

We are maintaining a 'Pink Book' to record the harassment of BRS workers by politicians and officials. We will note everything down. Our time will come, and then we will settle scores. Even minor criticisms are now tackled with false cases.

Even for displaying our meeting's flex banners, Minister Jupally ordered an attack on our activist Parameshwar. Is this democracy? Why are Congress leaders so afraid of us?

- Kavitha, BRS MLC

P2

**'Take action against networks helping Bangla, Rohingya intruders'**



**INDIA, EU SET DEADLINE TO CONCLUDE MEGA FTA**



**Kiara Advani, Sidharth Malhotra to welcome their 'greatest gift' SOON**



**DON'T MISS... 'Modern tech adding lethality in warfare'**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said critical, cutting edge and frontier technologies have been adding new dimensions of lethality as well as unpredictability in modern warfare. He also said, "If we want to remain strong and secure in adverse situations, we need youth trained in these technologies, who can provide solution to the critical technological challenges". Speaking at National Science Day celebrations, 'Vigyan Vaibhav - 2025', organised by ...

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**India 3<sup>rd</sup> largest startup ecosystem**

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday said India has emerged as the world's third-largest startup ecosystem with a combined valuation exceeding USD 354 million. The minister was virtually addressing the inaugural session of the third edition of IInvenTiv, a national research and development event being hosted by IIT Madras. IInvenTiv is a flagship event of the Ministry of Education, which was first held in 2022 at IIT Delhi featuring exhibits only from Indian Institutes of...

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**Investors become poorer by Rs 9L cr**

Investors' wealth tumbled by Rs 9 lakh crore on Friday, in tandem with a sharp decline in the domestic equity market, where the benchmark Sensex plunged 1,414 points following a bearish trend in global equities. Fresh tariff threats that ignited global trade war fears and relentless foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiment, analysts said. The 30-share BSE benchmark gauge tumbled 1,414.33 points or 1.90 per cent to settle at 73,198.10. During the day, it cracked 1,471.16 points or 1.97 per cent...

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**Hockey India unveils new format**

Hockey India on Friday unveiled a new format with a promotion and relegation system for the Senior Women's National Championship to be held in Panchkula from March 1 to 12. The competition will feature 28 teams divided into three divisions titled 'A', 'B' and 'C'. The new format aims to enhance competition but also provides intends to provide a pathway for teams to ascend to higher divisions or risk relegation based on their performances. "The introduction of the promotion and relegation system..."

-SPORTS

**'Govt ignoring students welfare'**

BRS Working President KTR launched a scathing attack on the Congress Government, accusing it of ignoring students' welfare after reports came that hostel students in Nagarkurnool district were forced to go hungry on Maha Shivaratri day. Taking to social media, KTR criticised ministers for rolling in luxury while students struggled for food, calling it the "peak of Praja Palana." "Ministers are busy with helicopter tours and fish feasts while hostel students are starving. This is the state of Revanth Reddy's so-called Praja government," KTR posted. He highlighted a shocking incident at the ST Boys Hostel in Kondaanagula in Achampet constituency, where hostel staff allegedly told students to walk km to temples for free meals instead of cooking for them. Reports said that of the 380 students, only 200 were present at the hostel on Shivaratri. Instead of providing them lunch, the hostel authorities directed them to a community meal at the Gudibanda Shiva Temple. For dinner, they were told to walk even further to the Ganganamma Temple in Veeramrajipally. Parents and local people fumed at the administration, questioning how students could be forced to trek long distances for food on a festival day. "Is starving students on a festival day Congress governance?" KTR asked, warning that the Telangana people would not remain silent. He called on the public to wake up to the failures of the Congress Government using the hashtag #CongressFailedTelangana.

**Avalanche buries BRO camp in Uttarkhand**

32 workers rescued, 25 still trapped

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Thirty-two of the 57 BRO workers trapped under an avalanche in the high-altitude village of Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district have been rescued, concern over the safety of the other 25 mounting as night fell on the snowbound slopes and rescue efforts came to a temporary halt. The snowslide, which buried a Border Roads Organisation camp between Mana and Badrinath, rolled down early on Friday morning. Multiple teams battled through tough

terrain, heavy snow and icy temperatures through the day to reach the men. They initially pulled out 10 workers and then the others, sources said. Four of those rescued are reported to

be in a critical condition, the Army PRO said. All 32 have been taken to the ITBP camp in Mana for treatment, the sources said. Mana, three kilometres from Badrinath, is the last village on the India-Tibet

border at a height of 3,200 metres. Visuals from Mana showed rescuers trudging through high piles of snow in a grim landscape bathed in white. Rescue operations were stopped in view of continuing bad weather and the impending danger of more avalanches in Mana. Two mild avalanches had followed the main one. The avalanche hit around 7.15 am, burying the workers inside eight containers and one shed, the Army said. Its swift response teams, comprising more than 100 people from the Ixex Brigade, especially trained in high altitude rescue



**Centre okays construction of Warangal Airport**

CM Revanth thanks PM Modi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a major boost to Telangana's aviation infrastructure, the Centre has officially approved the development and operationalization of the Mamnoon Airport in Warangal district. Civil Aviation Ministry Secretary Amit Kumar Jha and the Airport Authority of India (AAI) Chairman had conveyed the decision via an official letter to the state government. The approval comes as a break-

through for the Warangal region, where the airport's operations had been stalled for over a decade. One of the major obstacles to the project was the No Objection Certificate (NOC) restriction imposed under the Hyderabad International Airport Limited (HIAL) agreement, which barred the development of any new domestic or international airport within a 150-km radius for 25 years.

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**CM calls for Hyd-B'luru Defence Industrial Corridor**

Says Hyd is home for crucial defence establishments

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy stressed Telangana's vital role in the country's defence, calling for the declaration of a Hyderabad-Bengaluru Defence Industrial Corridor to attract investments and boost indigenous military manufacturing. Speaking at the Vigyan Vaibhav-2025 programme on Friday at Gachibowli, he highlighted Hyderabad's decades-long contribution to India's defence manufacturing. Addressing students and industry experts, Revanth said that Hyderabad is home to major defence establishments like the Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Defence



Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Mishra Dhatu Nigam (Midani), and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which have been manufacturing rockets

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**Rescue efforts on war footing**

Positive outcome unlikely in SLBC tunnel rescue ops: Collector

PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The rescue operation doesn't indicate a positive outcome, said Collector Badavath Santosh. Eleven top agencies specialising in tunnel disasters are leading the operation working with unmatched coordination and expertise. District Collector Badavath Santosh has refuted false reports circulating on media channels and social media claiming that five bodies were recovered from the SLBC tunnel accident site. Santosh dismissed reports that NGR's ground penetrating radar (GPR) captured images of human bodies in the debris of the SLBC tunnel where eight persons were trapped. "We have noticed that some fake news is going on that bodies have been found. That news is not

true. I request the media also. If there is any such news, we will inform from the Collector's office," he told reporters. Officials said rat miners are trying to penetrate and confirm where they are. "The rescue operation is still going on, and any official updates will be communicated through the District Public Relations Officer (DPRO). I request media outlets to refrain from spreading unverified information," he urged. Collector Santosh chaired a review meeting at the JP Base Camp Office, assessing rescue operations. The meeting was attended by senior officials, including Irrigation Special Secretary Prashant Jeevan Patil, NDRF officer Sukhendu, TSSPDCL CMD Musharraf Ali, Army officials Colonel

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**CM to meet PM on BC quota Bill**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is going to New Delhi on March 9 to meet Prime Minister Modi to ask him to approve the 42 per cent BC Reservations Bill in Parliament and subsequently to go for local body elections. The Chief Minister would also meet leaders of various political parties and appeal to them to support the BC Reservations Bill. It is learnt that the Telangana government will hold a Cabinet meeting on March 6 on the BC Reservations Bill, approve it and pass the Bill in the special Assembly session being held soon. The Chief Minister while addressing the TPCC's extended executive committee meeting held on Friday on the Gandhi Bhavan premises said that he would go to New Delhi any number of times to protect the rights of the state.

**State to launch Rs 6,000 cr self-employment scheme**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Government will prioritise self-employment schemes through SC, ST, BC and minority corporations to provide livelihood to unemployed youth, Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu said. Speaking at the quarterly review meeting with bankers on Friday, he said that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy would launch the Rs 6,000 crore self-employment initiative at Wanaparthy on March 2. Bhatti criticised the BRS admin for neglecting welfare corporations and asserted that the government considers social welfare a priority sector. He assured that the state is ready to provide subsidies and margin money and called upon bankers to support these schemes by extending financial aid. He emphasised that bankers play a crucial role in 'Rising Telangana', and that the government has devised policies to attract

global attention. Bhatti highlighted the state's investment-friendly environment, which provides skilled human resources, uninterrupted quality power supply, and a strong law and order framework. These factors, he said, helped Telangana bag investments of Rs 1.8 lakh crore at the World Economic Forum in Davos, he added. He said the government's commitment to agriculture was evident in the Rs 52,000 crore budget allocation. In just three months, Rs 22,000 crore was credited into farmers' bank accounts as per the farm loan waiver scheme, a record in the country. He said the decision helped both farmers and bankers, allowing loan recovery in a single stroke. He also detailed major allocations like the Rs 11,500 crore under Rythu Bharosa, Rs 1,500 crore under Rythu Bima, Rs 11,000 crore as subsidies for free power supply to farmers, and Rs 1,800 crore paid as

Continued on Page 2

**Delimitation of LS seats must be done on pro-rata basis: CM**

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU venkat.k.warlu@gmail.com ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that the delimitation of LS seats should be done on a pro-rata basis. The CM criticised Union Home Minister Amit Shah for stating that LS seats will not be reduced in South India. He demanded that the Centre should tell on what basis it will do delimitation. "Amit Shah is saying that LS seats will not be reduced. However, Amit Shah is not saying that LS seats will increase in South India. The BJP is trying to do 'injustice' to South India through LS delimitation. The BJP is trying to stay in power permanently by increasing LS seats in North India," Revanth said. Addressing the media on Gandhi Bhavan premises on Friday after the TPCC's extended executive committee meeting, the CM said the BJP is trying to increase LS seats in Bihar,

Continued on Page 2

**HC stays Tribunal order on Bhagya Laxmi Temple takeover**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant relief to the current temple management, the Telangana High Court on Friday stayed the Telangana Endowments Tribunal's order directing the Endowments Department to take over the Bhagya Laxmi Temple at Charminar and its day-to-day activities. The tribunal's order, dated February 21, 2025, had directed the appointment of an Executive Officer to manage the temple. The order was challenged by the appellants, represented by senior counsel Ashok Anand Kumar, who argued that the tribunal had overstepped its jurisdiction and ruled beyond the issues filed before it.

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**Telangana expects 17,500 MW peak summer power demand**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana's power utilities are gearing up to handle record peak electricity demand this summer, with projections indicating that demand may cross 17,500 MW. The Principal Secretary for Energy, Sandeep Kumar Sultania, reviewed the implementation of the Summer Action Plan by the Northern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited (TGNPDCL) during a tele-conference on Friday and asked engineers to be on alert in the coming months. During the meeting, Sultania expressed satisfaction with the current power supply situation and hailed power sector employees for ensuring quality, uninterrupted electricity supply. He acknowledged the sector's con-



tributions in meeting the highest peak demand of 16,601 MW on February 26. TGNPDCL CMD K. Varun Reddy reported that infrastructure upgrades have been executed to reduce over-

loads. The completion of 33 new substations, 83 new 33 KV feeders, 341 new 11 KV feeders, and 98 interlinking lines have ensured alternative power supply readiness. Of the 105 overloaded power trans-

formers, 99 have been upgraded, and 4,530 of the 4,850 overloaded distribution transformers have been replaced, with the remaining work set for completion by March 10. D. Krishna Bhaskar, the CMD of TGRANSCO, said the augmentation of 16 power transformers had been completed, with six remaining works in the NPDCL area prioritised for completion before March 10. Principal Secretary Sultania directed officials to deploy Emergency Response Team (ERT) vehicles for quick resolution of distribution transformer failures to prevent crops during peak summer. He also stressed the need for creating consumer awareness regarding the 1912 helpline for grievance redressal and emphasised completing maintenance works efficiently by availing necessary clearances in advance.





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03



HYDRAA Commissioner AV Ranganath reviewing lake bodies in Hyderabad on Friday

## Canines show their skills at passing out parade

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Newly trained canines and their handlers showcased impressive performances, including the namaste drill, obedience drill and seek far find during the 24th batch of the All India Level Canine Basic Induction Course at the Integrated Intelligence Training Academy (IITA) in Moinabad on Friday.

Director General Intelligence B Shivadhar Reddy presiding as chief guest noted that 72 canines and 101 handlers from various state and central police units had passed out on Friday.

Addressing the gathering Shivadhar Reddy said that highly trained canines and their handlers were playing a crucial role in safeguarding society. He extended his heartfelt congratulations to all the trainees, appreciating their dedication, discipline, and commitment to duty.

This year's batch comprised 72 canines and 101 handlers from various state and central police units, including Telangana, Bihar, Goa, Tripura, CISE, RGIA, and RPF

(Secunderabad and Vijayawada). The canines—36 Labrador Retrievers, 8 German Shepherds, and 28 Belgian Malinois—were rigorously trained in specialised areas such as explosives detection, narcotics detection, liquor detection, tracking, and assault operations.

Since its inception in 2004, the Canine Training Centre at IITA, Moinabad, has successfully trained 843 canines and 1,205 handlers. These well-trained canine units play an indispensable role in anti-sabotage operations, VIP and VVIP security, bomb threat responses, narcotics control, and crime investigations.

Telangana Police's canine teams at the 68th All India Level Police Duty Meet 2024-25 in Ranchi, Jharkhand secured six gold, four silver, and eight bronze medals, topping the medal tally and winning the prestigious Charminar Trophy for overall championship. Notably, Teja, a narcotics detection dog from Cyberabad trained at IITA, won a Bronze Medal and contributed to securing the Runner's Trophy.



Director General Intelligence B Shivadhar Reddy presiding as chief guest at 24th batch of the All India Level Canine Basic Induction Course at IITA Moinabad on Friday

## 'Modern technologies adding lethality in warfare'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said critical, cutting edge and frontier technologies have been adding new dimensions of lethality as well as unpredictability in modern warfare.

He also said, "If we want to remain strong and secure in adverse situations, we need youth trained in these technologies, who can provide solution to the critical technological challenges".

Speaking at National Science Day celebrations, 'Vigyan Vaibhav - 2025', organised by DRDO and others here, he said the changing formats of warfare in the recent years have an increasingly higher technological component as compared to the past.

War is increasingly moving from hardware-oriented to software, he said.

"If you want to remain strong and secure in adverse situations, we need youth trained in these technologies who can provide solutions to the critical technological challenges," he said.

From this point of view, education in modern science and technology is even more important for the safety and security of the nation, Singh said.

Addressing the audience, largely comprising school and college students, he urged the younger generation to adopt scientific outlook and critical thinking to delve into the questions of "how and why" and go beyond ordinary.

Each of the youngsters has a spark of brilliance and capacity to move the world. "It is only a question of recognising it and com-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh speaking at National Science Day celebrations in Hyderabad on Friday

mitting yourself to achieve it," Singh said.

The Central government, under the illustrious leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is fully committed to harness modern technology for the welfare of the people, he said.

As education is in the concurrent list of the Constitution, it is the joint responsibility of the Centre and states to ensure that future generation get the best of education and that the generations ahead are not only future ready but also globally ready, he said.

The New Education Policy (NEP) has endeavoured to change

generations to take up science and innovation for national development.

Recalling the significant contributions of ancient Indian scholars like Aryabhata and Bhaskaracharya, he said when India prospered in science, its economy also prospered.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited DRDO's Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex, the nerve centre for design and development of indigenous missile systems, in Hyderabad, Telangana on Friday.

He was briefed about the missile technologies and related programmes being carried out by Research Centre Imarat (RCI) Secretary, Department of Defence R&D and Chairman DRDO Dr Samir V Kamat and senior scientists and officials of RCI were present on the occasion.

Rajnath Singh also felicitated the team of the Long-Range Hypersonic Anti-Ship Missile project, successful flight-trials of which took place in November 2024. Interacting with the scientists, Minister Rajnath Singh commended them for their unparalleled contribution to India's defence capabilities and exuded confidence that, with concerted efforts, India will find itself among the top-three economies by 2027.

Rajnath Singh also paid glowing tributes to Dr APJ Abdul Kalam on the occasion. He stated that the former President's contributions to science and technology, missile development in particular, can never be forgotten.

## 'Living Temple' cultural show inaugurated

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

'Living Temple', a three-day cultural art show celebrating Indian temple art and heritage, was inaugurated at T-Works on Friday. The exhibition will be open from 11 am to 8 pm and features over 100 artworks.

Curated by Annapurna Madipadiga and supported by Telangana Tourism, 'Living Temple' brought together 30 renowned artists from across India to showcase the rich legacy of Indian temples. The exhibition blends traditional temple art with contemporary artistic expressions.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Smita Sabharwal, Principal Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Heritage, and Youth Affairs, Telangana, Mamidi Harikrishna, Director of the Culture Department, and eminent archaeologist KK Muhammed, former Regional Director (North), Archaeological Survey of India.



Smita Sabharwal emphasised the need to make this an annual event, bringing together both young and experienced artists, assuring continued government support. Archaeologist KK Muhammed highlighted the importance of innovative heritage tours, suggesting that monuments should offer immersive experiences like those in Singapore and China.

Artist and art director Thota Tharani stressed the need to preserve heritage and nature.

He shared his practice of ensuring no debris is left behind when dismantling sets, stating, "You must respect the place".

The event also included panel discussions on "Art, Heritage Tourism - The Missing Link," cultural performances, and expert insights. Featured artists included Thota Tharani, Amar Ramesh, Drdha, Charanjeet, Parnavi Bangar, and others, whose works celebrate temple art and its preservation.

## CS reviews arrangements for Vice-President's visit

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Secretary A Santhi Kumari held a meeting with senior officials to review the arrangements for the Vice-President of India's visit to the state on March 2.

At the State Secretariat on Friday, she instructed officials to work closely across departments to prevent communication gaps and ensure smooth arrangements.

The Chief Secretary stated that during his short visit, the Vice President will visit IIT Hyderabad, where he will interact with faculty, staff, and students. He will also attend a private event in the city before returning to New Delhi the same day.



Chief Secretary A Santhi Kumari holding a review meeting at the State Secretariat in Hyderabad on Friday

The Police Department was directed to ensure proper security and law enforcement. The Road and Buildings Department was asked to coordinate with the police for necessary arrangements. The Health Department was instructed to provide doctors and medical facilities, while the Energy Department was told to ensure an uninterrupted power supply.

Special Chief Secretary (Home) Ravi Gupta, Special Chief Secretary (R&B) Vikas Raj, Political Secretary Raghunandan Rao, I&PR Commissioner Dr. S. Harish, the Collectors of Hyderabad and Sanga Reddy, and police officials attended the meeting.

## TG banks disburse Rs 2.16 L cr under priority sector

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 44th State Level Bankers' Committee (SLBC) Quarterly Review Meeting was held on February 28, 2025, at Hotel Marigold, Hyderabad, to review the performance of banks in Telangana for the December 2024 quarter. The meeting was attended by Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu, Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao, Special Chief Secretary (Finance) K Ramakrishna Rao, and senior banking officials.

During the meeting, State Bank of India (SBI) Chief General Manager Rajesh Kumar presented the banking sector's performance, highlighting key statistics. The total deposits in Telangana banks grew by Rs. 36,915 crores, reaching Rs. 8,16,868 crores, while total advances increased by Rs. 74,865 crores, taking the total bank credit to Rs. 10,53,924 crores. The Credit-Deposit (CD) ratio remained above 100%, standing at 129.53%, demonstrating a strong lending environment.



State Level Bankers' Committee meeting, Hyderabad

Under agricultural credit, banks disbursed Rs. 58,791 crores as short-term production loans, achieving 64.75% of the annual target. Investment credit for agriculture, allied activities, agri-infrastructure, and agri-ancillary activities stood at Rs. 49,964 crores, covering 81.56% of the target. The MSME sector received Rs. 1,00,862 crores, achieving 77.80% of the set goal, while education loans stood at Rs. 487 crores and housing loans amounted to Rs. 2,781 crores. Under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), banks sanctioned Rs. 8,441 crores, meeting 61.01% of the annual target. Overall, banks in Telangana disbursed Rs. 2,16,112 crores under Priority Sector Lending (PSL), achieving 72.41% of the set target.

For street vendors under PM SVANidhi, banks sanctioned

4,26,084 loans in Tranche 1, 2,20,550 loans in Tranche 2, and 72,962 loans in Tranche 3. Additionally, under the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund, banks sanctioned Rs. 3,018 crores, against a cumulative target of Rs. 3,200 crores.

Speaking at the meeting, Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageswara Rao emphasized the need for banks to increase credit flow to agriculture and allied sectors, particularly under schemes like PMFME, loans against warehouse receipts, support for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), and oil palm cultivation. He urged banks to explore the abundant potential available in Telangana for agricultural development.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu lauded the banking sector for achieving financial targets but stressed the need to prioritize credit access for agriculture, weaker sections, and self-help groups (SHGs). The meeting was attended by senior officials, including NABARD CGM Uday Bhaskar, RBI DGM T Jagdish Kumar, and officials from SC and BC Welfare Departments.

## Warangal Railway Station to be redeveloped with expenditure of Rs 25.41 crore

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Warangal Railway Station will be redeveloped with an expenditure of Rs 25.41 crore under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Indian Railways is undergoing a major transformation, upgrading stations to provide world-class facilities. Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), 40 railway stations in Telangana are being redeveloped at a cost of Rs 2,737 crores to improve passenger ameni-

ties and boost regional growth. Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for this project in August 2023 and February 2024. Located on the Delhi-Chennai main line under South Central Railway (SCR), the station features Kakatiya-inspired architecture. It serves Warangal, Hanamkonda, and Kazipet, handling about 31,887 passengers daily.

Key upgrades of the station include a new station façade and entrance portico, a 12m-

wide Foot Over Bridge (FOB) with three lifts and four escalators, improved platform surfaces with additional cover, new waiting halls and toilets, including Divyangjan facilities, landscaping, and better traffic circulation. Modern signage and train information boards are also included.

Over 50% of the work is completed, with full completion targeted within this financial year. The upgrades aim to enhance passenger comfort and connectivity.



## Health challenges require integrated approach: GHMC Commissioner

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad is witnessing a surge in mosquito-borne diseases like dengue, chikungunya, and malaria, largely due to stagnant water accumulation, poor drainage, and rapid urbanisation. Addressing these public health challenges requires an integrated approach that considers human, animal, and environmental health, said Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) Commissioner Ilambarithi on Friday.

Speaking at the National Science Day Lecture at NIAB, GHMC Commissioner K Ilambarithi said the importance of One Health—a holistic framework connecting urban governance with public health. He highlighted GHMC's efforts in stormwater

management, vector control, solid waste disposal, and pollution control to curb disease outbreaks.

Dr Ilambarithi noted that urban flooding caused by inadequate stormwater drainage has become a recurring issue in Hyderabad, leading to waterlogging, infrastructure damage, and mosquito breeding.

To address this, GHMC is working on a comprehensive Stormwater Master Plan that includes clearing and maintaining existing drains, developing new drainage systems in high-risk areas.

Improving rainwater harvesting to prevent urban flooding and minimise water stagnation.

Improper waste disposal is another major factor contributing to public health crises. Accumulated garbage attracts disease-carrying pests and



GHMC Commissioner K Ilambarithi at NIAB on occasion of National Science Day in Hyderabad on Friday

worsens air and water pollution. GHMC has taken steps such as: Door-to-door garbage

collection across the city. Dr Ilambarithi stressed that air pollution from construction

dust, the urban heat island effect, and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) are emerging public health threats. Measures such as strict pollution control, green cover expansion, and responsible antibiotic use are essential for a healthier city.

"No single department can tackle these challenges alone," Dr Ilambarithi stated, calling for interdepartmental coordination between GHMC, the Health Department, Animal Husbandry, and the Pollution Control Board.

Partnerships with research institutions like NIAB will help shape evidence-based policies. On National Science Day, he urged policymakers, scientists, and citizens to work together for a safer, healthier, and more resilient Hyderabad, emphasizing that science, collaboration, and sustainability should drive urban health policies.



Women staging a protest over cancellation of bus services in Siddipet on Thursday night.

## SCCL rescue, relief teams earn nationwide recognition

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

The Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) rescue team has garnered nationwide recognition for its participation in various rescue and relief operations.

The 60 rescue personnel, hailing from Srirampur, Mandamari, and Bellampalli areas, are actively involved in such efforts. The SCCL management has been dedicated to developing its in-house rescue teams, investing significant resources in training them for various aspects of emergency response.

Currently, SCCL has 483 trained rescue and relief workers. These personnel, employed primarily in underground coal mines, are also specially trained to serve as rescue workers during emergencies. Despite SCCL's coal production capacity being only 10% of Coal India Limited's output, the company is a member of the International Mines Rescue Body (IMRB) since 2002. In times of crisis, SCCL's teams are looked upon



for their expertise in rescue and relief operations.

In addition to training its own teams, SCCL imparts training to rescue and relief workers from Hindustan Zinc Limited, Hatti Gold Mines Limited, and Uranium Corporation Limited. The team has received several accolades in international rescue and relief competitions.

Key figures in the training of the rescue teams include SCCL's General Manager (Rescue) K Srinivasa Reddy, Superintendent B Madhava Rao (DGM), Additional

Manager Bhaskar Reddy (trainer), and DYSE Narsimha Murthy, who have all played pivotal roles in honing the skills of the rescue teams at Godavari Khani.

Over the years, the SCCL rescue team has handled numerous critical incidents. For example, eight years ago, in a mining accident, a valuable continuous miner was trapped when a coal mine's roof collapsed. The SCCL team used state-of-the-art pneumatic hydraulic cutters to safely excavate the machine.

In another instance, a fire at the

Kothagudem Thermal Power Station in Kothagudem created thick smoke, obstructing the fire brigade's access. The SCCL rescue team took charge, bringing the flames under control.

Additionally, the team has successfully rescued workers trapped under boulders in a granite mine explosion in Cheemakurti, Prakasam district. They have also been instrumental in saving children trapped in bore wells, alongside executing effective rescue and relief operations during mining accidents.

The following is the breakdown of relief and rescue workers in various SCCL coal mining areas:

The following is the strength of relief and rescue workers in various coal mining areas of the SCCL: Srirampur - 89, Mandamari - 69, Ramagundam - 1-69 workers, Ramagundam 2 - 74, Adriaia project - 31, Bhupalapalli - 72, Manuguru - 20, Manuguru-20, Bellampalli-8, Kothagudem-6 and Illenduru-5

## Commuters put to hardship due to lack of adequate bus services

PNS ■ SIDDIPEET

Emotions are running high as women and girls are left in tears as they face long waits for bus rides back to their homes. Passengers have voiced their concerns, questioning, "How will we reach our destination if there are no buses at night?"

At the old bus station in Siddipet town, many have expressed dissatisfaction over the buses not adhering to their schedules. Uncertainty looms as passengers are left unaware of when the next buses will arrive. Commuters, who travel daily from approximately 50 kilometres away, have highlighted

that both the elderly and students depend on these services for their daily journeys.

On Thursday night, even after 10 pm, the absence of buses prompted protests from women and girls, who pleaded, "How will we reach our destination?"

When passengers sought information about bus arrivals, they discovered that no staff members were present in the control room. Compounding the issue, auto drivers were charging exorbitant fares, further exacerbating the distressing situation. Passengers, feeling helpless, remained seated at the bus stand in despair.

## Over 2.60 crore visited Vemulawada temple on Sivaratri day

PNS ■ VEMULAWADA

Over 2.60 lakh devotees had the darshan of Lord RajarajeshwaraSwamy at the Vemulawada pilgrimage centre on Feb 27, in connection with Maha Siva Ratri festival, according to the temple officials here on Friday. The Siva Ratri celebrations were conducted on a grand scale

for three days in Vemulawada, which is regarded as Varanas of the South.

Further, the officials said that the temple earned a revenue of Rs 1,31,89,000 on the festival day. Giving the break-up, they said that the temple earned Rs 45.83 lakh by way of fulfilling KodeMokku by devotees and Rs 57.12 lakh by way of sale of temple prasadam to devotees.



What all remains of the cars after colliding head-on with a bus on Peberu national highway in Wanaparthy district on Friday

## One dead, two injured in bus-car collision

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

One person was dead and two others were injured in a head-on collision between a bus and two cars on the Peberu National Highway in Wanaparthy district on Friday. The injured were shifted to Wanaparthy District Hospital, according to Peberu Sub-Inspector Hari Prasad Reddy.

The accident happened near the Peberu bypass on National Highway 44. A private bus travelling from Hyderabad to Tirupati collided head-on with two cars.

The cars were on their way from Kurnool to Hyderabad.

## Two members of Maoist party surrender to police

Kamareddy District Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma expressed the hope that the remaining five ultras, who hailed from Kamareddy too will surrender to the police

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

Kamareddy District Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma has revealed that two members of the banned Communist Party of India-Maoists, known as the Maoist party, surrendered to the police seeking to lead a peaceful life.

At a media conference held at the police headquarters in Kamareddy on Friday, Sindhu Sharma stated that Gurla Vijay Kumar alias Akash and Balakrishna, who were active members of the Maoist party, had surrendered to the police. She mentioned that they chose to surrender to lead a peaceful life with their families.

Gurula Vijay Kumar joined the Maoist party in 2022 under the leadership of Hidma. He was responsible for supplying necessary materials for the party, and in 2024, he was inducted into the party as a technical team member.

It was revealed that in June 2024, he attempted to attack the CRPF camp in Pusuguppa to steal weapons.

He had been involved in



Kamareddy District Superintendent of Police Sindhu Sharma speaking at a media conference in Kamareddy on Friday

about eight encounters between the police and Maoists. Sodi Balakrishna joined the Maoist Party in 2018 as a member of the Charla Area Committee under the leadership of Arun DVC. He worked in the Manugu Area Committee as an ACS member from 2022 to 2023. Until his surrender, he had been working as a member of the Charla Committee.

He was actively involved in attacks against the police during encounters and joined the party due to his attraction to the banned Maoist party's ideology. The SP also mentioned that five Maoists from the Kamareddy district are still in hiding. She expressed hope that they would return to the mainstream and contribute to the development of Telangana.



## 'Eligible families miss out on LPG subsidy'

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Despite the Congress government's promise under the Mahalaxmi scheme to provide cooking gas at Rs 500 per refill, beneficiaries in Ranga Reddy district are facing delays in receiving their subsidy. With 13,39,852 LPG connections in the district and 2,08,203 beneficiaries under the scheme, nearly 90 per cent of the eligible consumers are reportedly not receiving the subsidy, leaving them frustrated. They are being pushed from pillar to post.

Initially, the government deposited the subsidy amount into beneficiaries' accounts based on applications received at Prajavani programmes, using the white ration card as the eligibility criterion. However, payments have since stopped, forcing consumers to visit Mandal Parishad offices repeatedly.

While officials claim the subsidies are being disbursed, consumers argue that no

money is reflecting in their accounts. The Central government currently provides a subsidy of Rs 40.71 on cooking gas, but the promised state subsidy is missing. Frequent disputes between consumers and officials have been reported at MPDO offices, where staff members are struggling to provide clear answers. Civil Supplies Department officials have been inconsistent in their responses, sometimes attributing the subsidy delays to the lack of a white ration card.

Adding to the confusion, district civil supplies officials do not have clear records on the gas companies operating in the region or whether the Rs 500 subsidy will be consistently implemented. According to department records, Rs 17.57 crore in subsidy funds had been deposited in beneficiaries' accounts as of January 28. However, consumers report receiving messages stating that only Rs 40.71 has been credited for three days' worth of gas supply.



## Two children drown in reservoir

PNS ■ NALGONDA

In a heartbreaking incident near Nakkalagandi Project under Chandampet Mandal in the district, two young children drowned in the reservoir.

The deceased were identified as Marulu Hari Prasad (8) and Bittu (5). They were the sons of Katravath Rupla Saroj from Nakkalagandi Gram Panchayat.

Their parents had gone to Devarakonda to purchase groceries, and upon returning home, they realised their children were missing. Distressed, they searched for them with the help of villagers, but their whereabouts remained unknown.

After some time, villagers received information that two children were found in reservoir near the Nakkalagandi Project. Upon reaching the site, they confirmed that the children had drowned while playing and attempting to swim in the flowing waters.

## TGNPDCL to focus on customer-centric approach

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Northern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited (TGNPDCL) is committed to bringing electricity services closer to consumers and ensuring innovative solutions for their needs.

As part of this initiative, the TGNPDCL has introduced a "Vidyut Prajavani" (Electricity Public Grievance Programme) every Monday, where consumers can directly voice their concerns. Additionally, Consumer Reception Desks have been established at all circle, division, and section offices to address consumer complaints promptly. These initiatives will help resolve issues either immediately or within a stipulated time based on their severity. Furthermore, these efforts will enhance trust and strengthen relationships with consumers, according to officials.

To address farmers' concerns, TGNPDCL has launched the "Vidyut Adhikarula Polam Bata" (Electricity Officers' Field Visit) Programme, which has shown promising results. As part of this, the company is replacing damaged poles, tightening loose power lines, and installing intermediate poles to improve power infrastructure.

To mitigate power disruptions caused by heavy rains, strong winds, or technical failures, Emergency Power Restore Team (ERT) vehicles have been deployed. These vehicles are equipped with all necessary materials and GPS tracking systems, enabling teams to respond quickly to restore power in affected areas.

With the aim of achieving zero electrical accidents, TGNPDCL has appointed Technical Divisional Engineers as Safety Officers and is



conducting widespread awareness campaigns to educate consumers about electrical safety.

Farmers and consumers are advised not to undertake any unauthorised electrical work and instead use the toll-free number 1912 for assistance, the officials said. To ensure uninterrupted power supply, 33/11 KV interlinking lines have been established to provide an alternative power source in case of technical issues. Additionally, old substations are being renovated, and AB switches and fault passage indicators are being installed to quickly identify and resolve power faults.

To streamline the approval process for new service connections, TGNPDCL ensures that applications are not rejected outright without giving consumers a chance to respond. Consumers will also receive real-time status updates via SMS throughout the application process to avoid unnecessary delays. TGNPDCL has further strengthened its digital services by enhancing the TGNPDCL mobile app, which now includes 19 new features for customer convenience. Consumers can use the app to download and pay monthly electricity bills safely and easily within just two minutes.



Congress leaders paying tribute to Dr Rajendra Prasad's portrait at the DCC office in Khammam on Friday

## Tributes paid to Babu Rajendra Prasad on his death anniversary

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

On the occasion of the 62nd death anniversary of Dr Babu Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India and a freedom fighter, the District Congress Committee paid rich tributes to him. The meeting, organised by District Congress Committee president Puvvalla Durgaprasad and chairman of the State Warehousing Corporation Royal Nageswara Rao, was held at the DCC office, Sanjeeva Reddy Bhavan. Leaders participated in the event by offering floral tributes to his portrait.

During the event, they emphasised Dr Rajendra Prasad's significant role in

India's freedom struggle. They remembered his active participation in the 1931 Salt Satyagraha and the 1941 Quit India Movement, both under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, during which he was imprisoned. They also noted his role as the President of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Indian Constitution. He became the first President of independent India in 1950 and held the position until 1962. They lauded his impartial approach during his tenure as President and his substantial contributions to the nation's development. It was stated that walking in the footsteps of such great leaders is the true tribute we can offer.

## Illegal sand extraction continues unabated in Charla mandal

PNS ■ BHADRADRI KOTHAGUDEM

The Godavari and Taliperu rivers are in close proximity to the Charla mandal. In the agency areas, accidents being caused by illegal sand transportation during the night have been leading to fatalities. Recently, two young migrant labourers from Chhattisgarh were run over by a sand tractor in the early morning. One of them died, while the other sustained severe injuries. Despite all this, the inaction on the part of the officials and the lethargy of the authorities has allowed the illegal sand mining mafia to operate freely.

While ordinary people are struggling due to the shortage of sand for house construction, sand mining is continuing unabated during night hours.

Despite the government directing the officials to take strict action against the sand mafia, a small gang of influential people has been operating in the area and extracting



A tractor-load of sand being transported from Chala mandal in Bhadradi Kothagudem district

sand, besides deploying tractors to transport them to towns. Each load of sand is reportedly being sold at the rate of Rs 2,000.

Earlier, sand extracted from the Godavari river was available at Rs 1,000 per tractor-load sand was made available at Rs 1,000 and sand from

Taliperu at Rs 600.

Under the guise of government developmental works, contractors are transporting hundreds of truckloads of sand without paying seigniorage. Despite the illegal transportation, there has been no action by the officials.

Tribal organisations and

human rights advocates are calling for compensation for the family of the deceased and improved medical care for the injured.

They also insist that the government take a strong stance against illegal sand extraction and hold those responsible accountable.

Indian Bank

GAYATRINAGAR - MALKAJGIRIBRANCH  
42-442/43/1, SEETHARAMA NILAYAM  
GAYATRINAGAR LANE  
BESIDE RADHIKA THEATRE, MOULALI

APPENDIX IV  
(Rule-81D) POSSESSION NOTICE (for immovable property)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Indian Bank, GAYATRINAGAR-MALKAJGIRI under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(1)(f) read with Rule 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 24/10/2024 Calling on the Borrowers: M/S ELECTRO WAVE TECHNOLOGIES Prop Chandrapatla Samul 1-1-245/254, 1st floor, Srinivasa Nagar/Kopra, Hyderabad-500062. 2. Mr. Chandrapatla Samul S/o Mr. Chandralah (Proprietor) H No. 1-1-32/2251, Sarbaha Nagar, Kopra, Hyderabad-500062. Guarantor cum Mortgagor: 3. Mrs. Yellala Sivaramma w/o Late Yellala Narsimlu H No. 1-1-32/2251, Kopra, ECL, Hyderabad-500062. Guarantors: 4. Mr Chandrapatla Chandralah S/o Padma Rao H No. H No. 1-1-32/2251, Kopra, ECL, Hyderabad 500062. 5. Mr Chandrapatla Vajayamma W/o Chandralah H No. 1-1-32/2251, Kopra, ECL, Hyderabad 500062. 6. Mr Chandrapatla Pramed S/o Chandralah H No. 1-1-32/2251, Kopra, ECL, Hyderabad-500062. 7. Mr Chandrapatla Praveen S/o Chandralah H No. 1-1-32/2251, Kopra, ECL, Hyderabad-500062. With our GAYATRINAGAR-MALKAJGIRI Branch to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 19,02,008.00 (Rupees Nineteen Lacs Sixty-Two Thousand Nine only) together with interest, cost & charges from 24/10/2024 till date of payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 and 9 of the said Rules on this 24th day of February of the year 2025.

The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Indian Bank for an amount of Rs. 20,73,612/- (Rupees Twenty Lakhs Seventy Three Thousand Six Hundred Twelve only) as on 23/02/2025 and interest thereon.

\*No draw attention to the provisions of Section 13(8) of the SARFAESI Act and the Rules framed there under which deals with your rights of redemption over the securities\*

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

All that the piece and parcel of Open Plot bearing No 54, measuring 300.00 Sq. yards or 167.20 Sq. Mtrs in Survey No.469 of SRILAXMI NAGAR, Situated at Dammamaguda Ha Nagaram Village, Giam panchayat Dammamaguda, Keesara Mandal, Medchal Malkajgiri District and TELANGANA STATE within the boundaries of North Open Plot No. 63, South Plot No. 65, East Plot No. 61, West 30' Wide Road.

Note: Earlier notice dated 03.02.2025 & 14.02.2025 stands cancelled

Date: 24/02/2025  
Place: Hyderabad

BH-AUTHORISED OFFICER  
Indian Bank

ACROSS THE STATES



**NIA arrests top leader of Naxal frontal organisation**

A top leader of a frontal organisation linked to the banned CPI(Maoist) has been arrested by the National Investigation Agency, according to a statement issued on Friday. Raghu Midiyami, a leader of Moolwasi Bachao Manch (MBM), was taken into custody by the NIA on Thursday in connection with its probe into the Chhattisgarh terror funding case. MBM is also banned by the Chhattisgarh government. "The outfit has been engaged in collection, storage and disbursement of funds for CPI (Maoist) to further their anti-India agenda. NIA probes revealed that Raghu Midiyami was the nodal person for the distribution of the funds at the local level for staging and sustaining CPI(Maoist)-led protests," said the statement issued by the probe agency. Subsequent investigations revealed Midiyami to be a leader of MBM, it said. The Chhattisgarh Police in November 2023 arrested two accused in the case that was taken over by NIA in February last year.



**Mann sets deadline to make Punjab drug-free state**

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday convened a meeting with senior officials and set a deadline of three months to make the state drug-free. To give a renewed push to the state's anti-drug campaign, Mann said the government will set up special courts that will ensure speedy trial in drug cases and conviction of those found guilty. The meeting was held a day after a five-member sub-committee of Cabinet ministers was formed to monitor the ongoing drive against drug menace in the state. The sub-committee -- headed by Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema and comprising state ministers Aman Arora, Balbir Singh, Laljit Singh Bhullar and Tarunpreet Singh Sond -- has been tasked with overseeing the measures taken by the police and the health department to tackle the menace of drugs and implement de-addiction programmes.



**BSF nabs 15 Bangladeshis from Tripura border**

The Border Security Force (BSF) held 15 Bangladeshis, including seven children, along with three Indian tourists in two separate operations in Tripura, officials said on Friday. Acting on a tip-off, the BSF laid a trap in the border areas and managed to nab the Bangladeshis hailing from Moulvibazar, Sunamganj, Netrakona and Barisal districts of the neighbouring country. In an operation, three men, three women and seven children, all from Bangladesh, were arrested on Thursday from the international border at Kailashahar in Unakoti district, the officials said. BSF personnel also nabbed three Indian tourists for facilitating the Bangladeshis to enter Indian territory, they said. The BSF also held two Bangladeshis in another raid on the same day when they were attempting to cross the border to return to their home country. In another operation, the BSF along with the Government Railway Police (GRP) raided the Agartala station and managed to apprehend two Indians, who were allegedly engaged in the illegal transportation of goods to the neighbouring country.

PUNE BUS RAPE INCIDENT

**Request for water, food led to accused's arrest**

A request for food and water from a house led to the arrest of a 37-year-old man on the run after allegedly raping a woman inside a bus at Swargate bus station in Pune, police said on Friday. The police used drones and sniffer dogs to track down the accused, Dattaray Ramdas Gade, who was hiding in a paddy field in his native Shirur tehsil and apprehended him around midnight, an official said. A senior police officer said, "Gade was brought to Pune by 2 am. He was sent for a medical examination and formally arrested. The accused will be produced in court later in the day." Gade, a history-sheeter, fled to his native place in Shirur after allegedly sexually assaulting a 26-year-old woman inside a state transport bus at Swargate bus station in Pune in the early hours of Tuesday.

**India 3<sup>rd</sup> largest startup ecosystem worth over \$354 million: Pradhan**

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday said India has emerged as the world's third-largest startup ecosystem with a combined valuation exceeding USD 354 million.

The minister was virtually addressing the inaugural session of the third edition of IINventiv, a national research and development expo being hosted by IIT Madras.

IINventiv is a flagship event of the Ministry of Education, which was first held in 2022 at IIT Delhi featuring exhibits only from Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs).

Pradhan also extended invitations to international representatives and sought to strengthen research ties to foster global start-up opportunities. "As of 2025, India has emerged as the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, with a combined valuation exceeding USD 354 million. Tamil Nadu has always been a



land of innovation, entrepreneurship and excellence and has given India some of the brightest entrepreneurs, innovators, scientists and researchers who have made significant contributions to nation building," the minister said.

Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar, who was here to attend the inauguration, said with the significant participation of representatives from higher education institutes and the industry, IINventiv is set to emerge

as an iconic brand in the innovation sector.

"I am sure that the industry leaders attending the event will find many of the technologies on display useful, leading to further technology transfers in the near future," he said.

The second edition of the event with participating institutions from the top 50 of NIRF, apart from IITs, NITs, IISc and IISERS, was held at IIT Hyderabad last year. "We are now bringing together a platform in which industry leaders can

look at technology transfer, investors can look at avenues for funding and foster future collaboration. We have more than 180 exhibits from 39 participating institutions," said IIT Madras Director V Kamakoti.

"These feature the latest Research and Development that have been happening in these institutions, startups that have arisen out of the R&D done at these institutions as well as technology that is now available for commercialisation in the industry," he added.

The thematic areas that would be covered during the two-day event include Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning technologies; Aviation, Defence and Space, Marine Technology; Medical and Healthcare Engineering; Rural Technology; Smart Cities and Infrastructure; Advanced Manufacturing (Industry 4. and 5.0) and Circularity and Sustainability (Energy and E-mobility). A coffee table book on



**'Take action against networks helping Bangla, Rohingya intruders'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah Friday directed the Delhi Police to take stringent action against the networks that help illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas entering India, saying it is an issue of national security and should be dealt with strictly.

Chairing a meeting to review the national capital's law-and-order situation, he said strict action should also be taken against police stations and sub-divisions that consistently perform poorly.

Shah said it should be the Delhi Police's priority to eliminate interstate gangs in the city ruthlessly. Action must be taken with "top to bottom

and bottom to top approach" in narcotics cases, and such drug networks should be dismantled, he said.

"Strict action should be taken against the entire network that helps Bangladeshi and Rohingya intruders enter the country, get their documents made and facilitate their stay here. The issue of illegal intruders is also related to national security, and it should be dealt with strictly. They should be identified and deported," he told the meeting.

The meeting was also attended by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Delhi's Home Minister Ashish Sood, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora and other senior officials.

**India's foundation lies in 'Sanatan Dharma': Dhankhar**

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Underscoring India's deep spirituality and ancient civilisation, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said that the country's foundation lies in Sanatan Dharma.

India, which has long been a guiding force for the world through its preachings of non-violence, peace and brotherhood, will one day become the 'vishwa guru' (world leader), Dhankhar said.

He was addressing a gathering at the closing ceremony of the 150th birth anniversary celebration of spiritual leader Acharya Sri Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami Prabhupad, organised by Gaudiya Mission here.

Emphasising the unifying power of Sanatan Dharma, Dhankhar said, "Sanatan stands for inclusivity, universal values, patriotism and rising above caste, creed and economic divisions."

Reflecting on India's heritage, he asserted, "No other country in the world has a 5,000-year-old 'sanskriti'. India has been the spiritual centre of the world, and we have to carry this momentum forward."

Dhankhar, however, expressed regret over the setbacks India faced around 1,000-1,200 years ago when renowned universities like Nalanda and Takshashila—once attracting scholars from across the world—were

**Fire erupts in Mumbai high-rise; over 50 people rescued**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

More than 50 people stranded on the upper floors of a 57-storey residential building were rescued after a fire broke out in the high-rise in south Mumbai's Byculla area on Friday morning, officials said.

There was no report of casualty in the blaze that erupted around 10.45 am on the 42nd floor in one of the twin buildings of Salete 27 on Babasahab Ambedkar Road, an official from the fire brigade said.



Teams from the Fire Brigade, Mumbai civic utility BEST, police, 108 ambulance services, and other agencies

were mobilised immediately, an official said, adding the cause of the blaze was yet to be ascertained.

After more than two-and-a-half hours of efforts, the Fire Brigade doused the blaze on the 42nd floor of the high-rise building around 1.10 pm, he informed.

They also rescued 50 to 60 people who were stranded on the upper floors of the high-rise with the help of the building's security guards, said the official.

**'EXTREMELY UNFORTUNATE' SC laments suicides in IITs, IIMs, assures robust steps**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said incidents of suicides in IITs and IIMs were "extremely unfortunate" and assured a robust mechanism to check such cases.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh was informed by senior advocate Indra Jaising that in past 14 months, 18 suicides took place in Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). "It is extremely unfortunate what is happening. We will create a robust mechanism to check this situation. We will take this issue to the logical conclusion," it said.

Jaising, appearing for the mothers of students Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who allegedly died by suicide after facing caste-based discrimination, said universities and colleges hadn't given entire data on suicides taking place in their campuses despite a court



order. While Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Central University died on January 17, 2016, Tadvi, a student at TN Topiwala National Medical College, died on May 22, 2019, after she was subjected to purported discrimination by three doctors in her college.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said the University Grants Commission (UGC) had formulated draft regulations, which took care of majority of the concerns raised by the petitioners, and were uploaded on its website inviting suggestions and objections from the public.

**Cong brass discuss strategy with Kerala party leaders**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Top brass of the Congress along with party leaders from Kerala on Friday held a brainstorming session to discuss a strategy and the way forward ahead of next year's assembly elections, with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge asserting that the people will defeat the "oppressive" and "communal" fronts in the state.

The steps to be taken for strengthening the organisation and preparations for the assembly elections to be held next year were also discussed during the meeting, sources said.

"Change is inevitable in Kerala. Congress has built the development paradigm and welfare model of Kerala, and we will do everything possible to bring our UDF to power. Next year, people will defeat both the oppressive and communal fronts in the state," Kharge said



in a post on X. "We held a meeting of Kerala Congress leaders where we deliberated on our political strategy and the future of the state," he also said.

Besides Kharge, former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary K C Venugopal, Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Kerala Congress chief K Sudhakaran and CLP leader in Kerala assembly V D Satheesan, and

AICC in-charge Deepa Dasmunshi were present at the meeting. Senior party leader Ramesh Chennithala, party's chief whip and MP K Suresh, besides MP Shashi Tharoor and Kerala Mahila Congress president and MP Jebi Mather also participated in the deliberations.

The meeting with senior leaders from Kerala comes amid a row over Thiruvananthapuram MP

Tharoor's recent article in a newspaper that drew criticism from some party leaders over his "praise" of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the state for boosting the investment climate.

Tharoor has also hit out at the media for 'misrepresenting' his remarks made in Malayalam in a podcast.

The Congress is the main opposition party in Kerala and is seeking to wrest power from the LDF. Assembly elections are set to take place in Kerala in March-April next year.

Tharoor's article kicked off a political storm in the state a week ago, with the Congress questioning the basis of it while the CPI(M) welcomed it.

Later, Tharoor's remarks in a Malayalam podcast were seen by many as pitching himself for leadership in the state, which did not go well and upset a section of the state leadership.

**China increasing presence in IOR but India knows who goes where: Navy chief**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

China has been increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean Region over the past few decades with 6-8 naval ships of the People's Liberation Army Navy present there at any point of time but India knows "who goes where", which is more than half the battle won, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said on Friday.

Speaking at The Chanakya Dialogues conclave here on the theme 'Bharat 2047: Aatmanirbhar in War', the Navy chief said India has not allowed China to come anywhere where "we don't want them to come".

"China has been increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) for some decades now, not only in the oceans but even on land. And the PLA Navy, which is now the largest navy going by numbers, has



been putting 6-8 very capable combatants at any point of time in the IOR, despite piracy having been obliterated. It is no longer there," Admiral Tripathi said.

"A lot of things are happening. The

good part is that we as the Indian Navy are fully aware of what is happening, and who is doing what, where and why," he added.

India has got the kind of maritime domain awareness where both

manned and unmanned technologies are being used, along with space-based monitoring and international linkages with various agencies through which information is received, the Navy chief said. "And that is more than half the battle won because we know who goes where," he said.

Stating that China had been claiming that their ships were in the Indian Ocean Region for anti-piracy operations, Admiral Tripathi said, "Their initial ruse of coming to the Indian Ocean Region was that 'we are fighting the anti-piracy battle'. But all that is history. Apart from that, they have also been putting a large number of research vessels."

"Again, we know what they are doing. Satellite tracking vessels, deep-sea fishing vessels... All of us are aware that they are doing something which they should not be doing, such as

unregulated, irregular fishing. But all that we cannot stop," the Navy chief said.

He added that India can only ensure China doesn't do anything in "our areas of interest".

"And that we have been doing very effectively. We have not allowed them to come anywhere where we don't want them to come," he said.

Admiral Tripathi added that China has been supplying maritime equipment and systems to Pakistan for over two decades now.

"Since 2009, China has supplied Pakistan with three frigates, F-22s, Type 054... Four of them they supplied. They also supplied a satellite tracking ship, among others," the Navy chief said, adding that a recent deal between the two nations for eight submarines was a continuation of the process.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Lawbreakers as lawmakers

### Eradication of the influence of criminality in politics must be taken up on priority

In recent years, the issue of criminalisation in politics has increasingly come under scrutiny. With more politicians facing criminal charges and convictions, questions have arisen about whether the legal framework governing their disqualification from contesting elections is adequate. The ongoing debate, highlighted by a recent Supreme Court case challenging the constitutional validity of limiting disqualification periods, brings to the fore not only legal interpretations but also the broader menace of criminal influences in our political system. A petition filed before the Supreme Court has argued for a lifetime ban on convicted politicians from contesting elections. The petitioner contends that limiting disqualification to a fixed period—currently six years after release for offenses under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951—undermines constitutional provisions designed to keep criminals away from power. In response, the Centre has defended the existing provisions, arguing that a lifetime ban is “unduly harsh” and that it would amount to directing Parliament to frame a law in a particular manner—an overreach of judicial power. The government’s counter-affidavit emphasises that there are numerous penal laws that operate within a time-bound framework, ensuring that deterrence is balanced against the need to avoid undue severity.



This legal tussle highlights a crucial policy debate: should convicted politicians face an indefinite prohibition from electoral participation, or is a fixed term of disqualification both constitutional and proportionate? The government argues that the current system, which temporarily excludes convicted individuals, respects the principles of proportionality and reasonability. In its view, the legislative choice to limit the disqualification period is designed to offer both a punitive and rehabilitative measure while preserving democratic participation. Beyond legal debates, the deeper issue remains the rising tide of criminality within political circles. Criminal elements entering politics not only threaten the integrity of democratic institutions but also erode public trust. Politicians with a history of criminal behaviour may be more likely to engage in corrupt practices, undermining the rule of law. As criminalisation in politics becomes more pronounced, the call for stringent measures intensifies. Addressing the criminalisation of politics requires a multi-pronged approach that extends beyond the question of lifetime bans. Parliament could consider revisiting and potentially tightening the eligibility criteria for political candidates. Whether through a longer ban or additional restrictions for those convicted of certain serious crimes, legislative reforms should aim to disincentivise criminal conduct. There may be strong arguments for and against the life ban of convicted persons becoming lawmakers but one thing all can agree upon is that we do not need them in our parliament or state assemblies. How to do it is not difficult but who will bell the cat?

respects the principles of proportionality and reasonability. In its view, the legislative choice to limit the disqualification period is designed to offer both a punitive and rehabilitative measure while preserving democratic participation. Beyond legal debates, the deeper issue remains the rising tide of criminality within political circles. Criminal elements entering politics not only threaten the integrity of democratic institutions but also erode public trust. Politicians with a history of criminal behaviour may be more likely to engage in corrupt practices, undermining the rule of law. As criminalisation in politics becomes more pronounced, the call for stringent measures intensifies. Addressing the criminalisation of politics requires a multi-pronged approach that extends beyond the question of lifetime bans. Parliament could consider revisiting and potentially tightening the eligibility criteria for political candidates. Whether through a longer ban or additional restrictions for those convicted of certain serious crimes, legislative reforms should aim to disincentivise criminal conduct. There may be strong arguments for and against the life ban of convicted persons becoming lawmakers but one thing all can agree upon is that we do not need them in our parliament or state assemblies. How to do it is not difficult but who will bell the cat?

## PICTALK



Tourists at the Taj Mahal, in Agra

## Strengthening public institutions in the digital age

### Digital transformation is reshaping public policy, it is imperative that we embrace it without compromising our enduring commitment to integrity



O P SINGH



I am a civil servant passionate about governance, institutional resilience and public policy, exploring how institutions can adapt to the digital age. Imagine a world where policies are debated, revised and reshaped in real time—governance moving as quickly as a trending hashtag. That world isn’t coming; it’s already here. Public institutions, once the reliable backbone of governance, are now transforming rapidly. Social media, instant communication, and shifting public expectations have redefined how governments interact with citizens. Decision-making, once a structured process guided by expertise and long-term planning, now occurs in an environment where public sentiment can change overnight. This new landscape offers both opportunities and challenges. Increased public engagement promotes transparency and participation but also demands rapid responses. Today’s challenge isn’t just about efficient policy implementation—it’s about balancing speed with thoughtful deliberation and adaptability with established structure. A New Era of Governance Historically, governance followed a deliberate, structured path. Political leaders set broad directions, while institutions provided continuity, expertise, and safeguards. Decision-making

was data-driven and refined through expert consultation with a focus on long-term national interests. Then the digital revolution changed everything. Social media now plays a central role in shaping public discourse, often setting the agenda before formal institutions can respond. A 2023 Pew Research study noted that nearly two-thirds of adults in democratic nations now rely on social media for political news. This shift has empowered citizens and made governance more transparent and participatory, but it has also heightened expectations and pressured institutions to act swiftly. Adapting Without Losing Purpose The solution is not to resist change but to adapt strategically. Governments worldwide are using digital platforms to improve service delivery and civic engagement. For instance, India’s Digital India initiative has streamlined public services online, while Singapore’s Smart Nation program uses data analytics to enhance urban planning and governance. These examples show that when technology is integrated thoughtfully, it can boost both effectiveness and accessibility. Adaptation goes beyond dig-



DECISION-MAKING, ONCE A STRUCTURED PROCESS GUIDED BY EXPERTISE AND LONG-TERM PLANNING, NOW OCCURS IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE PUBLIC SENTIMENT CAN CHANGE OVERNIGHT

ital tools—it requires maintaining the integrity of governance. Institutions must prioritise expert-driven decision-making to ensure that policy shifts are well-considered rather than merely reactive. Preserving institutional memory through thorough documentation and continuous training ensures that experienced civil servants provide continuity, anchoring governance in expertise rather than short-term trends. The Importance of Public Trust At its core, governance depends on public trust. Institutions thrive when they are seen as credible, reliable, and fair. Trust is built through transparency, efficiency, and ethical practices. Governments that openly communicate their policies and decision-making processes foster confidence among citizens. Estonia’s e-Governance model, which gives citizens real-time access to government records, is a prime example. Efficiency is equally critical. Reducing administrative delays, streamlining processes, and making governance accessible are key to maintaining public trust. When institutions deliver results fairly and efficiently, they not only function better—they strengthen democracy.

**Finding the Right Balance** The digital age demands a balance between responsiveness and deliberation. Institutions must embrace innovation without becoming reactionary, listening to public sentiment while ensuring that policies are grounded in data, analysis, and long-term planning. Quick decision-making should never come at the expense of depth and foresight. This balance distinguishes effective governance from mere administration. Institutions that thoughtfully adapt are not just keeping pace with change—they are actively shaping the future of governance. **Looking Ahead** Public institutions are more than policy enforcers; they are the foundation of national stability and progress. As governance continues to evolve, these institutions must lead through innovation, efficiency, and an unwavering commitment to public trust. The digital age presents both challenges and opportunities. Institutions that adapt wisely will define the future of governance—not solely through speed or efficiency, but with foresight, trust and enduring strength. (The writer is DGP & Head of Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau; views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TRUMP’S GOLD CARD PLAN

Madam — US President Donald Trump has announced a new visa program that will offer a ‘gold card’ with a potential pathway to US citizenship for \$5 million (approx Rs 43 crores), which could significantly benefit Indian graduates and investors. It seems like a sale of citizenship for money. He is not even asking them to start a business, create jobs, or anything. Moreover, why should one spend 5 million dollars to go to the USA? With that money, they can lead a royal life (invest 5 million in India and get 14 per cent annualised ROI compared to 5 per cent in the US) in India itself, with their own thriving business and stay close to near and dear ones, which is a much better place now than the US. This is a simple sale of citizenship. This is nothing, but this Trump statement looks a bit stupid! Because, how many students in India will have 5 million dollars to buy a gold card? And which company will be ready to pay 5 million dollars for hiring an Indian employee in the US on a gold card? Is Trump thinking logically, or is he just high on the dose of fake nationalism? This far-right politics is turning the politicians into real fools. Whatsoever, Golden Visa is very expensive. **Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad**

### BRUTAL MURDERS SHOCK NATION

Madam— The nation is shocked at the brutal and spine-chilling crime of a 23-year-old man, who killed as many as five people, including his close relatives and girlfriend, within a few hours at various places in a radius of 15 kilometres in Thiruvananthapuram. By using a simple mallet, he has repeatedly hammered and finished the victims and then coolly surrendered at the police station on his own. It was by sheer luck that the sixth victim, his own mother, survived the attack, though she is still in serious condition. Even though the family was reportedly facing financial hardship, what prompted the man to commit such a heinous

## CBSE clarifies language policy



Refers to Editorial ‘Simmering Linguistic Tension’ (February 28), first Tamil Nadu and now Punjab is raising unnecessary controversy over regional languages, that too owing to the CBSE draft norms (not final) for conducting the 10th class board exams. The Punjab government’s hasty decision of imposing the Punjabi language on all 10th class examinations in the state of all

boards, whether Central or State, is uncalled for. This irrational decision has been announced without taking stakeholders—students and teachers—into confidence. It is nothing else but the imposing of the state’s will and Punjabi language on innocent students. How can a student who has never studied Punjabi suddenly take an examination of the same language in the 10th class? It is impossible and irrational. The CBSE was quick to clarify and assure that all regional languages, including Punjabi, will be included in the class 10 board exam. After this clarification and assurance, the Punjab government should immediately withdraw its decision of making Punjabi a mandatory language in all boards’ examinations in Punjab. **Vinay Kr Malhotra | Ambala Cantt**

crime was nothing but the grave impact of drugs. In fact, Kerala has been reeling under the threat of drugs for quite some time now. All kinds of drugs have been flowing into the state purportedly with the connivance of those in authority. It is a painful truth that a large number of youngsters, including students, are under the influence of drugs. However, the government has not taken any concrete steps to contain this serious menace. The present situation in the state is bound to ruin the young generation completely. As such, the government must take prompt and stern action against the drug mafia. **T T Sakaria | Delhi**

fearless stroke play propelled Afghanistan to a challenging total of 325 for 7 despite England’s experienced bowling attack. England’s chase was anchored by Joe Root, who counterattacked with a brilliant 120 off 111 balls, keeping his team in the hunt. However, Afghanistan’s fiery fast bowler Azmatulla Omarzai turned the game on its head with a sensational 5/58. This is the second time in a row that Afghanistan has beaten England in an ICC tournament. This and Zadrans’ pedigree once again advertised Afghanistan’s evolution as a rapid cricketing force. Despite a late fightback, England fell short by eight runs, handing Afghanistan one of their most significant victories in cricket history. This match will be remembered as a testament to Afghanistan’s rising stature and the sheer unpredictability that makes cricket a thrilling spectacle. **Gopalaswamy J | Chennai**

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**Gopalaswamy J | Chennai**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Rupee depreciation calls for structural reforms



R P GUPTA

Despite notable gains such as a reduced trade deficit, emerging challenges including global tariff tensions highlight the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms

Over the past decade (2014-2024), the compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of India’s exports of goods and services in USD terms has fallen sharply to about 5 per cent, compared to 17.9 per cent during 2004-2014 and 12.7 per cent in the period 1994-2004. This decline in export growth has coincided with a significant depreciation of the Rupee, which now trades at roughly Rs 86/87 per USD, a stark contrast to the Rs 60.50 per USD seen in 2013-14. In contrast, between 2000 and 2012, the Rupee remained relatively stable—with occasional appreciation driven by robust export growth at an impressive 19.5 per cent CAGR in USD terms. This historical perspective demonstrates that a strong, stable Rupee is not an inherent barrier to export performance. In fact, the key to sustained export growth lies in enhancing overall economic efficiency. This efficiency is shaped by a broad range of policies and regulations that affect factors such as capital, energy, logistics and raw materials. By improving these inputs, India can propel



exports forward while maintaining Rupee stability. A weak Rupee, however, tends to deter global investors. Given that domestic savings alone cannot fulfill India’s vast investment requirements, a steady inflow of global funds remains essential until the country transitions into a “Trade-Surplus Nation.” Recent changes in US leadership have sparked a tariff war, adding another layer of complexity to India’s export environment. Despite the sluggish export performance in the past decade, the country achieved a notable reduction in its trade deficit—from 4.3 per cent of nominal GDP in 2004-2014 to an average of 2.5 per cent in 2014-2024—primarily due to lower import volumes. In 2024, inward foreign remittances surged to \$129 billion, the highest globally, which

played a crucial role in reducing the current account deficit (CAD) from 1.7 per cent of GDP in 2013-14 to about 0.7 per cent. Consequently, Forex reserves swelled to 18.3 per cent of nominal GDP, underscoring the positive impact of these remittances. Looking ahead, potential challenges loom. Aggressive deportation policies by the US could discourage migration, thereby diminishing remittance flows. Moreover, if India shifts its oil and gas import sources from Iran, Gulf nations, and Russia to the US, the resulting higher import bill may widen the trade deficit. In response, India must marshal all available policy tools to boost exports, reduce imports, and eventually become a trade-surplus nation. Facilitating legal migration remains crucial until domestic job creation can sustain remittance inflows, which are vital for curbing the CAD. To further stimulate export growth, targeted export incentives for manufactured and agro-based goods should be implemented, while the untapped potential of service exports—ranging from

tourism and healthcare to education and professional consultancy—must be unlocked through dedicated policies. Additionally, reducing petroleum imports requires massive investments in railway infrastructure and expanded public transportation to lower fuel demand, and increased spending on petroleum exploration is the need of the hour. Enhancing domestic production of thermal coal and adopting innovative measures to reduce gold imports, such as a revised gold deposit scheme, are also essential steps. Finally, attracting global funds through measures like reducing capital gains tax on foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) and encouraging long-term borrowing via bonds backed by sovereign guarantees will help meet India’s investment needs. Overcoming outdated colonial-era business and taxation laws remains critical. A second wave of structural reforms is needed to stabilise the Rupee, secure higher GDP growth, and elevate India’s stature on the global stage. (The writer is an industrialist; views are personal)





## FIRST COLUMN

### THREE LEVELS OF CONTROL

Beyond our inner self, natural and material limitations shape our behaviour and outcomes



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We, human beings, are under control at three levels. The first one is at the level of self. We have been blessed with faculties such as mind, intelligence, etc. And we have free will to decide what we would like to think, decide and do. However, thinking and deciding are in our control, but being able to do is not. Our actions are limited by circumstances, instruments we have, how much we can apply ourselves and providence of course. Then, there are constraints like limited knowledge, facilities, nature, etc. Knowledge is unlimited, but we can have very limited knowledge only. Even good knowledge of a subject is difficult, never mind of countless subjects. This restricts us greatly. Nature is another limiting factor. The three modes of material nature, which are goodness, passion and darkness, determine how we would act manner. For example, a man predominantly in the mode of goodness will generally act wisely. The same cannot be said about persons under the control of the modes of passion and darkness. They make many mistakes. And we all generate 'karmas' (deeds) by minds, words and bodies (senses). These actions of ours, both good and bad put us in the control of the Divine Authority, appointed by God; it works under the superintendence of God. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) Imagine the extent of their work.



They have to be alert to record all our actions 24x7. This is nothing compared to what they have to do to decide our rewards and punishments, their timings, etc. In this, they have to correlate how these will impact others associated with us. Therefore, the Divine Authority may delay the punishment to make its effect on the family a little less harsh.

But the guilty person has no hope of reprieve even if the punishment is to be delayed to the next life. Our 'karmaphalas' (fruits of actions) are carried from life to life. If the job of the Divine Authority is mind-boggling, what God does is simply unimaginable. God has to watch the interest of all His devotees, no matter where they are. Then, He must appropriately respond to our prayers every time. He must also guide us if we sincerely seek it. Additionally, God must help if we deserve to come out of troubles we have gotten into due to our past 'karmas'. This is nothing compared to what God does for the Creation; He has to keep it going for millions of years for us souls. Imagine if there was dissolution every hundred years or so. How will we feel?

Then, God has innumerable galaxies to control. He has many planets where we can go to from the earth planet. There is heaven, where pious acts take us for limited periods. This is like going on a vacation to a dream place. There are many such planets which are higher and higher ending in the 'Vaikuntha' planet, which is the abode of God. Only those, who have been liberated reach there. They get freed from the cycle of birth and death. They remain there for good. Knowing all this, we must become wise, really wise. We must seek the shelter of God beginning now, not later. We must follow dharma to please God. God will guide and help. The divine Authority will be giving us more rewards than punishments, which we can tolerate easily. And we will be our best friends.

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

# Finding money for 'freebies': BJP faces an uphill task



UTTAM GUPTA

The challenge now is not just about delivering on electoral promises but also about balancing an already precarious fiscal equation that could see deficits skyrocket



Having swept the polls in the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi with a clinching 2/3rd majority, Rekha Gupta-led BJP - government faces the daunting challenge of having to find money to fulfil its poll promises. Amongst others, the BJP had promised Rs 2,500 a month to women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY); Rs 21,000 to pregnant women; LPG cylinders for Rs 500 and free cylinder on Holi and Diwali; a stipend of Rs 1000 a month to SC students pursuing technical and vocational courses; free education for needy students from KG to PG; free travel for students on Delhi Metro; Atal Canteens in Jhuggi Basti clusters providing nutritional meals for Rs 5 only; implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme and additional cover of Rs 5 lakh for senior citizens. BJP had also vowed to continue all existing schemes such as free electricity and free water (for monthly consumption up to a specified threshold) run by the erstwhile AAP - dispensation under the then Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal.

**How much will these freebies cost?** Let us look at the Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) under which the party has promised to give cash assistance of Rs 2500 per month to every woman. The number of women above the age of 18 years in Delhi is around 6700,000. @ Rs 2500 per month or Rs 30,000 annually to each woman, giving cash assistance to them all will require Rs 20,100 crore per annum (0.67x30,000). The assistance to pregnant women @Rs 21,000 per woman, taking a total of about 1500,000 pregnant women will cost around Rs 3150 crore annually.

As for subsidy on LPG, take consumption of 4 cylinders (14 kg each) per household (HH) in a year. The current cost of supplying a cylinder is around Rs 1000. For two cylinders (Holi and Diwali) promised to be given free, the subsidy will be Rs 2000 whereas for the other two to be given @ Rs 500 each, the outgo will be Rs 1000. This gives an annual subsidy of Rs 3000 per HH. The current population of Delhi is 330 lakh. Taking an average of 4 members per HH,



NOW, CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF BJP PROMISES. MODI HAS GUARANTEED THAT EXISTING SCHEMES WON'T BE DISCONTINUED. SO, FREE ELECTRICITY/WATER COSTING RS 11,000 CRORE WILL STAY. ADD TO THIS, THE FRESH GUARANTEES WHICH WOULD BE AT LEAST ABOUT RS 30,000 CRORE

we get a total of over 82.5 lakh HHs. Multiplied by Rs 3000 being the subsidy per HH, the annual outgo comes to Rs 2500 crore. Look at free education for needy students from KG to PG. According to the latest data available, around 10 per cent of Delhi's population was considered below the poverty line in 2011-12. On this basis, the number of poor persons comes to 33 lakh (330x0.1). About one-third of this or 11 lakh would be persons in the studying age 4 - 25 years. Taking the average expense of educating a child in India at the bare minimum of Rs 20,000 per annum, the total annual expense on "needy students" in the city would be about Rs 2200 crore (0.11x20,000). The additional burden of these four promises alone on the Delhi government's budget is Rs 27,950 crore (20,100+3150+2500+2200). Other freebies would bloat this figure by several thousand crore. Let us take the total to be around Rs 30,000 crore.

**What is the current state of Delhi's finances?**

For the current financial year (FY) 2024-25, the total expenditure of the Delhi government is estimated at Rs 76,000 crore. This includes revenue expenditure (RE) of Rs 61,000 crore and capital expenditure (CE) of Rs 15,000 crore. Against this, the total revenue receipts or RR (tax plus non-tax receipts including transfer from the Central government) is estimated at around Rs 58,000 crore. That leaves a revenue deficit or RD (RR - RE) of Rs 3000 crore. This is disconcerting when seen in the backdrop of Delhi's potential to generate substantial surplus given two fundamental factors working to its advantage.

First, due to its special status of being NCT, three major functions namely law and order, police and land

come under the Centre's jurisdiction hence, the latter foots the bill for expenses on those functions. Second, Delhi being a major hub of economic activity, its propensity to garner its tax revenue in terms of higher GST collection besides VAT on petrol and diesel and excise duty and VAT on alcohol (these products are outside the GST regime) is greater.

The RD will increase drastically when we consider the cost of servicing the loans taken by various departments of the Delhi government such as the Delhi Jal Board (DJB); over Rs 70,000 crore and Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC); Rs 60,000 crore (according to the CAG, these are cumulative losses of DTC as at end of FY 2021-22 and would have ballooned further during the following three FYs till end March 2025).

The liability for servicing those debts is vested entirely in the NCT government and should be reflected in its balance sheet. Look at the fiscal deficit (FD) which is the excess of total receipts over total expenditure. For FY 2024-25, it is estimated at Rs 18,000 crore which is 80 per cent higher than the FD during FY 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. The surge is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in CE from the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 22,000 crore for FY 2023-24 to Rs 15,000 crore for FY 2024-25.

If interest payments on loans taken by DJB and DTC (Rs 130,000 crore plus) which are merely adding to the mountain of debt on the books of those departments year after year are also included, the FD would be much higher. The situation had come to such a pass that the then CM Atishi had approached the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The precarious

ness of the state's finances has a lot to do with the galloping freebies and irregularities and mismanagement in running various schemes and overall governance on a monumental scale. During 2024-25, the cost of free electricity and free water alone is estimated to be about Rs 11,000 crore. According to CAG, during 2015-16 and 2021-22, the losses of DTC went up by Rs 35,000 crore and that was due to both free bus rides and misgovernance.

Now, consider the impact of BJP promises. Modi has guaranteed that existing schemes won't be discontinued. So, free electricity/water costing Rs 11,000 crore will stay. Add to this, the fresh guarantees which would be at least about Rs 30,000 crore. This takes the RE from Rs 61,000 crore during FY 2024-25 to Rs 91,000 crore during FY 2025-26 (assuming all other things remain unchanged). The RR is Rs 58,000 crore, we get RD of Rs 33,000 crore - up from Rs 3000 crore budgeted for FY 2024-25.

The incumbent government has also promised to clean Yamuna River, clean the air, renovate/build roads, cleanse the drainage systems, build and renovate hospitals and schools in fact, take up and complete a host of physical and social infrastructure projects needed for ensuring a good quality life for Delhiites. That means even if CE is restored to 2023-24 level Rs 22,000 crore, that won't be enough. Even with this insufficient level, the total expenditure will be Rs 113,000 crore. Minus RR of Rs 58,000 crore, we get FD of Rs 55,000 crore. Put simply, the Centre will have to arrange for at least Rs 55,000 crore to enable the BJP to live up to its promises for Delhi.

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

# India's solar surge: Powering the journey to net zero 2070

India is charting an ambitious course toward Net Zero 2070, with solar energy emerging as the mainstay of its renewable revolution

India's steadfast commitment to achieving Net Zero by 2070 is catalysing a dramatic shift in its energy sector, with solar power emerging as the principal driver of this transformation. Abundant sunlight, rapidly decreasing technology costs, strong government support, and an expanding skilled workforce have combined to place solar energy at the heart of India's renewable strategy. While the country has celebrated significant milestones in solar adoption, it also faces multifaceted challenges that require innovative policy interventions and strategic foresight to sustain its momentum. Over the past decade, India has achieved remarkable progress in solar energy. The nation not only met its ambitious renew-

able targets but exceeded them, with solar power now accounting for over 60 per cent of its renewable energy mix. By 2024, India surpassed the 100 GW milestone, establishing itself as a global leader in solar energy. For example, Rajasthan's solar capacity exceeds 24 GW. Rapid expansion is evident in a 19 per cent increase in solar generation from 2023 to 2024, with solar installations making up over two-thirds of new renewable capacity. India's role in the International Solar Alliance underscores its commitment to global solar collaboration, as the initiative seeks to mobilise over \$1 trillion in investments for developing countries. National agencies, particularly the Solar Energy Corporation of India,



DISHHA SHARMA

have been vital in driving the development and implementation of solar projects under the National Solar Mission. Despite these impressive achievements, significant obstacles remain on the path to full solar integration. One major challenge is the limited connection of solar installations to the national grid, with only 16 per cent of capacity currently integrated. This gap

restricts the country's ability to fully exploit its vast solar potential. Moreover, there are stark regional disparities in solar development. While states like Rajasthan and Gujarat lead the charge, many eastern and northeastern regions lag behind, resulting in an uneven distribution of renewable resources. Financial hurdles also pose serious challenges. Although government subsidies help reduce costs, the high initial capital required for large-scale installations, coupled with elevated interest rates and delayed payments, discourages private investment. Manufacturers struggle with a shortage of competitively priced solar cells, a problem compounded by strict Domestic Content Requirements that strain pro-



duction capabilities. These financial constraints not only hinder current project deployment but also threaten future expansion in the sector. Another critical issue is India's heavy reliance on imported components. Despite having a domestic module production capacity of around 11 GW, India still depends on global supply chains for essential items such as polysilicon,

wafers, and solar cells. This dependency leaves the country vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, particularly amid geopolitical tensions and trade imbalances, as China continues to dominate global solar manufacturing. Furthermore, the scarcity of critical minerals like cobalt, nickel, and lithium—vital for solar panel production—further complicates efforts to build a self-sufficient solar industry. Local challenges add another layer of complexity. Land acquisition for solar projects often faces resistance from local communities and farmers, leading to protests, legal disputes, and, in some cases, violent confrontations. In Rajasthan, disputes over land rights have led to project cancellations, highlighting the

need for transparent and inclusive processes that respect local interests and ensure fair compensation. Addressing these local concerns is essential for fostering community support and facilitating smoother project implementation. To overcome these challenges, India must adopt a multifaceted strategy. Strengthening policy frameworks to provide long-term stability is crucial, as is enhancing inter-state cooperation and ensuring reliable access to energy data for effective monitoring. Public-private partnerships can expand solar adoption in underserved regions by providing risk mitigation instruments to attract investment. Promoting domestic manufacturing of solar panels and key compo-

nents will reduce import dependency and bolster energy security. Additionally, investing in workforce development to build a skilled labor pool for solar installation, maintenance, and manufacturing will be vital for sustaining industry growth. By focusing on robust policy support, financial innovation, domestic manufacturing, and community engagement, India can significantly unlock the full potential of its solar resources. With sustained government backing and strategic collaboration between public and private sectors, the nation is well-positioned to lead the global solar revolution.

(The writer is assistant professor IIM Mumbai; views are personal. Inputs from Supriya Kaushik and Asmita Tewari)





## 'Hyderabadis are slow to act, which affects promotion of MMA'

In an exclusive chat with **The Pioneer**, Shaikh Khalid, the head coach of the MMA India team, shared his journey from a passionate martial arts enthusiast to one of the key figures in India's MMA landscape. He also reflected on the lack of awareness and infrastructure for MMA in Hyderabad



TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Shaikh Khalid, the head coach of the MMA India team, has been an influential figure in the growth of mixed martial arts (MMA) in India. His journey into the sport began in his childhood when he was captivated by martial arts movies, particularly those starring Mithun Chakraborty.

Despite his growing passion, Khalid's parents, like most, wanted him to focus on academics. But his love for martial arts only intensified, eventually leading him to make the bold decision to leave school and train full-time. He started his martial arts journey with Indian mud wrestling before transitioning to Karate, where he trained for nearly eight years. Over time, he also picked up Judo, Muay Thai and Kickboxing, participating in several national-level competitions. However, it was Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) that truly sparked a transformative change in his career. "Shaikh Khalid, based in Hyderabad, India, is a highly accomplished martial artist and MMA coach with 24 years of experience. As an IMMAF Black Belt and one of the world's top 10 MMA coaches, he has dedicated his career to shaping the future of Indian MMA. Khalid is the founder and head coach of TAMMA and serves as Joint Secretary and Board Director of MMA India,

playing a pivotal role in the sport's development nationwide.

Leading one of India's most dominant MMA teams—known as the "House of Champions"—Shaikh Khalid has consistently guided his fighters to remarkable success. His team is a top contender at national events, frequently securing top-three rankings and clinching first-place finishes multiple times. Under his leadership, the team has produced numerous national and international champions, including gold medalists at the IMMAF World and Asian Championships.

Since 2015, Khalid has represented India in various IMMAF events as a coach and not long ago, as an official Cutman after completing the IMMAF Cutman course in 2024. His debut as a Cutman



at the MMA India National Championship 2025 showcased his versatility and commitment to the sport.

Recognised with the MMA India Best Coach Award for 2023-2024, Shaikh Khalid continues to lead and inspire, cementing his legacy as a driving force in Indian MMA.

For Khalid, MMA is more than just a physical sport. "MMA isn't just about fitness or fighting—it builds discipline, resilience, and self-defense skills," he explains. It's precisely these aspects of the sport that motivated him to make MMA more accessible to people, especially in a region where awareness of the sport was still limited. Being a proud Hyderabad, Khalid takes immense pride in his city's growth and transformation over the years. "We are a generation that has witnessed tremendous development in the city. We've seen everything grow—from infrastructure to the attitude of people. The 'Nawaabi' vibe that once defined Hyderabad is now more educated, and people are participating in sports." However, he also notes some challenges in the local promotion of MMA. "Compared to other states, there's not much awareness of MMA in Hyderabad and Telangana. Other states conduct several MMA events, but that's not the case here," he adds. Despite this, he acknowledges the role that social media has played in increasing awareness of MMA. "I would say that social media's credit is 70% for the growth of MMA," he affirms, recognizing the potential of online platforms to spread knowledge about the sport.

Khalid also shares a lighthearted reflection on the Hyderabad approach to work. "Hyderabadis never do their work on the same day and try to do it by the time," he laughs. "We wait a lot for the time. I believe this could also be a reason why MMA is not

much promoted or recognized here. Everyone thinks they'll do it at some point, but not right now."

Despite these challenges, there are aspects of Hyderabad that Khalid misses dearly when traveling. "One thing I always miss is the 'sukoon', the 'appanap' and the culture. It's something we don't find in other places," he says with affection. He also shares his fondness for the local cuisine, although he notes that the city's food culture is evolving. "Over time, there's been a shift from Biryani to Mandi. The Hyderabad way of eating food and a lot of things have changed," he reflects, noting that there's now a variety of food options available in the city.

Khalid's concerns extend beyond just MMA; he believes there's a lack of support for sports in Hyderabad. "In other states, MPs and MLAs, no matter which party they belong to, put their best efforts into supporting sports. But in Hyderabad, I haven't seen anyone step forward to provide that kind of support," he observes.

This lack of infrastructure and government backing is something that affects all sports, not just MMA. "Many of the stadiums are in poor condition. Take LB Stadium, for instance—it has been around since the time of the Nizams, but today it's in a pathetic state," he laments. Khalid emphasizes that proper development is needed to bring sports in Hyderabad up to par with other states and countries. "If youngsters get into sports, they won't fall into bad habits," he adds.

On the global stage, MMA continues to gain recognition. Khalid points out that MMA has even been included in the Youth Asian Games, a feat that many are unaware of. "Recently, MMA was included in the Youth Asian Games, but not many people are aware of it. It doesn't even include Karate, but it includes MMA," he points out. As someone who has represented India as a coach in about 14 countries, Khalid has witnessed firsthand the immense support and infrastructure these nations provide to their athletes. "The infrastructure and support from governments abroad are immense, but here in Hyderabad, it's almost nonexistent," he says, highlighting the disparity in sports development between India and other countries.

Despite these challenges, Khalid remains hopeful about the future of MMA and sports in Hyderabad. He believes that if the sport receives proper support and recognition, it can help shape the future of many young individuals. "There's a saying in Lucknow—'Muskuraiye, aap Lucknow mein hain,'" Khalid smiles. "Similarly, I would say for Hyderabad, 'Hyderabad aaye aur yahan ki Biryani aur chai zaroor pee ke jaayein.' I love Hyderabad," he concludes, proudly reiterating his deep connection to his city.

### DIL DOSTI AUR DOGS:

## A HEARTFELT TALE THAT WAGS BUT DOESN'T HOWL

Plot

Set in Goa, *Dil Dosti Aur Dogs* follows multiple interconnected stories revolving around the bond between humans and their pet dogs. A struggling couple, played by Sharad Kelkar and Keerti Kelkar, adopt a female dog, hoping it will bring joy into their lives after years of failing to conceive. Their world changes when the dog unexpectedly gets pregnant, giving them a new perspective on parenthood. Meanwhile, hotel manager, played by Kunaal Roy Kapur insults a dog, which later drowns, leaving him guilt-ridden. In an attempt to make amends, he grows close to Tridha Choudhury's character, who runs a pet adoption center. Elsewhere, a lonely young girl played by Aarohi Patel, is searching for her lost dog, struggling to connect with her stepfather, played by Ehan Bhat, in the process. Their journey of finding the dog helps them bridge their emotional gap. There's also a subplot about a dog-smuggling racket, adding an element of suspense. Finally, Neena Gupta's character, a traumatised elderly woman, finds comfort in adopting a stray dog, only to later face the heartbreaking realisation that it won't be with her forever. These lives cross paths throughout the film, each reflecting different aspects of companionship, love, and loss.

Highlights

The film's strongest moments are those that explore the unconditional love between humans and their pets. The emotional depth, especially the traumatised elderly woman's storyline is especially moving, as Neena Gupta brings grace to her role of a woman who finds new meaning in life through her dog, only to later deal with inevitable grief. Similarly, the bond of Arohi's character with her missing pet tugs at the heartstrings, as does the couple's journey of rediscovering happiness through their adopted dog. The Goa setting adds visual charm, and the film's heartfelt intent is evident throughout. Most importantly, the dogs themselves steal the show with their natural, unfiltered presence, making every scene featuring them delightful to watch.

Drawbacks

Despite its emotional core, the film suffers from weak execution and an inconsistent tone. Kunaal's character redemption arc feels rushed, and his



REVIEW

romance with Tridha's character lacks depth. Some storylines are unnecessarily exaggerated, such as the over-the-top action sequence in the climax, which feels completely out of place in a film centered on human-animal relationships. The screenplay struggles to balance realism with dramatisation, often leaning into outdated tropes that make certain moments feel forced. Additionally, the film's attempt to blend multiple genres—romance, drama, suspense—results in an uneven narrative.

Performances

Neena Gupta stands out with a heartfelt performance, elevating the film's emotional quotient. Sharad Kelkar brings sincerity to his role, while Keerti Kelkar matches his energy. Kunaal Roy Kapur's portrayal is decent, though his character arc lacks depth. Tridha Choudhury and Ehan Bhat are charming but don't get enough screen time to fully develop their characters. Aarohi Patel is impressive, capturing the innocence and determination of a child longing for her lost pet. Tinnu Anand makes an appearance but is underutilised. Ultimately, the real stars of the film are the dogs, whose presence brings authenticity and warmth to the narrative.

Technical Aspects

The cinematography captures Goa's scenic beauty well, but the film's overall visual appeal is hampered by average production quality. Editing is inconsistent, with some scenes stretched unnecessarily while others feel abruptly cut. The background score attempts to heighten emotions but is forgettable, and the songs fail to leave a lasting impact. The biggest

weakness lies in the screenplay, which lacks polish and often resorts to cliché storytelling. If the writing had been more refined and the emotional beats more naturally integrated, the film could have been far more effective.

Verdict

*Dil Dosti Aur Dogs* is an emotionally driven film that has its share of touching moments but ultimately lacks the storytelling finesse needed to make a lasting impact. While dog lovers will find certain scenes deeply moving, the film's inconsistent tone, unnecessary melodrama and scattered execution prevent it from being truly memorable. The heart of the film is in the right place, but its narrative flaws dilute its emotional potential. If you're a pet lover looking for a feel-good watch, this film offers some sweet and sentimental moments—but don't expect it to match the emotional depth of classics like *Hachi: A Dog's Tale* or *Old Yeller*.

DIRECTED BY:

Viral Shah

PRODUCED BY: Jyoti Deshpande, Masumeh Makhija, and Viral Shah

CAST: Neena Gupta, Masumeh Makhija, Sharad Kelkar, Kunaal Roy Kapur, Keerti Kelkar, Tinnu Anand, Ehan Bhat, and Tridha Choudhary

Streaming on: JioHotstar

RATING: 2.5/5

## Navigating new tax landscape

The government of India has presented the Income Tax Bill 2025, which has significantly changed India's taxation system. The amendment seeks to simplify tax laws, minimise confusion and promote economic growth. Under new regulations and amendments, taxpayers must be aware of these amendments to comply well with the new system.

Among the bill's most innovative aspects is streamlining taxation law by removing obsolete provisions and restructuring sections to facilitate better comprehensibility. It also introduces one "Tax Year" in place of the current financial year and assessment year arrangement, with the advantage of compliance ease for companies as well as taxpayers.

The bill extends the renovated tax slabs of the Union Budget 2025-26 and provides more enhanced income tax exemptions and reliefs to salaried taxpayers. Certain other significant modifications include the modifications in HRA tax relief, enhanced TCS limits and relief on education loans.

With such modifications, taxpayers need to be alert while making wise financial choices. As a worker, a freelancer, or an entrepreneur, if you are aware of the 2025 income tax regime, you will be able to plan and optimize tax savings.

Simplification of tax laws

Another of the major objectives of the Income Tax Bill 2025 is simplification of tax laws and making them less complex to adhere to. The bill abolishes obsolete provisions and repeals comparable sections, thereby making the tax code simpler. Unlike the archaic Income Tax Act of 1961, which was a colossal 52 chapters and 823 pages long, the new law is relatively short, with only 23 chapters and 16 schedules on 622 pages. The new structuring aims at dispelling misunderstandings and alleviating the stress on individuals and businesses to lodge their taxes.

Standard tax year enforced

The important change includes enacting a uniform "Tax Year," which shall replace the former financial and assessment year configuration. The new 12-month block makes it easy for business enterprises and individuals to keep accounts and taxes. In the case of new entrepreneurs or professionals, the tax year would begin from when they set out or commence earnings, and thereby tax filing would become easy.

Updated tax slabs and rates

The new bill keeps the tax slabs and rates that were introduced in the Union Budget 2025-26, providing some stability for taxpayers. Now, individuals earning up to INR 12,00,000 won't have to pay any income tax. Plus, salaried taxpayers will get a standard deduction of INR 75,000, raising the non-taxable income limit to INR 12,75,000. Taxpayers can pick between the old and new tax systems based on what works best for them.

Eyes on the new tax regime: FY 2024-25 vs. FY 2025-26

When we put side by side the income tax you will pay under the new tax regime in FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26, it's quite clear that the latter holds the guarantee of paying less tax. For the ones with incomes up to INR 12 lakh, there will be no tax to pay in FY 2025-26, that is, more savings in your pocket. However, even if your income is more than that, you'll gain the tax savings ranging between INR 36,400 and INR 1,43,000.

Optimising tax with HRA: A strategy for couples

With the new tax slabs, the taxpayer has to analyse which regime provides the most savings. Married couples can employ tactical tax planning to avail themselves of the maximum benefits. A couple can select the old tax regime for claiming HRA and deductions by one spouse and the new regime by the other.

For instance, Disha and Rohan, a couple working in Mumbai, pay INR 60,000 as rent and earlier divided the amount equally to avail HRA deductions. By moving Rohan to the new regime and allowing Disha to claim the entire HRA deduction under the old regime, they can save INR 1.13 lakh in taxes. Such planning optimizes the use of exemptions and deductions.

Increase in TCS limits & education loan benefits

In an attempt to make compliance with tax smoother, the government has enhanced TCS ceilings as well as presented relief to loan repayments against education.

Prime TCS revisions:

Higher TCS level for foreign remittances: The LRS-driven threshold of TCS has increased from INR 7 lakh to INR 10 lakh, reducing tax



consequences in the event of regular overseas transactions.

Relief on education loan: Return of education loans availed from recognized financial institutions is exempt from TCS, thereby encouraging overseas education.

IMPACT ON PERSONAL FINANCES

Salaries and disposable income

The new tax system is meant to raise take-home pay for a wide range of taxpayers. Through the increase in non-taxable income levels and the scaling down of tax rates, individuals will feel lower tax burdens, which might boost spending and economic growth as a whole.

Housing and real estate benefits

Relief from tax on multiple houses: Two self-occupied houses can now be claimed by homeowners as tax-free. The tax was earlier levied on the notional rent of the second house.

Higher TDS Limit on Rent: The TDS limit on rental income has been raised from INR 2,40,000 to INR 6,00,000 per year. Tenants should deduct TDS only when rent is higher than this amount, lessening the compliance burden for both landlords and tenants.

Investment and capital gains revision

The Income Tax Bill 2025 continues with the current capital gains tax structure but makes certain revisions:

Taxing High-Premium ULIPs: ULIPs with premium payments of over INR 2,50,000 in a year will now be subject to capital gains taxation. Long-term gains (over one year) are taxed at 12.5% after an exemption of INR 1,25,000, while short-term gains are taxed at 20%. This aligns the taxation of high-premium ULIPs with that of equity mutual funds.

Debt Mutual Funds: Investors in debt mutual funds purchased after April 2023 can claim a tax rebate of up to INR 60,000 under the new regime, reducing tax burdens on fixed-income investments.

Cryptocurrency regulations

The Union Budget 2025-26 did not extend tax relief to crypto investors. The 30% tax on virtual digital asset (VDA) profits and the 1% TDS on transactions remain in place. However the Income Tax Bill 2025 makes reporting of cryptocurrency transactions obligatory on designated reporting entities for greater market transparency and compliance.

Other Tax Updates

NPS Vatsalya: A taxpayer can now claim exemption of tax on NPS Vatsalya, along with a further INR 50,000 deduction under Section 80CCD(1B) in the previous tax regime. Withdrawals continue to be 60% tax-free, with 40% compulsorily utilised for annuities.

NSS Withdrawals: From August 29, 2024, withdrawals from the National Savings Scheme (NSS) will be tax-free, including principal and interest, even if previous deductions were claimed.

Extended ITR Filing Deadline: Taxpayers now have four years instead of two to file updated Income Tax Returns (ITRs).

(The author, Ajay Kumar Yadav, is the CEO and CIO of Wise Finserv.)

# what's brewing?



The Young FICCI Ladies Organisation (YFLO) hosted a power talk titled "Redefining Glamour & Influence—A Power Talk for the Next Generation," featuring Shalini Passi, a visionary art patron, collector, and philanthropist. The event took place at The Leela in Hyderabad, providing a platform for insightful discussions on the evolving concept of glamour and influence in contemporary society. Shalini Passi shared her experiences and perspectives, offering valuable inspiration to the next generation.

PARTY  
Photos by- SV Chary



The Telangana Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited, a state government undertaking, in order to provide marketing support to artisans, is organizing various events, including the "Crafts & Textiles Mela", which will take place at NTR Stadium, Hyderabad. The event will end on March 9, 2025. This event, jointly organised with NABARD, was inaugurated by Minister Tummala Nageshwara Rao, Shailaja Ramaier, IAS, Principal Secretary to Government, I&C (H, T&H), Vice Chairman, B.Uday Bhaskar, Chief General Manager (Nabard, T.S).



Sanrakshan Kshamatha Mahotsav – SAKSHAM 2025, an annual campaign focused on raising awareness about fuel conservation, was successfully concluded at the N.T. Rama Rao Auditorium, Telugu University, Nampally, Hyderabad. The fortnight-long initiative, organized by the State Level Coordinator for the Oil Industry in Telangana under the aegis of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, was attended by esteemed dignitaries, including VSNV Prasad, IFS, Director – Civil Supplies, Government of Telangana.



Quadric IT has unveiled a cutting-edge innovation at BioAsia, including the Reusable Smart AI-Based Notebook. Co-invented by Suman Balabommu, Kesari Sabniveesu, and Raghu Ram Thatavarthy, this revolutionary notebook combines AI-driven technology with sustainability, transforming the way we take notes while reducing environmental impact.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



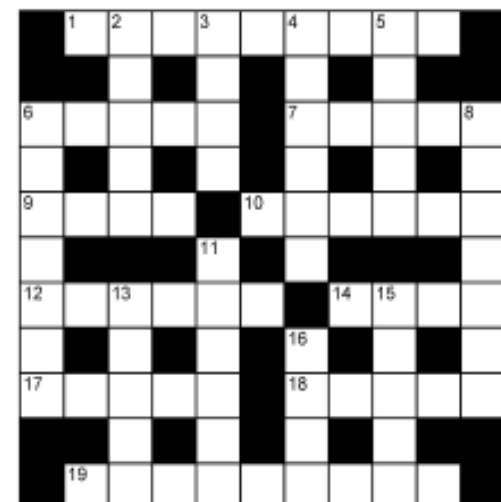
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



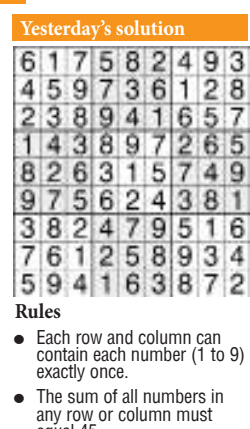
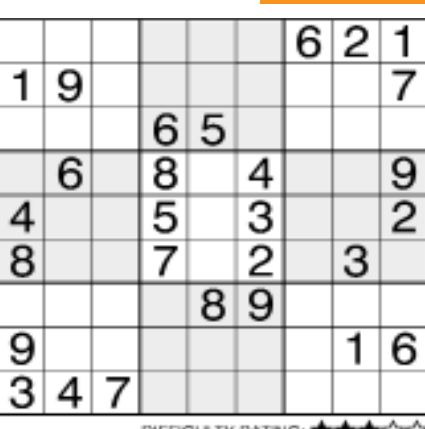
### CROSSWORD



### NANCY



### SUDOKU



### ACROSS

- 1 Underwater transport
- 6 A breakfast meat
- 7 Steals
- 9 A large farm building
- 10 Cross a river on this
- 12 Not married
- 14 A stringed instrument
- 17 Attempted
- 18 Reflection in a mirror
- 19 Scientific study of the stars and planets

### DOWN

- 2 A sore in your mouth
- 3 To look after something for someone
- 4 Go back to a place

- 5 With no clothes on
- 6 Look after someone else's children
- 8 Church spire
- 11 An unpowered aeroplane
- 13 These grow on fingers
- 15 A warning sound
- 16 A potter's oven



### GINGER MEGGS



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

# Sabdham is nothing but noise pollution in disguise

SURESH KAVIRAYANI  
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Actor Aadhi is well-known to both Telugu and Tamil audiences, having played lead roles in several Tamil films before taking on character roles in Telugu films like *Sarrainodu*, *Ninnu Kori*, *Rangasthalam* and *Warrior*. His first commercial breakthrough came with *Eeram* (2009), a Tamil supernatural thriller directed by Arivazhagan, which was later released in Telugu as *Vaishali* and became a hit. Eeram used water as its central supernatural element, and now, 16 years later, Aadhi and Arivazhagan reunite for *Sabdham*, where sound takes centre stage as the film's supernatural force. Released simultaneously in Tamil and its Telugu-dubbed version, *Sabdham* attempts to create a gripping horror-thriller but falls short.

## STORY:

Three medical students from a college in Munnar commit suicide, but the college authorities try to cover it up, avoiding media and police intervention. The students suspect supernatural involvement behind these deaths. To dispel these fears, the college dean hires paranormal investigator Vyuma Vaidyalingam (Aadhi Pinisetty), known for using a special sound kit to communicate with spirits and solve cases.

During his investigation, Vyuma suspects a lecturer and house surgeon, Avanthika

(Lakshmi Menon) and discovers a disturbing history—42 mysterious deaths in the college library. Avanthika, who does not believe in ghosts, somehow has a deep connection to these events. Meanwhile, former chairman Diana (Simran) remains in a coma, adding another layer of mystery. Who is Nancy Daniel? What dark past is hidden within the library walls? And how are these deaths connected to Avanthika? To find out, you'll have to watch *Sabdham*.

## ANALYSIS:

Arivazhagan, who made a strong debut with *Eeram*, once again explores the supernatural genre, this time using sound as the key element. While there have been studies on the impact of sound in warfare and its therapeutic use in medicine, *Sabdham* takes the concept further, using it as a medium for paranormal investigation.

The first half is engaging, even though there are no chilling horror moments. The concept of a paranormal investigator communicating with spirits using sound might seem odd at first, but Aadhi's performance makes it somewhat believable. However, the film takes a predictable turn in the second half. As the mystery unfolds, the suspense vanishes, making the plot feel repetitive and uninspired.

## PERFORMANCES:

Aadhi delivers a convincing performance as the paranormal investigator. Although the concept of such a character



might seem unrealistic, his portrayal adds credibility to the role. Lakshmi Menon as Avanthika gives a solid performance, while Simran and Laila appear in brief but notable cameos. Redin Kingsley provides some comic relief, offering a few laughs in between the tension. The supporting cast, primarily from the Tamil industry, does well in their respective roles.

## TECHNICAL ASPECTS:

Thaman's music, while effective in parts, becomes overwhelming in several scenes, diminishing the intended impact. A horror-thriller does not always need loud, jarring sounds to create fear—sometimes, a subtle score or silence works better. Arun Bathmanaban's cinematography is commendable, capturing eerie visuals well, but the film's overall execution doesn't do justice to its concept.

For a film titled *Sabdham* (which translates to "sound"), the excessive use of loud background music ironically becomes its biggest flaw. While thrillers and horror films

rely on sound to build tension, sometimes silence can be far more effective. Unfortunately, in *Sabdham*, the overuse of sound effects leads to irritation rather than suspense. The screenplay falls apart in the second half, with the linking of the deaths, suicides and the library's past executed in a routine and outdated manner. The antagonist's introduction just before the climax feels abrupt and forced. Despite an intriguing premise, *Sabdham* ultimately suffers from weak storytelling and missed opportunities.

## VERDICT:

While *Sabdham* attempts to deliver a supernatural thriller with an innovative concept, it fails to maintain suspense and originality. The excessive use of sound, a predictable second half and outdated storytelling weigh the film down. Although Aadhi's performance is commendable, the film does not match the gripping tension of *Eeram*. *Sabdham* ends up as a routine supernatural thriller with only a few genuinely engaging moments.

**Cast:** Aadhi, Lakshmi Menon, Simran, Laila, Redin Kingsley, Rajiv Menon, and others

**Cinematographer:** Arun Bathmanaban **Music Director:** S. Thaman

**Producers:** Siva, S. Banupriya Siva **Director:** Arivazhagan

**Rating:** 2/5



## Vishwambhara faces delay as makers opt for re-shoots

It's not great news for *Vishwambhara*, the upcoming Chiranjeevi-starrer, as the film is currently undergoing re-shoots for some key scenes, according to sources. This fantasy-themed film was supposed to be completed long ago, but production is still ongoing at various locations.

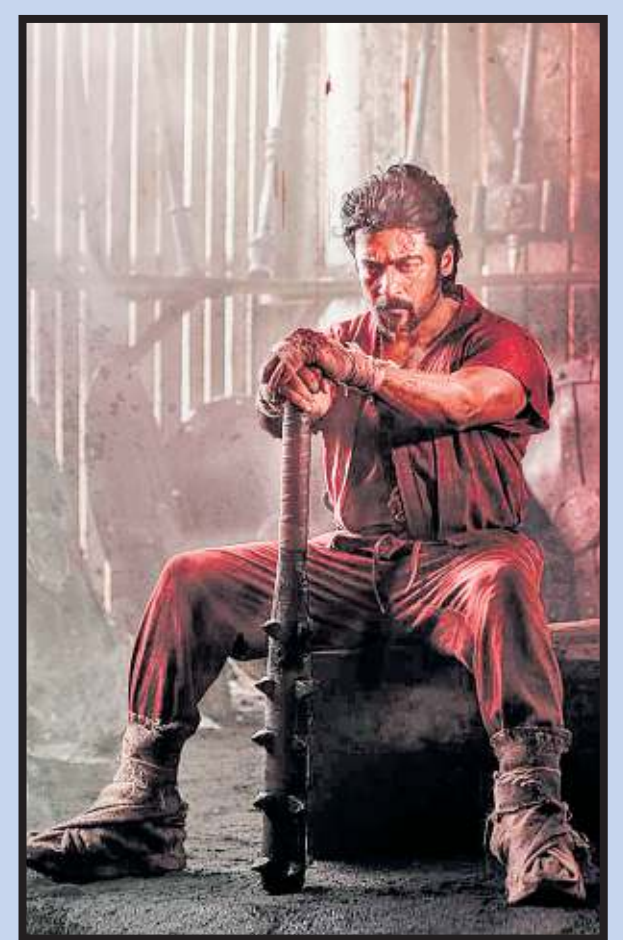
Bollywood actor Kunal Kapoor plays the antagonist in this film, which is directed by *Bimbisara* fame Mallidi Vassishtha. Trisha, who plays the female lead, completed her portions long ago. However, the makers decided to reshoot certain scenes and requested her to return for additional filming.

Sources reveal that Trisha was displeased with the decision, citing

scheduling conflicts. Despite initial reluctance, she eventually agreed and came to Hyderabad, allotting a few hours for the re-shoots.

The teaser, released during the Dasara festival last year, faced criticism due to substandard CGI. Even Chiranjeevi was reportedly dissatisfied with the teaser's visual effects. Despite this, the makers continue to rely heavily on CGI and early footage has not received positive feedback from those who have seen it.

With the team now planning to announce the release date, promotions will begin soon after. However, concerns about the film's visuals and production delays remain a talking point among fans and industry insiders.



## Anurag Kashyap's makes his Telugu debut with *Dacoit*



Bollywood director and actor Anurag Kashyap has been actively appearing in South Indian films lately. He recently played a villain in Vijay Sethupathi's Tamil film *Maharaja* and also appeared in *Viduthala Part 2* (Tamil) and a Malayalam film. Now, Kashyap is set to make his Telugu debut with *Dacoit*, starring Adivi Sesh in the lead role. The film is being made simultaneously in Hindi, prompting the makers to cast Kashyap in a key role. Mrunal Thakur plays the female lead.

Anurag Kashyap has joined the project in a powerful role, portraying a fearless police inspector who is a staunch Ayyappa devotee and has zero tolerance for corruption. According to the makers, his character is sharp-minded, witty and sarcastic, adding depth to the film's intense narrative filled with action, emotion and drama. *Dacoit* follows the journey of a convict seeking revenge on his ex-girlfriend, who betrayed him. As he devises a dangerous plan to trap her, the story unfolds into an emotionally charged saga of love, betrayal, and vengeance.

"Playing a police officer who is an Ayyappa devotee is both fun and challenging. The conflict between duty and dharma, and his approach to the job with a dry sense of humor, makes the character fantastic," said Kashyap about his role in *Dacoit*. He also expressed excitement about the bilingual shoot, saying, "Getting the same impact in both languages is a challenge, but I'm thoroughly enjoying it."

The film marks the directorial debut of Shaneli Deo, with Supriya Yarlagadda producing and Suniel Narang co-producing. The story and screenplay have been jointly crafted by Adivi Sesh and Shaneli Deo.

## Kiara Advani, Sidharth Malhotra to welcome their 'greatest gift' soon

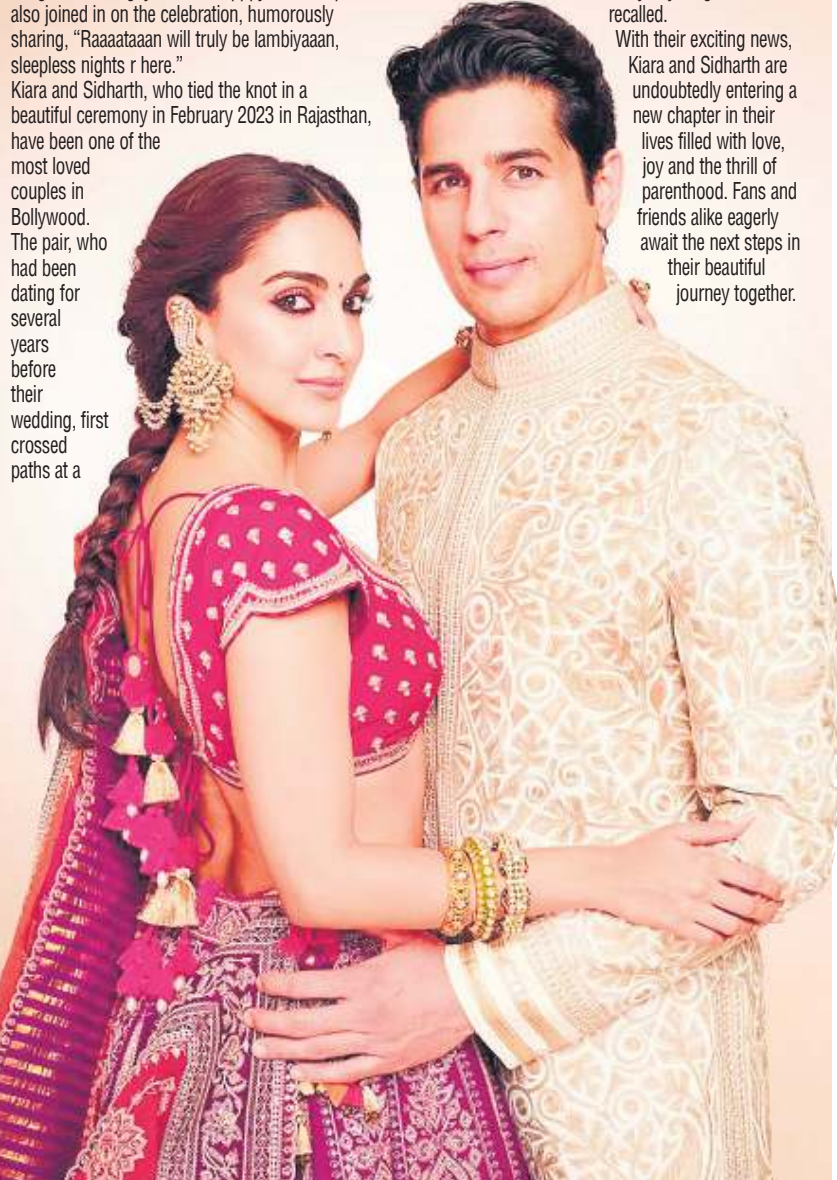
In a joyful revelation, Bollywood power couple Kiara Advani and Sidharth Malhotra took to social media on Friday to share some wonderful news: they are expecting their first child. The couple posted an adorable picture of baby socks held in their hands, accompanied by a heartwarming caption that read, "The greatest gift of our lives. Coming soon."

Their announcement was met with an outpouring of love and congratulations from celebrities and fans alike. Shilpa Shetty expressed her excitement with a sweet "Awwwww congratulations are in order," while Rakul Preet Singh couldn't contain her happiness, commenting, "Omggggggg congratulations guys. so so happy." Ekta Kapoor also joined in on the celebration, humorously sharing, "Raaaataaan will truly be lambiyaaan, sleepless nights r here."

Kiara and Sidharth, who tied the knot in a beautiful ceremony in Rajasthan in February 2023 in Rajasthan, have been one of the most loved couples in Bollywood. The pair, who had been dating for several years before their wedding, first crossed paths at a

party after Kiara wrapped up filming for *Lust Stories*. During a memorable appearance on *Koffee with Karan*, Kiara shared a heartfelt and romantic story about Sidharth's proposal. She revealed that he popped the question during a special dinner at a Michelin-star restaurant in Rome. "He planned the works. He had done this candlelight dinner. We go back after dinner and he takes me up for a walk. We go up and suddenly the violinist comes out of the bushes playing and sweetly, his little nephew is taking our video from behind the bushes. He then goes on one knee and proposes. I was not expecting it that night, so I was so overwhelmed, I didn't say anything," Kiara recalled.

With their exciting news, Kiara and Sidharth are undoubtedly entering a new chapter in their lives filled with love, joy and the thrill of parenthood. Fans and friends alike eagerly await the next steps in their beautiful journey together.



## Sithara Entertainments acquires Telugu rights for Suriya's *Retro*

Of late, Telugu audiences have seen a surge in dubbed releases from Tamil, Malayalam and Kannada industries. Some dubbed films are even securing major theatrical releases, sometimes clashing with multiple new releases on the same day.

In response to this growing demand, Sithara Entertainments has acquired the Telugu theatrical rights for *Retro*, the much-anticipated Suriya-starrer. The film, which has already garnered attention with its powerful teaser, is set to release on May 1.

Not long ago, Sithara Entertainments has distributed films like *Leo* (Tamil), *Devvara*

(Telugu) and *Brahmayugam* (Malayalam), further expanding its reach across industries. Now, with *Retro*, the production house is bringing another high-profile Tamil film to Telugu audiences.

Directed by Karthik Subbaraj, *Retro* stars Pooja Hegde as the female lead, with music composed by Santhosh Narayanan. The film is produced by Suriya and Jyotika under their production banner.

With Sithara Entertainments backing the Telugu release, *Retro* is expected to make a strong impact in both Tamil and Telugu markets. Fans are eagerly waiting to see Suriya in this much-hyped project.

## Sankranthiki Vasthunnam to stream on ZEE5 from March 1

Among recent Telugu releases, *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* stands out as the only unanimously declared blockbuster. Starring Venkatesh, the film became the highest-grossing Telugu film at the regional level, marking a major milestone for the veteran actor at the age of 65. Directed by Anil Ravipudi and produced by Dil Raju, the film not only earned critical acclaim but also helped the producer recover losses from *Game Changer*.

Now, this family entertainer is gearing up for its OTT and satellite premiere after a sensational theatrical run. It will have a unique dual premiere on Zee Telugu and ZEE5 on March 1 at 6 PM. Additionally, the film will be available in multiple languages, including Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

Aishwarya Rajesh and Meenakshi Chowdhary play the female leads, while child artist Revanth delivers a hilarious performance, which is considered one of the film's highlights.

The story revolves around retired police officer YD Raju (Venkatesh), who leads a peaceful life in the Godavari region with his wife, Bhagyalakshmi (Aishwarya Rajesh). However, his quiet life is disrupted when his ex-girlfriend, Meenakshi (Meenakshi Chowdhary), re-enters his life, pulling him into a high-stakes rescue mission involving a renowned entrepreneur.

Blending family emotions with comedy, *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* has been widely praised for its engaging narrative and humor.



# Hockey India unveils performance-based system for national championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hockey India on Friday unveiled a new format with a promotion and relegation system for the Senior Women's National Championship to be held in Panchkula from March 1 to 12.

The competition will feature 28 teams divided into three divisions titled 'A', 'B' and 'C'. The new format aims to enhance competition but also provides intends to provide a pathway for teams to ascend to higher divisions or risk relegation based on their performances.

"The introduction of the promotion and relegation system is a significant step in raising the standard of hockey across the country," Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey said.

"It ensures that every match in the Championship holds importance, whether it's a battle for the title or to avoid relegation. We look forward to an exciting tournament where teams can showcase their skills and aim for the top."

The top 12 teams will compete in Division A which will be further split into four



pools of three teams each and will play in a league format within their respective pools. The top two teams from each pool will advance to the quarterfinals, scheduled for March 9, followed by the semifinals on March 10 and the final and 3rd/4th place play-off on March 12. The bottom two teams will be

relegated to Division B for the next edition. Nine teams will compete in Division B, with the goal of earning promotion to Division A. Here, five teams are in Pool A and four are in Pool B.

"The top two teams will earn promotion to Division A for the next season, while the

bottom two will be relegated to Division C. No knockout rounds will be held in Division B; the league standings will determine promotions and relegations," HI said.

Seven teams in Division C will vie for promotion to Division B which will have three teams in Pool A and

four in Pool B. Division C will also only play league matches, with the top two teams securing promotion to Division B.

During the league stage, teams in all three divisions will earn points based on their performance. Each team will be awarded three points for a win, one point for a draw, and

no points for a loss. In Division A, the league stage will culminate with the knockout rounds, while Divisions B and C will conclude with final standings determined solely by league matches.

**Division A**  
Pool A: Hockey Haryana, Hockey Association of Odisha, Hockey Karnataka  
Pool B: Hockey Maharashtra, Manipur Hockey, Hockey Punjab

**Pool C:** Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Mizoram, Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu

**Pool D:** Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Bengal, Uttar Pradesh Hockey

**Division B**  
Pool A: Telangana Hockey, Hockey Uttarakhand, Assam Hockey, Hockey Rajasthan, Hockey Association of Bihar

**Pool B:** Delhi Hockey, Chhattisgarh Hockey, Hockey Chandigarh, Hockey Himachal Pradesh

**Pool A:** Kerala Hockey, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu Hockey, Hockey Gujarat

**Pool B:** Hockey Andhra Pradesh, Le Puducherry Hockey, Hockey Arunachal, Hockey Jammu and Kashmir.



# Praggnanandhaa draws against Gurel Ediz

PTI ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a second straight draw against Turkey's Gurel Ediz while Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defences of Germany's Vincent Keymer in the second round of the Prague Masters here.

Chithambaram, who has been knocking hard on the doors of elite circles, scored his first victory with black pieces after squeezing himself out of danger zone in his first-round game against Czech Grandmaster Nguyen Thai Dai Van.

The Indian was involved in the sole decisive game of the day in the 10-players round-robin format, while the other matches ended in draws.

Dai Van drew his second game on the trot with Sam Shankland of the United States, top seeded Wei Yi from China opened his account after splitting the point with Dutchman Anish Giri, and Quang Leim Le of Vietnam achieved the same result against Navara David from Czech Republic.

With seven rounds to go, Chithambaram joined Shankland in lead on 1.5 points out of two games. They are followed by Giri, Le, Dai Van, David, Keymer and Praggnanandhaa.

Ediz and Wei Yi share the last spot on a half point apiece from their two games. On a day when world champion Boris Spassky breathed his last, Chithambaram's victory had traits of the Russian's style of play to go for the kill at the first opportunity and not let it slip.

The Queen's gambit accepted may have a solid reputation with black pieces but the young Indian cavalry is all out to breakout of that stereotype. How else could one explain Chithambaram's choice of move order that gave white the

luxury of a dynamic centre? It was an inch-by-inch invasion that won Chithambaram a pawn in the middle game and the trade of queens was later forced by the Indian to harp on the better possibilities for his troupe.

Chithambaram was quite unstoppable as he kept increasing the pressure till Keymer walked in to a lost rook and pawns endgame — it took 45 moves in all.

Praggnanandhaa has shown his ability to play all openings with either colour and his choice of French defence turned out to be a good one guaranteeing an equal game.

The lone problem was to make something out of an equal position and the 16-year old Turk proved why he is hailed as one of the brightest among young Europeans, as he gave a little away.

The players signed the peace on move 46 when it was evident the rook endgame did not offer chances for either of them.

In the challengers' section which is being held simultaneously, Divya Deshmukh broke out of her shackles to score an impressive victory over Richard Stalmach of Czech Republic.

The adage about the King being a strong piece in the endgame came right for Divya, even though her position oscillated between better and winning.

In the end, Divya had two connected passed pawns in the middle of the board, well aided by her marching king. The game lasted 50 moves.

Results (round 2): Vincent Keymer (GER, 1) lost to Aravindh Chithambaram (IND, 1.5); Wei Yi (CHN, 0.5) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 1); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (CZE, 1) drew with Sam Shankland (USA, 1.5); Gurel Ediz (TUR, 0.5) drew with R Praggnanandhaa (IND, 1); David Navara (CZE, 1) drew with Le Quang Leim (VIE, 1).



# WPL: RCB looks for victory against DC

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Defending champions Royal Challengers (RCB) Bengaluru will be determined to give their home fans a parting victory over a fatigued Delhi Capitals (DC) outfit here on Saturday, before the Women's Premier League (WPL) moves to Lucknow for its third leg.

RCB had begun the third season of WPL with two wins in Vadodara, but their fortunes have nosedived since the tournament caravan shifted to their home ground M Chinnaswamy here. Three consecutive defeats, including a heartbreaking loss in the Super Over to UP Warriorz, have left them reeling.

Placed third on the table and winless at home so far, RCB will be desperate to bounce back against a Delhi Capitals side facing the challenge of playing back-to-back games before the WPL heads to Lucknow.

The Meg Lanning-led Capitals will have little recovery time as they take on Mumbai Indians in a top-of-the-table clash on Friday before locking horns with RCB the very next day.

RCB's struggles have been glaring in both batting and bowling. Their batting unit collapsed in the defeat against Gujarat Giants on Thursday, with skipper Smriti Mandhana's form being a major concern. Her 81 against DC remains her only notable

knock in five innings, as spin continues to be her Achilles' heel.

Her opening partner, England's Danni Wyatt-Hodge too has been inconsistent, while Australian veteran Ellyse Perry, despite being in sensational touch, suffered a rare failure with a maiden WPL duck against Gujarat Giants.

The bowling department has been equally underwhelming. Frontline pacers Renuka Singh and Kim Garth have lacked consistency, often erring in line and length.

Spinners Georgia Wareham, Ekta Bisht, and Kanika Ahuja have struggled to exert control in the crucial middle overs, compounding RCB's woes further.

Delhi Capitals, too, have endured an inconsistent campaign, with two losses sandwiched between three wins. Their batting lineup has finally started firing with Shafali Verma and Jess Jonassen finding form.

However, skipper Lanning continues to struggle at the top. Jemimah Rodrigues and Annabel Sutherland have provided occasional fireworks in the middle order, but DC will seek more consistency from their batting unit.

In Shikha Pandey, Marizanne Kapp, young Titas Sadhu, Sutherland, and Minnu Mani, DC boast a formidable bowling attack, making them a dangerous opponent despite their inconsistencies.

# New Zealand excited to play in different conditions: Bracewell

PTI ■ DUBAI

New Zealand off-spinner Michael Bracewell on Friday brushed aside any talks about India getting an unfair advantage in the ongoing Champions Trophy by playing all their games in Dubai, simply saying that his team was "excited to try and play in different conditions".

Rohit Sharma's team is playing all its matches in Dubai, and even the final will be held here if India goes the distance.

New Zealand will be playing their first match of the tournament here — against India on Sunday — after their last two games were held in Pakistan.

Some cricketers, including South African top-order batter Rassie van der Dussen and former Australia skipper Pat Cummins, have said India are in an advantageous



position as they have played all their games at one venue while other teams have had to travel to different venues in Pakistan.

India had refused to travel to Pakistan for the tournament citing security reasons.

"Look, it is what it is. It's been decided, and that's the way it is, and there's no point dwelling on that," said Bracewell, when asked if India have unfair advantage in Dubai.

"It's part of what makes it exciting. I personally think it's coming to a different ground and trying to figure out those different conditions. Yeah, not much more to say on that other than we're excited to try and learn and play in different conditions," added the 34-year-old off-spinner.

The New Zealander opined that the pitches here would aid spin and it would be a good idea to train hard before

the game against India. "The wickets here have looked like they've taken a bit of a spin. So, it'll be good to try and get used to the wickets as quickly as we can. We've obviously enjoyed the pitches in Pakistan."

"And I think we've got a pretty well-balanced side to play in any condition. So hopefully, we can continue to do that and adjust to what's in front of us. I think that's been the strength of our side, adjusting to the surface. So, hopefully, we continue to do that as a side," he added.

He said New Zealand doing consistently well against India in ICC tournaments was because of his players not putting themselves under pressure.

New Zealand recently inflicted a humiliating 3-0 Test defeat on India, becoming the first touring side to seal a series win in India in 13 years.

# UTT sixth season to begin from May 29

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The sixth edition of Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT), the sport's premier league in India, will be held from May 29 to June 15 in Ahmedabad, the organisers announced on Friday.

The state-of-the-art EKA Arena, a venue that has staged the 2016 Kabaddi World Cup and 2019 Intercontinental Cup (football), will be the venue for the event that will be in Ahmedabad for the first time.

As UTT continues to grow, eight teams featuring top Indian and international table tennis stars will battle for the crown, with defending champions Goa Challengers looking to claim a historic

third title. "Ultimate Table Tennis has been instrumental in transforming the table tennis landscape in India, providing our players with an unparalleled platform to compete against top international talent," Table Tennis Federation of India Secretary Kamlesh Mehta said.

The upcoming season will feature eight teams split into two groups of four for the draw, with each team playing five ties in the league stage -- facing all three opponents in their group once and two randomly drawn teams from the other group.

The top four teams at the end will advance to the knockout rounds, leading to the grand finale on June 15.

# West Ham beats Leicester in Premier League

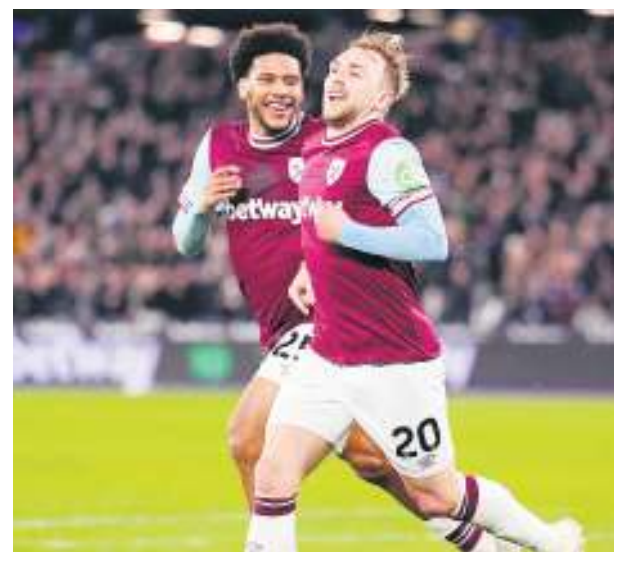
PTI ■ LONDON

West Ham handed relegation-threatened Leicester its fourth straight Premier League loss by beating Ruud van Nistelrooy's team 2-0.

Leicester failed to score in each of those defeats — and allowed a total of 12 goals — to remain 19th in the standings, five points from safety. The Foxes have lost 11 of their past 12 league games.

Tomas Soucek scored in the 21st minute for the home team at London Stadium and the Hammers doubled the lead when Jarrod Bowen's strike deflected off Jannik Vestergaard for an own goal just before halftime.

Leicester shook up its coaching staff after Friday's 4-0 home loss to



Brentford but kept Van Nistelrooy in charge. In 14 Premier League games under the Dutch manager,

Leicester has two wins, one draw and 11 losses. "We were way too passive," Van Nistelrooy told TNT

Sports. "Of course we're in a situation where we're not winning games and we're in a situation where we are in the bottom three, and the pressure's on. But I think the way to get out of it is to literally move forward — on the pitch as well. We have to take initiative."

West Ham moved past Everton into 15th place and has recorded back-to-back Premier League wins for the first time this season.

Graham Potter, who replaced the fired Julen Lopetegui as manager seven weeks ago, said Thursday's victory was a "professional performance," following up from a 1-0 victory at Arsenal last Saturday.

"For us, we're just delighted with two wins, two clean sheets and six points," he said of the mini-run.

# Champions Trophy: South Africa eyes semifinal spot against England

PTI ■ KARACHI

As the battle for the semifinals intensifies in Group B, top-ranked South Africa will aim to assert their dominance and secure a spot in the final four when they face a struggling England in a high-stakes Champions Trophy (CT) clash here on Saturday.

Unlike Group A wherein two best sides — India and New Zealand — have sailed through with ease into the knockouts, Australia, Afghanistan and South Africa in Group B are locked in for an intense battle over the two days for the remaining two semifinal berths.

A crushing loss by eight runs to Afghanistan not only sent England out of the contention for the semifinals but also kept the Asian team's hopes alive of making to the final four, which has kept both South Africa and Australia on tenterhooks.

Afghanistan will take on Australia on Friday in Lahore riding on the big wave of confidence from their

last outing between the two teams in the 50-over format.

The Afghans had pushed Australia to the brink in their last meeting in the 2023 ODI World Cup before Glenn Maxwell's sensational 201 not out turned the tables.

While there are possibilities of the contest being affected by rain, a win for Afghanistan will be enough for them to seal a spot in the semifinal, as Australia's defeat will leave the Steve Smith-led side locked in for a battle with South Africa for the second and final spot from this group.

South Africa (3 points, 2.140 NRR) are likely to progress if Australia (3 points, 0.475 NRR) beat Afghanistan (2 points, -0.990 NRR), even if the Proteas lose to England because of their healthy NRR.

A favourable result should not be too difficult for South Africa who have all their bases covered and more importantly, have their key players in-form compared to a misfiring England, who are overly



dependent on Joe Root. In their only completed contest so far — South Africa split points with Australia after a washout in

Rawalpindi — the Proteas had crushed Afghanistan by a massive 107 runs. Ryan Rickelton struck a century while skipper Temba

Bavuma, Rassie van der Dussen and Aiden Markram hit a half-century each to power South Africa to a formidable 315/6

batting first, following which the bowlers produced a unified show to bundle out Afghanistan for a mere 208.

While on-paper, South Africa are a formidable unit and have been the team to beat in recent ICC events, their overall form over the last one year or so doesn't inspire confidence as South Africa have lost eight of their last 12 ODIs and won only four since January 2024.

South Africa had also failed to make the tri-series final in Pakistan also involving New Zealand, prior to the Champions Trophy, and Bavuma's side will be required to find consistency against a hurting England who will be determined to sign off on a high. Barring Root, England do not inspire much confidence as they are amid a losing streak which began with a 0-3 hammering by India before this tournament.

Root's 120 was the only bright spot for England against Afghanistan as the venerable batter was the only one to convert

his start and show the promise to do the job for his side, which ideally should have been completed but the 2019 World Cup winners lacked the gumption.

England, who had begun the tournament with a defeat to Australia, are likely to go through changes in terms of leadership but before all that unfolds, Jos Buttler would be keen to rally his troops around for one final laugh.

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

**South Africa:** Temba Bavuma (c), Tony de Zorzi, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, David Miller, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs, Rassie van der Dussen, Corbin Bosch.