

QUOTE OF THE DAY The pioneer "Chandrababu Naidu told me that I am a minister of the nation. He directed me to work as the two Telugu states people's minister and to develop Telangana with sincerity as I develop Andhra Pradesh. The NDA government is sincerely working for the development of Telangana. We are taking every opportunity for its development" - K Rammohan Naidu, Union Civil Aviation Minister

'I'm loyal Cong worker, anyone questioning my dedication is in illusion'

COURT ORDERS FIR AGAINST EX-SEBI CHIEF, 5 OTHERS

'Cinema should inspire, not disgust': Former vice president urges FILMMAKERS

DON'T MISS... Vontimitta fete from Apr 6 to 15 Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Executive Officer J Syamala Rao inspected the preparations for the annual Brahmotsavam at Sri Kodandarama Swamy temple in Vontimitta, Kadapa district, scheduled from April 6 to 15, alongside the state festival of Sri Sita Rama Kalyanam. accompanied by Kadapa District Collector Dr Cherukuri Sridhar, SP EG Ashok Kumar, TTD JEO Veerabrahmam, and other officials, the EO reviewed the temple premises, Kalyana Vedika, and surrounding areas on Saturday evening...

Bodies of 3 more workers recovered The bodies of three labourers were pulled out from the avalanche-hit Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli on Sunday, bringing the death toll to seven, while efforts were on to rescue another missing worker on the third day of the operation. Army doctors said 46 workers who were earlier rescued have been brought to the military hospital in Jyotirmath while one with a spinal cord injury was airlifted to AIIMS, Rishikesh. Three of the workers are in critical condition...

Goyal's US visit for trade talks today With India and the US gearing up to start negotiations for a proposed bilateral trade agreement, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal's Washington visit will begin on Monday, according to an official. Goyal is likely to hold talks with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, the official said. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more...

Praggnanandhaa scores second win Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa scored his second victory on the trot, outwitting Vincent Keymer of Germany to join compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram at the top on three points after the end of the fourth round of the Prague Masters here. Aravindh survived some initial hiccups before signing peace with Sam Shankland of the United States, while top seed Wei Yi of China finally found his form at the expense of local star David Navara. Anish Giri of Netherlands played out his fourth draw in as many games with Gurel Ediz of...

Rammohan: Naidu asked me to develop TG on par with AP

Union Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu stated that Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu had advised him to ensure the development of Telangana on par with Andhra Pradesh. Speaking at press conference along with another Union Minister G Kishan Reddy here on Sunday, Rammohan Naidu said, "Chandrababu told me that as a Union Minister, I must work for the people of both Telugu states. Develop Telangana as you develop Andhra Pradesh. The NDA Government is committed to Telangana's progress, utilising every available opportunity for its development." He highlighted that while the Centre is focusing on aviation and aerospace manufacturing in Hyderabad, similar opportunities would be explored for Andhra Pradesh. He emphasised that AP has vast potential for aviation infrastructure growth, given its strategic location and expanding industrial base. On Telangana's aviation projects, he mentioned that the Centre is awaiting land acquisition for the Mamnoon Airport, which it aims to complete within two-and-a-half years, instead of the usual 36 months. Criticising the previous BRS administration, Rammohan Naidu remarked



Union Minister G Kishan Reddy addressing the media on Sunday along with Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu and BJP MLA P Rakesh Reddy

- AP focusing on expanding its aviation sector and attracting aerospace investments.
The Union Minister says that the NDA govt is dedicated to TG's development.
Centre plans to set up aviation and aerospace manufacturing units in Hyderabad.
Centre aims to complete Mamnoon Airport in 2.5 years, pending land acquisition.
Rammohan Naidu blames the BRS for turning Telangana from a surplus-budget state into a debt-ridden one.
Centre is ready to expedite Warangal Airport if the Telangana government provides land.

that Telangana, which had a surplus budget before bifurcation, was now debt-ridden due to misgovernance. He reiterated that the Centre was willing to expedite the completion of Warangal Airport if the state ensured land acquisition. Meanwhile, Andhra Pradesh continues to focus on expanding its aviation sector, with efforts to strengthen regional connectivity and attract investments in aerospace manufacturing.



India beat NZ by 44 runs Shreyas 79, Varun's spin help in victory

semifinal here on Tuesday while the Kiwis play South Africa in the other semifinal in Lahore on Wednesday. As they have been doing throughout this tournament, the Indian spinners placed efficiency ahead of wizardry, and bowled in a manner suited to the conditions. Ravindra Jadeja found massive turn off the pitch but the New Zealand batters were done in by the effort from Chakravarthy who relentlessly targeted the stumps. Spinners took over once Hardik Pandya got rid of Rachin Ravindra early. Williamson, who was dropped on 17 by stumper KL Rahul off Axar Patel, played a refined innings full of placements and elegance, but there hardly was any support for him from the other end.

YSRCP struggles amid legal bombardment by TDP govt

The political landscape in Andhra Pradesh has turned volatile as the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government ramps up its legal offensive against the opposition YSR Congress Party (YSRCP). The revival of old cases and a fresh wave of arrests targeting YSRCP leaders have sparked concerns over the fairness of these actions while also exposing internal discord within the party's legal apparatus. YSRCP chief and former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has condemned the slew of cases against his party members and directed the legal team to provide



CM committed to uplift of women: Savitha Marking International Women's Day, the NDA government in Andhra Pradesh has announced a new initiative to empower women by providing training in tailoring and distributing free sewing machines. The scheme aims to enhance the economic prospects of women across the State.

AP govt suspends IPS officer for 'unauthorised' foreign visits

The Andhra Pradesh government on Sunday suspended senior IPS officer P V Sunil Kumar for allegedly making repeated foreign visits without prior permission during the previous YSRCP regime. In a government order, Chief Secretary K Vijayanand stated that Kumar, a DGP-rank officer awaiting posting, had deviated from the travel plan approved by the government during those overseas trips. "Now, therefore, in the exercise of the powers conferred under Rule 3 (1) of the All India Service (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969, the Government of Andhra Pradesh hereby places P V Sunil Kumar, IPS, under suspension with immediate effect," said the Chief Secretary in the order. According to the top bureaucrat, Kumar repeatedly demonstrated willful disregard for established practices. His actions exhibit gross negligence, indiscipline, and grave misconduct by undertaking foreign travel without obtaining the requisite permission, he said, adding that disciplinary proceedings were being contemplated for such repeated acts of "grave misconduct." Georgia, the UAE, Sweden, the USA, and the UK were among the destinations involved in these alleged unauthorised visits between 2019 and 2024, the Chief Secretary noted. He further said although Kumar was granted permission to visit Georgia from March 1 to 4, 2024, he allegedly deviated from the approved plan and visited the UAE within those four days without permission. Similarly, Vijayanand pointed out that Kumar visited the USA between February 1 and 28, 2023, departing from Hyderabad without obtaining prior government approval, among other such unauthorised trips. The State was ruled by the erstwhile YSRCP government, led by Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy, between 2019 and 2024.

3 women siblings, infant killed as car collides with auto

In a gory road accident, three women siblings and a three-month-old infant were killed, while three others sustained injuries when a car collided with the auto-rickshaw they were travelling in at Kammuru village in Kuderu mandal on Sunday. According to the police, one of the deceased, Saraswati (32), had given birth to a baby girl, Vidyasri, three months ago. She was travelling with her daughter and her two elder sisters, Leelavathi (42) and Yegeswari (40), to her mother-in-law's house in Rayampalli, Uravakonda mandal, from her parents' home when the mishap occurred. All four, including the infant, died on the spot.

UK, France, Ukraine agree to work on ceasefire plan

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer told world leaders on Sunday that they need to step up to a "once in a generation moment" for the security of Europe, at a summit in London to discuss ending Russia's war in Ukraine. Starmer said that getting a good outcome for Ukraine was "vital to the security of every nation here and many others too." He was flanked by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron during the official photo to mark the start of talks. Earlier Sunday Starmer said Britain, France and Ukraine had agreed to work on a ceasefire plan to present to the United States.

Rushikonda Beach loses Blue Flag certification

The Blue Flag certification, granted in 2020, placed Rushikonda Beach on the world tourism map, attracting eco-conscious travellers and boosting the city's image as a responsible coastal destination. However, recent complaints about deteriorating conditions, including waste accumulation, malfunctioning security systems, stray dog infestations, and poor upkeep of amenities, led FEE to reassess and ultimately revoke the status. For a city aspiring to become the executive capital of Andhra Pradesh, such a development is more than just a lost title—it's a dent in its reputation. "Losing the Blue Flag status reflects poorly on the state's ability to manage its natural assets. It signals a failure to meet international standards and impacts tourism potential," says Dr. Anjali Sharma, an environmental scientist specialising in coastal management. A warning for other tourist hubs The loss of this certification underscores broader concerns regarding Andhra Pradesh's commitment to environmental and tourism infrastructure. Industry experts fear it may deter environmentally conscious tourists and investors, potentially affecting other beaches and heritage sites across the state. Local residents and business owners are already feeling the impact.

NTR police rescue fourth baby from child trafficking gang

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Officials from the NTR District Police Commissionerate have successfully rescued another baby from an infant trafficking gang, bringing the total number of infants rescued to four. The latest rescue took place in Rajamahendravaram on Sunday, following information provided by the arrested gang members.



The police handed over the rescued baby to a Women and Child Welfare Department-run childcare shelter in Vijayawada, ensuring proper care and protection. On Saturday, the Nunna Rural Police Station House Officer (SHO) Krishna Mohan had transferred three babies rescued earlier from the trafficking network to the same department.

The operation was carried out under the directions of NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu and the supervision of Commissioner's Task Force Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Srinivasa Rao. The rescue team included Taskforce ACP K Latha Kumari, North Zone ACP Sravanthi Rai, and Inspectors from the Task Force and the Nunna Rural Police. The police successfully busted the five-member women-led trafficking gang, leading to a series of rescues.

Villagers demand urgent Forest Dept clearances for roads

Road project aims to link five villages within NR Puram panchayat



PNS ■ PADERU

Villagers from the isolated hamlets of Buruga and Chinna Konela, nestled within the Anantagiri mandal of the ASR district's Rompalle panchayat, have made a desperate appeal to the District Collector, demanding swift approval of Forest Department permissions to build a crucial road. The proposed route, connecting Onija to Chinna Konela, is seen as a lifeline for these long-neglected communities.

A recent tragic event highlighted the dire need for the road. Eswar Rao, a resident of Chinna Konela, died while working in Guntur district. His family was forced to carry his body for eight kilometres through treacherous terrain after an ambulance could only reach Vanija village in Vizianagaram district. While District Collector Alluri Seetharama Raju authorised following media reports of this incident, the stalled Forest Department permissions persist as a major roadblock.

simple request for a road is being unjustly denied. Driven by frustration, the residents have threatened a major protest at the upcoming ZP governing body meeting in Paderu if the permissions are not granted. Somula Appalaju (Ward Member, Rompalli panchayat), Konaparthi Simhachalam, Buruga Veeraiyah, and numerous other villagers, took part in the demonstration.

Plea to disburse overdue salaries to BRAOU Study Centre staff

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Chairman of the Telangana Council of Higher Education (TGCHE), Prof V Bala Krishna Reddy, has committed to ensuring the swift disbursement of overdue salaries to the staff at the Dr BR Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU) Study Centre in Andhra Pradesh. He also expressed his intention to engage with higher authorities from both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana regarding university-related issues, as stipulated in the State Bifurcation Act.

On Sunday in Hyderabad, Dr Velaga Joshi, the Officer on Special Duty (OSD) for Dr BR Ambedkar Open University in Andhra Pradesh, met with Prof Bala Krishna Reddy to formally present a request concerning these issues. During their discussion, Joshi raised several concerns related to the university. In a subsequent press release, Joshi noted that 10 years had passed since the implementation of the State Bifurcation Act, which has affected the procedures of Dr BR Ambedkar University in the State. As a result, he pointed out that approximately 30,000 students have been unable to gain admission to the Dr BR Ambedkar Open University. Joshi brought this matter to the attention of Prof Bala Krishna Reddy and sought a timely resolution.

CPM's Praja Chaitanya Yatralu from March 8-17

March aims to address challenges faced by the people



CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao addressing a press conference about the State budget in Vijayawada on Sunday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPM State secretary V Srinivasa Rao has announced that the party will conduct 'Praja Chaitanya Yatralu' (People's Awareness Marches) across the State from March 8-17 to address the challenges currently faced by the people. As the programme will be launched on International Women's Day, he emphasised that the Yatra aims to spotlight women's issues.

problems. In addition, they are planning to conduct Cycle Yatras. He urged the State government to implement the free bus travel scheme, one of the six key assurances made by the NDA. Furthermore, he called for the government to provide financial assistance of Rs.1,500 to unemployed youth and women by Ugadi. To support this cause, the party plans to organise various programmes. Rao stated that the people are eagerly awaiting resolutions to their issues from the new government, as well as subsidies outlined in the recently presented budget, but they have been disappointed thus far.

He questioned the allocation of Rs.309 crore for the Veligonda project, raising concerns about delays in its completion despite a two-year deadline. He highlighted that although the Centre promised Rs.12,000 crore for the Polavaram project, only Rs. 6,000 crore was allocated in the State budget, leaving many feeling cheated. Additionally, he criticised the government for lacking support for women, noting that there was no mention of the free bus travel scheme and that funding for the promised Rs.1,500 per month has not been allocated. He remarked that the burden of high electricity costs is being placed on citizens. Moreover, he pointed out that unnecessary meters were installed to benefit Adani, allowing the company to collect enormous profits, and urged the public to oppose this situation.

During a press conference held at Balotsav Bhavan in Vijayawada on Sunday, Srinivasa Rao, accompanied by party State secretariat members Y Venkateswara Rao, Ch Babu Rao, and Ch Prabhakar Reddy, outlined the party's plans. He stated that from March 22 to 28, they will organise protests and hunger strikes at government offices to demand resolutions for the issues identified during the Yatralu. If no solutions are reached by that date, they intend to initiate further protests in April and May.

The Left leader accused the State government of cutting allocations for the Super Six schemes and claimed that the government is trying to reduce the number of beneficiaries under the P4 programme, labelling it as deceitful. He criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for failing to address the issue of Special Category Status for the State during his visits to New Delhi. He pointed out that Chandrababu had previously stated that investors would flock to the State if this status was granted.

Srinivasa Rao expressed frustration over the State government's failure to cancel the SECI agreement, particularly since even a smaller country like Sri Lanka had the courage to do so with Adani. He also voiced anger about the exorbitant electricity costs imposed on the State, criticising Chandrababu, who had previously promised to release a White Paper before assuming power, but has since neglected that promise.

Spiritual wisdom illuminates seekers

Three-day spiritual discourse titled 'Secret of Sadhana' commences

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Like the daily sunrise that dispels darkness, knowledge and devotion light the way for spiritual seekers, declared Swami Paripoornananda during the opening of a three-day spiritual discourse titled 'Secret of Sadhana'. The event, which commenced on Sunday, aims to unravel the profound wisdom embedded in ancient scriptures and showcase its relevance in contemporary life.



Emphasising the timeless teachings of Bhagavad Gita, Swami Paripoornananda under-

scored that each reading of the sacred text brings fresh insights, guiding spiritual aspirants toward divine connection and self-awareness. He delved into the central philosophies of Sri Krishna, the divine teacher of the Gita, Adi Shankara, the proponent of Advaita Vedanta, and Ramana Maharshi, the revered sage of self-inquiry. The discourse encouraged attendees to integrate these spiritual principles into their daily lives, offering solutions to modern challenges through the

application of eternal wisdom. The event commenced with a traditional lamp-lighting ceremony. Several distinguished personalities graced the occasion, including Mantena Satyanarayana Raju, Chairman of the Visakhapatnam Music and Dance Academy, Dr. GRK Prasad, Secretary of Kala Bharathi, and Dr. Chitti Pantulu. As a mark of reverence, Swami Paripoornananda was honoured with a ceremonial garland, and all attendees were offered Prasadam (blessed food).

The president and the secretary of Kala Bharathi expressed their joy at the enthusiastic participation, highlighting the audience's deep engagement and the role of such spiritual discourses in fostering inner awakening. With two more days of enlightening discussions ahead, the event promises to be a transformative journey, guiding seekers toward enlightenment and self-realization through the practice of Sadhana.

Visakhapatnam to launch plug-and-play co-working spaces for startups

State-backed initiative aims to alleviate financial burdens and foster IT growth

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam's local government is pushing forward with plans to establish ready-to-use co-working offices for small and medium-sized IT businesses. This move aims to relieve the financial burden of setting up independent offices and stimulate the city's rapidly expanding technology sector. The initiative, driven by the State government, comes after discussions between IT Minister Nara Lokesh and various IT consulting firms. These companies have pledged to manage and equip the spaces, providing essential infrastructure on a rental basis.



The district administration is actively searching for suitable private buildings, targeting a total area of 250,000 to 300,000 square feet. Officials have already examined roughly 10 potential sites, including locations in Botsa Square, VIP Road, Old Jail Road, MVP Colony, and Seethammadhara. The anticipated rental costs, estimated between Rs 50 and Rs 60 per square foot, are expected to be particularly appealing to smaller IT companies. Reports on the inspected buildings have been handed over to the government, and IT consulting firms are currently evaluating the properties, with agreements with building owners expected to be finalised soon.

The co-working model will serve businesses needing as little as 2,000 square feet of space. Consulting firms will provide furnished offices, power, and air conditioning, allowing companies to concentrate on their core activities. Many of these firms operate with teams of 10 to 20 employees and require basic amenities such as desks and shared meeting rooms. A single building could potentially

accommodate 10 to 20 such companies, fostering a collaborative business environment. "This plan is designed to mirror the success of co-working spaces in major IT centres like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Noida," stated an industry insider familiar with the project. "It will offer a vital starting point for startups and

The district administration is actively searching for suitable private buildings, targeting a total area of 250,000 to 300,000 square feet. Officials have already examined roughly 10 potential sites, including locations in Botsa Square, VIP Road, MVP Colony, and Seethammadhara

small IT businesses, promoting innovation and growth in Visakhapatnam."

The government's goal is to attract more IT companies to the city by providing affordable and well-equipped workspaces, thereby creating jobs and strengthening the local economy. This initiative is viewed as a crucial part of the State's wider strategy to establish Visakhapatnam as a leading IT hub.

Vizag Police reintroduce Visitor Monitoring System

System examines details of people who stay in the city's lodging establishments daily

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move to tackle escalating crime rates, the city police have reintroduced a digital platform for monitoring visitor activity in hotels and lodges. Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi announced the reactivation of the Visitor Monitoring System (VMS), a strategy initially launched during the tenure of former Commissioner CH Srikanth, as a critical component of their wider crime prevention plan.



The system is designed to closely examine the details of approximately 50,000 individuals who stay in the city's more than 1,000 lodging establishments daily, ranging from high-end hotels to budget accommodations. This initiative aims to establish a strong digital surveillance network to bolster public safety. "Our priority is the safety and security of our community," the Commissioner emphasised. "This system will deliver essential data to help us identify and apprehend offenders before they can commit crimes."

The system demonstrated significant effectiveness when it was originally put into operation, an anonymous police source revealed. "Its abandonment was a lost opportunity. We believe its reintroduction will greatly improve our ability to monitor and control criminal activity."

The VMS utilises a specialised mobile application with secure logins for hotel management, enabling the real-time registration of guest information, including arrival and departure times. This information is then accessible to the police, facilitating the rapid identification of known criminals or potential suspects. While hotels have traditionally kept guest logs, the VMS seeks to modernise this process, providing a centralised database for police access.

However, the system fell into disuse under previous administrations, largely due to oversight and inconsistent enforcement. Commissioner Bagchi is now leading the effort to revitalise it, assigning the Crime Branch

the responsibility of ensuring consistent data uploads. "The system demonstrated significant effectiveness when it was originally put into operation," an anonymous police source revealed. "Its abandonment was a lost opportunity. We believe its reintroduction will greatly improve our ability to monitor and control criminal activity."

ACROSS THE STATES

Bodies of 3 more missing workers recovered from avalanche site

PNS ■ DEHRADUN (UTTARAKHAND)

The bodies of three labourers were pulled out from the avalanche-hit Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli on Sunday...



One person is still missing for whom the search is in progress, they said. The bodies have been brought to Jyotirmath by helicopter where the post-mortem was being done at the Community Health Centre.

Uttarakhand's Udhm Singh Nagar district, Ashok (28) from Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh and Harmesh from Una in Himachal Pradesh, the officials said.

The avalanche hit the BRO camp between Mana and Badrinath on Friday, burying 54 workers inside eight containers and a shed.

UKD-AVALANCHE-SURVIVORS

Came to senses next to dead co-worker, spent 25 hours more to be rescued, says avalanche survivor

BRO worker Jagbir Singh came to his senses surrounded by an endless expanse of white, next to a dead co-worker, his body stuck inside mounds of snow with a fractured leg and injuries to his head.

under an avalanche in the high-altitude village of Mana in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district. Jagbir Singh from Amritsar said he was sleeping in his container at the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp when the snowslide sent them tumbling several hundred metres down.

Trishul Yatra underway in UP to reach Lucknow today

Hindu organisation carrying out a yatra that aims to preserve religious places and connect youngsters with Sanatan culture will halt in Lucknow on Monday.



Two Indians, one Nepali held for trafficking drugs

Three people, including two Indians, were on Sunday arrested from Nepalgunj sub-metropolitan city for trafficking narcotic drugs, Nepal Police said.



Grief-stricken over cat's death, woman hangs self in UP

A 36-year-old woman, reportedly in grief over the death of her cat, hanged herself in Mohalla Kot Hasanpur here, police said on Sunday.

I'm loyal Cong worker, anyone questioning my dedication is in illusion: Shivakumar

PNS ■ KARNATAKA

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday said he was a loyal Congress worker and anyone questioning his dedication to the party and the Gandhi family is in illusion.



He also asserted that the party will come back to power in the 2028 Assembly polls. Shivakumar was reacting to speculation about his recent meeting with party central leaders in Delhi...

to a question on speculation about his visit to Delhi and that he had apparently put some conditions on party leaders. Speaking to reporters here, he said, "If anyone, let them be from any party, questions my dedication to the Congress party and the Gandhi family, it is their illusion."

'Regional commander' of Maoist outfit arrested

PNS ■ CHATRA (JHARKHAND)

A self-styled regional commander of a banned Maoist outfit, who was carrying a bounty of Rs 18 lakh on his head, was arrested in Chatra district, police said on Sunday.

A huge cache of arms and ammunition was also recovered from the Maoist belonging to the Tiritiya Sammelan Prastuti Committee (TSPC), they said. "He, along with three associates, were arrested during a vehicle checking drive near Putsgiya bridge in Hunterganj area on Saturday."

"Arms and cartridges, including a US-made rifle, were also recovered," the officer added.

Oppn to boycott of tea party on assembly session

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Opposition parties in Maharashtra on Sunday said they would boycott the customary tea party on the eve of the assembly's budget session, which begins on Monday, claiming the government has failed to address several pressing issues.



They raised concerns over allowing "tainted" ministers in the cabinet, rising attacks on women and comments from ruling party leaders about not releasing funds to areas that

elected opposition leaders as lawmakers. The Maha Vikas Aghadi, comprising the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP), is the face of the opposition in the state, while the Mahayuti alliance of BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP is the ruling bloc.

Build hospitals along expressways: UP CM to officials

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday directed officials to take comprehensive measures to reduce road accidents.



He emphasised the need for building hospitals on both sides of expressways -- similar to food plazas -- to provide immediate medical aid to accident victims. The chief minister issued the

directions during a meeting of the State Road Safety Council that was attended by ministers, senior bureaucrats, divisional

Activists of rival Shiv Sena factions face off in Thane

PNS ■ THANE

Activists of the Shiv Sena and Shiv Sena (UBT) came face to face and shouted slogans ahead of a rally in Maharashtra's Thane city on Sunday evening amid heavy police deployment.

The incident occurred near Anand Ashram, where the Shiv Sena (UBT) organised a rally in preparation for the upcoming civic elections. Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders Vinayak Raut, Sanjay Raut, and Chandrakant Khaire arrived in Thane to pay their respects to late Shiv Sena leader Anand Dighe, and as they gathered at Dighe's bust outside Anand Ashram, members of the rival factions, including women, confronted each other, leading to a heated exchange of slogans.

Gangster held, weapons seized: Punjab Police

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police on Sunday said it has arrested a gangster and seized from him three sophisticated weapons sourced from Pakistan.



The accused was identified as Hardeep Singh alias Deepa, a resident of Ferozepur.

Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said police seized a 9 mm Glock pistol, a 30 mm Beretta pistol and a pump action gun, along with three magazines and 141 cartridges, from Hardeep Singh.

Besides, 45 grams of heroin was also recovered from his possession, he said. Yadav said preliminary investigation revealed that these weapons were sourced from Pakistan through an unidentified foreign-based entity, intended for use in terror and criminal activities in the state.

Private lunar lander Blue Ghost aces moon touchdown

PNS ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth's celestial neighbour ahead of astronaut missions.



Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's northeastern edge of the near side.

Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles (360,000 kilometers) away. "You all stuck the landing. We're on the moon," Firefly's Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported. An upright and stable land-

ing makes Firefly -- a startup founded a decade ago -- the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Even countries have faltered, with only five claiming success:

Russia, the US, China, India and Japan. A half hour after landing, Blue Ghost started to send back pictures from the surface, the first one a selfie somewhat obscured by the sun's glare. The second shot included the home planet, a blue dot glimmering in the blackness of space.

Two other companies' landers are hot on Blue Ghost's heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week.

Blue Ghost -- named after a rare US species of fireflies -- had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 (2 metres) tall and 11 feet (3.5 metres) wide, providing extra stability,

according to the company. Launched in mid-January from Florida, the lander carried 10 experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid USD 101 million for the delivery, plus USD 44 million for the science and tech on board.

It's the third mission under NASA's commercial lunar delivery programme, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade.

Firefly's Ray Allensworth said the lander skipped over hazards including boulders to land safely.



PM Modi offers prayers at Somnath temple

PNS ■ GIR SOMNATH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday offered prayers at the revered Somnath temple in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district on the second day of his three-day visit to his home state.

The PM is scheduled to go on a lion safari and chair a meeting of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) at Sasan on Monday to mark World Wildlife Day, officials said.

Currently, Asiatic lions inhabit approximately 30,000 square kilometers across 53 talukas in 9 districts of Gujarat, said a government release. Additionally, as part of a central project, a National Referral Center for Wildlife is being established on over 20.24 hectares of land at New Pipalya in Junagadh district, it said.

Moreover, a high-tech monitoring centre for wildlife tracking and a state-of-the-art hospital have also been set up in Sasan to strengthen conservation efforts, added the release.



Omar Abdullah chairs meeting of alliance partners

PNS ■ JAMMU

As Jammu and Kashmir is preparing for the first budget session in seven years, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday chaired a joint meeting of the alliance partners here and discussed various issues for the smooth functioning of the house. The 40-day budget session, having a total of 22 sittings, is scheduled to start on March 3 with the address of Lt Governor.

This will be the first budget of the government after it assumed power in October last year. Abdullah, who is set to present the budget on March 7, had held the charge of home and General Administrative Department among others during his previous stint as the chief minister in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir from 2009 to 2014. The previous five budgets were presented and passed by the parliament in the absence of the legislative assembly in J&K.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

A clash of diplomacy and dignity

A dramatic Oval Office face-off between Trump and Zelensky, marked by sharp exchanges, underscores global political instability

In a high-stakes meeting that captured global attention, President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky clashed in a dramatic showdown at the White House. What began as cordial greetings quickly spiraled into an explosive exchange, leaving Zelensky visibly humiliated on the world stage—even as his defiant stance earned him renewed backing from European leaders. The encounter marked the first in-person meeting between Trump and Zelensky since Trump's return to power in January. Early on, smiles and handshakes gave way to heated words as US Vice President JD Vance pushed for a diplomatic resolution to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Vance's remarks underscored a fundamental point: the need for serious diplomacy to end the war, while also implicitly contrasting Trump's previous approach with that of past administrations. However, as the dialogue unfolded, Zelensky's pointed references to the long history of inaction—citing the annexation of Crimea and subsequent military struggles—sparked



a vehement rebuttal. In a sequence of rapid-fire exchanges, Trump dismissed Zelensky's critiques and reminded him of the overwhelming military support provided by the United States, arguing that without this aid, Ukraine's resistance could have crumbled in days. Despite the abrasive tone and what many saw as a public humiliation, Zelensky's resistance during the meeting resonated far beyond the confines of the Oval Office. While Trump's unconventional style and bombastic rhetoric further alienated many European policymakers, Zelensky's defiant posture emerged as a symbol of unwavering national resolve. European leaders, long critical of Trump's erratic diplomacy, viewed

the exchange as evidence that Ukraine needed to assert its own dignity in the face of American grandstanding. Moreover, Trump's harsh social media post demanding Zelensky "come back when he is ready for peace"—served not only as a dramatic moment of political theatre but also as a catalyst for European unity in support of Ukraine. Zelensky's refusal to be cowed sends a powerful message to both his domestic audience and international supporters. The Zelensky US visit might strengthen Ukraine's negotiating position and ensure a more coordinated effort to counter Russian advances. Trump's return to a more unpredictable form of diplomacy has underscored deep-seated divisions within the international community. His blunt dismissals and confrontational tactics risk undermining the credibility of traditional US diplomatic channels, potentially destabilising long-established alliances. In contrast, Europe's reaction suggests a pivot towards a more measured, collective response that prioritises multilateral engagement over unilateral posturing. This divergence could reshape how global conflicts are addressed in the future, signaling a shift away from "big talk" and towards pragmatic, alliance-based strategies. The Oval Office showdown will likely be remembered as a defining moment in the ongoing Ukraine war and in the evolution of American foreign policy.

PICTALK



A farmer prepares an agricultural land for paddy cultivation, in Nadia

A new era for rural revival and inclusive growth

With a sharp focus on strengthening infrastructure and boosting holistic rural development, the UP budget underscores a visionary and inclusive agenda



KESHAV PRASAD MAURYA

The Budget presented by the BJP's double-engine government in Uttar Pradesh will go a long way in strengthening infrastructure and further boosting the holistic development of rural areas. The state government's mammoth budget of Rs 8,08,736 crore for the all-round development of the state reflects the inclusive and visionary approach of the government, taking full care of the poor, disadvantaged, youth, women empowerment and Annadatas. This budget is 9.8 per cent higher than last year's, indicating the government's pro-development agenda. Under the Prime Minister's vision of a developed India, special emphasis has been placed on rural areas.

The mainstay of the economy of the state is the rural sector and the government has been continuously working towards ensuring that the benefits of the schemes reach the deprived sections of the society. Believing in the credo of self-reliance, the government has been focusing on fortifying the development arcs of villages to make them self-reliant as they will play an important role in creating a strong Uttar Pradesh. While over 96 lakh rural families have benefited under the State Rural Livelihood Mission (UPSRML), on the other hand, financial transactions worth Rs 31,103 crore have been facilitated through 39,556 Banking Correspondent Sakhis. Until now, more than two lakh women have become "Lakhpati Didi," helping them become self-reliant. Uttar Pradesh is also the first state in the country to guarantee concrete houses to the poor.

Fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', the state government has already constructed more than 3.6 million houses in resolution. Providing further impetus to the cause, a provision of Rs 4,882 crore has been made in the Budget for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). Also, an amount of Rs 1,200 crore has been proposed under the Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana



(Rural). While the Prime Minister's empathetic leadership has ensured a roof over the heads of the poor, the state's economy has also been flourishing.

The government's efforts have ensured the economic growth rate of the state has been recorded at 11.6 per cent, which is higher than the national GDP growth of 9.6 per cent. Once considered a 'BIMARU' state, the estimated gross domestic product (GSDP) of the state has now risen to Rs 27.51 lakh crore, doubling from 2017-18. In line with this momentum, Uttar Pradesh's economy is expected to reach Rs 30 lakh crore in the next fiscal, which will significantly contribute towards making the state a \$1 trillion economy.

Along with the ramping up of infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh is now witnessing a revolution in the transportation sector.

The North-South Corridor Plan will be implemented keeping in view road connectivity and highway expansion. Under this, Rs 200 crore has been provided for the widening and construction of roads. A budget of Rs 2,900 crore has been proposed for the widening of roads. Also, a provision of Rs 1,450 crore has been made



THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS ALREADY CONSTRUCTED MORE THAN 3.6 MILLION HOUSES IN RESOLUTION. PROVIDING FURTHER IMPETUS TO THE CAUSE, A PROVISION OF RS 4,882 CRORE HAS BEEN MADE IN THE BUDGET FOR THE PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (RURAL)

for the construction of bridges and railway over-bridges to ease traffic congestion. The incredible growth has taken into account the need to further bolster youth empowerment and job creation. A budget of Rs 1,000 crore has been allocated under the Chief Minister's Youth Entrepreneur Development Scheme. Under the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana, 49.86 lakh smartphones/tablets have been distributed to promote smart education. Free coaching is also being provided to the youth through the Abhyudaya Yojana. Renewable energy and artificial intelligence have been given special emphasis to ensure that youngsters do not fall behind. While the Artificial Intelligence City will be set up in Lucknow, plans are underway to set up a 500 MW solar power plant which will entail a cost of Rs 2,500 crore. Prime Minister Narendra Modi places special emphasis on ensuring the wellbeing of farmers and wants to ensure they do not fall behind in these changing times. In line with this, Annadatas have been placed at the top of the priority list in the mission of achieving the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, Rs 79,500 crore have been distributed to farmers while Rs 496 crore have also been disbursed under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. The state's sugarcane production capacity has also increased from 72 tonnes to 85 tonnes per hectare, boosting the income levels of farmers.

The recently presented Budget will not only take the development of the state to new heights but will also transform rural India. From roads to digital infrastructure, farmers to industry, and women empowerment to a bright future for the youth, this Budget has been able to ensure that the needs of every section of society are taken care of.

With the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and schemes aimed at boosting the rural economy and infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh is rapidly moving towards fulfilling the dream of a self-reliant India. I am confident that this Budget will realise the vision of 'growth and progress' of UP and propel the state towards the exalted status of the most developed state in the country.

(The writer is Deputy Chief Minister of UP; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FINDING FUNDS FOR FREEBIES

Madam — Apropos of the article 'Finding money for freebies: BJP faces an uphill task' (March 1), the statistical analysis and approach towards the funding of freebies is very realistic and compels the new BJP government to salvage the economy of the Capital. It is really challenging to mobilise the whopping revenue expenditure of Rs 20,100 crores on the promised direct cash transfer of Rs 2500 per month to women, Rs 3150 crores on cash assistance to the pregnant women, Rs 2500 crores on LPG cylinder subsidy, and Rs 30000 crores on education. Central funding of Rs 55000 crore is imperative. These figures are staggering and more than half the revenue expenditure budget of the Delhi state government. Many of the beneficiaries may not be deserving and needy of the freebies, but it can't be debated now and one section of people is providing resources for the others. Since it is a double-engine government, the central funding is a certainty.

However, the other state governments will expect the same level of funding from the Union government. However, the local municipal corporations must be asked for self-reliance and mobilise their own resources. There should be separate autonomous development authorities for Dwarka, Rohini and East Delhi. Earlier arrangements of separate MCDs for North, South and East Delhi were doing well and should be restored. The Delhi government should raise circle rates and stamp duties for properties as the market values have risen phenomenally. Liquor shops should be under government control without any licenses to private vendors and more taxes should be imposed on liquor consumption. New mandis, commercial, and industrial complexes should be constructed for raising additional resources.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SEBI GETS NEW CHAIRMAN

Madam — Tuhin Kanta Pandey, the former Finance and Revenue Secretary, was appointed as the new chairman of the SEBI. The new appointment is crucial as the for-

Decriminalise Indian politics



It is with reference to the editorial "Lawbreakers as Lawmakers." It is time to eradicate the influence of criminality in Indian politics. The rising number of elected representatives with criminal backgrounds in Parliament and State Assemblies is a matter of deep concern to all law-abiding and right-minded citizens. The increasing trend is dangerous and has steadily been eating into the vitals of democratic polity along with the growing corruption of a humongous

nature. Good governance gets seriously undermined when, for instance, criminals, gangsters, or mafia dons become the political bosses of bureaucrats and subvert the system to serve their interests. In 2005 the Supreme Court ruled that a sitting MP or MLA will be disqualified from contesting the election if convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more by a court of law.

The growing dependence of political parties on criminals for muscle power and electability must be stopped. It is high time all political parties came together and developed a consensus on keeping criminals—some with serious charges including kidnapping, rape, murder, grave corruption and crime against women—out of the system.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

US-Ukraine talks fail

Madam — The abrupt failure of US-Ukraine talks underscores a troubling loss in American diplomacy. Trump's insistence on securing indefinite rights to Ukraine's rare minerals in exchange for past aid—while rejecting Zelensky's request for security guarantees—was a blatant betrayal of trust. The talks' undiplomatic nature, with raised voices, Trump walking out and Zelensky skipping lunch, further damaged relations.

This shift signals that US commitments are now transactional, undermining credibility and emboldening adversaries like Russia. Such treatment of a war-torn ally weakens global trust in the US, proving that administration changes do not necessarily maintain the nation's moral or strategic responsibilities or commitments. The fallout from this episode will have lasting consequences on international alliances and geopolitical stability.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Breakthrough 'Bedi cooling turban' a glimmer of hope for brain stroke

This innovative device selectively cools the brain—bypassing the complications of whole-body hypothermia—and comes in handy in the treatment of brain stroke

At the recently concluded 71st Annual Conference of the Indian Association of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Sciences, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi, Director of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Sciences at Park Grecian Hospital in Mohali, presented a groundbreaking technique designed to protect the brain from oxygen deprivation during surgery. Nicknamed the "Bedi Cooling Turban," this innovative method is a trailblazer in more ways than one.

It is well known that lowering the temperature of an injured organ can help reduce damage. However, the brain presents a unique challenge because whole-body cooling introduces its own set of complications, and in brain surgery, only the brain needs to be cooled. Even a brief period of oxygen deprivation can result in devastating consequences, such as a massive stroke.

Dr Bedi conceived the idea during intensive brainstorming sessions and set out to cool only the brain. Drawing on his vast experience, he designed a unique cooling



turban made of plastic tubes arranged in a coil. Once the patient is anaesthetised, the device is placed around the head and cold, sterile water is pumped through the coils using a specialised machine, cooling the brain while leaving the rest of the body unaffected. To date, this device has been successfully used in 48 cases to repair blockages in brain arteries, preserving brain function throughout. Dr Bedi refined his surgical skills in advanced cardiovascular techniques at Escorts Heart Institute and St Vincent

Hospital in Sydney, where he managed cases using whole-body cooling (hypothermia) to preserve organ function. At the conference, the technique received an enthusiastic response from 1,700 national and international expert delegates.

Dr Rajneesh Malhotra, Cardiac Director at Max Hospitals, expressed particular enthusiasm, suggesting that the technique be applied to more clinical cases to further safeguard patients' brain function. He noted that innovations like this empower Indian surgeons to tackle

cases that might otherwise seem hopeless.

Dr Bedi confirmed that he plans to patent the technique and publish his findings so that it can be adopted worldwide to benefit similar cases. In conclusion, Dr Harinder Singh Bedi's innovative "Cooling Turban" technique represents a significant advancement in brain-protective strategies during cardiovascular and thoracic surgeries. By focusing cooling efforts solely on the brain, this breakthrough minimises the risks associated with whole-body hypothermia and opens new avenues for treating oxygen deprivation during surgery.

With successful application in 48 cases and enthusiastic endorsement from leading experts, this pioneering approach underscores the ingenuity of Indian medical innovation. Dr Bedi's commitment to patenting and sharing his findings promises to influence global surgical practices, ultimately saving countless lives and setting a new standard in patient care with excellence.

(The author is a columnist; views are personal)



GYAN BHADRA





FIRST COLUMN

DEALING WITH EXAM ANXIETY

Embracing positive thinking, smart study habits and relaxation can make exams a breeze



SAKSHI SETHI

Examinations are integral to the educational system and are designed to assess students' knowledge, understanding and skills. However, for many students, exams are a source of significant anxiety, leading to stress, reduced performance, and even physical or emotional distress. Overcoming exam anxiety requires a combination of psychological strategies, effective study techniques, and a supportive environment. By adopting a proactive approach, students can transform their exam experiences from overwhelming to manageable.

There is no denying that exam anxiety is real, but so is one's resilience. The anxiety can stem from various factors, including fear of failure, high expectations from parents or teachers, past negative experiences, or inadequate preparation. Symptoms of exam anxiety range from nervousness, restlessness and even difficulty concentrating to physical manifestations such as headaches, nausea and rapid heartbeat. Recognising these symptoms is the first step in overcoming exam-related stress. Dealing with exam stress can be a heavy load and can often make an individual feel lonely. A crucial aspect of managing exam anxiety is cultivating a positive attitude toward examinations. Students need to view exams as opportunities to demonstrate their learning rather than threats to their self-worth. A growth mindset can improve only through effort and practice and can significantly reduce anxiety. Use of positive affirmations such as "I am prepared" or "I can handle this challenge" can boost confidence. Additionally, normalising mistakes and failures as part of the learning process can help students overcome the fear of underperformance. One of the primary reasons for exam anxiety is inadequate preparation. Implementing effective study strategies can enhance confidence and performance. Creating a well-structured study schedule can help prevent last-minute cramming and ensure thorough coverage of subjects. Active



learning techniques, such as summarisation, mind mapping and teaching concepts to peers can also help retain information better. Practicing with past exam papers and taking mock tests can familiarise students with the exam pattern, reducing uncertainty and nervousness. Relaxation techniques can significantly reduce exam-related stress and improve focus. Deep breathing exercises, mindfulness meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation can help calm the mind before and during exams. Engaging selves in physical activities such as yoga, stretching, or even a short walk can release tension and improve concentration. Ensuring adequate sleep, maintaining a balanced diet, and staying hydrated contribute to overall wellbeing, making students more resilient to stress. A supportive environment at home and school plays a vital role in alleviating exam anxiety. In today's competitive environment, it becomes important for parents to encourage their children rather than pressurise them with unrealistic expectations. Study groups and discussions with peers can provide moral support and motivation, making exam preparation a less isolating experience.

What plays the most vital role is on the day of the exam, where students, by following simple yet effective strategies, can stay calm and focused. Following strategies such as arriving early, taking deep breaths, and engaging in light stretching before entering the examination hall can help reduce nervousness. Managing time effectively by allocating specific minutes to each question can help prevent panic. If anxiety arises during the exam, taking a few moments to pause, taking deep breaths, and refocusing can help prevent stress from escalating. Exam anxiety is a common challenge faced by students, but it can be effectively managed through self-awareness, positive thinking, strategic preparation, relaxation techniques, and a supportive environment. Ultimately, overcoming exam anxiety is not just about securing good grades but also about developing resilience and lifelong learning skills.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Is Forest Rights Act driving deforestation?



B K SINGH

Despite its noble intent to secure the livelihoods of tribals, the Forest Rights Act has inadvertently opened the door to rampant deforestation and widespread encroachment

The law has been enacted to confer rights over the use of forest lands by individual tribal or forest dwellers under their occupation on the prescribed cutoff date. Besides the individual rights, there is also provision for community rights over certain forests for benefits of collection of usufructs like beedi leaves, minor forest products, grazing, fishing etc. and rights can also be conferred to the communities for sustainable management of forest resources.

But the rights can be granted only when they are in actual possession of the forest land or have been enjoying the usufructs or sustainably managing the forest resources on or before 13-12-2005 for tribal and three generations (75 years) before this date for other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs). Despite opposition from foresters, conservationists and environmentalists the law was enacted by the UPA government supported by left parties in 2005. This was followed by notifying the rules and the implementation from January 1, 2008.

Dipak Sarmah who succeeded me as the head of Karnataka Forest Department on my superannuation has observed on page 154 of his book titled, 'Forests Of Karnataka - Why And How Of Where They Are,' "Most of the benefits that had accrued in the forests since the 1980s by way of forest consolidation due to implementation of Forest (Conservation) Act appear to have been nullified as a result of the implementation of the Forest Rights Act. The ominous signs of fragmentation and loss of forests are already discernible in a number of states as evident from the biennial India State of Forest Reports published by the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun.

A clearer picture will emerge in about a decade or so, by which time we would come to realise the true impact of the Forest Rights Act on our forests. But it may be then too late to retrieve the losses. Foresters alone cannot prevent the unauthorised removal of trees and the destruction of forests. Villagers set fire to burn the wood and grab the land. Forests are perpetually subjected to encroachments with the support of local leaders. Even if police presence is ensured and the community's resistance is bulldozed while removing encroachments, the problem resurfaces and lands are again grabbed. Political leaders question the removal of cultivation when land is devoid of tree growth. Fresh plantations are damaged and the forest area is re-encroached. Practically all encroachments till 25th October 1980, when the Forest (Conservation) Act came into operation were already regularised by the Union Government.

The Act was operational from 2008 with the new cutoff date of 13-12-2005. It was only the vote bank; the OTFDs were brought in to benefit from the legislation though their encroachments till 25th October 1980 were regularised. It can be understood that OTFDs cannot have more than a generation-old encroachment on the new cutoff date, yet a floodgate of forest destruction was opened for them. Without having any consideration for the ecological security of the country, OTFDs went on a rampage, cleared the fresh tree growth, occupied lands and claimed rights. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the nodal agency for implementation took up several reviews to monitor the progress of the



FOREST AREAS GIVEN FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF GRAM SABHAS HAVE BEEN DEVASTATED, DEGRADED AND FRAGMENTED. THERE ARE PATCHES OF BAMBOO FORESTS IN MEDHA LEKHA GRAM SABHA WHERE ALL BAMBOO CLUMPS WERE CLEARED IN ONE STROKE IN 2012

states, further diluting the provisions in 2012 to ignore the only scientific evidence of satellite imagery interpretation among the evidence to be relied on in support of the claim. The claims of the tribal community, who had only to prove the occupation as of December 2005 were easily acceptable initially, but that too is now two decades old. Left-leaning forces and NGOs fought for claim cases of individual forest rights (IFR), community forest rights (CFR) and rights to manage the forest resources sustainably. This has accelerated the deforestation. IFRs have already been granted to 2.2 million tribal and OTFDs, covering nearly 5 million ha of forest land. Several activists have written articles in newspapers and magazines showing a satisfactory performance over the grant of IFRs and suggesting the states focus their attention on CFRs and grant of forest rights for sustainable management to avail the provisions that have been neglected by the states so far. The estimates of the activists suggest that 30 million hectare forest lands comprising more than 40 per cent of the total forest area can be granted for CFRs and sustainable management.

They further argue that if this is done, it has the potential to secure the rights and livelihood of 200 million people including 90 million tribal. Local press in Hyderabad has recently brought out that seven lakh acres of forests have been occupied in 2022-23 and claims over four lakh acres for tribal were approved in Telangana before the 2023 Assembly election. State machineries have accepted the claims overlooking the reports of the concerned divisional forest officer. J Ramesh, Nature Friends

Environmental Development Society, Hyderabad, accused the state of pressurising officials for recognition of rights to ineligible individuals resulting in large-scale deforestation leading to the scam of unprecedented proportion.

There are reports from Rampachodavaram Forests division, Rajamundry (AP) that tribal department officials are granting rights in Papikonda National Park for money. A retired IFS M Padamanaba Reddy has filed a PIL for the scam. In February 2019, just before the Lok Sabha polls, states moved the Supreme Court to review its order of eviction of rejected IFR claims and allow them to re-verify. The court accepted it, but so far the states have not concluded and continue to accept the fresh claims. What signal does it send down the line?

The Act has provided unlimited time for filing claims and deforestation and bringing the land under plough can continue. No one has any concern about the ecological security of the country. It is to be understood that all rejected claimants are in occupation of the forest land, where they have already been successful in deforesting and clearing the area. More rejected claims are encouraged, and more deforestation takes place.

The only place where the CFRs and rights to manage the forests sustainably have been granted is the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra. Section 3-1 (i) of FRA 2006 is relevant here, where rights can be granted to villages of Gram Sabha who have the experience of managing the area sustainably. Further the requirement of Section 4 (3) of the Act is also

essential for the grant of rights i.e. they should have the resource as on 13-12-2005 for tribal and 75 years before this date for OTFDs. Management rights have been granted in many Gram Sabhas of Gadchiroli overlooking both the provisions.

Activists are taking this example all over the country and pressing for a repeat of this. This has been frequently quoted example in articles and papers. What these authors have been hiding is the destruction of forests. Forest areas given for the sustainable management of Gram Sabhas have been devastated, degraded and fragmented.

There are patches of bamboo forests in Medha Lekha Gram Sabha where all bamboo clumps were cleared in one stroke in 2012. Forest officers were physically prevented from entering the area. Bamboo has not responded well to the clear feeling. The fresh regeneration is bushy and does not yield any usable bamboo culm. It yielded certain culms every four years when it was managed by the Forest Department.

The management of Medha Lekha Gram Sabha has not been sustainable and the area has not yielded culms in 2016, 2020 and 2024. Taking a cue from Madha Lekha, other Gram Sabhas have also started clear felling and over-exploitation of the resource. Further, the revenue realised from the sale proceeds has not been ploughed back for fresh regeneration activities and the management has become completely unsustainable.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of Forest Force, Karnataka; views are personal)

The integral role of phygital in shaping India's rural economy

The emerging phygital model—merging the tangible strengths of traditional systems with the efficiency of digital innovation—is redefining growth

With over 1.4 billion inhabitants, India's economic landscape has evolved dramatically in recent years. Yet, while urban centres boom, the nation's rural heartland—home to around 908.8 million people as of 2022—continues to play a pivotal role in shaping the country's potential. Although initiatives like Digital India have ushered the country into a digital era with 806 million active internet users by February 2025, technology alone cannot resolve deep-seated infrastructural challenges. This is where the phygital model—a fusion of physical and digital elements—steps in to bridge the divide and ensure balanced growth.



SAMEER MATHUR

Phygital combines the tangible benefits of traditional systems with the efficiency of digital technology, creating a hybrid framework that enhances accessibility, empowers local businesses, and fosters inclusive growth. In rural regions, where infrastructural deficits and resource limitations persist, phygital strategies are not about replacing established

methods but rather integrating them with modern digital solutions. This approach is proving transformative across key sectors such as banking, commerce, agriculture, healthcare, and public services. **Driving Financial Inclusion** For years, traditional banking models have struggled to serve India's vast rural expanses. High operational costs, challenging geography, and low financial literacy have hampered efforts to bring modern financial services to remote communities. While FinTech has broadened access through digital banking, a fully digital approach can alienate those who lack familiarity with smartphones or online transactions. The phygital model addresses these gaps by merging digital conve-

nience with physical touchpoints. Systems like Aadhaar-enabled Payment Systems (AePS), micro-ATMs, and local banking correspondents empower rural residents to conduct transactions, access credit, and secure subsidies without the need for continuous internet connectivity. In many villages, Customer Service Points (CSPs) provide essential in-person support, guiding users as they gradually transition to digital financial solutions. Furthermore, partnerships between FinTech companies and local kirana stores or post offices have effectively transformed these outlets into mini banking hubs. This integration allows people to withdraw cash, pay bills, and transfer money within their



locality, bypassing the need to travel long distances to bank branches and operating beyond standard banking hours. The result is a significant leap forward in achieving comprehensive financial inclusion. **Reinvigorating Rural Commerce** E-commerce has revolutionised urban shopping by altering customer habits and payment methods, but rural

consumers still rely heavily on cash transactions. A completely digital model often fails to resonate with these communities. Instead, the phygital model has emerged as an effective alternative by combining the reach of online platforms with the trust of local, physical commerce. Local kirana stores are increasingly functioning as pick-up points for online orders, ensuring that digital transactions are accessible even to those without digital payment capabilities. Assisted commerce kiosks further support rural shoppers by helping them browse products, place orders, and make payments—often in cash—thereby bridging the gap between digital platforms and traditional retail.

Transforming Agriculture Agriculture remains the backbone of India's rural economy, providing livelihoods for more than 42 per cent of the population and contributing around 18.2 per cent to the nation's GDP. However, farmers have long contended with issues such as limited market access, dependence on intermediaries, and unpredictable weather. Phygital solutions are beginning to address these challenges by integrating digital tools with conventional agricultural practices. Platforms like eNAM enable farmers to compare prices and market their produce directly, thus reducing reliance on middlemen. At the same time, traditional mandi networks continue to play an essential role in the trading process.

By ensuring that digital marketplaces and physical trading hubs operate in tandem, the phygital approach provides farmers with a more balanced and effective route to market. **Enhancing Essential Services** Beyond commerce and agriculture, phygital innovations are making significant strides in healthcare and public service delivery. Rural communities have traditionally faced barriers to accessing quality healthcare. Now, telemedicine kiosks supported by trained health workers enable remote consultations with specialists, while mobile health units equipped with diagnostic tools bring medical care directly to remote areas. (The writer is Managing Director and Founder of Roinet Solution; views are personal)

Tiger Shroff unleashes a fiercer Ronnie in Baaghi 4 poster



Sharing the poster on his Instagram, Tiger reflected on how the *Baaghi* franchise has shaped his career, calling it the foundation of his action-hero image. He wrote, "The franchise that gave me an identity and allowed me to express my eagerness to prove myself as an action hero... is now the franchise that is changing my identity. He's definitely not the same this time, but I hope you guys accept him the way you did 8 years ago."

The electrifying transformation has already caught the attention of industry peers. Arjun Kapoor commented, "Aatank" with a fire emoji, while Mouni Roy called it "Besttt" with heart emojis. Director-choreographer Remo D'Souza also hyped up the poster with multiple fire emojis.

On the occasion of Tiger Shroff's 35th birthday, the makers of *Baaghi 4* treated fans to a gripping new poster, offering a glimpse of the actor in a more intense and ruthless avatar. The latest look at the film was unveiled by Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment (NGE), heightening the excitement around the fourth installment of the blockbuster action franchise.

The poster, shared on social media, features Tiger's character, Ronnie, bloodied and battle-worn, staring fiercely into the camera with a cigarette in his mouth. The bold tagline on the poster reads, "This time he is not the same," hinting at a major shift in his character's journey.

Bringing his expertise in high-octane action, acclaimed Kannada filmmaker A. Harsha helms *Baaghi 4*. Known for delivering mass entertainers like *Bhujarangi* (2013) and *Vajrakaya* (2015), Harsha's signature style promises to take the franchise to new heights.

Produced by Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, *Baaghi 4* also stars Bollywood veteran Sanjay Dutt in a pivotal role. The action thriller is set to hit cinemas on September 5, 2025.

With Tiger's evolved persona, intense action, and a fresh directorial vision, *Baaghi 4* is shaping up to be one of the most awaited action spectacles of the year. Fans can expect a darker, grittier and more brutal Ronnie than ever before.

Typecast again? Bobby Deol opens up about getting only villainous roles



industry by storm with his menacing on-screen personas. From playing the sinister Baba Nirala in *Aashram* to the ruthless antagonist in *Animal*, he has proved his versatility time and again. His performances in *Race 3*, *Love Hostel* and the upcoming *Kanguva* further solidify his place as a formidable villain.

The actor admits that playing these roles is both thrilling and demanding. "There's a unique challenge in playing a negative character. You have to make the audience love to hate you and that's not easy," he explained.

While Deol appreciates the recognition his performances have garnered, he also acknowledges the downside. "I've started getting only villainous roles now. I don't mind playing negative characters, but I also want to explore other shades. It's not about being the lead hero—it's about variety."

Despite his concerns about typecasting, Deol continues to challenge himself. He shared that his current projects push him beyond his comfort zone, requiring significant effort to bring depth to his performances.

With *Ek Badnaam Aashram Season 3 Part 2* now streaming on Amazon MX Player, Bobby Deol's evolution as an actor remains a fascinating journey. Whether he continues to embrace the dark side or ventures into new territory, one thing is certain—he has firmly re-established himself as a force to be reckoned with in Bollywood.

Bobby Deol is riding high on the success of *Ek Badnaam Aashram Season 3 Part 2*, but along with the praise, he finds himself at an interesting crossroads in his career. The actor, once known for his romantic and action-hero roles, has successfully reinvented himself with powerful negative characters. However, he now admits that this transformation has led to a new challenge—typecasting.

In a latest interview, Deol credited filmmaker Prakash Jha for changing the course of his career by casting him as the controversial godman Baba Nirala in *Aashram*. "At that stage in my career, few believed in my ability to play a dark, intense character—except for Prakash Jha. He saw something in me that others didn't and that changed everything," he shared.

Bobby Deol has taken the



Lookbook

Renowned actors, celebrated designers and influential personalities gathered to support Sussanne Khan's vision with *The Charcoal Project*, making it a glamorous evening filled with style and elegance. The store is its second retail gallery in Hyderabad, following in the footsteps of their success in Mumbai. This also marks an exciting collaboration, renowned Interior Designer Gauri Khan joins forces with Sussanne Khan with a dedicated floor showcasing products from her eponymous label Gauri Khan Designs.



Mika Singh says Bipasha Basu's tantrums made him regret producing Dangerous

Singer Mika Singh has made a shocking revelation about his unpleasant experience working with actor Bipasha Basu on the 2020 crime thriller *Dangerous*. In a latest interview, Mika claimed that Bipasha's attitude on set was problematic and even suggested that her current lack of work is a consequence of her behaviour. Mika, who turned producer with *Dangerous*, initially intended to create a low-budget film primarily as a platform to showcase his music. However, things took an unexpected turn when Bipasha joined the project. Reflecting on his experience, Mika shared that *Dangerous* was originally planned as a Rs 4 crore film. "I liked Karan a lot and wanted to produce a low-budget film—around Rs 4 crore," he said. At the time, he couldn't afford filmmaker Vikram Bhatt as a director, so he brought him on board as a

writer, with Bhushan Patel helming the project. Things changed when Bipasha expressed interest in being part of the film. "I was considering another actress, but she wanted to be a part of it," Mika revealed. However, her involvement led to a significant budget spike. "The shoot was set in London, and the budget increased from Rs 4 crore to Rs 14 crore... And the drama created by Bipasha ensured that I would always regret getting into production," he added. According to Mika, Bipasha's on-set behaviour made the production process difficult. "It was a team she was comfortable with and they were playing a couple, who had to feature in

kissing scenes. Suddenly, she was throwing tantrums, saying she won't do this or she won't do that," he said. The problems didn't end there. Mika also claimed that the dubbing process for the film was constantly delayed. "Someone always had a sore throat. If it was Bipasha who was sick at one time, it was Karan at another," he recalled.

Mika Singh's candid remarks have stirred curiosity about Bipasha Basu's side of the story. The actor, who has been away from films in recent years, has not yet responded to the allegations. Meanwhile, *Dangerous*, which was released on MX Player in 2020, received mixed reviews and failed to make a lasting impact. Whether Bipasha will address Mika's claims remains to be seen, but his comments have certainly reignited discussions about her career choices and past collaborations.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



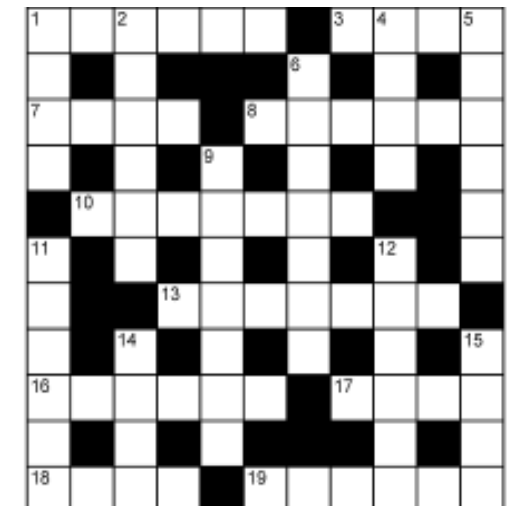
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| 1 | 5 | | 6 | 7 | 4 | | | |
| | | | 3 | 9 | | | | |
| | 9 | 1 | | | | | | 6 |
| 5 | 1 | | | 8 | 7 | | | |
| | | 6 | 3 | 7 | | | | |
| 6 | 7 | | | 3 | 9 | | | |
| 8 | | | | 5 | 6 | | | |
| | 6 | 8 | | | | | | |
| 1 | 9 | 3 | | | 7 | 8 | | |

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- A sheep's coat
- Halt
- A tangle in your hair
- Get
- Sets fire to
- Courage
- Disappear
- Thought
- Lines
- A bird that is raced for sport
- Watch
- Female tiger
- Tremble with cold
- A bed for a baby
- Cold winter flakes
- Sunrise

DOWN

- Counterfeit
- As much as is needed
- Rip
- Draw with this



'Cinema should inspire, not disgust': Former vice president urges filmmakers

SURESH KAVIRAYANI

The former Vice President of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu, took a strong stand against the current trends in cinema, criticising filmmakers for promoting double-meaning dialogues, excessive vulgarity, and portraying smugglers and traitors as heroes on the big screen.

Former Vice President of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu, has strongly criticised the glorification of smugglers and anti-social elements in films, stating that such portrayals send the wrong message to society. Speaking at a memorial event for veteran actress, playback singer and studio owner Krishnaveni, held at the Film Nagar Cultural Centre (FNCC) in Hyderabad, Naidu acknowledged the golden era of cinema while raising concerns about its current state.

Comparing past and present films, Naidu noted that smuggling and criminal activities have been glorified in recent years. "I agree that cinema is a business, but at the same time, it should carry a message," he said.

Reflecting on Krishnaveni's illustrious career, he praised her versatility as an actress, singer and studio owner, highlighting her contribution as the producer of N.T. Rama Rao's debut film *Mana Desam*. He urged today's actors to learn from legends like Krishnaveni, emphasising that earlier films conveyed emotions through expressions



rather than physical intimacy.

Naidu also recalled how iconic actors NTR and ANR set high standards in filmmaking, with meaningful dialogues, soulful music and strong storytelling. He criticised the increasing use of double-meaning dialogues, saying, "Many assume that adding vulgarity will make a film successful, but that is completely wrong. If not meaningful, at least

dialogues should have good intent." He stressed the importance of quality comedy in films, stating that humor is an essential part of life. "A film should offer mental peace, not leave the audience disgusted," he remarked.

Naidu also reminisced about meeting Krishnaveni twice—once at an event for actress Jamuna and later in Vijayawada.



Kishan's *Mazaka* struggles at theatres despite festival release

Sundeep Kishan and Ritu Varma's latest film *Mazaka*, released on February 26 on the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, has turned out to be a major box-office disappointment. Directed by Nakkina Trinadha Rao and produced by Razesh Danda, the film was expected to open well due to the festival release. However, to everyone's surprise, theaters remained largely empty.

Adding to the woes, *Mazaka* had an unusual mid-week release on a Wednesday, which further impacted collections on Thursday and Friday. Even the weekend failed to revive its prospects, with audiences outright rejecting the film.

Despite a strong supporting cast, including Rao Ramesh and the return of Anshu Sagar (*Manmadhudu* fame), the film had several shortcomings. The poorly received songs and last-minute

trailer release failed to generate buzz.

While Rao Ramesh's performance was appreciated, the film suffered from a weak script by Bezawada Prasanna Kumar, especially in the emotionally disconnected second half. Trade analysts believe the father-son comedy track also did not work, leading to the film's failure. Despite the theatrical failure, the producer has managed to recover costs through OTT and satellite rights, with Zee Studios securing the film for a good price.

Following the massive success of *Dhamaka*, the underperformance of *Mazaka* raises concerns about the future of the Nakkina-Prasanna collaboration. Fans are now eagerly waiting to see how they redeem themselves with their next project.



MAD Square & Robinhood set for March 28 clash?

The 2023 film *MAD*, made on a modest budget with newcomers, became a sensational hit. Now, its much-awaited sequel, *MAD Square*, was initially set to release on March 29, 2024. However, the makers have now decided to prepone the release by a day, with the film hitting screens on March 28 instead.

The decision to advance the release was influenced by the fact that March 29 falls on Amavasya (New Moon Day), a date some distributors advised against for the film's release. Taking their concerns into account, the makers opted for an earlier premiere, ensuring an extended weekend and holiday advantage that could boost the film's box office prospects. Interestingly, *MAD Square* will now share its

release date with Nithiin's *Robinhood*. However, the producer clarified that there is no competition between the two films. "Since March 29 falls on Amavasya, our distributors felt it was best to advance the release, and we were happy to oblige. There was never any intention to cause a last-minute rescheduling. We wholeheartedly wish that March 28 will be a memorable day for Telugu cinema, with both *Robinhood* and *MAD Square* lighting up the big screens," the producer stated on social media. *MAD Square* is produced by Harika Suryadevara and Sai Soujanya, with Kalyan Shankar directing. The film stars Narne Nithiin, Sangeeth Shoban and Ram Nithin in lead roles, while Reba John features in a special song.

Kannappa teaser: Prabhas, Akshay Kumar, and others promise a grand spectacle

The much-awaited teaser of *Kannappa* is finally out, offering a visual spectacle packed with action, devotion, and high-stakes drama. The teaser features an ensemble of big stars, including Prabhas, Akshay Kumar and Mohanlal, alongside Vishnu Manchu and Mohan Babu. Akshay Kumar takes on the divine role of Lord Shiva, while Prabhas appears as Rudra, promising an intense and visually stunning experi-

ence. Vishnu Manchu leads as Thinnadu, a fearless warrior who embarks on a journey of ultimate devotion to Lord Shiva. The teaser also gives a glimpse of Kajal Aggarwal and Preity Mukundhan, adding more star power to the film. Shot extensively in the lush forests of New Zealand, *Kannappa* offers breathtaking visuals, blending mythology with cutting-edge action sequences and emotional storytelling.

Director Mukesh Kumar Singh described *Kannappa* as more than just a film—it is a tribute to faith, devotion, and transformation. Vishnu Manchu, who has been passionately working on this project for over a decade, shared, "This film is incredibly close to my heart. It brings to life a historical tale that is often mistaken for mythology." Produced by M. Mohan Babu, *Kannappa* is set for a grand worldwide release on April 25.



Bhagyashri Borse in talks to star opposite Prabhas in Prashanth Varma's next

Despite the failure of her debut film *Mr. Bachchan*, actress Bhagyashri Borse is emerging as one of the most sought-after newcomers in Tollywood. She is now in talks to star opposite Prabhas in an upcoming film directed by Prashanth Varma.

A source close to the production revealed that Bhagyashri is the frontrunner for the female lead role in this high-budget film,

which is expected to begin production later this year. Director Prashanth Varma, who gained massive recognition with *HanuMan*, was initially set to direct Ranveer Singh. However, due to undisclosed reasons, that project was shelved, and Varma instead approached Prabhas, who agreed to collaborate. A look test was conducted and if all goes well, Bhagyashri will be cast in this ambitious project.

Meanwhile, Bhagyashri is keeping busy with multiple films. She is set to star in *Kingdom* alongside Vijay Deverakonda, an untitled project with Ram Pothineni and *Kaantha* featuring Dulquer Salmaan. She has also landed a role opposite Suriya in a film directed by Venky Atluri. With several big projects in her pipeline, Bhagyashri Borse is proving that one flop does not define an actor's career.



After *Pushpa 2*, Allu Arjun prioritises Atlee over Trivikram?

After the much-anticipated release of *Pushpa 2*, Allu Arjun was set to collaborate once again with director Trivikram Srinivas. Reports suggest that their film has a mythological touch, revolving around Lord Subramanya Swamy. Though officially announced long ago, the project has been delayed due to Arjun's commitments to *Pushpa 3* and Trivikram's post-*Guntur Kaaram* developments.

Latest reports indicate that the Allu Arjun-Trivikram film may not commence this year. Instead, Arjun is considering working with Tamil director Atlee for his next project. Discussions regarding the budget are still ongoing, as the film is expected to be a high-budget venture.

After the unprecedented success of *Pushpa 2*, especially in the Hindi market, Arjun is under pressure to maintain the momentum. Since *Pushpa 2* did not perform as expected in Telugu and other South Indian languages, but dominated in the Hindi belt, his next project needs to cater to a pan-India audience. Atlee is reportedly preparing a story that aligns with this vision.

Given the mythological aspects of Trivikram's script, Arjun feels it would require significant time to execute. Hence, he prefers to take on Atlee's project first. An official announcement regarding this collaboration is expected soon, according to sources.