loan from their self-help group as it will no longer be given free. But this isn't stopping them, especially Pinky, who is buying 100 chicks. "The benefits I have gained from being a poultry farmer cannot be measured only in monetary terms. It has changed my life." (The author is a journalist writing on development and gender; views are personal)



## IN BRIEF



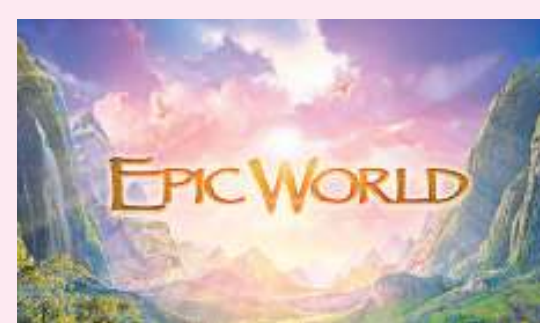
### Wipro to invest USD 200 mn in Wipro Ventures

A major Wipro on Wednesday said it will invest USD 200 million (about Rs 1,740 crore) in its arm Wipro Ventures to accelerate its funding for startups in the technology innovation space. This marks the fourth funding round for Wipro Ventures since it began operations ten years ago, and is aimed at speeding up investments in startups at the early to mid-stage level, a company statement said. "This latest investment reaffirms our commitment to helping startups grow faster, innovate, and collaborate with the IT services industry to support large enterprises. We envision a collaborative ecosystem, where these emerging technologies can be deployed globally, drive progress, and create sustainable value for all stakeholders involved," Wipro CEO and MD Srinu Pallia said. Established in 2015, Wipro Ventures focuses on identifying and investing in promising early-stage startups that drive technological innovation. The Wipro Ventures team connects Wipro and its clients to a global ecosystem of startups working on disruptive technologies, enabling Wipro's clients to access the latest innovations while providing startups access to a global network of enterprise customers, the statement said.



### Star Health Insurance expands service

Standalone health insurer Star Health and Allied Insurance Company Ltd has expanded its Home Health Care initiatives to 100 locations across the country, the company said on Wednesday. Launched in July 2023, the initiative covers 85 per cent of Star Health Insurance's customer base, offering cashless doorstep medical care service. "At Star Health, we believe that health insurance goes beyond providing financial coverage. It is a bridge to accessible and affordable healthcare for every individual. Our vision is to remove barriers such as high hospitalisation costs, logistical challenges and the stress associated with seeking care. By bringing quality medical care closer to customers, we aim to ensure their comfort and peace of mind," company MD and CEO Anand Roy said in a company statement. Cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Pune have been proactive in the adoption of these services, with services primarily focused on treating conditions such as viral fever, dengue. More than 15,000 patients have benefitted from the Home Health Care programme.



### EPIC World launches EHI

EPIC World on Wednesday announced the launch of the Entrepreneurial Households India Index, which will track the performance of 34 listed companies. The index constituents include Au Small Finance Bank, Bajaj Finance, Shriram Finance, Bandhan Bank Ltd and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank. The EHI index, developed by EPIC World with Morningstar Indexes, provides calculation services and tracks the performance of 34 publicly listed companies that offer products and services designed for entrepreneurial households. The companies on the index have a combined market capitalisation of USD 115 billion and a five-year revenue CAGR of 22 per cent, EPIC World said in a statement. The global platform, supported by impact investor Elevar Equity, has plans to enable the build-out of 50 blue-chip companies to cater to entrepreneurial households (EHs). "EPIC World is set to unlock India's USD 100 trillion opportunities as Entrepreneurial Households are expected to grow 10X in the next 20 years," it said.

## Worst over on India's growth trajectory: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The worst seems to be over for the Indian economy's growth trajectory, a German brokerage said on Thursday. GDP growth, which had slipped to a seven-quarter-low of 5.4 per cent in the September quarter leading to a lot of concerns over the economy's strength, is likely to rise to 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, the report by Deutsche Bank said.

"We think the worst is over as far as India's growth trajectory is concerned but, even with the improvement of momentum, overall GDP growth is likely to remain below the potential growth rate of 7 per cent in FY26," the bank's analysts said.

In the report which comes a day ahead of the release of official data on economic performance, the analysts also said that we have to be cautious about the forecasts as there can also be a revision in previous years' data.

The brokerage added that its leading indicator derived from 65 high-frequency indicators

is also pointing towards a 6.2 per cent growth.

The Reserve Bank is likely to deliver another rate cut of 25 basis points at the upcoming review of the monetary policy in April to help growth.

Minutes of the last policy reveal that all the members on the six-member monetary policy panel feel that rates remained at restrictive levels,



it said. After the April rate cut, RBI will focus more on the liquidity measures to ensure transmission of the 0.50 per cent repo rate cut to the real economy, it said, adding that more cuts are unlikely in the current cycle.

The central bank is already cognizant about the liquidity needs, and the recent USD 10 billion swap announcement is "encouraging", it said.

## Australia unveils roadmap to boost trade ties with India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Australia on Wednesday unveiled an ambitious roadmap to deepen its trade and investment ties with India, with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese describing it as an attempt to find paths towards a better future for both sides.

The roadmap identified four "superhighways of growth" -- clean energy, education and skills, agribusiness, and tourism -- with a broader aim of seizing the enormous trade and investment opportunities arising out of India's economic rise.

There is no greater time to engage economically with India than now, Albanese said while launching the "Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India" at an event at Deakin University in Melbourne.

Describing India as a "giant" on the world stage, he said the country continues to grow in stature. India is on track to be the third largest economy by the end of this decade and it is growing in ways that are complementary to Australia's own economy, he said.

Albanese called the



roadmap a "guide to seizing the enormous trade and investment opportunities of India's economic rise, one that is shaped and informed by the knowledge and experience gathered from 400 consultations in every state and territory, as well as in India."

"What the roadmap does is give us detailed directions to the greater realisation of the potential of the Australia-India relationship. Successfully tapping that potential will be good for Australian business and Australian consumers," he said.

"It will help secure our supply chains in an uncertain world. And it will create jobs and growth," he noted.

The roadmap comes over two years after India and

## Major push to India-UK trade ties

UK Ministers announce 17 new deals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The UK on Wednesday said its Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and Investment Minister Poppy Gustafsson announced 17 new export and investment deals during their visits to India this week.

It also said that New Delhi's recent Union budget drives more opportunity for British insurance companies to expand their presence in India.

British insurance companies in particular have gained more potential to expand in India following the recent Indian budget, which increased the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) permitted in the insurance sector from 74 per cent to 100 per cent, a read-out by the UK said.

The UK has the third largest technology economy in the world, and a number of UK technology companies have also announced expansion into India, accelerating their growth journey, it noted.

"The UK's Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds and Investment Minister Poppy Gustafsson have announced 17 new export and investment deals during visits to India this week," it said.

However, details of the export and investment deals are not immediately known. Business and Trade Secretary Reynolds said tech-



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nology and life sciences are two "huge" growth sectors for the UK economy.

"I'm proud that government support has helped some of our finest businesses in these sectors to expand into the exciting Indian market," he said.

"It's great to see them going for growth, and their successes will amount to tens of millions of pounds for the UK economy," he added.

There are already over 950 Indian-owned companies operating in the UK and over

650 UK companies operating in India, cumulatively supporting over 600,000 jobs across both economies, the readout noted.

It said the recent Indian investments in the UK valued at over 100 million pounds in total are expected to create hundreds of new jobs over the next three years in a range of sectors including AI, professional services and textiles.

These investments are proof of global investor confidence of doing business in

the UK, it said.

The trend of strong Indian investment into the UK in recent years is evident, with the last year-on-year change showing the value of inward FDI stock from India having increased 28 per cent at the end of 2023, the readout said.

India has remained the second largest investor in terms of number of projects into the UK for five consecutive years.

Minister for Investment Gustafsson said: "The new Indian investment proves that the government's Plan for Change is giving Indian businesses the confidence they need to continue investing in Britain."

"Now the UK will strive to be more ambitious and collaborative than ever before as we show the world why the UK is the best place to invest."

On Monday, Reynolds and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal announced the relaunch of talks on a free trade agreement between the UK and India that can support jobs and bring more growth across both economies.

Gustafsson is visiting Mumbai and Bengaluru to bang the drum for Britain, champion free trade and promote exciting investment opportunities in the UK for Indian companies, the readout said.

## Road projects worth Rs 80,000cr will soon start in Assam: Gadkari

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

Work on road projects worth Rs 80,000 crore will soon start in Assam, Union road transport minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday.

Key projects, including a tunnel under Brahmaputra River, an elevated corridor at Kaziranga National Park and the Guwahati Ring Road will be undertaken as part of this initiative, he added.

Addressing a session on road, railway, and riverine infrastructure at the Advantage Assam 2.0 business summit virtually, Gadkari said projects worth Rs 3 lakh crore under his ministry will be completed in the state by 2029.

Work on projects worth Rs 60,000 crore is already underway in the state and in various stages of completion, he said.

These include projects which will not only improve connectivity within the state but also boost road communication with Tripura and Nagaland, he added.

Gadkari said projects worth another Rs 80,000 crore are about to commence in the state.

Major projects under it would be the Rs 15,000-crore tunnel under the Brahmaputra connecting Numaligarh and Dholpur, Rs 6,000-crore elevated corridor in Kaziranga National Park and the Guwahati ring road.

The multi-modal logistics hub at Jogighopa is almost complete and can be opened



soon, he added.

Highlighting Assam's potential in the bamboo-based new-age industry, Gadkari stressed its role in fuel manufacturing and other economic sectors.

Gadkari claimed that almost all projects demanded by the state government have been okayed by his ministry.

The development of the Northeast is a top priority for the Narendra Modi-led government, as evident from the substantial investments made in the region since 2014, he said.

## World Bank bullish on Indian economy

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

The World Bank on Wednesday expressed strong confidence in the Indian economy and appealed to all to come and invest in the country.

Speaking at the Advantage Assam 2.0 Business Summit, World Bank country director Auguste Tano Kouame said the lender remains optimistic about India's economic prospects, despite a slight downward trend in growth.

"We are not worried about India's growth at the moment. We are very bullish about India and will remain bullish," he added.

He emphasised that fluctuations of one percentage point in economic growth do not alter the World Bank's positive outlook. "If somebody is worried about recent data, we would like to say that don't worry. India is the shining light in the world. If you are looking to invest, then come and invest here. The Indian growth makes it the place to invest," he added.

For the current fiscal, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) projected the economic growth at 7.2 per cent in December 2024, compared to 8.2 per cent in 2023-24.

## Nifty tanks over 14 pc on FIIs exodus

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity benchmark indices are facing massive corrections, with the NSE Nifty declining over 14 per cent from its lifetime high hit in September last year due to several negative triggers like stretched valuations, foreign fund exodus, disappointing quarterly earnings and rising global trade tensions dragging markets lower.

The BSE benchmark Sensex hit its record peak of 85,978.25 on September 27 last year, and the Nifty also reached a lifetime high of 26,277.35 on the same day.

The Nifty tumbled 3,729.8 points or 14.19 per cent from its all-time high level. The BSE bellwether index Sensex is



down 11,376.13 points or 13.23 per cent from its record peak.

Equity markets came under bear attack from last October onwards after smashing many record high levels.

"A correction of this magnitude is usually triggered by a combination of factors. Investor sentiment was tempered when

a number of large corporations reported lower-than-expected Q3 results. Furthermore, the Indian stock market faced a difficult environment due to Trump's tariff threats and worries about India's slowing economic growth, which caused international investors to keep selling.

"The Sensex witnessed a sharp decline of over 13 per cent from its peak, driven by heavy FII outflows, negative technical indicators, weak corporate earnings and global economic concerns," Puneet Singhania, Director of Master Trust Group, said.

"Additionally, weak US economic data and inflation risks, fuelled by President Donald Trump's tariffs, added to market uncertainties."

## 'India looking to hike ethanol blending with petrol'

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

India is looking at increasing its target to blend ethanol with petrol to more than 20 per cent and has formed a committee under the NITI Aayog for this, Petroleum Minister Hardeep S Puri said on Wednesday.

Addressing the Advantage Assam 2.0 business summit in Guwahati, he said 19.6 per cent blending has already been achieved.

"We will be looking at more than 20 per cent blending of biofuel. Already a NITI Aayog group has been set up and

they are looking into it," he said.

"We had set a target of 20 per cent blending by 2026, but already achieved 19.6 per cent. I am sure we will touch 20 per cent next month," he added.

Puri said that the country has a capacity of 1,700 crore litre of blending, and already 1,500 crore litre are being utilised.

With India spending USD 150 billion on different types of fuel imports, he said that one area where the attention is lacking is green hydrogen. "The green hydrogen price



is presently USD 4.5. If you can bring it closer to USD 2.5, there will be a revolution. We will see a massive shift to

green hydrogen from traditional fuel," the minister told leaders of PSU and private energy firms present at the

session on hydrocarbons. He said that every country is moving towards clean energy, but it has to be done by

surviving the challenges and demands of the economy.

"For an economy like India growing at 6-7 per cent, it needs fuel. We need to survive the present for a cleaner future," he added.

Puri said all the fossil fuel production companies will achieve net zero by 2045, even though India has developmental challenges.

"A country on the global stage will be assessed with the energy consumption it makes. If the energy consumption is slowing, it means the economy has started showing the red flag," he said.

## SpiceJet posts Rs 26 crore profit in Dec quarter

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Budget airline SpiceJet on Wednesday reported a profit after tax of Rs 26 crore for the three months ended December 2024, helped by overall improved performance.

The carrier had posted a loss of Rs 300 crore in the year-ago period.

"Total revenue surged by 35 per cent to Rs 1,651 crore, driven by strong passenger demand, improved yields and enhanced operational efficiency. Passenger Load Factor (PLF) stood at an impressive 87 per cent," the airline said in a release.

Its total revenue stood at Rs 1,077 crore in the 2024 September quarter.

However, compared to Rs 2,149 crore reported for the three months ended December 2023, the total revenue is lower in the latest December quarter.

The results for the third quarter of the current financial year were scheduled to be

announced on Tuesday.

However, the meeting of the company's board of directors, through video conferencing, started at 1.30 pm and ended only at 11.50 pm on Tuesday, according to a filing made to BSE at 12.51 am on Wednesday.

In the 2024 December quarter, the airline, which had been facing multiple headwinds, raised Rs 3,000 crore from qualified institutional investors.

"For the first time in a decade, the company turned net worth positive - an important milestone that underscores the success of our turnaround strategy. The past is behind us and we are now firmly focused on building a stronger, more resilient future for SpiceJet," its Chairman and Managing Director Ajay Singh said in the release.

The net worth stood at Rs 70 crore in the latest December quarter. SpiceJet also said that Rs 170 crore was spent for the ungrounding of aircraft.





# what's brewing?

## DIRECTOR PRAKASH JHA IS ALL PRAISE FOR BABA NIRALA AKA BOBBY DEOL FOR AASHRAM S3 PART 2

Bobby Deol's portrayal of Baba Nirala in *Aashram* has been a defining role in his career and director Prakash Jha is all praises for the actor's dedication. Prakash Jha is known for his hard-hitting storytelling and has time and again highlighted how Bobby brought depth and conviction to the character, making Baba Nirala one of the most talked-about figures in Indian web series history.

In a recent interaction, when asked about casting Bobby Deol in *Aashram*, he replied, "Bobby really worked hard. He has the capacity to play this role and that is why I thought to cast him. I needed a face that appealed to everyone and hats off to him; he worked really hard on his character, on the language and understanding of the role."

With the upcoming season of *Aashram* set to release next month, the anticipation around Baba Nirala's return is at an all-time high. Fans are eager to see how Bobby Deol continues to evolve in this complex and layered role, further cementing his place in the world of digital entertainment.



### LOOKBOOK

Bollywood celebrities immersed themselves in the devotion of Mahashivratri, sharing heartfelt prayers and wishes with their fans. Many took to social media to post chants, mantras and spiritual reflections, embracing the divine energy of Lord Shiva. Some visited temples and participated in special pujas, seeking blessings and expressing gratitude. Others engaged in meditation and fasting, marking the occasion with deep reverence. The festival brought a wave of spirituality across the industry, with stars celebrating the power and wisdom of Lord Shiva.



### Vivek Agnihotri begins writing new script after intense research

Filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri has announced that he has begun working on a new script on an incredible, untapped subject, marking the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivratri. The director, known for his thought-provoking work such as *The Kashmir Files*, took to social media to share this news, providing a glimpse into his creative process. In his post, Agnihotri wrote, "On this day of Mahashivratri, I've started writing a new script on an incredible, untouched subject. My team spent a long time researching it. After living with pain and anger for four years while making #TheDelhiFiles, this feels like a complete detox."



The filmmaker also posted a selfie of himself, where he is seen sitting on a chair with his laptop. Meanwhile, Vivek Agnihotri is currently busy with his upcoming project, *The Delhi Files - The Bengal Chapter*.

On October 3, 2024, Agnihotri announced his next project, *The Delhi Files - The Bengal Chapter*, set to release on August 15, 2025. The film will be released in two parts, with *The Bengal Chapter* being the first installment. Sharing the poster on social media, Vivek wrote, "MARK YOUR CALENDAR: August 15, 2025. After years of research, the story of #TheDelhiFiles is too powerful for one part. We're excited to bring you *The Bengal Chapter* - the first of two parts, unveiling a significant chapter in our history." *The Delhi Files* stars Agnihotri's wife, Pallavi Joshi, who is also co-producing the film. The cast also includes Mithun Chakrabarty, Anupam Kher, Puneet Issar, Babbu Maan, Govind Namdev and Palomi Ghosh, among others.

On January 26, the makers shared the intriguing first-look poster of Mithun Chakrabarty, featuring him in an intense avatar. The poster featured him reciting the Constitution of India with a burned tongue amidst a vacant corridor. Mithun appeared rugged, with a white beard, passionately reciting the Constitution. *The Bengal Chapter* delves into the poignant Bengal tragedy, revealing a lesser-known chapter of India's history.



### Palak Tiwari's *The Bhootnii* promises chills, laughs & surprises

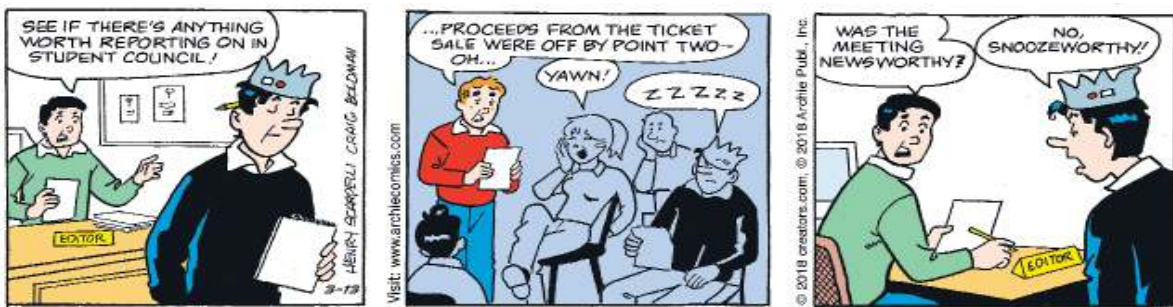
The much-awaited announcement teaser of *The Bhootnii* has finally dropped, and what better day than Maha Shivratri—a night deeply tied to mysticism and supernatural energies—for its eerie reveal? This horror-comedy promises a thrilling mix of spine-chilling moments and laugh-out-loud chaos. Palak Tiwari, who has been making waves with her effortless screen presence and growing influence in the industry, stars in this quirky supernatural tale. Known for her glamorous persona and youthful charm, sources closed to Palak revealed that "She is stepping into an all-new avatar that's bound to surprise her fans, her performance will showcase her versatility like never before." More details will be unveiled soon.

Having already carved a niche for herself in the fashion and brand endorsement space, Palak is now steadily making her mark in films. *The Bhootnii* could be her breakthrough moment in the horror-comedy genre, offering her the perfect blend of thrills and laughs to display her acting chops. The teaser hints at a mysterious force at play, blending horror and humor in a way that keeps audiences both on edge and entertained. With its perfect mix of scares, laughter, and Maha Shivratri's mystical energy in the air, *The Bhootnii* is all set to cast its spell.



## FUN

### ARCHIE



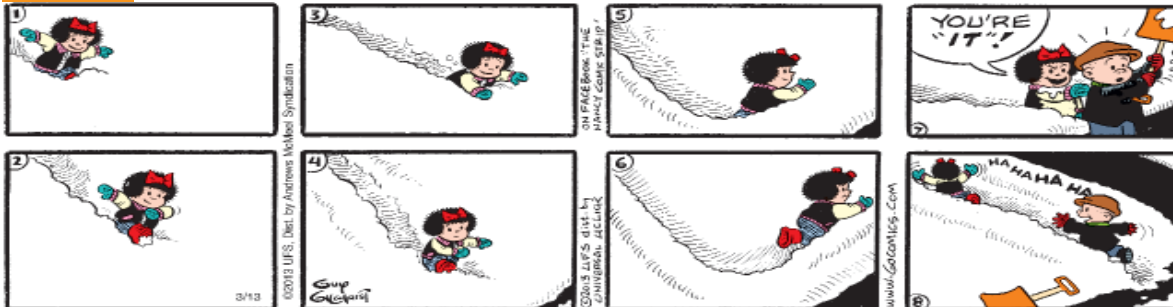
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



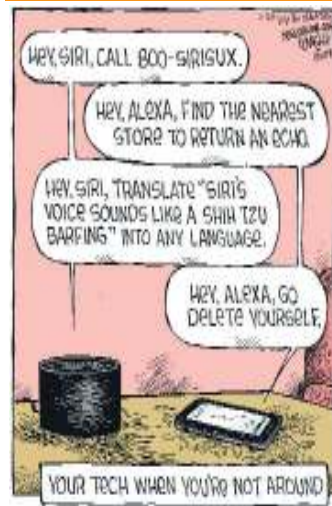
### GINGER MEGGS



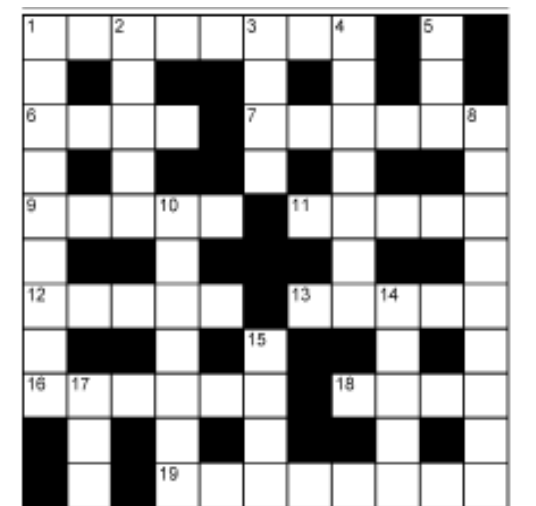
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU

	6	4	9		8		2	
8					7		6	3
3			1	5				
7			6		5			
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#### Yesterday's solution

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

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

#### ACROSS

- Someone who keeps pestering you
- Became taller
- Start a tennis game with this
- Part of a serial story
- Female sheep
- Feeling sad and fed up
- To try a little piece of food to see if you like it
- A fishing boat
- Train tracks
- Stood (3,2)
- A book of maps of countries
- Up until now

#### DOWN

- A frightening dream
- Articles





## Creating a community of Hive, merging profit with purpose

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

In a world where businesses often prioritise profits over purpose, The Hive is pioneering a movement that merges corporate success with social responsibility. Founded by activist Zabi Khan, Hive is an initiative dedicated to making companies more socially responsible in ways that are both meaningful and beneficial to their brand. Khan's journey into activism began at a young age, driven by a deep empathy for animals. Losing his first pet was a defining moment that set him on a path of animal welfare. For the next decade, he devoted himself to animal welfare. But as he grew, he realised something crucial—activism wasn't

understood by many and those who did appreciate his efforts treated it as something extraordinary. "People would tell me I was doing something 'special,' but in reality, I was only fulfilling my duty as a human being. Activism shouldn't be seen as an exception—it should be an integral part of everyone's life," he explains. This realisation led him to a bigger vision. He wanted to make activism more accessible—something that people could incorporate seamlessly into their daily lives. Zabi observed that companies had the power to either harm or heal the world. He wanted to create a system where businesses could operate sustainably and responsibly while also benefiting from it. That's how Hive was born! "I wanted to help companies become socially responsible in a way that also contributes to their brand image. When a business does

good, people respect them more, and that respect translates into loyalty." Hive collaborates with businesses to identify causes that align with their values and industry. The goal is to make social good a natural part of their operations rather than a forced CSR activity. One of its key collaborations is with iGym, a wellness and fitness brand. Zabi has designed initiatives that tie fitness to social impact, ensuring that gym members don't just work on their physical health but also contribute

to the greater good. For instance, Hive and iGym have launched an eco-run, where participants pick up plastic waste while jogging through selected locations. "We know we can't clean Hyderabad in one or two runs, but that's not the point. The goal is to shift mindsets. When a family participates in the run, they start thinking twice before littering themselves. That's how change begins," Zabi emphasises. Beyond fitness, Hive is planning collaborations with diverse industries, such as dermatology clinics to provide free treatments for burn survivors

and car resale companies to donate ambulances to NGOs. Hive's long-term vision includes launching an application called Karma Meter, an innovative platform designed to encourage volunteerism among college students. "Students will be able to select causes they resonate with—animal welfare, climate action, women's empowerment, orphanages, and more. Each cause will have specific tasks and students can log their activities in the app to earn karma points." These points can be redeemed for tangible rewards, such as a free gym membership at iGym or a free

dermatology treatment. "In this way, students contribute to social causes, businesses build trust and credibility and society as a whole benefits," says Zabi. At the core of Hive's mission is the belief that businesses should be accountable not just for how they make money, but how they use it. "All of us will leave this world one day, but what truly matters is the legacy we leave behind," Zabi reflects. "Not the money, not the luxury—but the impact we create. If you have the power to make the world a better place, why wouldn't you?"



## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH WELLNESS

In the competitive world of fitness, where most businesses focus solely on profits and expansion, IGYM stands out for its commitment to social responsibility. Founded by Vamshi Reddy, it is more than just a premium fitness centre—it is a movement that integrates physical wellness with meaningful community initiatives. In an exclusive interview, Vamshi shares his vision, the impact of social initiatives on his brand and how he balances business growth with giving back to the community. For IGYM, collaborating with Hive was a strategic decision driven by shared values. "Collaborating with Hive, led by the inspiring animal activist Zabi, was a natural choice for us. Hive's commitment to social causes and innovative approach to social media marketing aligns perfectly with IGYM's mission to foster a healthier and more compassionate community. This partnership will enable us to leverage Hive's expertise in reaching a broader audience and promoting our initiatives effectively. Together, we aim to create a supportive environment that encourages both physical wellness and social responsibility, ultimately benefiting the community as a whole." The partnership with Hive has not only boosted IGYM's visibility but has also reinforced its commitment to social change. "Zabi and his team at Hive have had a profound impact on IGYM. Their passion for animal welfare and social causes has transformed IGYM into more than just a place for physical fitness—it's now a hub for social change. Their innovative marketing strategies have significantly elevated our engagement, leading to better results for our clients and greater community involvement. His dedication to making a positive impact has inspired us to integrate more social initiatives into our core operations, enhancing our brand's identity and purpose." Unlike many entrepreneurs who focus solely on business expansion, he firmly believes in giving back. His philosophy is simple: businesses should contribute to the communities that support them. "My commitment to social responsibility is driven by a deep belief that businesses must give back," he explains. "While business growth is essential, it is equally important to address societal issues and contribute to the well-being of our community. Whether it's through community fitness programs, educational workshops, or charitable

activities, we ensure that our growth positively impacts those around us. This holistic approach enhances our brand and fosters a sense of purpose and fulfillment within our team." One of IGYM's most impactful initiatives is its commitment to empowering young girls through self-defence training. "We wanted to give something back to society and the inspiration to adopt an orphanage and teach self-defence to girls initially came from Zabi. We quickly echoed this sentiment and showed a strong desire to empower the most vulnerable members of our society." IGYM's dedication to this cause is not just symbolic—it is backed by expertise. "We are proud to be the most premium gym in India, with membership fees of almost Rs 3 lakh annually. Our training plans are unparalleled, led by Branko Teodorovic, Mr. Universe 2023 and a six-time world champion in bodybuilding. We brought Branko from New York, where he trained Hollywood stars, socialites and HNIs," he shares. For Vamshi, the goal is to create lasting change. "I believe that every child deserves a safe and supportive environment and self-defence training is a crucial skill that can enhance their confidence and security. By taking this step, we aim to create a lasting impact on their lives, giving them the tools they need to protect themselves and pursue their dreams fearlessly. Our goal is to instill a sense of empowerment and resilience in these young individuals, fostering a brighter and more secure future for them." Another significant initiative by IGYM is the upcoming Eco Run, a 5K run designed not just for fitness enthusiasts but for those passionate about environmental conservation. "The Eco Run is designed to be a vibrant and engaging event that promotes fitness and raises awareness about environmental

conservation. To make it engaging, we have incorporated various activities such as eco-friendly challenges, educational booths, and fun runs for all age groups. Participants will also receive eco-friendly merchandise as a reminder of the importance of sustainability." The impact of the Eco Run goes beyond the event itself. "We aim to create a lasting impact by encouraging participants to adopt eco-friendly practices in their daily lives. By combining fitness with environmental advocacy, we hope to inspire a broader movement towards cleaner and greener communities." When asked what message he hopes to spread through IGYM's social initiatives, Vamshi is clear: "If I could rally the community around one key message, it would be: 'Empowerment through Wellness.' At IGYM, we believe that true wellness encompasses physical fitness, mental health, and social responsibility. By fostering a culture of empowerment through our social initiatives, we aim to inspire individuals to take charge of their health, support one another, and contribute positively to their communities. Together, we can build a healthier, more inclusive, and resilient society." With IGYM at the forefront of both fitness and social change, Vamshi's vision is proving that a gym can be more than just a place to work out—it can be a force for empowerment, awareness, and lasting impact.



Hive, founded by Zabi, is redefining the role of businesses by integrating social responsibility into their daily operations. With a focus on merging profit with purpose, Hive helps companies seamlessly align their values with impactful causes, ensuring that activism becomes a natural part of their culture



## Transforming moods into trendsetting styles of self-expression

PNS|EXCLUSIVE

Hair is more than just a feature on our head; it's an extension of who we are. Whether it's a sleek, polished look or wild curls that flow with personality, our hair allows us to communicate without saying a word. Throughout history, hair has held a significant place in culture, and today, it's no different. With countless styling tools, treatments, and trends at our fingertips, transforming our hair to reflect our moods or match our aspirations has become an art form.

**The Emotional Connection**  
Just like fashion, Dastagir Sayed, Technical Head, Artisto shares, "hair can be a mood mirror, signaling changes in how we feel or how we want to be perceived. A dramatic change, like cutting bangs or opting for a bold color, can signify a fresh start or an empowering shift in perspective. On the other hand, a more subtle transformation might reflect moments of calm, peace, or even nostalgia. Think about the days when you

want your hair to be effortlessly natural and carefree—curly hair styled loosely, flowing with the wind—expressing freedom and authenticity. Or those times when you opt for the precision of a sharp bob, signifying confidence and control."

### Trendsetting Styles

Hair trends evolve faster than ever, influenced by social media, celebrity culture, and the ever-changing world of fashion. From textured waves to the precision of straightened locks, these styles give individuals the freedom to explore different facets of themselves. As we move toward a more inclusive, self-aware society, hair trends are being redefined. There's an increasing focus on embracing one's natural texture and celebrating the beauty in diversity, where straight, curly, wavy, or coiled hair all shine in their unique ways.

### Innovation in Tools and Techniques

Thanks to advancements in hair styling

tools, achieving these transformative looks has never been easier. The precision of modern hair straighteners, dryers, and curling irons ensures that you can switch up your style to reflect a new version of yourself, effortlessly. For instance, styling tools with advanced heat control technology provide not only a faster styling experience but also the flexibility to protect the hair, preserving its health while achieving desired results.



### Empowerment Through Hair Care

With all the options available, it's clear that the way we care for our hair is just as crucial as the way we style it. Healthy, well-maintained hair is the foundation for any look. From nourishing masks to gentle shampoos and conditioners, investing in hair care is an act of self-love. It empowers you to feel your best, whether you're showing off your hair's natural shine or styling it into a bold statement. Hair isn't just a canvas; it's a powerful form of self-expression that transcends trends and celebrates individuality. Every time you run your fingers through your hair, you're not just styling; you're making a statement. So, why not make it count? The next time you grab your hair styling tools, think of it as a way to showcase your moods, your personality, and your confidence. After all, hair is more than just hair—it's an expression of who you are.

## STUDY WARNS CGMS COULD HARM HEALTHY ADULTS BY OVERESTIMATING BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

While continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) may be of significant help to people living with diabetes, they may harm healthy adults by showing inaccurate results that can lead to unnecessary food restrictions, according to a study on Wednesday. CGMs were originally designed to help diabetics manage their blood sugar. It helps by tracking glycaemic index (GI) -- a measure of how quickly a food can make your blood sugar. However, these devices are now increasingly being used by health-conscious adults to track how different foods affect their glucose levels. The peer-reviewed research, published in The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, warns that CGMs could be overestimating blood sugar levels in healthy adults, leading to unnecessary dietary changes. "CGMs are fantastic tools for people with diabetes because even if a measurement isn't perfectly accurate, it's still better than not having a measurement at all. However, for

someone with good glucose control they can be misleading based on their current performance. For healthy individuals, relying on CGMs could lead to unnecessary food restrictions or poor dietary choices. If you want to assess your blood sugar accurately, traditional methods are still the way to go. We want to better identify the sources of the error in CGMs so that we can improve their performance in the future and have active research on this topic," said Professor Javier Gonzalez from the Department for Health, from the University of Bath. Researchers measured blood sugar responses in healthy volunteers (non-diabetic, within a healthy BMI range) using two methods -- a CGM and the gold standard finger-prick test -- to assess the accuracy of CGMs in fruit-based products, ranging from whole fruit to smoothies. The CGM consistently reported higher blood sugar levels compared to finger-prick tests. When participants consumed a smoothie, the device

overestimated the GI by 30 per cent, reporting a GI of 69 (medium) compared to the traditional test result of 53 (low). Whole fruit was misclassified as medium or high-GI foods by CGMs, while the finger-prick test showed they were low-GI. This could lead users to mistakenly believe that fruit could cause harmful spikes in blood sugar. The research also debunked the common myth that blending fruits into a smoothie raises their GI. Whether eaten whole or blended, fruits like apples, bananas, mangoes, and oranges remained low on the GI. CGMs are unlikely to be a valid method to determine whether a food has high or low GI, said the researchers. Gonzalez said the CGMs may be inaccurate because they measure glucose in the fluid surrounding your cells, not directly in your blood. "This can lead to discrepancies due to factors like time delays, blood flow, and how glucose moves between different parts of the body."

## Genetic testing paving the way for preventive care

What if your healthcare plan could be as unique as you? Imagine knowing your health risks before they ever become a problem and having the tools to prevent illness instead of just treating it. This is the reality that genetic testing is shaping—a future where personalized prevention is not just possible, but essential. At the heart of this evolution is your genetic profile, a detailed map of your body's unique blueprint. It provides critical insights into your risks for chronic diseases, your body's response to treatments and how you can optimise your health through lifestyle adjustments. With the power of genetics, preventive healthcare is being transformed from reactive symptom management to proactive, precision-driven care.

### What is a genetic profile?

Your genetic profile is a deep dive into your DNA, the code that governs how your body functions. This code contains valuable information that influences:

- Your predisposition to chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.
- How your body processes nutrients, exercise, and medications.
- Your risk for hereditary conditions that may impact future generations.

By building a genetic profile, healthcare providers can move beyond generalized recommendations and design highly tailored care plans that reflect your unique biology.

### How genetic testing revolutionises preventive care

Genetic testing offers a new approach to prevention by identifying risks before they manifest as symptoms. Here's how it's shaping modern healthcare:

#### 1. Early risk detection

Genetic testing allows for the identification of inherited risks, such as mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, which significantly increase the likelihood of developing breast and ovarian cancer. This early detection gives patients the opportunity to undergo regular screenings and take preventive actions.

#### 2. Personalised preventive plans

Knowing your genetic predispositions helps healthcare providers craft prevention strategies that are specific to your needs. For example, someone with a genetic risk for Type 2 diabetes can implement lifestyle changes, such as dietary adjustments and increased exercise, to delay or prevent the condition.

#### 3. Optimised medication management

Genetics can reveal how your body metabolizes medications. By

understanding your genetic makeup, doctors can prescribe the most effective drugs at the right dosage, minimizing side effects and improving treatment success rates.

#### 4. Hereditary health planning

- Since genetic information is passed down through families, understanding your genetic profile can also help protect the health of future generations. Relatives can be tested to assess and mitigate shared risks.

### Role of technology in genetic preventive care

Technology plays a pivotal role in unlocking the full potential of genetic testing. Digital platforms can now analyse genetic data alongside other health metrics, creating real-time recommendations for both patients and providers. This integration allows:



- **Continuous monitoring:** Algorithms can assess changes in a person's risk factors and health status over time.
- **Personalised health management:** Apps can deliver tailored fitness, nutrition and mental wellness plans based on genetic profiles.
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Providers gain access to genetic insights through integrated platforms, enabling more precise and timely interventions.

Technology bridges the gap between science and practice, turning complex genetic information into actionable steps for prevention and wellness.

### Challenges to overcome

#### 1. Awareness and understanding

Many people are unaware of how genetics can impact their healthcare. Education initiatives are essential to help patients and providers understand the value of genetic insights.

#### 2. Accessibility

While genetic testing has become more affordable, making it universally accessible across socio-economic groups is a critical priority for global healthcare systems.

#### 3. Data Privacy

Protecting sensitive genetic information is vital. Robust privacy frameworks and secure data management practices are key to fostering trust in genetic-based care.

(The author, Dr. Geethika Sai Nutakki, is the VP Business Development and Health Tech, at Aciana.)



# Indian team should win Champions Trophy: Lalchand Rajput

PTI ■ SHARJAH

For Lalchand Rajput, it was a plunge into an unknown territory when he was appointed manager of a young Indian team for the inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007. No one gave them a chance, but they still triumphed. Nearly 18 years later, the 63-year-old former player is backing an Indian team full of world beaters to not just win another prestigious ICC event, but do so convincingly. "This Indian team looks ruthless. They try to dominate and win every game. They don't want to give the opponents a chance to come back into the game. That is the attitude. And the way they are playing, I think they should win the Champions Trophy convincingly," Rajput said. Rajput is currently the head coach of UAE cricket team, and watched Virat Kohli score his 51st ODI century in the six-wicket win over Pakistan in Dubai on Sunday, and he now expects skipper Rohit Sharma to smash his way to a big hundred. "So Virat got a 100. All boxes are ticked. Now it's only up to Rohit to get a big 100," Rajput quipped, adding that the "Indian team have a clear instinct that that will just finish their opponents." "We have always seen that India



play better when the platform is big." But the veteran coach had a word of caution as well for the team, which registered comfortable victories against Pakistan and Bangladesh and will next play New Zealand in their last group game on Sunday. "See, in cricket, you cannot take it

lightly. Every game is important, because if you take one or few overs lightly, that can change the game as well. So we have got to be at our best every time. We don't want to relax at any moment," he remarked. "Both the games India has won comfortably. But in cricket, we can't say anything, we have to take one

game at a time. We don't have to take New Zealand lightly. New Zealand is a better team (than Pakistan and Bangladesh), they have also won both the games and their morale is also high," he pointed out. On Kohli's superlative performance, the former India player said: "I think Virat played a fantastic

innings, you know, and he showed his class. We always think of King Kohli, I think he proved again. Big match, big match temperament. Big match player." With the team in such great form, he is not in favour of ringing in any changes for the upcoming match, which is only of academic interest with both sides already in the semifinals. "I don't think they will try anything (new) because when the team is doing well, you go with the same momentum. "Unless there is some injury, or somebody wants to be rested, but I don't think there will be any change. It's up to the management because there are few days in between. But I would always say that you always continue with the winning team," Rajput said. Fielding is the only area where this Indian team can do even better, the former Afghanistan and Zimbabwe coach said. "Yes, fielding, we can always do better. Because at the crucial stage, we cannot drop catches. So, fielding is one aspect where we can always do better. "Last game, I was there. I will definitely come for the next game as well. New Zealand and semifinals, and hopefully, the finals as well," he signed off.



## Committee formed to revise norms for assistance to NSFs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The sports ministry has constituted a six-member committee to revise the norms for providing financial assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) keeping in mind the "emerging challenges" facing India and the country's bid to host the 2036 Olympics. The committee would be headed by joint secretary (sports) Kunal, and includes executive director (Teams) Ritu Pathik, Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) CEO N S Johal, former TOPS CEO commodore (Retd) PK Garg, and president of Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) Sahdev Yadav. Yadav is also the treasurer of the Indian Olympic Association (IOA). In a note marked to all members of the committee, Tarun Pareek, the under secretary in the sports ministry, said, "The undersigned is directed to say that the norms of providing financial assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs were revised by the Ministry vide letter dated 28.2.2022. "A new Olympic Cycle has started which necessitated the need for review of the norms in view of the evolving circumstances, which demand a comprehensive review to address the emerging challenges and India's aspiration to host 2036 Olympic Games," read the circular which is in PTI's possession. "Accordingly, it has been decided to constitute a committee consisting of the following to suggest the revised norms of scale of assistance for various components under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs."

Last November, India submitted a 'Letter of Intent' to host the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Future Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan after months of informal dialogue with the IOC. Under the Scheme of Assistance to NSFs, the national sports federations are assisted for several purposes such as organising tournaments inside the country, participation in international tournaments organised abroad, purchase of equipment, organising coaching etc. Among other things, the NSFs also take care of the requirements for customised training of top level and promising sportspersons. In the latest annual budget, the NSFs will be entitled to a ₹400 Crore assistance from the ministry, which is a marginal increase from ₹340 Crore allocated last year. The specifics of the committee's mandate are not mentioned in the ministry circular. But its formation comes a few weeks after a top ministry source told PTI that a graded system of funding was being mullied. Under this system only those NSFs which comply with the good governance norms of the draft national sports bill will be entitled to their full share of the ministry grant. "If you are fully compliant with the good governance provisions than you get your entire share but if it is not the case then there could be cuts when such a system comes into effect. But it is only an idea under consideration as of now," a source in the sports ministry had said. "The implementation can greatly improve transparency and performance of the NSFs," he had insisted.



## Vijender calls for 'fresh and fair' elections in BFI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's first and only male boxer to have won an Olympic medal, Vijender Singh has called for "fresh and fair" elections in the crisis-ridden Boxing Federation of India (BFI) and said that he won't hesitate to be among the candidates if "given a responsibility". The 39-year-old, whose 2008 Beijing Olympics bronze marked the beginning of arguably the best phase of Indian boxing before things went downhill little over a decade later, is currently plying his trade in the professional circuit. However, he hasn't competed since 2022. "I would like to stand for the elections whenever they happen. I have fought all my life, it would be another fight for me. I have no idea whether I will find support but I am not afraid to place myself out there," Vijender said. "If there is an opportunity for me to make a change, I will give it my best. But that does not mean I am retiring as an athlete. I would never do that," he added. In a post on his X account, the star boxer said for Indian boxers to do well, it is imperative that they train abroad. "For that, we need to conduct fresh and fair elections ASAP to build a strong federation. I will be more than happy to contribute my experience if given any responsibility by our government. @PMOIndia @mansukhmandviya," posted

the Haryana-pugilist, who was the first Indian male boxer to win a world championship medal (a bronze) back in 2009 and to be ranked world number one. His comments come a couple of days after the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) handed over boxing's administration to an ad-hoc committee, citing a delay in the conduct of India's (BFI) elections. The Ajay Singh-led BFI has promised to challenge the decision in the Delhi High Court and has called the IOA's order illegal. The tenure of BFI office-bearers ended on February 3. The administrative mess has been in the making for months owing to internal complaints against alleged financial misconduct, and turf wars between officials, who do not have a history of cohesive functioning. The IOA's five-member ad-hoc committee has been entrusted to oversee the sport's administration until elections are held. The panel is led by former Athletics Federation of India (AFI) treasurer Madhukant Pathak and includes long-time boxing federation officials such as Rajesh Bhandari (vice-chairman), DP Bhatt, Virendra Singh Thakur, and former Asian champion Shiva Thapa, who serves as the sole players' representative. The administrative logjam has had a cascading effect on the boxers' performance and training as well.

## Virat Kohli can break Tendulkar's 100-century record, says Jaffer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India opener and Mumbai stalwart Wasim Jaffer believes Virat Kohli will continue to play for at least three to four more years and is well on track to break Sachin Tendulkar's record of 100 international centuries. Kohli (36) currently has 82 international centuries across all formats, with his latest coming in India's commanding six-wicket victory over Pakistan in the Champions Trophy in Dubai. But before this, Kohli had struggled for runs at home. "As a cricket fan you want to see Virat as much as you can. With the form he was in (against Pakistan), nobody wants to see him get out. When he makes runs everybody is happy, and I am sure everyone wants Virat to play for 3-4 more years and break all records," Jaffer said during the launch of India Corporate T20 Bash (ICBT20), a corporate cricket



league, here on Wednesday. "The century record is one that looks like Virat is going to break. When Sachin Tendulkar made 100 centuries it looked it will never be broken but the way Virat made runs since 2010 it looks he will break that impossible thing. If Virat breaks that Sachin Tendulkar will also be very happy," he added. Jaffer, a member of the steering committee of the league, was also all praise for Shubman Gill but said it is unfair to compare him with Kohli. "It will be unfair on Shubman

to judge him with Virat Kohli, Shubman is making his own road. He is playing terrific cricket. In England series, he was man-of-the-series, he made a good start to the Champions Trophy and I hope he will continue because everybody has expectations from him. He and the likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal are going to take India batting forward. "It is nice to watch the way he is playing cricket," he said. Former South Africa opener Herschelle Gibbs, who is the brand ambassador of the ICBT20, echoed Jaffer's views, stating that Kohli has a lot of

cricket left in him. "I think its long time because of his (Kohli's) fitness and his hunger, he can go for at least another 4 years. He is in the same boat like AB de Villiers, AB might have retired a bit too early but there were never issues with their fitness and hunger. Virat's hunger for runs is unbelievable," Gibbs said. "The way he copes pressure specially while chasing in ODI cricket is phenomenal." Gibbs said India are favourites to win the Champions Trophy, and also lauded Gill as a "special player". "Shubman is a special talent, he is technically correct and bit more talented," he said. "India are obviously the favourites, they look very strong. But South Africa are also in a good space, obviously I understand their history when it comes to big tournaments but hopefully they can rectify that and we can see South Africa and India in final. But India looks formidable."

## Subhman Gill consolidates top spot in ICC ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Shubman Gill on Wednesday consolidated his position atop the ICC ODI batting rankings after playing a big role in his team's qualification for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy. Gill, who scored a match-winning 101 not out against Bangladesh and 46 against Pakistan in Group A matches played in Dubai this past week, has gained 21 rating points and moved up to 817 rating points, increasing the gap with second-placed Babar Azam from 23 to 47 points.

Virat Kohli's unbeaten 100 against Pakistan has helped him overtake Daryl Mitchell of New Zealand to fifth position while KL Rahul has moved up two places to 15th position after notching an unbeaten 41 against Bangladesh. New Zealand batters Will Young (up eight places to 14th) and Tom Latham (up 11 places to 30th) have moved up after scoring centuries against Pakistan while Rachin Ravindra's ton against Bangladesh has lifted him 18 places to 24th. Glenn Phillips is another Kiwi batter to gain, up 12 places to 28th position.

## ICC clears bowling action of Matthew Kuhnemann

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's left-arm spinner Matthew Kuhnemann, who was reported for an illegal bowling action during the second test against Sri Lanka last month, has been cleared by the ICC after undergoing extensive testing in Brisbane. The development means Kuhnemann will be able to resume playing for Australia in the test tour of the Caribbean scheduled later this year. "Kuhnemann's action has now been deemed to be legal and the left-arm spinner will continue to bowl in international cricket," the ICC said in a statement. The 28-year-old Kuhnemann had undergone an independent bowling assessment at the National Cricket Centre in



Brisbane, where it was revealed that the amount of elbow extension for all his deliveries was within the 15-degree level of tolerance permitted under the ICC Illegal Bowling Regulations, the apex body said. Despite being called for his action, Kuhnemann played a pivotal role in Australia's 2-0

resolved. It has been a challenging period for Matt however he has carried himself exceptionally well. "He has had the full support of Australian cricket and he can now move forward to the next phase of his international career with great confidence." After the test series in Sri Lanka, match officials asked for an independent assessment of Kuhnemann's bowling action. The ICC allows bowlers a maximum of 15 degrees of flex in their bowling arm, and anything beyond that is deemed illegal. The spinner, who made his Test debut for Australia in 2023, has 25 wickets to his name so far from five matches. Kuhnemann will be available for selection for the three-Test series in the West Indies across June and July.

# Champions Trophy: Pakistan to play for pride against Bangladesh

PTI ■ RAWALPINDI

Their dreams of defending the Champions Trophy (CT) title at home shattered, an under-fire Pakistan team will seek to play for pride when it faces an equally insipid Bangladesh in a dead rubber here on Thursday. With the tournament offering very little margin for error, Pakistan crumbled to suffer heavy defeats to New Zealand and arch-rivals India, which left them on the brink of elimination before the Kiwis confirmed it with their win over Bangladesh. Disgruntled fans are now calling for sweeping changes in the country's cricket structure starting from the very top of the pyramid, days after the first global tournament in Pakistan in 29 years got underway. This marks the third straight time Pakistan has bowed out in the group stages of a global white-ball tournament,

following early exits in the 2024 T20 World Cup and 2023 ODI World Cup. At a time when teams have embraced a fearless, aggressive approach, Pakistan seemed to be stuck in the past. Their top order remains passive, playing out deliveries in hope rather than intent, waiting until the 35th over to accelerate. Their struggles were glaring, as they showed no urgency, playing a staggering 161 dot balls against New Zealand in Rawalpindi and 147 against India in Dubai. Poor shot selection, substandard fielding, and untimely injuries have only deepened Pakistan's woes. The loss of game-changing opener Fakhar Zaman to injury left a huge void at the top, and his replacement, Imam-ul-Haq, failed to make an impact. Meanwhile, star batter Babar Azam and captain Mohammad Rizwan have



also fallen short of expectations, offering little resistance when it mattered the most. Pakistan has historically relied on its formidable pace attack to win matches, but frontline quicks Shaheen

Afridi, Naseem Shah, and Haris Rauf have looked rusty and ineffective, failing to provide the firepower they once promised. Beyond the field, Pakistan's perpetual instability has been a major factor in their

downward spiral. A system plagued by constant upheaval has seen the team cycle through countless selectors, eight different coaches, including World Cup-winning South African Gary Kirsten, and

four captains in just three years. With chaos at the top, Pakistan's struggles on the pitch seem inevitable. On the spin-friendly tracks of Dubai and Karachi, Pakistan bafflingly named

only one specialist spinner in Abrar Ahmed, leaving their bowling unit toothless. Like Pakistan, last edition's semifinalists Bangladesh have also been knocked out of the tournament after successive defeats to India and New Zealand. Their batting lineup, barring glimpses of resilience from Towhid Hridoy, captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, and Jaker Ali, has largely failed to fire. Despite thriving on spin-friendly conditions at home, the Bangla Tigers have struggled against slower bowlers, a weakness thoroughly exposed in this campaign. Bangladesh's inability to capitalise on key moments, particularly their sloppy fielding, has cost them dearly. Dropped catches in both matches have only added to their woes. However, up against an off-colour

Pakistan, Bangladesh could sense an opportunity to finish their campaign on a high and salvage some pride. **Teams (from):** **Pakistan:** Mohammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (vice captain), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf, Khushdil Shah, Usman Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi. **Bangladesh:** Nazmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid, Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), MD Mahmud Ullah, Jaker Ali, Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Parvez Hossain Emon, Nasum Ahmed, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nahid Rana.



# MAZAKA DOESN'T REALLY BRING MUCH OF ITS 'MAZA', BUT RAO RAMESH NAILS THROUGHOUT

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Director Nakkina Thrinadha Rao and writer Prasanna Kumar Bezawada, known for delivering hits like *Nenu Local* and *Dhamaka*, have joined forces once again for *Mazaka*, which was released on the occasion of Maha Shivratri. The film stars Sundeep Kishan and Rao Ramesh in lead roles, marking Sundeep Kishan's 30th film. Ritu Varma plays the female lead, while *Manmadhudu* fame Anshu makes her comeback after many years. Here's a look at the film's story and how it fares.

## STORY

Venkata Ramana (Rao Ramesh) and his son Krishna (Sundeep Kishan) belong to a middle-class family. Venkata Ramana is searching for a bride for Krishna, but no one is willing to marry him because there is no woman in the household. A marriage broker advises Venkata Ramana to remarry first, as it would make it easier to find a match for his son.

One day, Venkata Ramana sees Yashodha (Anshu) and falls in love with her at first sight. He wants to marry her, but Yashodha has plans to move to the USA. Meanwhile, Krishna also falls in love with a college girl, Meera (Ritu Varma). Both father and son try their best to win over their respective love interests, but a major twist occurs when Bhargav Varma (Murali Sharma) enters the picture.

Bhargav Varma sets a condition that both father and son must fulfill if they want to marry the women they love. What is this condition? How is Bhargav Varma related to Yashodha and Meera? Will Venkata Ramana and Krishna finally get the family photo they dream of with the women they love? The film unravels these questions in an entertaining manner.

## ANALYSIS

Director Nakkina Thrinadha Rao has a track record of delivering successful entertainers like *Cinema Chooipista Mava*, *Nenu Local* and *Dhamaka*. Writer Prasanna Kumar Bezawada has collaborated with him on multiple projects and their combination has generated curiosity about *Mazaka*.

Several films in the entertainment genre have lately prioritised comedy over logic, aiming purely to



## REVIEW

**Cast:** Sundeep Kishan, Rao Ramesh, Ritu Varma, Anshu Sagar, Ajay, Hyper Aadhi, Murali Sharma, Raghu Babu, Srinivas Reddy, and others

**Cinematography:** Nizar Shafi

**Music:** Leon James

**Producer:** Razesh Danda, Umesh Kumar Bansal

**Story, Screenplay & Dialogues:** Prasanna Kumar Bezawada

**Director:** Nakkina Thrinadha Rao

**Rating:** (2.5/5)

amuse the audience. *Mazaka* follows the same formula—it focuses on entertainment but lacks logic. Unfortunately, Prasanna Kumar seems to have lost his touch with the screenplay. Interestingly, this story was in circulation for years before finally landing in Rao Ramesh's hands. Prasanna initially wrote the script with Rao Ramesh in mind and later, Sundeep Kishan was added as the lead actor.

The core plot is simple—a father and son both

fall in love and want to marry their respective partners, but an obstacle stands in their way. The first half is engaging, with Rao Ramesh's love story adding freshness to the narrative. Typically, films focus on a young hero trying to impress a girl, but here, a middle-aged man pursuing romance brings novelty. The chemistry between Sundeep Kishan and Ritu Varma is also well-developed in the initial half.

However, the film falls apart in the second half. The conflict between Anshu and Ritu Varma's characters lacks depth and is based on an unconvincing, almost silly, premise. Several scenes feel unnecessarily dragged, making the second half sluggish. One standout moment is the emotional kitchen scene between Rao Ramesh and Ritu Varma, which adds some weight to the narrative.

On the downside, certain comedy scenes, espe-

cially those involving Jabardasth Rohini, Anshu and Rao Ramesh, are poorly executed. The interactions between Rao Ramesh and Anshu in the latter half feel artificial, failing to evoke the intended impact. While the climax has some redeeming moments—particularly the wedding scene featuring Sundeep Kishan and Hyper Aadhi, which, despite being reminiscent of Atharintiki Daredi, manages to entertain—the overall storytelling falls short.

## PERFORMANCES

Rao Ramesh steals the show. Though some might find his performance over-the-top, his role demands a loud and energetic portrayal, which he delivers effectively. His comedic timing, especially in the first half where he tries to impress Anshu, adds to the film's charm. However, his chemistry with Anshu lacks conviction.

Sundeep Kishan plays a role that suits him well, delivering a solid performance. Ritu Varma is adequate, while Anshu looks beautiful but fails to impress with her expressions. Murali Sharma gets a meaty role after a long time and does justice to it. Hyper Aadhi and Srinivas Reddy manage to generate a few laughs. Ajay, who plays a police officer, starts off well but becomes loud and irritating in the latter half.

## TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Technically, the film is average. The cinematography by Nizar Shafi is decent, but Leon James' music is a major letdown. The last two songs, along with their choreography, fail to leave an impression and are a significant drawback. The dialogues, however, provide some comic relief, with well-placed punchlines aimed at mass audiences.

## VERDICT

*Mazaka* offers entertainment but only in bits and pieces. The Nakkina-Prasanna duo seems to have lost their magic touch, especially in the second half, which drags down the film. While the story has potential, weak execution and lack of a strong conflict dilute the impact. The film redeems itself slightly with its ending, but overall, it fails to be a consistent entertainer.

Rao Ramesh is the film's biggest asset, and his performance alone makes *Mazaka* a watchable, time-pass entertainer. However, the film could have been much better had the makers paid more attention to strengthening the second half.

## Tuk Tuk promises a magical ride with aspiring actors

Another concept-based small film is set to hit the screens this March. Directed by Supreeth C Krishna, *Tuk Tuk* revolves around a magical scooter-cum-auto, blending fantasy with entertainment. Aspiring actors Harsha Roshan, Karthikeya Dev, Steven Madhu, Saanvi Meghana and Nihal Kodhaty play key roles in this film. *Tuk Tuk* is jointly produced by Rahul Reddy, Lokku Sri Varun, Sriramula Reddy and Supreeth C Krishna. The shooting of the film has been completed, and it is currently in post-production. The makers have announced that *Tuk Tuk* will be released on March 21. On the occasion of Maha Shivratri, they unveiled a new poster along with the



release date. *Tuk Tuk* is a fresh, new-age story where every scene will offer audiences a unique experience. One of the major highlights is a magical scooter-cum-auto with extraordinary powers, captivating everyone who comes across it. This vehicle also holds a deep mystery, adding intrigue to the storyline," said director Supreeth C Krishna. He further added that the film is packed with entertainment, making it appealing to both youth and family audiences. "We strongly believe that *Tuk Tuk* will be well received by viewers from all walks of life," he said. The narrative unfolds in a village setting, with the enchanted scooter-cum-auto playing a crucial role in the plot.

## 'I am the perfect fit for villain roles'

Bollywood veteran Mithun Chakrabarty's son, Mimoh Chakrabarty, is set to make his Telugu debut with *Nenekkadunna*. Airtel fame Sasha Chettri plays the female lead, while Madhav Kodada is making his directorial debut. Maruthi Shyam Prasad Reddy is producing the film, which is scheduled for release on Friday, February 28. "My childhood was filled with South Indian movies. My father (Mithun Chakrabarty) owns a hotel in Ooty and since I grew up there, I was exposed to a lot of Telugu and Tamil films," said Mimoh, reminiscing about his connection to Southern cinema. He added that his father is happy about his Telugu debut. "He advised me not to worry about the language but to focus on my work with honesty," he shared. Speaking about the film, Mimoh said, "This is a female-oriented film. It has a strong message, but at the same time, it is a complete popcorn entertainer with songs, action sequences and engaging scenes." He added that the story emphasises the importance of female journalists standing on their own feet. Revealing how he landed the role, Mimoh explained, "The makers had already signed Sasha Chettri. When they were looking for an actor for my role, a friend of mine recommended me. Director Madhav Kodada then came to Mumbai and narrated the story to me, and that's how I came on board. I felt this would be a great debut for me in Telugu cinema." When asked if he would be open to playing villainous roles, Mimoh responded enthusiastically. "Of course! I am waiting for villain roles. I feel I am a perfect fit for such characters. As an actor, I don't want to limit myself. If I get good characters, I am open to comedy and supporting roles as well," he said. Mimoh also recalled watching *Gopala Gopala*, in which his father played a key role. "Now, he is acting in Prabhas' *Fauji*. To the outside world, he is a superstar. But to me, he is my father. More than a father and son, we share a bond like friends," he concluded.

## Shruti Haasan reflects on her role in *The Eye* ahead of India premiere at Wench Film Festival

Acclaimed Indian actress and musician Shruti Haasan is all set to make her international debut as the lead in the highly anticipated British psychological thriller, *The Eye*. Directed by Daphne Schmon, the film promises to captivate audiences with its chilling storyline and atmospheric setting. *The Eye* will be premiering in India as the opening feature of the 5th Wench Film Festival, an event dedicated to celebrating horror, sci-fi, and fantasy films. Founded by Sapna Bhavnani, this festival will run from February 27 to March 2, 2025.

*The Eye* follows the haunting journey of Diana, played by Shruti Haasan, who travels to a secluded island to scatter the ashes of her late husband, Felix (Mark Rowley). As Diana seeks closure for her loss, her grief soon transforms into intrigue when she encounters the mysterious 'Evil Eye' ritual—an ancient and eerie practice that holds the potential to bring Felix back from the dead, but at a disturbing cost.

Set against the breathtaking landscapes of Greece, the film was shot on location in Athens and Corfu, where the natural beauty of the sur-

roundings enhances the eerie and suspenseful atmosphere of the story. The film's visuals, paired with its gripping narrative, are expected to leave a lasting impact on viewers worldwide.

After its initial screening at the London Independent Film Festival and a showcase at the Greek International Film Festival, *The Eye* has been generating significant buzz among global audiences. The film's India premiere at the Wench Film Festival marks a major milestone in its journey, and it is expected to continue to stir excitement as it gains momentum internationally.

Reflecting on her role in the film, Shruti Haasan shared her excitement for working on a psychological thriller—a genre she has always found intriguing. She expressed her enthusiasm for being part of a story that delves deep into human emotions, grief, and the supernatural.

"The opportunity to portray Diana in *The Eye* has been incredibly exciting for me," Haasan said. "Psychological thrillers have always fascinated me. This film's compelling storyline, combined with its top-notch production quality, makes it even more special. What truly stands out, though, is that the film was created under an all-women-led production house. I'm deeply passionate about supporting women in the film industry and this project reflects that commitment."

Produced by Fingerprint Content, *The Eye* is not just a captivating psychological thriller, but also represents a new wave of filmmaking focused on sustainability. The film's production team took significant steps to minimise its environmental footprint during the shoot, setting a precedent for future films that seek to blend creative excellence with eco-conscious practices.



## POOJA HEGDE BAGS A WHOPPING FEE FOR SPECIAL SONG IN COOLIE

Rajinikanth has teamed up with director Lokesh Kanagaraj for their upcoming film *Coolie*. The movie features an ensemble cast, including Telugu superstar Nagarjuna, Kannada star Upendra, Malayalam actor Soubin Shahir, Sathyaraj, Shruti Haasan, Reba Monica John and others. Produced by Kalanidhi Maran, *Coolie* is one of the most anticipated films of the year, and the makers have roped in Pooja Hegde for a special song.

According to sources, the shooting of this special song was completed on Tuesday. Pooja Hegde, making her comeback to South cinema, has already signed films opposite Suriya and Tamil superstar Vijay. While she is busy with Tamil films and has also signed a couple of Hindi projects, she took up this special song in *Coolie* because it is a Rajinikanth film, the source revealed.

The actress reportedly charged Rs 2 crore for this special number,

which was shot over three days. This makes it one of the highest fees paid to an actress for a special song. With its star-studded cast and high production value, *Coolie* is expected to be a massive entertainer. The film is slated for a summer release, according to sources.

Director Lokesh Kanagaraj, known for his intelligent filmmaking, is one of the most sought-after directors in Tamil cinema. He has previously helmed blockbusters like *Leo*, *Vikram*, *Master* and *Kaithi*. In *Coolie*, Rajinikanth plays a character named Deva and expectations are sky-high for this collaboration.

