

QUOTE OF THE DAY
 The pioneer
 The CM who opposed land sales while in the opposition, is now leading the charge to auction prime government lands to raise revenue. When I asked about this in the Assembly, they dismissed it as mere land transfers to TSIC. But as soon as the session ended, they mortgaged the same land for loans of Rs 10,000 crore. Now, before the next session, they are auctioning the same land
 — Harish Rao, BRS MLMLA P4

'Security apparatus must remain adaptive to emerging threats'
 5

GOVT TAKING STEPS TO MAKE INDIA EXPORT-FRIENDLY: FM
 8

Anurag Kashyap and Manju Warrier's long-delayed collaboration back ON TRACK
 P12

DON'T MISS...

Two drown as boat capsizes in Godavari

Two men drowned in the Godavari River near Rajahmundry after their boat capsized early on Tuesday morning. The incident occurred between the seventh and eighth pillars of the railway bridge. Police reported that 12 people from Simhachal Nagar, Kotilingalapat, and Ganesh Nagar of Rajahmundry had travelled by boat to an island in the river for a late-night party. The group reportedly held a "cocktail party" on the island, continuing until midnight. During their return journey, water began to flood the boat rapidly. Panic ensued, and the...

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'Why not teaching Tamil in Hindi States'

Targeting the BJP-led Centre over alleged Hindi imposition, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President M K Stalin on Tuesday wondered why the union government has not facilitated setting up of an institution to teach Tamil or other south Indian languages to people of states in north India. Writing to party workers as part of his series on the theme of "all-time opposition to Hindi imposition" Stalin said, Google Translate, Chat GPT and Artificial Intelligence help people overcome language...

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Equity rout: Sensex sinks below 73,000

Falling for the third straight day, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 96 points to close below the 73,000 mark on Tuesday amid global equity rout on tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,989.93, down by 96.01 points or 0.13 per cent, as 18 of its components declined and 12 settled with gains. During the day, it dropped 452.4 points or 0.62 per cent to a low of 72,633.54 but recovered some of the losses in the second half. Extending the...

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Gavaskar backs Rohit Sharma

Backing India captain Rohit Sharma, who was subjected to fat-shaming, cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday said that slim guys are for modelling and in cricket, mental strength is what matters, not physical size. Addressing the unnecessary criticisms directed at India skipper in the middle of Champions Trophy by a politician, Gavaskar reminded how Mumbai's big-hitting Sarfaraz Khan also faced body shaming, but it didn't affect his performance at all. "I have always said, if you want only slim...."

-SPORTS

Singer Kalpana found unconscious, hospitalised

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Singer Kalpana Raghavendar was reportedly found unconscious in her house in Nizampet. She is undergoing treatment at a corporate hospital in Hyderabad. The reason for her illness is not known. Kalpana, a resident of Vertex Privilege Gated Community in Nizampet, had not opened the gates of her house for two days, raising suspicion among security personnel. The guard informed the residents' association which tried to contact her on the phone but received no response. The association contacted Kalpana's husband who also tried calling her but failed to get through. Subsequently, they called the police.

NDA candidates win two key MLC seats

Alliance faces setback in Teachers' segment of North AP with PDF clinching the seat



- PDF candidate Gade Srinivasulu Naidu wins the North Coastal Andhra Pradesh teachers' constituency.
- TDP leader Alapati Rajendra Prasad secured a majority of 82,320 votes in Krishna-Guntur.
- Perabathula Rajasekhara won the West-East Godavari seat with a margin of 77,461 votes.
- Gade Srinivasulu Naidu defeated NDA-supported sitting MLC Raghu Varma in North Coastal Andhra.
- Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu terms victories as a morale booster for the party.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant political development, two NDA-backed candidates emerged victorious in the Legislative Council elections from the graduates' constituencies of Krishna-Guntur and West-East Godavari districts. However, the alliance faced a setback in the teachers' constituency of North Coastal Andhra Pradesh, where the Progressive Democratic Front (PDF) candidate clinched the seat. The vote counting process concluded on Tuesday.

TDP senior leader and former MLA Alapati Rajendra Prasad registered a decisive win in the Krishna-Guntur Graduates' constituency with a massive majority of 82,320 votes. He secured 1,45,057 votes, while his closest competitor, Lakshmana Rao, managed to secure 62,737 votes. Of the total 3,47,116 eligible voters in this constituency, 2,41,500 participated in the polling held on February 27, with over 25,000 votes being declared invalid. In the West-East Godavari

Graduates' constituency, NDA-backed Perabathula Rajasekhara emerged victorious, securing 1,24,702 votes. His nearest rival, DV Raghavulu, garnered 47,241 votes, giving Rajasekhara a comfortable victory margin of 77,461 votes. However, the NDA faced a setback in the Visakhapatnam-Vizianagaram-Srikakulam Teachers' constituency, where PRTU candidate Gade Srinivasulu Naidu defeated NDA-supported sitting MLC Raghu Varma, Naidu, contesting on behalf of the PDF,

secured a decisive win, shifting the political dynamics in the teachers' constituency. Chief Minister and TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu hailed the victories of the NDA-backed candidates, describing them as a morale booster for the party. Addressing a meeting of party workers at the TDP state office in Mangalagiri, he expressed confidence that the election results would serve as 'Sanjeevani' to reinvigorate the efforts to rebuild the state.

'A crucial victory for State reconstruction'

Naidu vows to bring Godavari water to Bankacharla

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu asserted that the victory of coalition candidates in the Graduates' MLC elections was crucial for the state's reconstruction. He was addressing a gathering at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) central office in Mangalagiri, where a victory celebration was held for Alapati Rajendra Prasad and Perabathula Rajasekhara. Naidu highlighted that investments worth Rs 6.5 lakh crore had been secured for the state, promising nearly five lakh job opportunities. He emphasised that unity among the three coalition parties was essential for Andhra Pradesh's future. "We have come together solely for the state's

reconstruction—there are no personal interests involved. This unity must be permanent and rooted in mutual respect," he said. Taking a swipe at the previous administration, Naidu criticised the proposal for three capitals, asserting that what was once deemed impossible—such as the Visakhapatnam steel plant—had now been achieved. He added that the Visakhapatnam railway zone had been completed, and plans were in place to establish NTPC and Genco plants with an investment of Rs 1.9 lakh crore. Reaffirming his commitment to the Telugu community, Naidu stated, "Both regions are equal to me, like two eyes. We have pledged to bring Godavari water from Polavaram Banakacharla."



'Rice cards' to replace ration cards: Manohar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is set to replace traditional ration cards with 'rice cards', as many perceive ration cards as certificates rather than eligibility-based benefits, said Minister for Civil Supplies Nadeendra Manohar. He clarified that the shift aims to reinforce that ration cards are issued strictly based on eligibility criteria. Speaking during Question Hour in the AP Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, Manohar addressed queries from BJP MLA P Vishnu Kumar Raju and TDP MLA G Buchaiah Chowdary regarding white ration cards. He explained that ration card services are temporarily halted due to ongoing e-KYC management. The government has

submitted income tax payee details to the Centre for e-KYC verification, ensuring fair distribution. Andhra Pradesh currently has 19.4 million ration cards, benefiting around 42.6 million people. Manohar also stated that individuals owning taxis, apart from private vehicles, remain eligible for ration cards. He assured that those needing name removals or modifications can approach the Joint Collector in their district at any time. The minister announced that the government is preparing to issue new ration cards with QR codes, resembling credit cards. He added that an online portal for updating family member details will be launched soon. While the rollout was originally planned for February, it has been delayed for unspecified reasons.

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Narayana: 'Swachh Andhra' key to Vision 2047 goals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is advancing its 'Swachh Andhra' initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission, aiming for a zero-waste environment by 2047, said Minister P Narayana. He announced while attending the 12th Asia-Pacific Regional 3R Circular Economy Forum in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The three-day international forum focuses on integrated waste management, environmental protection, and climate restoration. On the first day, Andhra Pradesh's Municipal Department and Swachh Andhra Corporation officials



Minister Narayana highlighted that Swachh Andhra plays a crucial role in the State's 'Swarna Andhra 2047' vision document, released by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. The government is taking a structured approach to waste management, pollution control, and environmental sustainability, including waste-to-energy projects, bio-CNG plants, and liquid waste management facilities.

reached an agreement with Union Urban Development Minister Manohar Lal to collaborate on waste management initiatives. Union

Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav and representatives from various countries also participated. Minister Narayana highlighted that

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AP showcases tourism potential at ITB Berlin 2025

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/BERLIN

Andhra Pradesh is making a strong push to establish itself as a global tourism hub, with Minister for Tourism, Culture, and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh leading the charge at ITB Berlin 2025, one of the world's largest tourism trade fairs. Upon his arrival in Berlin on Tuesday, Minister Durgesh received a warm welcome from NRIs, Jana Sena supporters, and followers at the airport. He was accompanied by Amrapali Kata, Managing Director of Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), as he joined the inaugural event of ITB Berlin 2025, held at



the Berlin Expo, Center City, from March 4 to 6. During the event, he also met with Indian Ambassador to Germany, Ajit Gupta, and later extended a warm reception to Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner.

Expressing his enthusiasm, Minister Durgesh stated that the state government is committed to positioning Andhra Pradesh as a premier tourism destination, leveraging its rich cultural heritage.

AP GST collections robust in February

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh recorded a 3.79% increase in gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in February 2025, compared to the same month last year, signalling steady economic growth. In contrast, neighbouring Telangana reported a modest 1% growth. Net GST collections in the state surged by 11.82% year-over-year, reflecting improved tax compliance and an expanding tax base. Cumulatively, net revenue collections for the financial year rose by 4.76%, underscoring Andhra Pradesh's strong fiscal position. Continued on Page 2

'Focus on kindness towards animals'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday lauded the unique wildlife conservation, rescue and rehabilitation initiative 'Vantara', which he visited this week, and urged people to focus on kindness towards animals. Modi on Sunday visited Vantara, the animal rescue, conservation and rehabilitation centre in Gujarat's Jamnagar district. Spread over 3,000 acres, Vantara is located at Reliance Industries' Jamnagar refinery complex. It is a rescue centre dedicated to the welfare of captive elephants and wildlife, providing sanctuary, rehabilitation and medical care to animals rescued from abuse and exploitation. Modi said in a post on X, "Inaugurated Vantara, a unique wildlife conservation, rescue and rehabilitation initiative, which provides a safe haven for animals while promoting ecological sustainability

PM Modi hails 'Vantara'



and wildlife welfare. I commend Anant Ambani and his entire team for this very compassionate effort." "An effort like Vantara is truly commendable, a vibrant example of



our centuries-old ethos of protecting those we share our planet with," he said, sharing pictures from his visit. At Vantara, Modi said he saw an elephant which was the victim of an acid attack. "The elephant was being treated with utmost care. There were other elephants, too, which were blinded and that, too, ironically by their mahout.

India defeats Aussies, enters CT final

PNS ■ DUBAI

Virat Kohli did not finish the chase for once but his measured 84-run knock steered India into their fifth Champions Trophy final with a clinical four-wicket win over an under-strength and profligate Australia in the first last-four clash here on Tuesday. The Indian triumph ensures that the final of the eight-team competition will now be held here instead of Lahore, the original host of the marquee clash, as Rohit Sharma's men will not travel there owing to security concerns. Player of the match Kohli (84, 98 balls, 5x4) was the fulcrum of Indian batting as they scaled down 265 in 48.1 overs after Steve Smith (73) and Alex Carey (61) led the Aussies to 264. Now, India will await the winner of the second semifinal between the South Africa and New Zealand at



Lahore on Wednesday. Kohli had wonderful support from Shreyas Iyer (45) with whom he realised 91 runs for the third wicket, and steadied the ship after the early departures of skipper Rohit Sharma (28) and Shubman Gill (9). Australia were weakened by the absence of some of their premier stars, but India had not beaten them in the knockouts of an ICC tournament since the quarterfinal of the 2011 World Cup.

TDP's entry into Telangana politics worrying KCR

The TDP's re-entry into Telangana politics after a brief period, probably to stop the BRS from coming to power a third time, needs to be discussed in detail. After keeping away from contesting the TG Assembly elections in 2023, which enabled the Congress to grab power, the TDP is now planning its future moves in TG. This development is worrying the BRS as it can polarise votes in favour of the main players.



Congress Party headed by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in AP. Although the TDP is happy with AP, it wants to protect its identity in TG as it was there the TDP took birth 43 years ago under the leadership of NT Rama Rao. Despite being defeated by the TDP in his home turf Chandragiri in Chittoor district, Congress legislator Chandrababu left the Congress and joined the TDP headed by his father-in-law NTR. Very soon he became the TDP General Secretary and gained NTR's confidence. When NTR was dethroned in an internal coup by his finance minister Nandendra Bhaskar Rao in August 1984, Chandrababu played the key role in preventing the TDP's MLAs from being poached by rivals. The coup was carried out with the support of the Congress headed by Indira Gandhi. NTR became the greatest adver-

As everyone knows the NDA comprising the BJP, the TDP and the Jana Sena Party (JSP) headed by film star Pawan Kalyan fought jointly against the YSR Congress Party headed by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in AP



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sary of the Congress as he was responsible for the first defeat of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh. NTR's toppling united the entire opposition in the country against Indira Gandhi. After a month NTR was reinstated on September 16, 1984. Chandrababu had a good image in NTR's mind, particularly after the parading of MLAs in front of the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in New Delhi. Chandrababu gained more power and it made him engineer another coup with the support of NTR's family.

This was the reason for the success of Chandrababu's second coup carried out in 1995 after a gap of 11 years.

The TDP is going to make its presence felt in Telangana which it considers as its 'motherland'. NTR launched a party for all Telugus irrespective of caste and creed. Despite its strong roots in a major caste, the TDP was considered a political party of all Telugu groups under NTR's leadership.

Another power centre has emerged with the TDP's

going to be declared backwards after the enumeration of Backward Classes (BCs) by the TG government? How many seats will go to the BCs as their population is higher than those of the ruling castes?

The BRS relies on Telanganites and specialises in inciting anti-Andhra sentiment. Its leadership has asked TG people to reject Chandrababu as he was trying to rule Telangana indirectly by aligning with the Congress in the 2018 Assembly polls. The results came out as per the expectations of KCR after his focused campaign against CBN. With the sole objective of toppling the BRS government, Chandrababu decided not to contest the 2023 Assembly elections paving the way for the easy transfer of TDP votes to the Congress.

In the first election held after the 2014 bifurcation, the TDP won 15 seats out of 119 seats in the TG Assembly. This was because non-locals living in

and around Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy district backed the TDP. The TDP got only two seats in rural Telangana. But the BRS admin headed by KCR made TDP legislators join the BRS. The same thing was repeated in 2018 also. Chandrababu couldn't concentrate on TDP affairs in Telangana as he had to look after his party in residual AP.

Now AP politics is in CBN's control as the NDA posted an impressive victory winning 164 seats out of 175. Chandrababu is planning to replicate the same NDA experiment in Telangana as the BJP is also emerging as a strong party in TG. If the experiment is successful in TG, it will be an inspiration to continue the same combination in the next AP elections too.

KCR is worried over the possible replication of the NDA experiment in TG. With his image dented after the filing of cases against his son and daughter, KCR is struggling

politically. He is unable to attend Assembly sessions despite the completion of a year after his election as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) as he is facing medical problems.

If the TDP enters TG politics through the NDA then equations may change for KCR. If it becomes reality then TDP sympathisers across TG might rally behind NDA. The situation can become embarrassing for the BRS in the event of a direct fight between the Congress and the NDA.

KCR seems to be thinking of ways to stop the TDP from entering TG. Andhra people living in Telangana have a soft corner for the TDP. So far the BRS managed to gain the sympathy of non-locals by offering them a few seats in the Assembly and local bodies.

KCR tried out this strategy in the NDA experiment in TG. With his image dented after the filing of cases against his son and daughter, KCR is struggling

TDP celebrates victory in Graduate MLC polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh asserted that whether through EVMs or ballots, victory belongs to the TDP-led alliance. Speaking at a celebration at the TDP central office following the party's sweeping success in the Graduate MLC elections, Lokesh credited the win to the party's commitment to welfare and development.



Lokesh thanked graduates for their support and called the victory historic, noting that the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) lacked the courage to field candidates effectively. He high-

lighted the TDP's strategic early announcement of candidates as a game-changer in the elections. The results saw Alapathi Rajendra Prasad winning the Krishna-Guntur Graduate MLC seat by 82,000 votes, while Rajasekhara secured the East-West Godavari Graduate MLC seat with a 77,500-vote majority. Lokesh took a swipe at the opposition, stating that the Pulivendula MLA has yet

to recover from public backlash.

Praising Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Lokesh said the government has introduced key welfare initiatives in just nine months, including pensions and financial assistance for various groups. On job creation, he reiterated the party's promise to provide 2 million jobs and announced plans for mega recruitment notifications and major investments across sectors.

He concluded by thanking party workers and supporters for their dedication and warned that lawbreakers will not be spared.

Liquor distribution made transparent: Minister Kollu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Excise and Mines Minister Kollu Ravindra highlighted the administrative reforms undertaken by the coalition government to bring transparency to the liquor distribution system. Since the coalition assumed power, 3,396 liquor shops have been allocated, generating Rs 1,797 crore in revenue from application fees. Additionally, 350 shops have been reserved for workers involved in traditional liquor preparations, and a Rs 103 crore subsidy on licence fees has been provided.

Speaking in the AP Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, Minister Ravindra criticised the previous government for allegedly favouring select individuals in granting liquor licences. He claimed that seven new companies were established during the previous tenure, receiving over 63% of total orders.

Speaker Ayyanna calls for regular Financial Committee meetings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Legislative Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu has emphasised the need for financial committees to convene at least twice a month to ensure effective legislative oversight. Chairing the first meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, Estimates Committee, and Public Undertakings Committee at the Assembly on Tuesday, he highlighted the delays in their formation and called for active participation from members.

Recalling past Assembly sessions, Ayyanna Patrudu noted that during NTR's tenure, budget discussions extended up to 60 days, even running until midnight, whereas current sessions last just 15 days.

He mentioned a recent resolution passed at an Assembly Speakers' meeting in Delhi, advocating for a minimum of 60 days of Assembly sessions annually, which was unani-



mously accepted by state speakers.

Deputy Speaker K. Raghurama Krishnaraju underscored the importance of these committees, urging members to treat them as mini-assemblies and actively participate in discussions. He suggested conducting field visits to enhance their effectiveness and bring credibility to their work.

Public Accounts Committee Chairman Bura Ramajananeyulu expressed gratitude for his appointment and pledged transparency and impartiality in the committee's operations. Estimates

Committee Chairman Jageshwar Rao and Public Undertakings Committee Chairman Koon Ravi Kumar also assured commitment to their responsibilities, with Ravi Kumar emphasising that his committee would monitor adherence to government regulations based on the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) recommendations.

The meeting was attended by Assembly Secretary General Prasanna Kumar Suryadevara, Deputy Accountant General T. Bhaskar, and members of the three financial committees, along with senior officials.

'A crucial... Lokesh denies coercion in V-C resignations; Botsa seeks probe

Continued from Page 1

Some are politicising our efforts to divert surplus water to drought-hit areas.

Telangana need not suffer due to water transfers to Andhra Pradesh."

He also called for linking the Ganga and Kaveri rivers for long-term water security.

Naidu praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for driving the country forward with development, welfare, and good governance.

"My goal is to elevate the Telugu community," he said, recalling how former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's reforms had transformed the nation.

TDP state president Palla Srinivas, BJP state president and MP D. Purandeswari, along with several ministers and coalition leaders, attended the event.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The controversy over the resignation of university Vice-Chancellors (VCs) intensified in the Legislative Council, with Education Minister Nara Lokesh refuting the YSR Congress Party's (YSRCP) allegations of coercion, while opposition leader Botsa Satyanarayana insisted on a judicial probe.

Responding to YSRCP's claims that 15 VCs were forced to step down, Lokesh asserted that the coalition government conducted the appointments transparently and challenged the opposition to provide evidence of intimidation. He pointed out that among the 17 resignations, 10 were submitted without citing reasons, while two mentioned allowing the government a free hand. The remaining five resigned following oral instructions but did not claim coercion. Lokesh emphasised that similar resignations occurred when the YSRCP assumed power, adding that he possessed evidence to support his assertions.

He dismissed allegations that the government was backtracking on an investigation after evidence surfaced in the Council. Lokesh argued that resignation letters con-



tained no references to threats and accused the YSRCP of appointing unqualified individuals during its tenure. He urged for a broader discussion on past irregularities, stating, "Let's discuss how the education department was misused as an ATM."

However, Botsa Satyanarayana countered that the government had backed down from its challenge after being confronted with facts. Speaking to the media outside the Assembly, he termed the forced resignations unprecedented in independent India and questioned the authority of the Higher Education Council's Chairman and Secretary to demand resignations of Governor-appointed VCs. Botsa alleged that when faced with evidence, the government resorted to intimidation and abusive language instead

of answering the opposition's concerns.

Beyond the VC issue, Botsa also criticised the coalition government on multiple fronts. He accused it of reducing the Polavaram project's height from 45.72 metres to 41.15 metres, which he claimed would affect power generation and water supply. He blamed CM Chandrababu Naidu for prioritising contractors over public interest and evading questions in the Council.

Additionally, Botsa accused the government of neglecting handloom weavers, comparing its inaction to YSRCP's Rs 960 crore aid under 'YS Nethanna Nestham' and Rs 1,396 crore for pensions. He alleged the coalition was misleading the public with unfulfilled promises.

On power sector issues, he demanded that the government absorb the Rs 15,000 crore True-Up charges and refuted claims that YSRCP's borrowings were excessive, stating they were only a third of the previous TDP government's debt. Regarding the MLC elections, he dismissed allegations of YSRCP fielding candidates, instead accusing the coalition of electoral malpractice and misuse of power.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh is poised to become a global investment hub, with a renewed focus on maritime, logistics, and infrastructure development, said Minister for Roads, Buildings, Investments, and Infrastructure, BC Janardhan Reddy. Speaking at a conference on Maritime, Logistics & Infrastructure Development in Vijayawada on Tuesday, he underscored the state's efforts to enhance its logistics and port capabilities.

Highlighting the strategic importance of the logistics sector, the minister pointed out that reducing logistics costs to single digits in GDP by 2030 is a key objective of the 2022

AP aims to be global investment hub: R & B Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



National Logistics Policy. With a coastline of 1,053 kilometres, Andhra Pradesh is leveraging its maritime potential to establish itself as India's leading maritime gateway. He announced that under Chief

Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's leadership, the state has introduced a Maritime Policy for 2024-29 to drive this transformation.

Minister Reddy expressed confidence that one of the

world's top 20 ports could soon be located in Andhra Pradesh. The 6th LEADS (Logistics Ease Across Different States) Index for 2024 has already recognized the state as a 'Fast Mover' in the logistics sector, further reinforcing its growth trajectory.

Stressing the need for collaboration between the government, industries, and investors, he urged stakeholders to tap into the vast opportunities in logistics and maritime infrastructure. He also outlined plans to develop Greenfield and Brownfield ports and enhance coastal tourism, positioning Andhra Pradesh as a prime destination for infrastructure investments in the coming years.

Special Protection Wing for women and children on the anvil

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is set to establish a Special Protection Wing dedicated to ensuring the safety of women and children, Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha announced on Tuesday. The unit, to be led by an IPS officer of IG rank, will function under the 'EAGLE' initiative, reinforcing the government's commitment to women's security irrespective of political affiliations.

Responding to YSR Congress MLC Varudu Kalyani's remarks on the previous government's Disha App, Minister Anitha dismissed the initiative as mere publicity. She questioned its effectiveness, asking whether any complaints had been registered under the Disha Act and why it had not been properly implemented over the past five years.

Minister Subhash's efforts behind Graduates' MLC victory

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The success of the coalition candidates in the Graduates' MLC elections is largely attributed to the efforts of Labour Minister Subhash Vasamshetti. Parabattula Rajasekhara secured a significant victory as the Graduates' MLC from East-West Godavari districts, while Alapati Raja also registered a strong win in the Guntur-Krishna constituency.

The coalition government took these elections seriously, appointing state-level leaders as in-charges for each mandal to strengthen the campaign. Minister Subhash Vasamshetti played a crucial role, personally visiting his own district as well as the constituencies where he was in charge. He actively engaged with graduates through meetings and phone calls, implementing necessary strategies to ensure



victory. Minister Subhash stated that he considered winning these two MLC seats a key responsibility.

He consistently coordinated with MLAs, providing strategic guidance. Expressing satisfaction over the larger-than-expected victories, he remarked that the results reflected strong graduate support for the coalition government.

He further assured that the

coalition government would take appropriate steps to address the concerns of graduates and unemployed youth across the state. Minister Nara Lokesh also reaffirmed in the Legislative Council that the DSC notification would be released in March, underscoring the government's commitment to public welfare and state development under Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's leadership.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha
Tithi: Shashthi: Mar 04 03:16 PM to Mar 05 12:51 PM
Saptami: Mar 05 12:51 PM to Mar 06 10:51 AM
Nakshatram: Kritika: Mar 05 02:37 AM to Mar 06 01:08 AM
Rohini: Mar 06 01:08 AM to Mar 07 12:05 AM
Rahukalam: 12:27 PM to 1:55 PM
Yamagandam: 8:03 AM to 9:31 AM
Varjyam: 04:26 PM to 05:58 PM
Gulika: 10:59 AM to 12:27 PM
Amritakalam: 10:53 PM to 12:23 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL
VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 37°C
Humidity: 58%
Sunrise: 6:23 AM
Sunset: 6:15 PM
Updated: March 4, 2025 5:00 PM

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Allot space for Srivari temple in all State capitals: TTD Chairman

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Trust Board Chairman Sri BR Naidu has requested the chief ministers of various States through a letter upon the instructions of AP CM N Chandrababu Naidu that all the State capitals of the country should allocate some free space towards the construction of Srivari temple.

The letter stated that temples are not just spiritual centres, but also contribute to the development of society. Temple tourism plays a crucial role in the development of the country. Everyone is taking steps towards spirituality. Every State capital should have a Venkateswara Swamy temple. There should be Srivari temples in all the major parts of the country as well. Crores of devotees donate to the temples.

We are spending that money on other service programmes including education and medicine. Temples play a major role in preserving our culture and heritage, it said.

Improve city's animal birth control drive: VMC chief

Visits ABC operation centre and bio-methanisation plant

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has mandated that officials enhance the city's Animal Birth Control (ABC) operations. He underscored the importance of upgrading surgical equipment and implementing necessary measures to streamline the ABC processes.

On Tuesday, Commissioner Dhyanchandra paid a visit to the ABC operation centre and the bio-methanisation plant situated at the garbage transfer station in Ajith Singh Nagar. He provided specific guidance to the officials regarding the ABC initiatives.

At the bio-methanisation plant, Dhyanchandra sought information about the power generation process utilising vegetable waste. Prior to this, he inspected the Anna Canteen in Ajith Singh Nagar and engaged with the public to assess the quality of the food. He instructed officials to uphold hygiene standards across all Anna Canteens in the city.



Additionally, he requested that officials take measures to establish a shelter for the public's convenience at the Anna Canteen. He emphasised the importance of conducting unannounced inspections to ensure food quality.

The Commissioner oversaw de-silting operations at the Dabakotlu Centre in Ajith Singh Nagar and provided specific instructions to the de-silting crew. He directed officials and staff to eliminate any encroachments that may be obstructing the drainage system.

Accompanying him were VMC Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Suresh, Superintendent Engineer (Projects) P Satyakumari, Executive Engineer Srinivas Reddy, Assistant Medical and Health Officer Dr Babu Srinivas, Vehicle Depot in charge EE Yesupadam, and Zonal Commissioner Prabhudas, among others.

NTR DC urges public to take part in nature farming initiative

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G. Lakshminsha has urged the public to actively participate in the Nature Farming initiative, emphasising its significance for human survival. He noted that NTR district leads the state in the adoption of this sustainable agricultural approach.

A workshop on the Kharif action plan for Nature Farming was conducted at the Nature Farming Project Office within the Rythu Sadhikara Samstha premises in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Resource persons, unit in-charges, model maker trainers, and other stakeholders took part in the session, where officials administered an oath of commitment to Nature Farming.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Lakshminsha highlighted the need to dispel misconceptions about Nature Farming among farmers. He urged officials to launch district-wide awareness campaigns and educate Self-Help Group (SHG) members through rallies to promote the benefits of this farming practice.

"I hold a Doctorate in Organic Farming. The excessive use of chemical fertilisers and



pesticides is causing serious harm to human health. Sustainable agricultural products can be cultivated using organic fertilisers, biological catalysts, and other natural solutions," he stated.

Expressing confidence that natural farming would benefit farmers, he directed officials to expand Ayacut areas and conduct awareness programmes. He reiterated his vision for NTR district to set an example in Nature Farming implementation. He also referred to the Swarnandhra 2047 vision document, which prioritises Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF).

The workshop also featured Kalaka Mysamma, a progres-

sive woman farmer from Battinapadu in Kanchikacherla mandal, who has been practising Nature Farming on two acres since 2018. She shared her experience of earning Rs 1.30 lakh annually by cultivating intercrops along with cotton. Her success has enabled her son to pursue higher education at IIM, while her daughters have completed degrees in Aerospace Engineering and Nursing.

The event was attended by NTR District Agriculture Officer and Nature Farming Project Manager DMF Vijaya Kumari, along with trainers D. Ravi Kumar, A. Vani, Ch. Anjireddy, P. Rajasri, V. Sindhu, and others.

Durga temple earns Rs 4.07 cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada has earned a hundi income of Rs.4,07,39,829 in 26 days. The average income per day was Rs.15.66 lakh. In addition to the hundi collection, around 700 grams of gold ornaments and 6,550 grams of silver jewellery were offered by the devotees.

The temple authorities conducted the hundi counting on the sixth floor of the Sri Mallikarjuna Maha mandapam on Tuesday. Temple Executive Officer K Ramachandra Mohan, Deputy EO M Ratna Raju and other officials supervised the counting process.



Take care of eyes during exam prep

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As the academic year comes to an end, lakhs of students are preparing to give their final examinations. This is a period of anxiety and stress coupled with long hours of study. In the midst of all the exam preparation, one crucial aspect is often overlooked: eye health, which is crucial to the outcome of the examinations, said Dr Krishna Priya, LVPEI, Vijayawada campus.

She says that students experience eye fatigue as a result of the ever-increasing demand for digital learning and screen time, coupled with prolonged study sessions. The symptoms such as dry eyes, headaches, blurred vision, and migraines are a common concern. They result in difficulty among students to study and increase stress levels for them and their parents. It is important for everyone involved students, parents, teachers, and doctors to work together to prioritise eye health among students, in the lead up to the examinations.

To combat eye strain, get a comprehensive eye examination, follow the 20-20-20 rule, frequent blinking, maintain correct posture, limit digital gadget use, avoid direct exposure to air conditioning, prioritise physical activity, sleep and stay hydrated.

Shockwaves in North Andhra as Pakalapati loses Teacher MLC poll

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The defeat of Pakalapati Raghuvarma in the teacher MLC elections across North Andhra has sent shockwaves through political circles, marking a setback for the ruling coalition. Analysts see this loss, just nine months into the government's tenure, as an indication of growing dissatisfaction among government employees. However, TDP and Jana Sena leaders argue that the outcome stemmed from strong voter opposition rather than campaign missteps.

The BJP, which remained largely inactive after Pakalapati's nomination on February 7, is reportedly blaming the TDP and Jana Sena for the loss. Meanwhile, independent candidate Gade Srinivasulu Naidu secured victory through second-preference votes, obtaining 9,237 votes out of 20,135, surpassing Pakalapati by 710 votes. This result has intensified scrutiny over the alliance's shortcomings.

Senior political analyst Dr. Ramesh Choudhury remarked that the election exposed cracks within the TDP-Jana Sena-BJP coalition, with the BJP's detachment signalling internal tensions.



Setback for the ruling coalition amid growing employee dissatisfaction; BJP-TDP-Jana Sena alliance faces internal struggles

failed to secure substantial BJP support, and analysts suggest this disengagement may have been a crucial factor in Pakalapati's loss. Jana Sena, despite urging voters to back the coalition candidate, struggled to sway the electorate.

Political strategist Ashwin Prasad pointed out that winning elections in North Andhra requires addressing government employees' concerns, which the TDP-Jana Sena alliance failed to do. A closer look at the results shows that nearly 60% of government employees and teachers abstained from voting for

Pakalapati. This is in stark contrast to the previous MLC elections, where TDP's Vepada Chiranjeevi Rao secured a decisive win against the YSRCP government due to strong anti-government sentiment.

Dr. Choudhury questioned whether this loss should be viewed as a reflection of public dissatisfaction with the alliance, urging a thorough introspection before future elections. Additionally, the invalidation of 656 votes has raised debate—whether it was a protest move or voter errors. Given teachers' reputation as informed voters, such a high number of invalid votes is unusual. Visakhapatnam Collector and Returning Officer Harindhara Prasad clarified that the 92.4% voter turnout was commendable, and the invalid votes resulted from errors like improper marking and multiple selections.

Following this setback, the ruling coalition is reevaluating its strategy. While PRDU supporters celebrate Gade Srinivasulu Naidu's victory, the TDP-Jana Sena-BJP alliance now faces the challenge of resolving internal conflicts and regaining voter trust ahead of future elections.

Veterinary students protest over accreditation, stipend

327 students demand VCI recognition and stipend hike

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

A month-long student demonstration at the Veterinary Science College in Garividi, affiliated to Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University (SVVU), Tirupati, has exposed severe shortcomings in infrastructure, staffing, and accreditation, jeopardising the futures of hundreds of aspiring veterinarians. For the past month, 327 students from all academic years have staged continuous protests at the college gates, enduring scorching heat, to demand immediate resolution of their grievances.

The core of the students' agitation is the absence of Veterinary Council of India (VCI) accreditation for the third and fourth-year programmes. This accreditation is essential for graduating students to obtain professional registration, a prerequisite for practicing veterinary medicine.

"We enrolled with high hopes, but the lack of VCI accreditation has severely hampered our career prospects," said Lokesh Venkata Sai, a senior student. "Without registration, we are barred from pursuing employment or further studies." Adding to their concerns, students are demanding a substantial increase in their monthly stipend, which has remained at Rs. 7,000 for 13 years. They are advocating for a raise to Rs. 20,000, aligning with the stipends received by medical



students. Despite being established in 2016 with Rs 82 crore in NABARD funding, the college faces significant infrastructure deficiencies. Students allege that the facility remains incomplete and inadequately equipped, lacking essential laboratory equipment and teaching resources. A critical point of contention is the severe faculty shortage. With only 42 instructors employed, far below the VCI-mandated 86, the college has repeatedly failed to secure accreditation.

Students attribute the current crisis to administrative oversights, particularly during the previous YSRCP administration. While the college was initially approved and infrastructure development commenced under the TDP government in 2016, students allege the YSRCP prematurely inaugurated the college in 2021 without completing essential facilities.

Furthermore, a 2016 government order for the appointment of 84 permanent faculty members was reportedly ignored, and allegations persist that NABARD funds were

diverted, leaving a Rs. 14-crore debt to contractors. Consequently, the main college building remains unfinished, forcing students to attend classes in the veterinary clinical complex, designed for treatment, not academic instruction.

Students have responded by boycotting classes and staging sit-in protests, demanding immediate faculty appointments, completion of infrastructure, and expedited efforts to secure VCI accreditation. University officials have pledged to complete pending construction, laboratory setup, road improvements, and electrification in the coming months. However, students report minimal progress. Attempts to alleviate the faculty shortage through transfers from other colleges have also proven largely ineffective.

"VCI regulations stipulate that at least 86 faculty members are required to manage all 17 departments. We currently have only half that number. We implore the authorities to take swift action to prevent further academic setbacks," stated a protesting student.

Phishing scam targets drivers with fake traffic tickets

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A sophisticated cyber fraud operation targeting unsuspecting drivers through phishing links disguised as official traffic violation notices has come to light, prompting urgent warnings from the Cybercrime Police in Visakhapatnam. The fraudulent scheme has resulted in significant financial losses for multiple victims, highlighting the growing threat of online scams.

Inspector K. Bhavani Prasad of the Vizag Cybercrime Police revealed that fraudsters are distributing deceptive links under the name "NextGen mParivahan.apk." These links are designed to mimic genuine government notifications related to traffic violations. Once individuals click on the link, they unknowingly install a malicious application, which grants

cybercriminals unauthorised access to their mobile devices. "After the APK file is installed, the perpetrators gain control over the victim's phone, allowing them to execute financial transactions without the victim's consent," explained Inspector Prasad. "Several victims have reported substantial monetary losses from their linked bank accounts, credit cards, and digital payment platforms like Amazon." Preliminary investigations estimate the total amount stolen through this method to be between Rs 7 to Rs 8 lakh. So far, five official complaints have been registered at the city's cybercrime

police station, with each victim reporting similar financial losses.



Authorities have raised concerns about criminals exploiting public trust in official communication channels. Inspector Prasad advised extreme caution when encountering unsolicited messages containing links or APK files. "Do not click on unknown links or download any APK files. These are highly dangerous and can result in serious financial repercussions," he warned.

The police are actively investigating the case and working to track down the perpetrators behind the scam. To prevent further incidents, authorities have issued crucial guidelines for citizens, urging them to stay vigilant against unsolicited messages, avoid clicking unknown links or downloading suspicious APK files, verify traffic violation notices through official government portals, regularly check bank and credit card statements for unauthorised transactions, and promptly report any suspected cyber fraud to the authorities.

"Our priority is to combat this menace and safeguard the public from such cybercriminals," Inspector Prasad stated. "By staying alert and following necessary precautions, we can collectively prevent further financial losses."

Vizag stadium ready to host IPL matches: ACA chief & MP Sivanath

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) President and MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has announced that the ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam is fully equipped to host two Indian Premier League (IPL) matches this month. Speaking at a Planning and Preparedness Meeting held at the stadium, he emphasised that hosting these matches would be a moment of pride for Visakhapatnam.

Following the meeting,

Sivanath inspected the recently completed modernisation works at the stadium. He, along with Visakhapatnam City Police Commissioner Shanka Batra Bhagi, took part in a brief game of cricket on the ground.

Expressing gratitude to the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for its cooperation, Sivanath thanked the GMR Group for selecting the Visakhapatnam stadium as the home ground for Delhi Capitals. He confirmed that the Delhi Capitals would play against the Lucknow Super

Giants on March 24 and Sunrisers Hyderabad on March 30.

Sivanath stated that significant efforts were made to convince the Delhi Capitals to play in Visakhapatnam, particularly addressing concerns regarding floodlights and other facilities. He noted that major upgrades were completed within two months to meet international standards.

With cricket's growing popularity, stadiums across the country are undergoing modernisation, he said, adding that



the ACA-VDCA Stadium has been upgraded to match top-tier venues. Enhancements include renovated dressing rooms, improved amenities, and a total of 250 new toilets. The stadium's lighting system was upgraded with LED floodlights, costing approximately Rs 9.5 crore, with total modernisation expenses amounting to Rs 40 crore. The ACA aims to recover these costs within the next two and a half years.

Sivanath assured that if the BCCI grants full international recognition to the stadium, it

would pave the way for more international matches in the future. On Tuesday, representatives from the BCCI, Delhi Capitals, Visakhapatnam District Collector Hareendher Prasad, and other officials held discussions to ensure smooth execution of the upcoming matches.

He also highlighted the support of the NDA government in stabilising the state's affairs and assured continued cooperation from the state government in developing sports infrastructure.

Select beneficiaries for SC, BC Corp loans: WG DC

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has instructed officials to identify beneficiaries for subsidized loans under the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Backward Classes (BC) Corporations.

During a meeting with Corporation Executive Directors, bankers, and department officials, the Collector reviewed the disbursement of loans through these corporations. She emphasised that constituency-wise beneficiary lists should be prepared and that all loans should be granted by March 31.

She stated that under the 'Unnati' scheme, aimed at SC women's empowerment, 120 units would be sanctioned without bank consent, at a cost of Rs 3.60 crore, enabling beneficiaries to purchase passenger auto rickshaws. Additionally, Rs 24.39 crore has been allocated for the purchase



The Collector said that the BC Corporation has sanctioned Rs 36.50 crore for setting up 1,901 units under the self-employment scheme for BC communities. She added that Rs 3.12 crore has been sanctioned for setting up 39 generic medical shops, with a 50% subsidy for each unit. Similarly, Rs 4.30 crore has been sanctioned for establishing 215 units under the self-employment scheme for EWS communities, with a 50% subsidy. She said Rs 2.28 crore has been approved for setting up 35 generic medical shops, with a 50% subsidy on each unit.

of 714 auto rickshaws under the SC General category. She mentioned that up to Rs 3 lakh per unit would be sanctioned for the purchase of goods transport vehicles, while a 60% subsidy would be provided for setting up sheep units under the Animal Husbandry Department. She added that a 50% subsidy would be given for the purchase of agricultural equipment.

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ting up 1,901 units under the self-employment scheme for BC communities. She added that Rs 3.12 crore has been sanctioned for setting up 39 generic medical shops, with a 50% subsidy for each unit. Similarly, Rs 4.30 crore has been sanctioned for establishing 215 units under the self-employment scheme for EWS communities, with a 50% subsidy. She said Rs 2.28 crore has been approved for setting up 35 generic medical shops, with a 50% subsidy on each unit.

She explained that Rs 23.31 crore has been sanctioned for setting up 694 units under 'Chandranna Soplanam' through the Kapu Corporation, and loans with a 50% subsidy would be provided for each unit. She also mentioned that Rs 25 crore has been sanctioned for setting up 10 small and medium-scale industries, which will be granted to groups of three to five members. Each unit will receive Rs 25 lakh, of which 40% will be subsidised.



International Women's Day to be held in Markapuram; CM to attend

PNS ■ GUNTUR

International Women's Day will be celebrated on a grand scale in Markapuram, Prakasam district, on March 8, with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu attending the event, announced Ministers V. Anitha, S. Savitha, and Gummadi Sandhya Rani.

The three ministers—Home Minister V. Anitha, BC Welfare Minister S. Savitha, and

Women and Child Welfare Minister Gummadi Sandhya Rani—held a review meeting at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Tuesday to discuss the arrangements for the programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister S. Savitha stated that as part of the celebrations, the government has decided to distribute sewing machines to one lakh women. She urged the public to ensure the success

of the International Women's Day event.

Home Minister V. Anitha directed officials to finalise beneficiaries for the government schemes, with the Chief Minister personally handing over the benefits during the event. She instructed officials to set up 15 stalls representing various departments at the venue.

She also announced that the 'Sakthi' app, developed for

women's safety, will be unveiled by the Chief Minister during the programme.

Minister Gummadi Sandhya Rani called for district-level celebrations of International Women's Day across the state.

The meeting was attended by BC Welfare Director Mallikharjun, along with officials from MEPMA, police, Women and Child Welfare, Tribal Welfare, and Social Welfare departments.



Min Mandipalli inaugurates women's sports competitions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Transport, Sports, and Youth Services Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy underscored the importance of sports and games in enhancing the mental and physical well-being of women employees, who balance professional and family responsibilities throughout the year. He stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, the government is committed to supporting talented athletes and promoting sports initiatives across the state.

In celebration of International Women's Day, Minister Ramprasad Reddy inaugurated the Women's Sports Competitions organised by the APNGGO (Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted and Gazetted Officers) Association Women's Wing at the Indira Gandhi Municipal

Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, he highlighted the state government's efforts to boost the sports sector, mentioning that the recently introduced New Sports Policy by Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has increased the sports quota from 2% to 3%. He encouraged women employees to set aside at least one week each year to engage in sports and assured the state government's full support for such initiatives.

The minister also emphasised that participation in sports empowers women both physically and mentally, helping them manage stress and maintain good health. He reaffirmed the coalition government's commitment to providing all necessary resources to state employees without complications and resolving their concerns effectively. He further assured that specific measures

would be implemented to enhance the safety of women employees.

Commending the APNGGO state leadership for organising these women-centric sports competitions, he noted the association's significant contribution in successfully conducting such events for over seventy-five years. Following the inauguration, he released balloons to mark the occasion.

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmi, APNGGO State President KV Shiva Reddy, General Secretary A Vidyasagar, Women Employees Association Chairperson V Nirmala Kumari, Women's Division Convener P Madhavi, AISGEF Women's Committee Convener M Rajalakshmi, State Publicity Secretary B Janaki, State Secretary B Tulasi Ratnam, and other officials were present.

Collector hands over victory certificate to Perabathula

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru District Collector K. Vetri Selvi on Tuesday handed over the winning certificate to Perabattula Rajasekharam, who was elected to the Legislative Council in the recent elections.

Rajasekharam, backed by the coalition parties, secured

victory by defeating PDF candidate Didla Veera Raghavulu with a margin of 77,461 votes. He polled 1,24,702 votes, while Raghavulu managed 47,241 votes. Independent candidate G.V. Sundar secured 16,183 votes, while a total of 2,18,997 votes were cast in the election. Notably, 19,789 votes were declared invalid in the

Graduates Constituency MLC election.

Election Returning Officer and District Collector K. Vetri Selvi presented the certificate of election to Rajasekharam and commended Additional SP N. Suryachandra Rao and DSP Shrawan Kumar for ensuring the elections were conducted peacefully.

16 passengers hurt as RTC bus overturns

Driver of vehicle said to be on the phone at the time of the incident



PNS ■ NANDYALA

Sixteen passengers were injured when an Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) express bus overturned near Kalavatala village in Kolimigundla mandal, Nandyala district, on Tuesday.

The bus, en route from Jammalamadugu to Tadipatri, veered off the road and flipped onto agricultural land.

Passengers allege the driver was using a mobile phone while driving and operating the bus at high speed. They stated that despite warnings, the driver continued driving recklessly, leading to the loss of control.

The driver and conductor were among the injured. All 16 injured passengers were transported to hospitals in Banaganapalli, Owk, and Kolimigundla for treatment.

Ramadan: Change in working hours of Urdu medium schools

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has officially announced a change in working hours for Urdu medium schools during the holy month of Ramadan, said NMD Farook, Minister for Justice and Minority Welfare, during a press conference held in Amaravati on Tuesday.

Minister Farook explained that the government has issued orders that revise school hours from 8 am to 1.30 pm, effective from March 3 until March 30. He further explained that this decision comes as a response to requests from teacher associations and various organisations across the State.

NMD Farook highlighted that the government had previously authorised Muslim employees working in various State departments to leave work one hour early during Ramadan, in order to facilitate their religious practices. He mentioned that this facility was announced at the end of last month, and the recent change in school hours aligns with these earlier directives.

Govt selling already mortgaged land, says BRS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BRS has strongly criticised the Congress Government's move to auction government lands worth Rs 30,000 crore, accusing Chief Minister Revanth Reddy of hypocrisy.

BRS MLA Harish Rao lashed out at the ruling party, alleging that the CM, who opposed land sales while in the opposition, is now leading the charge to auction prime government lands.

Harish also pointed to GO Ms. No. 54, issued on June 26, 2024, which revealed plans to sell land at Rs 75 crore per acre, amounting to Rs 30,000 crore.

"When I questioned this in the Assembly, they dismissed it as mere land transfers to TSIC. But as soon as the session ended, they mortgaged the same land for Rs 10,000 crore for loans. Now, before the

next session, they have moved to auction the same land," he alleged.

Harish pointed out that as TPCC chief, Revanth had declared government lands as Telangana's public assets, arguing that selling them would leave no space even for graveyards in future. "He shed crocodile tears then, but now, as CM, he is shamelessly putting these lands up for auction," he said.

The BRS leader accused the government of misleading the Assembly on the issue. He recalled that Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy had assured the House three months ago that government lands would not be sold.

"But tenders for appointing consultants to facilitate the auctions were issued on February 28 exposing their double standards," he said.

2 drown as boat capsizes in River Godavari; 10 rescued

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Two men drowned in the Godavari River near Rajahmundry after their boat capsized early on Tuesday morning. The incident occurred between the seventh and eighth pillars of the railway bridge.

Police reported that 12 people from Simhachal Nagar, Kotilingalpet, and Ganesh Nagar of Rajahmundry had travelled by boat to an island in the river for a late-night party.

The group reportedly held a "cocktail party" on the island, continuing until midnight.

During their return journey, water began to flood the boat rapidly. Panic ensued, and the passengers shifted to one side, causing the boat to tilt and ultimately capsize.

Gada Raju of Bhavanipuram and 54-year-old Chevala Annavaram of Kotilingalpet drowned. Ten others were rescued by local fishermen. The bodies were recovered and shifted to the Government

General Hospital (GGH) for post-mortem examination.

Local residents expressed concerns about the islands in the Godavari being used for illegal activities, including "cocktail parties," gambling, and cockfights. They claim the islands' inaccessibility by land vehicles makes them difficult for police to patrol.

Joint Collector China Ramudu, along with DSPs Ramesh Babu and Srikanth, arrived at the scene to oversee the body recovery operation.



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Resurvey of lands to ensure accuracy and transparency: Anagani

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Revenue Anagani Sathya Prasad has emphasised that the resurvey initiative undertaken by the coalition government aims to minimise errors and ensure transparency. The initiative, which began with 690 pilot villages, is expected to cover all villages within three years. A cabinet subcommittee has been formed to address issues related to lands listed under Section 22-A (1) (c), with recommendations expected soon.

Responding to queries from TDP members Pratipati Pulla Rao, Koonna Ravi Kumar, Bonala Vijayachandra, and Raja Gopal in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, Minister Prasad criticised the previous government's land resurvey process. He pointed out that while surveys were conducted in 6,688 villages, landowners were not given proper notice, and the objection period was reduced from 60 days to just 21 days, which was against their interests.

Addressing the challenges posed by JLPs, where multiple landowners share a single parcel, Minister Prasad announced the introduction of online subdivision services at village and ward secretariats. These services aim to ease the process of individual registration and title mutation.

To further assist landowners, he stated that from January 1, 2025, a six-month fee exemption will be available for those wishing to subdivide their properties. Since the launch of these services, 71,337 applications have been received, with 62,816 already processed.

Explaining the resurvey methodology, he said that villages are divided into blocks, with each block covering 200 to 250 acres. Each block is staffed with two surveyors, one Village Revenue Officer (VRO), and one Village Revenue Assistant (VRA). Additionally, a WhatsApp group will be created for each block to keep farmers informed and ensure seamless communication before surveys begin. Each day, surveys will cover only 20 acres, prioritising accuracy and thoroughness in operations.

Plea to set up 25-bed AYUSH Research Hospital in Nandigama

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A group of various voluntary organisations, including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, along with representatives from Hindu, Muslim, and Christian religious groups, has submitted a petition advocating for the establishment of a 25-bed AYUSH Research Hospital. This facility is proposed to be located on a 16-cent plot owned by the AYUSH Department on CM Road in Nandigama in NTR district.

The petition was presented to Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath at the MP's office in Vijayawada on Tuesday. It included a letter from Nandigama MLA and Government Whip Tangirala Sowmya. Ex-Servicemen's Association president Vasireddy Prasad, former AYUSH Medical Officer Dr Kapa Bhanu Prasad, KVR College former principal Vasireddy Satyanarayana Prasad, and Pensioner's Association president Patcha Uma



Representatives from various religious organisations presenting a petition to MP Kesineni Sivanath on Tuesday

Maheshwara Gupta held a meeting with the MP.

The petitioners urged that various AYUSH medical systems, including Ayurveda, Yoga, Homeopathy, Unani, Siddha, and the Buddhist medical system of Sowaigpa, be integrated under a unified framework. They emphasised the importance of incorporating modern technology to enhance the valuable insights derived from ancient traditional medical practices. This approach aims to extend the benefits of these medical sci-

ences to the residents of Nandigama and its neighbouring areas through the proposed AYUSH Grid.

Kesineni Sivanath expressed his commitment to discuss the proposal with the Chief Minister, the State Health Department, and the local MLA. He also pledged to collaborate with AYUSH officials to prepare detailed project estimates and submit them to the Central AYUSH Department, to transform Nandigama into a research hub for alternative medical systems.

ACROSS THE STATES



Odisha: Man kills father for refusing to give Rs 10

A 40-year-old man in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district beheaded his father on Tuesday after he refused to give him Rs 10 to buy 'guthka', police said. The accused went to a police station carrying the severed head to surrender himself, a senior officer said. "The man beheaded his 70-year-old father with a sharp weapon and surrendered at Chandua Police Station along with the severed head. His mother fled the spot. The murder took place following a heated exchange of words between the accused and his parents," he said. The deceased was identified as Baidhar Singh. Baripada SDPO Pravat Mallick said, "The murder occurred over a petty issue. The accused became angry when his father refused to pay Rs 10 for 'guthka', a tobacco product. The police reached the village along with a forensic team, and an investigation is underway, the officer said.

'Security apparatus must remain adaptive to emerging threats'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's security apparatus must remain adaptive to emerging threats such as cyber and hybrid warfare as well as "space-based espionage", Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday.

He said internal security is not just about managing conventional threats like terrorism, separatist movements, and left-wing extremism but it is also about preparing for unconventional threats that can destabilise the nation's economic and strategic interests.

"The adversaries of today do not always come with traditional weapons; cyber-attacks, misinformation campaigns, and space-based espionage are emerging as new-age threats that require advanced solutions," he said.

The defence minister was speaking at a conference on 'Advanced Technologies for Internal Security and Disaster Relief Operations' organised jointly by the Defence Research



and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

In his address, Singh highlighted the growing complexities in global security and the increasing overlap between internal and external threats.

"Security challenges in the modern world are evolving rapidly, and the overlap between internal and external security is increasing," he said.

"It is imperative that our institutions break silos and

work collaboratively to ensure a strong, secure, and self-reliant India."

The defence minister said India's national security must be viewed holistically, integrating efforts across different security agencies and leveraging the latest technological advancements.

"The DRDO has played a pivotal role in enhancing India's defence capabilities, and its contributions to internal security are equally commendable," he said.

Policy decisions needed to protect patients from being fleeced: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday left it to the states to take appropriate policy decisions to protect patients and their attendants from being "fleeced" and taken "undue advantage" of after a PIL alleged that they are compelled to purchase medicines and medical devices at a higher rate from pharmacies run at private hospitals.

The apex court also stressed that any mandatory direction by it may hamper the functioning of private hospitals and have a cascading effect.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh disposed of a PIL filed by a law student Siddharth Dalmia and his advocate father Vijay Pal Dalmia that alleged that the private hospitals compel the patients and their attendants to purchase medicines from in-house pharmacies or

those with which they have collaboration, and they are charged higher rates for medicines, implants and medical devices.

The bench said, "We dispose of this petition with direction to all state governments to consider this issue and take appropriate policy decisions as they deem fit." Noting that health is a state subject, the bench said relevant regulatory measures can be taken by the state governments keeping their local conditions in mind.

Highlighting that the issue falls in the policy domain, the bench said it is for the policymakers to take a holistic view of the matter and frame appropriate guidelines ensuring there is no exploitation of the patients and their attendants and, at the same time, there is no discouragement and an unreasonable restriction for the private entities to enter the health sector.

"We dispose of this petition with direction to all state governments to consider this issue and take appropriate policy decisions as they deem fit."



Court sends SDPI president M K Faizy to 6-day ED custody

Delhi court on Tuesday sent SDPI national president M K Faizy to the custody of the ED for six days in an alleged money laundering case over proscribed Popular Front of India (PFI). Additional sessions judge Chandar Jit Singh sent Faizy to custody on the plea of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) seeking his interrogation and confronting him to unearth the money trail in the case and conspiracy. The Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), founded in 2009 and headquartered in Delhi, is alleged to be the political front of the now banned Popular Front of India (PFI). In its application seeking 10 days of his custody, the ED alleged Faizy was on the run. The accused opposed the application, saying the funds were transferred before the PFI was declared unlawful. "How could accused know that the government was going to declare it unlawful so that could have stopped the transaction," the defence counsel said.



Oppn demands restoration of OPS in Assam

Opposition parties in Assam on Tuesday demanded the restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) for government employees, leading to uproarious scenes in the assembly, a brief adjournment of proceedings and suspension of an MLA for the day. The matter was moved as a resolution by Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, urging the government to restore OPS for all government teachers and other employees "in order to secure their future, ensure social security and to give recognition for dedicating the active period of their lives to serve the public and the government". He maintained that the National Pension System (NPS) and the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) were not beneficial for employees as they would be entitled to a meagre amount of money after attaining superannuation. Other opposition parties, including Congress, AIUDF and CPI(M), also supported the resolution, urging the government to restore OPS. Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar said, "The employees work for the government during their most productive years.



'Four more days are left'

AAP demands clarity on monthly aid to women

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP staged a protest here on Tuesday and demanded clarity from the BJP-led Delhi government on the promise to roll out Rs 2,500 monthly financial assistance to women by the International Women's Day on March 8.

The demonstration outside the Mandi House metro station here was led by former Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition Atishi along with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs and party workers.

Atishi in a post on X questioned the BJP government over the delay in implementing the scheme.

Post-Independence, Cong formed a self-imposed govt: Khattar

PNS ■ PATNA

Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Tuesday asserted that the Congress, upon Independence, had formed a government in the country that was "self-imposed and not democratically elected".

The senior BJP leader also claimed that the Jana Sangh, the party's previous avatar, was formed to prevent the Congress from enjoying "unbridled" power, alleging that the Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had put a "question mark" on democracy.

"After Independence, the Congress did not form a democratically elected government. The government was self-imposed. In 1951, a year ahead of the first general elections, our ideological forefathers formed the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The idea was to ensure that power does not become unbridled," Khattar said.

The Union minister was addressing the state council meeting organised by the BJP's



Bihar unit, in which Dilip Jaiswal was unanimously elected as the provincial president. Khattar, who is a former Haryana chief minister, also recalled having travelled to Delhi to attend a rally of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, who had risen up in revolt against the then Congress government headed by Indira Gandhi.

"I was all of 21 years back then. Indira Gandhi's Emergency had placed a question mark before the country's democracy. I might not have understood much of what JP said at the rally in Maurice Nagar locality. But the speech inspired me to devote myself to serving the nation," said the BJP leader.

Stalin asks why Centre not teaching Tamil in northern states

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Targeting the BJP-led Centre over alleged Hindi imposition, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President M K Stalin on Tuesday wondered why the union government has not facilitated setting up of an institution to teach Tamil or other south Indian languages to people of states in north India.

Writing to party workers as part of his series on the theme of "all-time opposition to Hindi imposition" Stalin said, Google Translate, Chat GPT and Artificial Intelligence help people overcome language issues and it would be beneficial for students to learn only necessary technology and imposing a language shall only be a burden to them.

The DMK chief said Gandhi believed that people of southern states learning Hindi and those in northern states learning one of the southern languages would pave the way for national unity and the Dakshina Bharat



Hindi Prachar Sabha was founded to fulfil the wish of Father of the nation. "Gandhi himself had taken part in programmes in the sabha's headquarters in Chennai. Now, the sabha is operational across southern states with 6,000 centres," Stalin said.

Further, the chief minister, refraining from specifically naming anyone, posed whether an organisation like "Uttar Bharat Tamil Prachar Sabha or Dravida Basha Sabha" was established in north India to facilitate people of northern states to learn one of the languages of southern states.

Hitting out at BJP without naming it directly, the chief minister alleged that those who claimed to get installed a statue of saint poet Thiruvalluvar on the banks of River Ganga had it dumped on a garbage heap and wondered whether such people would set up an institution to propagate Tamil. "Those who follow the path of Godse will never fulfil the objectives of Gandhi." Even during the bygone times of Madras province, Gandhiji was instrumental in the christening of provincial Congress party unit as Tamil Nadu Congress.

Munde's resignation not enough, dismiss Fadnavis govt: Aaditya

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Tuesday demanded the dismissal of the Devendra Fadnavis-led government and imposition of President's rule in Maharashtra in view of the "deteriorating" law and order situation in the state.

He was speaking to reporters here in the wake of the resignation of state minister and NCP leader Dhananjay Munde, days after his close aide Walmik Karad was named as the mastermind in the Beed sarpanch murder case.

He said only Munde's resignation was not sufficient considering the law and order situation in the state.

Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed, was abducted, tortured and murdered on December 9 last year allegedly for attempting to



stop an extortion bid targeting an energy company in the district.

Talking to reporters, Thackeray said, "Resignation (of Munde) is not enough. The government should be dismissed and President's rule should be imposed in the state."

The former minister also cited recent instances of crime against women like the rape of

a 26-year old woman in a Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) bus in Pune and the setting ablaze of a 17-year-old girl in Mumbai.

"Law and order situation in the state has been deteriorating since the last three years. If the government is not dismissed, who will come to Maharashtra for investment, how will citizens be safe?" he asked.

Governor accepts Munde's resignation

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan on Tuesday evening accepted the resignation of cabinet minister Dhananjay Munde. The NCP minister, who held the food, civil supplies and consumer protection portfolio, earlier in the day submitted his resignation to CM Devendra Fadnavis, who forwarded it to the Governor. A Raj Bhavan statement said the Governor has accepted the resignation of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Minister Munde on the recommendation of Fadnavis.

After the state CID filed a chargesheet in the sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case in Beed district naming Walmik Karad, Munde's close aide, as the accused No. 1, Fadnavis asked his cabinet colleague to resign.

NDA govt ended Hindu-Muslim riots in Bihar: Nitish Kumar

PNS ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday claimed that the NDA government headed by him put an end to frequent Hindu-Muslim clashes in the state by taking measures such as fencing graveyards and bringing to justice those named in communal riots. The longest-serving chief minister of Bihar, who would seek a fifth consecutive term in office in assembly polls due later this year, was replying to a debate on a motion of thanks to the governor's address to the joint session of the bicameral legislature.

Opposition members began raising angry slogans, as soon as the JD(U) president said, by way of an introductory remark, "Before we came to power in 2005, the law and order situation was so pathetic that people feared going out of their homes after dusk. Bad roads also made commutes difficult."



The 74-year-old got miffed over the ruckus and told the opposition members in an admonitory tone, "You people are children. Do you know what was the situation back then?" Pointing towards Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav, Kumar said, "Even he is a child", and raised his finger in the direction of the press gallery to remark, "Ask the journalists if you want to know how bad things were back then."

The CM, who has been a BJP ally for most part of his career, also indirectly referred to the RJD-Congress combine with the remark, "Earlier, the state was always plagued by clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

'India may have over 440m overweight people'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

By 2050, India could have over 440 million obese and overweight people, a global analysis published in The Lancet journal has estimated.

Number of overweight and obese adults by mid-century in India (218 million men and 231 million women) could be the second highest in the world, after China, with the US, Brazil and Nigeria expected to rank third, fourth and fifth, respectively, the findings by an international team of researchers reveal.

These researchers, including those from the Indian Council of Medical Research, collabo-

rated for the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Study 2021.

As per the study, already almost half the world's adults -- a billion men and over a billion women aged 25 years and above -- were overweight and obese in 2021. In India, the numbers were over nearly 180 million -- 81 million men and 98 million women.

However, by 2050, this number globally could rise to nearly 3.8 billion -- 1.8 billion men and 1.9 billion women -- "over half of the likely global adult population at that time", the authors said.

"While China, India, and the USA will continue to constitute a large proportion of the glob-



al population with overweight and obesity, the number in the sub-Saharan Africa super-region is forecasted to increase by 254.8 per cent," they wrote. The researchers also estimated that about 16 million boys and over 14 million girls in India, aged 5-14 years, could be overweight and obese by 2050,

making it world's second highest after China.

However, in the 15-24 age group, the world's highest burden could come from India, with over 22 million men and nearly 17 million women in the country suffering from this health crisis in 2050.

Lead author Emmanuela Gakidou, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), University of Washington, US, which coordinates the GBD study, said, "The unprecedented global epidemic of overweight and obesity is a profound tragedy and a monumental societal failure."

The study, the "most comprehensive global analysis to

date", could help governments and the public health community "identify priority populations experiencing the greatest burdens of obesity who require immediate intervention and treatment, and those that remain predominantly overweight and should be primarily targeted with prevention strategies", Gakidou said.

The latest estimates come against the backdrop of Prime Minister Narendra Modi making a strong pitch for combating obesity in his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radiocast on February 23.

Obesity will have to be dealt with to be a fit and healthy nation, he said.

CBI busts exam racket in ECR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the arrest of 26 railway officials, the CBI on Tuesday said it has busted a departmental exam racket in East Central Railway (ECR) and seized Rs 1.17 crore cash.

The railway officials were arrested on Monday night for allegedly leaking papers of departmental examination for the elevation to posts of chief loco pilot at Mughal Sarai, they said, adding the exam was to be conducted on Tuesday.

"During the checks conducted by CBI, at three spots on the intervening night



(March 3-4) at Mughal Sarai, a total of 17 candidates were found with photocopies of hand-written question papers," a CBI spokesperson said.

All 17 departmental candidates who are presently working as loco pilots had allegedly paid money for the question paper and were caught red-handed with the copies during the raid, he said.

"Overall, 26 railway officials (including the 17 aspirants) have been arrested in this case so far," the spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency has registered the FIR against a senior divisional electrical engineer (operations) who was given the responsibility for setting and preparing the question paper for the said examination.



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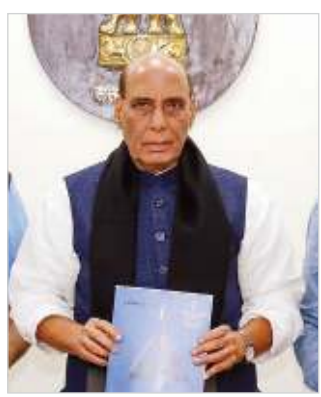
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Securing the skies

With adversaries rapidly upgrading to next-generation aircraft, India must prioritise air combat readiness

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is at a critical juncture, balancing the need for rapid modernisation with self-sufficiency under the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative. A recent report by the Empowered Committee for Capability Enhancement of the IAF, has identified key thrust areas and provided recommendations to address shortfalls and enhance the force's capabilities. The IAF is currently operating at 31 fighter squadrons, significantly below the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons. The delays in the induction of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk1A and the gradual phasing out of ageing Jaguar, MiG-29UPG, and Mirage-2000 present an urgent need for new acquisitions. The report underscores the necessity of accelerating the production of the LCA Mk1A, LCA Mk2, and the fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Besides, the need for additional Airborne Early-Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft, mid-air refuelers, and advanced missile systems is crucial for operational capabilities. The committee has stressed the role of the private sector in complementing efforts by Defence PSUs and the DRDO to boost production capacity and efficiency in aerospace manufacturing. The slow pace of domestic fighter jet production has led to gaps in operational readiness, particularly when adversaries like China and Pakistan are rapidly modernising their air forces with fifth- and even sixth-generation aircraft.



The complex procurement process and lack of streamlined decision-making continue to delay critical acquisitions compromising the air strength. While progress has been made in indigenous defence production, there are still gaps in high-end technologies such as jet engine development, advanced avionics, and stealth capabilities. The financial allocation for defence needs to align with modernisation goals, ensuring adequate funding for both indigenous projects and immediate acquisitions. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has directed that the committee's recommendations be implemented in a structured and time-sensitive manner to prevent further delays. The government must ensure the timely execution of the AMCA program and increase HAL's production capacity to meet annual fighter jet requirements. Besides, a reformed procurement mechanism, reducing bureaucratic delays, is essential to fast-track approvals and acquisitions. Strengthening collaborations with global aerospace leaders to bring in advanced technology while setting up domestic manufacturing hubs will help accelerate modernisation. Encouraging private defence manufacturers through policy reforms, incentives, and infrastructure support will boost self-sufficiency in aerospace production. The recommendations underscore call for urgent action and need for addressing systemic challenges, and fostering innovation through private sector involvement. Indeed, India must achieve a combat-ready and self-sufficient air force capable of countering emerging threats. The need for a modern and highly efficient Air Force is more critical than ever.

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Russia China help Junta hold the fort

Myanmar's civil war sees resistance forces making major gains, yet the Junta retains key cities and economic hubs with China and Russia's backing



ASHOK K MEHTA

Last week, Home Minister Amit Shah held a review meeting of Manipur under the President's Rule and also discussed the trade routes to Myanmar with the border areas no longer under Junta's control. Myanmar's Generals have ruled the roost since 1962. Their fourth coup February 2021, is the longest but one which has met with the biggest resistance and for the first time, the Bmar (Burmese) joined the opposition which consists of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO), People's Defence Force (PDF) under National United Government (NUG), local militias and rebel groups all united in defeating the Junta.

Under Junta's rule organized crime of which it is beneficiary has risen phenomenally to USD 2bn in cyber scams and other frauds. Many Indians have been unsuspecting participants and victims. Never before has Resistance been so organized in its fight against the military; success has come without any unified command and what at best is coordinated operations like Three Brotherhood Alliance which launched Operation 1027 by three EAOs - TNLA, MNDAA, and AA. The last of these - the Arakan Army - is militarily the strongest and operates in the Rakhine province in the south while the other two EAOs operate in the northern Shan state. Codename 1027 denotes the launch date of the massive offensive in the north on October 27, 2023.

China plays a double role: supporting the Junta as well as some of the EAOs. Lately, there has been a policy shift - full support to the Junta. But Chinese pronouncements are deceptive; best to go by Chinese deeds, not words. On the ground, in the fourth year of the war, the Junta has lost considerable ground but is nowhere near being defeated. On the scale of conflict measurement, Junta holds 21 per cent of the territory which consists of the precious Irrawaddy heartland of Bmars and includes the new capital Nyaung-U, Yangon and Mandalay, the two largest cities; and all sea ports and air bases. Only one seaport the India-operated Sittwe is under threat surrounded by the Arakan Army. Two military command headquarters and two air bases in the north and south have been taken by Resistance forces. Some 145 of 350 townships are lost by Junta which has also lost all trade routes/posts on the borders with Bangladesh, India, China, and Thailand. Only one trade route Moosa, is with Junta. The Resistance controls 42 per cent territory with the remaining being No Man's Land. More importantly, 80 per cent of people especially Bmars support resistance while only 20 per cent are with Junta. During previous uprisings, Bmar always supported the Junta. Corruption is endemic, top down and has eroded Junta's military capabilities. It has led to defections and desertions with fighting battalions down to 100 men against the standard 600 soldiers. Some 167 battalions appear to have been lost, and weapons sold resulting in low morale and scant will to fight. Casualties are numerous on both sides but no figures have been released. Junta commanders have made false claims about facts on the ground. Some ghost units are on the Orbat. Most supply lines have been rendered unusable for reinforcements. All movement is by air and counter-attacks therefore also launched from air causing heavy casualties among the civilian population. The Resistance has been enriched



by defectors who bring weapons and skills. Women now comprise 60 per cent of the force though they are mainly in support roles. In earlier uprisings, women constituted only 10 per cent. This time diaspora support is unprecedented and a significant factor. Recruitment to PDF has also risen with support being provided by external players. PDFs are called 'watermelons' green outside and red inside. While green is the colour of the uniform, red is the colour of the National League for Democracy flag. Despite the high morale and momentum of success, Resistance requires a new military strategy, another 1027. Resistance is expected to attack Junta's defence ordnance factories - their defence industrial base - near Mandalay and its loss will be a big blow to the military but still not enough to unhinge it. PDF has to reorganize into battalion/brigade formations under a command structure to be able to capture and hold ground and take strategic targets like airbases. China and Russia, two P5 members in the UNSC, are partners with No Limits but not military allies. Both support the Junta. Russia is now the key military supplier and since 2021, has provided equipment worth USD 406 mn. Junta supreme Senior General Min Aung Hlaing visited Russia last year ostensibly for a medical check-up. Russia supplied six Su30 aircraft while six Burmese elephants were sent to Moscow. The Sukhois will significantly enhance aerial capability and cause additional civilian casualties. China remains the key stakeholder in Myanmar and is supporting the Junta as it has made major military and economic investments in Myanmar. It eyes the rich minerals, oil, gas and hydropower. Its gas pipeline from Kyaukpadaung to Kunming in Yunnan provides Beijing access to the Indian Ocean. Gas pipelines are being supplemented by road and railway arteries. Along with Coco Island given on lease, the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor constitutes an alternative route to China's Malacca dilemma. With 20,000 new recruits with Junta, Beijing has calculated that Resistance cannot defeat it. So Beijing-brokered ceasefires with EAOs in Kachin and Shan states and Kokang region in the north and also with MNDAA in January 2025. Beijing will also support Junta to hold elections in November 2025 giving it the fig-leaf of legitimacy. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)



CHINA PLAYS A DOUBLE ROLE: SUPPORTING THE JUNTA AS WELL AS SOME OF THE EAOs. LATELY, THERE HAS BEEN A POLICY SHIFT-FULL SUPPORT TO THE JUNTA. BUT CHINESE PRONOUNCEMENTS ARE DECEPTIVE; BEST TO GO BY CHINESE DEEDS, NOT WORDS

PICTALK



Women participate in bike rally 'Queens on the Wheel', in Bhopal.

PTI

RBI's Repo Rate cut: A golden opportunity for homebuyers

With the RBI lowering the repo rate by 25 basis points, home loan borrowers stand to benefit from reduced EMIs, making homeownership more affordable

Any time is a good time when it comes to buying a home. However, the recent repo rate cuts signal a lowering of interest rates in the future, thus, hinting at a possibly more stable economy and increased scope for real-estate investment. Home buyers in India are wondering whether they should consider purchasing a home following the recent repo rate cuts by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The country's central bank recently lowered the repo rates by 25 bps from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first rate cut in five years by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which can result in significant savings for home loan borrowers.

Small and steady savings on EMIs Home loan applicants stand to benefit from RBI's recent decision, as it will help them service loans at a lower cost. This reduction in EMIs would also make homeownership more affordable



for potential buyers. Let's illustrate this with an example. Suppose that you took a 20-year home loan of Rs 20 lakhs at an 8.75% interest rate. Your current monthly EMI would be somewhere around Rs 17,674. With the new rate, your monthly EMI drops to Rs 17,356, resulting in a total savings of Rs. 76,259. If you maintain your current EMI payments, you could pay off your loan 5

months earlier than originally planned. For those who are hesitant to enter the housing market due to high property prices and interest rates, this may be a good opportunity to take advantage of reduced borrowing costs. However, it is imperative to consider other factors such as market trends, location, and personal financial stability before making a decision. **Way to loan refinancing options**

Borrowers might feel that the savings from reduced repo rates are minimal when it comes to monthly EMI outgoings. As the saying goes, "A penny saved is a penny earned," and even a small saving on EMIs could contribute to larger savings in the long term. Additionally, borrowers with strong credit scores can take advantage of competitive refinancing options. Since they are considered low-risk by lenders, they are most likely to secure lower interest rates on refinanced loans.

Win for the housing sector The RBI aims to stimulate the economy by making home financing more accessible. This can lead to increased demand in the housing sector, especially in areas where property prices have been sharply increasing due to infrastructure development and improved amenities. The reduction in the cost of borrowing can help mitigate some pressure from skyrocketing housing. (The writer is CEO & Co-Founder, BASIC Home Loan; views are personal)



ATUL MONGA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A GLIMMER OF HOPE IN MANIPUR

Madam - The editorial, "A Fresh Start..." (March 4, 2025), presents a positive outlook on the surrender of illegal arms in Manipur. However, as noted in the editorial, this is likely only a fraction of the weapons still in the possession of warring groups. Despite this development, nothing substantial has been done to bring lasting peace to the state—except for the resignation of the Chief Minister, who was widely seen as responsible for the unfortunate turn of events. The 60,000 displaced individuals forced into the forests must be allowed to return to their homes and lead normal lives. For this to happen, the government must establish an impartial administration that earns the trust of all sections of society. Symbolic gestures alone will not suffice; all looted and illegal arms must be surrendered to achieve real progress.

If both the state and central governments had been genuinely committed to fostering peaceful coexistence among the groups, the situation would not have deteriorated so severely for so long. Even after major incidents—including the looting of arms, around 250 murders, women being paraded nude, and places of worship being ransacked—the government's inefficacy remained glaringly evident. Yet, it took an inordinate amount of time to secure the Chief Minister's resignation. President's Rule alone cannot bring about meaningful change, as it operates under directives from the Home Ministry, which itself has been exposed for its lack of a clear strategy. True peace will return only when an impartial and competent administration takes charge. Unfortunately, neither the state nor the nation has a charismatic leader capable of inspiring a positive response from the people.

A G Rajmohan | Chandigarh

FORMER SEBI CHIEF IN TROUBLE

Madam—Apropos the front page news item, "Buch Booked", published on Mar. 3, this is my response. With a special court directing the Anti-Corruption Bureau

The Legacy of Sri Ramakrishna



The birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, according to the Bengali lunar calendar, was celebrated on March 1 this year. Sri Ramakrishna urged us to liberate ourselves from religious dogma. He

famously said, "There are many doors to God's house... No matter which door you enter through, you get inside." He did not merely preach tolerance—he practiced it. Sri Ramakrishna followed the path of Islam for some time and adhered to its teachings. Later, he practiced Christianity for a brief period, demonstrating his belief in the idea that "Many opinions, many paths." Swami Vivekananda, his devoted disciple, once said, "Each human being embodies God. This is what I have learned from my Master, Sri Ramakrishna." His teachings serve as a powerful antidote to inhumanity, religious hatred, and untouchability—values that remain profoundly relevant today.

Sujit De | Kolkata

(ACB) to file FIR against the former SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Buch for alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations, the case will likely have far-reaching implications for regulatory governance in India's financial markets. Whether this probe will uncover deeper systemic failures or simply remain a high-profile legal battle remains to be seen. However, the controversy surrounding SEBI's regulatory actions has already sparked enough concerns among investors and market participants. Analysts believe that such legal battles could impact investor confidence, especially among foreign institutional investors who rely on SEBI's oversight for market transparency. As the case unfolds, it remains to be seen how the investigation will impact SEBI's credibility and its approach to future regulatory enforcement. Importantly, the case also raises serious questions about the central government's commitment to transparency and integrity on the functioning of the country's premier regulatory body for securities and commodity market. Ranganathan | Chennai

REIN IN SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Madam - In a recent ruling, the Supreme Court emphasized that individuals engaged in social media influencing or podcasting must uphold morality and decency in their content before broadcasting it. The Court stressed that such influencers must recognize their responsibility towards society. Creating humor through vulgar slang and offensive language does not contribute positively to society. Instead, it fosters a negative mindset, particularly in the younger generation (Gen Z). Striving to appear as a "cool dude" in front of an audience does not absolve influencers of their responsibilities as citizens. In his defense, Ranbir Allahabadia argued that his controversial statement was made purely in jest. Humor should not come at the expense of emotions or sensitivity. Instead, influencers should focus on fostering a respectful and thoughtful environment that contributes to a united society.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

PURIFYING THE MIND,
RESTORING THE EARTH

If we truly wish to combat pollution, we must first cleanse our thoughts and correct spiritual imbalance



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJJI

Most of us are very much aware of the word 'Pollution', be it a child, a youngster or an old person. However one could not contemplate the reasons or source from which this dreadful monster called pollution occurs. Today, globally every country is facing consequences of pollution, contamination or abuse of air, water, food & even Space on a very large scale, but they are not able to find a foolproof solution to this dangerous threat to humanity. Although many institutions & regulatory bodies have been established.

Today a fast-developing country like India stands poised on a pinnacle of wealth and power, yet we Indians live in a land of vanishing beauty, increasing ugliness, shrinking open spaces, and an overall environment that is diminishing daily by pollution noise and blight. So where does this take us? Would there be a solution to control or tackle pollution problems & save humanity? Well!! The answer lies with the ones who are posing this question, i.e. we the humans, YES! Over the years, while discussing deeply about cause & effect of pollution, we smartly avoid looking at the actual problem that's deeply rooted in the mental sphere rather than the sphere of matter. If we look up the dictionary meaning of the word pollution, we may find something like 'to destroy purity of; to contaminate'. However, we humans are only aware of the material pollution in the branches of the polluted tree & we have disregarded the seed or root of 'thought pollution' which gave growth to that tree. So without destroying the root basis of pollution, the source can never be purified. It won't be an exaggeration to say that the problem of environmental pollution is actually due to the pollution of man's mind which is full of selfishness, jealousy, greed, anger, etc. The problem of ecological imbalance is due to our mental imbalance, and the disequilibrium in nature is due to disequilibrium in man's mind. Another fact that is generally



unknown or is little realised is that the vibrations from a polluted mind contaminate or corrupt the atmosphere; they make it tense and vicious. Most of us make a mistake by thinking that our thoughts are invisible & psychic and hence they can't do anything, but actually, thoughts have both hands and legs, because one can control one's hand to rob nothing, control one's legs to kick nobody, but one can scarcely control one's thought without thinking as thought is too deep to be expressed, too strong to be suppressed, too fast to be drawn back, hence he who will not command his thoughts, will soon lose command of his actions.

The wars struggles and quarrels of mankind are very often caused by this. Deep thinking would reveal that most of the present global problems are due to thought pollution, for this pollution destroys a person's sense of being impartial, considerate and cooperative and makes him callous, inimical, violent-prone and vicious. It influences economics, politics, commerce, business, even friendship and all relationships

The ultimate solution to this problem lies in realising the self and also our relationship with other human beings. Remember !! Great men are those who see that the spiritual force is much stronger than the material force. Hence without a spiritual orientation of the relationship between man and man, moral and spiritual values cannot be brought into play or be sustained, and, in the absence of these core values, no problem can be solved for a considerable length of time. It is, therefore, essential for all of us to understand the real and intrinsic nature behind the mask or the garment of the body to set the direction right. If this is not done, then possibly science without spirituality may dangerously lead mankind to a nuclear catastrophe population explosion or environmental upheaval. So, let us use the powerful weapon of spiritual wisdom to cleanse our souls from thought pollution & survive in harmony with nature & its elements without any kind of disturbance whatsoever.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Unlocking Punjab's
export potential

A S MITTAL

With targeted policy support, infrastructure investment and global market integration, Punjab can play a transformative role in India's trade success story

India has vast industrial and agricultural capabilities across 800 districts, yet 40% of its merchandise exports originate from only 10 districts. Gujarat dominates this landscape with five key contributors: Jamnagar, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bharuch, and Kachchh. The other significant players include Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, Bengaluru in Karnataka, Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, and NOIDA in Uttar Pradesh. Alarmingly, Punjab—home to a robust industrial base in textiles, bicycles, sports goods, engineering goods, tractors, agricultural implements and food processing—is conspicuously absent from this export powerhouse. The 'One District-One Product' (ODOP) initiative was introduced to rectify this imbalance, but meaningful progress has yet to materialise. If India is serious about reaching its ambitious target of \$1 trillion in exports by 2030, it must expand its export landscape beyond this handful of districts.

The next wave of growth will undoubtedly come from unlocking the potential of industrial hubs like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Hoshiarpur and Mohali. These regions must receive robust, targeted policy support, a conducive environment and infrastructure development, and substantial financial support to enable Punjab's industries to compete with the country's top export-driven districts. India's Global Export Challenge India's share of global exports has stagnated for decades, hovering around 2% and currently at 1.8% as of 2024. Ranked 17th among the world's top exporters, India falls behind various developing nations like Mexico, which ranks 9th.

To achieve the goal of at least doubling India's merchandise export value from \$437 billion in FY 2023-24 to \$874 billion by FY 2030, a strategic overhaul is essential—one that prioritises the establishment of export hubs in underrepresented regions, particularly Punjab, entire of potential.

The Imperative for a Decentralised Export Strategy

Punjab accounts for a mere 2% of India's total exports, but this share holds immense growth potential. To unlock this potential, the 'Districts as Export Hubs' initiative must go beyond paper & policy discussions and be actively and aggressively pursued. The government should prioritise transforming Punjab into a significant export player, leveraging the state's industrial cities, which are primed for expansion.

Punjab's Key Districts with High Export Potential

Ludhiana: The Unrivaled Textile and Bicycle Powerhouse Ludhiana dominates India's bicycle exports with an astounding 80% market share. However, India's presence in the global \$33.3 billion bicycle market is alarmingly low, standing at less than 1%, while China effortlessly commands 60%. Similarly, in the textiles, apparel, and hosiery sector—valued at \$1.7 trillion—India's share languishes at a mere 5%, compared to China's commanding 37%. With strategic branding, robust trade facilitation, and decisive policy support, Ludhiana is poised to become a global leader in these vital sectors.

Jalandhar: The Untapped Giant in Sports Goods

Exports Jalandhar produces an impressive 45% of India's sports goods and con-



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tributes 75% of the country's sports-related exports. Yet, India holds a mere 0.56% share in the global sports goods market, valued at \$220.57 billion, while China captures a staggering 42.2%. Jalandhar must actively integrate into international supply chains to aggressively penetrate markets in the USA, UK, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, and South Africa.

Hoshiarpur and Mohali: The Manufacturing Titans Hoshiarpur and Mohali are home to one-third of India's Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) and are the undisputed leaders in tractor exports. The global tractor market, valued at \$62.7 billion, is dominated by Germany with a 16% share, while India barely scrapes by with 2.2%. Mohali is also emerging as a significant tech and pharmaceutical hub, which is crucial for high-value exports that will fuel economic growth.

Amritsar: The Strategic Gateway to Global Trade

Amritsar, a historic trade hub, can leverage its advantageous proximity to the Wagah-Attari border to significantly enhance cross-border trade with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. By expanding trade policies, Punjab and northern India can assertively access high-demand markets in the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will further solidify Amritsar's role as a pivotal player in global trade.

Basmati Export Zone:

A Major Global Opportunity Punjab leads the charge by contributing 40% of India's basmati rice exports, which account for 65% of the global market. Amritsar, Tarn Taran and Gurdaspur must be developed into a dedicated Basmati Export Zone under the One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme. With the correct branding

and compliance, Punjab has the potential to tap into previously unexplored markets.

Tackling Key Export Challenges Head-On

1. Infrastructure and Logistics: Access to ports is strategically essential to any state when engaging in international trade, as landlocked regions face the comparative disadvantage of high trade costs and hindrances in the freedom of transit from the seas. Punjab's landlocked status must not be a hindrance. The Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor (AKIC) needs to be expedited to enhance dry ports and logistics hubs under the Trade Infrastructure for Exports Scheme (TIES). Introducing state-owned wagons will be a game-changer for bolstering Punjab's exports and addressing the freight burdens associated with shipping.

2. Cost of Industrial Land: Land prices in Ludhiana and Mohali are prohibitively high, ranging from Rs. 5-7 crore per acre, stifling expansion. Authorities must prioritise the allocation of vacant industrial plots in focal points and Panchayati Raj-owned land for industrial use to establish a viable industrial land bank.

3. Global Market Compliance: With 18% of India's exports directed toward the European Union (EU), Punjab's industries require substantial support to meet evolving international regulations, including the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism and stringent deforestation laws.

4. Leveraging Free Trade Agreements: Many exporters in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are currently unaware of India's FTAs. Local chambers and business federations must launch aggressive awareness campaigns to maximise these agreements among entrepreneurs.

5. Boosting MSMEs: Punjab's micro, small, and medium enter-

prises (MSMEs) need targeted financial support and strong market linkages to thrive in global trade. District Export Promotion Councils (DEPCs) headed by respective deputy-commissioners (DCs) are underperforming as DCs are already overburdened with multiple administrative tasks, and dedicated senior officials to be assigned to formulate District Export Action Plans (DEAPs) to bolster MSMEs.

6. Promoting Geographical Indications (GIs):

Punjab's GI-tagged products, such as Basmati rice, Phulkari embroidery, Amritsari Papad, and Jalandhar sports goods, possess immense global potential. Establishing dedicated stalls at international airports and providing financial backing for branding will amplify their presence in international markets.

Visit Bharat Demands Viksit Districts: India's ambitious export targets can only be realised through a decisive, decentralised approach centred around its more districts. With Punjab's rich industrial and agricultural heritage, it is positioned to emerge as a key export powerhouse. By fortifying district industries, enhancing trade infrastructure, and driving global market integration, Punjab will play a crucial role in India's export-led growth narrative. For India to achieve a truly 'Viksit Bharat', its districts must assume a more prominent role in export activities. This strategic shift will reshape India's global trade landscape and ignite widespread economic development and employment generation.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Unmasking the financial networks threatening national security

Illicit financial flows drive disruptive activities by foreign-backed dubious NGOs, influencing policies and protests that impact India's growth and development

India is at a pivotal moment in its history, reclaiming its status as a global leader. Our economic resilience, democratic foundation, and cultural unity have driven our progress, but hidden forces seek to undermine this advancement. This battle is not fought with conventional weapons but through financial manipulation, foreign influence, and strategic disruptions disguised as humanitarian aid, social activism, and policy advocacy. Foreign-funded networks have infiltrated India's socio-political fabric, threatening our sovereignty from within. One major threat is illicit financial flows fueling disruptive activities in India. Nepal's recent grey listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)



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highlights how money laundering networks in South Asia pose a significant security risk. Nepal has become a hub for financial irregularities, increasing the possibility of unregulated funds entering India through informal channels. This is not just an economic issue—it is a matter of national security, stability, and control over our developmental path. For years, foreign-backed

organizations such as USAID, DFID, Open Society Foundations, and the Ford Foundation have funneled substantial financial resources into India under the pretext of supporting human rights and social causes.

While genuine welfare efforts are welcome, evidence suggests that some of these funds have been strategically diverted to disrupt India's growth, create internal discord, and propagate anti-India narratives globally. A glaring example is the farmers' protests, which began as a movement for agrarian reforms but quickly escalated into a global propaganda campaign. Foreign lobbying groups, anti-India activists, and Khalistani supporters exploited the movement to mobilize protests, shape media

narratives, and turn a domestic issue into an international crisis. Financial audits have exposed a complex network of foreign funding behind this orchestration.

This raises the question—are these movements truly in India's interest, or are they calculated efforts to delay our growth? The infiltration of foreign narratives into India's civil society directly threatens our self-reliance and policy-making sovereignty. While India welcomes foreign investments aimed at development and genuine social progress, we cannot allow our policies, protests, or progress to be dictated by external forces with hidden agendas. The FATF's decision to place Nepal on its grey list is a direct consequence of its weak finan-



cial regulations, unmonitored cross-border transactions, and insufficient anti-money laundering measures. These financial loopholes have created a shadow economy, facilitating illicit funding that could have serious implications for India's security. India shares a 1,751 km-long porous border with Nepal, allowing free movement of people and goods. While this has strengthened economic and cultural ties, it has also enabled smuggling, unaccounted money transfers, and potential terror financing. Intelligence agencies have flagged instances where hawala networks in Nepal were used to channel funds into India to support destabilizing activities.

One major concern is Nepal's financial exemption allowing investments in infrastructure without disclosing sources of funds, making it a conduit for dubious transactions. While FATF's grey listing does not impose sanctions, it signals global financial institutions that Nepal is vulnerable to illegal money transfers, potentially triggering reduced foreign investments and regional financial instability. Recognizing these threats, the Modi government has taken decisive action to curb foreign

interference. Over 20,700 NGOs have lost their FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) licenses due to financial irregularities, undisclosed foreign funding sources, and misuse of contributions. The tightening of FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) regulations ensures greater scrutiny of financial transactions linked to activism, political lobbying, and potential terror financing. Collaboration with FATF, INTERPOL, and global security agencies has enhanced India's ability to track cross-border fund flows and dismantle illegal financial networks fueling unrest. Strengthening oversight on foreign-funded NGOs, think tanks, and advocacy groups to ensure full transparency and

accountability. Enhancing security measures along the Indo-Nepal border to curb illicit financial transactions and smuggling networks. Promoting domestic funding mechanisms to empower local organizations and grassroots initiatives, reducing reliance on external financial aid. Our civil society is strong enough to drive change through indigenous resources and a vision rooted in national interests. The need of the hour is self-reliance—strengthening grassroots organizations and building an Indian developmental model based on internal merit rather than foreign charity.

(The writer is Secretary General, Confederation of NGOs of Rural India; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Apollo Green Energy to form subsidiary

Apollo Green Energy (AGEL) on Tuesday said it will set up a subsidiary AGEL Renewable Energy Ltd and invest Rs 500 crore to develop 1 GW renewable energy portfolio over the next 2-3 years. The subsidiary will focus on utility-scale solar while integrating advanced energy storage solutions, including hydrogen-based systems, a company statement said. According to the statement, through this investment, AGEL Renewable Energy Ltd aims to develop a 1GW renewable energy portfolio over the next 2-3 years, starting from FY26, to bridge critical gaps in India's renewable energy landscape and contribute to the country's clean energy goals. AGEL has announced plans to launch its subsidiary AGEL Renewable Energy Ltd and is planning to invest Rs 500 crore, it added. The company will actively bid for large-scale government tenders and establish power purchase agreements (PPAs) with utilities and commercial consumers. Additionally, AGEL Renewable Energy will hire up to 200 people across various roles, including engineering, project management, research and development, and operations.



Galaxy Health insurance launches Top-up plan

Stand-alone health insurance company Galaxy has rolled out Galaxy Top-up that has been designed to offer extra protection at a lower cost and ensures policy holders have access to quality healthcare, the city-headquartered company said on Tuesday. Galaxy Top-up provides a 'Premium Promise' to customers, guaranteeing no premium hikes until policy holders make a claim or turn 55 years of age, whichever comes first. Unlike traditional health insurance products, Galaxy Top-up offers higher sum insured ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 2 crore and provides comprehensive coverage and flexibility, the company said in a statement here. "Health insurance is no longer a luxury -- it is a necessity as health issues in individuals continue to pose significant challenges. Many policyholders now prefer top-up plans over additional basic covers because they are more budget friendly and offer greater benefits. Keeping this in mind, we have introduced Galaxy Top-up, a smart and cost-effective solution that ensures access to advanced medical care without financial stress," Galaxy Health Insurance MD and CEO G Srinivasan said.



Mizoram govt presents Rs15,198 cr budget

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday presented a Rs 15,198.76 crore budget for 2025-2026 and announced a 75 per cent increase in fund allocation for the flagship 'Bana Kaih' (Handholding) scheme, a financial assistance programme for farmers and small entrepreneurs. He said the government will introduce a scheme from April to provide health insurance of up to Rs 5 lakh cover per year to beneficiaries. The chief minister, who also holds the finance portfolio, also presented supplementary demands for grants for the current fiscal (2024-25) amounting to Rs 3,512.33 crore. There was no proposal for levying new taxes in the budget. Presenting the annual budget and supplementary demands in the assembly, Lalduhoma said the government gives priority to the state's flagship programme 'Bana Kaih' scheme and allocated Rs 350 crore for the 2025-26 fiscal, a 75 per cent increase from Rs 200 crore earmarked in the current fiscal.

Govt taking steps to make India export-friendly: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the government remains steadfast in reducing regulatory burdens, besides enhancing trust-based governance and taking steps to make India a "seamless, export-friendly" economy.

A robust manufacturing sector free from unnecessary regulatory bottlenecks will further attract both domestic and foreign investments, driving economic growth, positioning India as a trusted global player, Sitharaman said while addressing a post-budget webinar on "MSMEs as engine of growth, manufacturing, exports, regulatory, investment and EoDB Reforms". "Our government remains steadfast in reducing regulatory burdens and enhancing trust-based governance to improve the ease of doing business. Through the budget announcements, we are taking various steps towards making India a seamless, export-friendly economy, one where businesses are free to focus on innovation and expansion, and not paperwork and penal-



ties," Sitharaman said.

Addressing the webinar earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked Indian industry to take "big steps" for taking advantage of global opportunities at a time when the world is looking at India as a trusted partner, which can produce quality goods.

"I want that our industry should not look at these expectations of the world as a mere spectator. We cannot remain spectators, you will have to look for your role in this, you will have to seek opportunities for yourself,"

Modi said.

In her 2025-26 Budget speech, the minister had announced that a high-level committee for regulatory reforms will be set up for a review of all non-financial sector regulations, certifications, licences, and permissions.

"The committee will be expected to make recommendations within a year. The objective is to strengthen trust-based economic governance and take transformational measures to enhance 'ease of doing business', espe-

cially in matters of inspections and compliances," said the Budget speech.

Sitharaman said decriminalisation of business related laws reduces the legal risks, allowing industries to operate with greater confidence. Over 42,000 compliance requirements have already been removed, and over 3,700 legal provisions have been decriminalised since 2014. In the Jan Vishwas Act 2023, more than 180 legal provisions were decriminalised.

"Our government will now bring up the Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0 to decriminalise more than 100 provisions in various laws. It will further simplify processes for businesses," Sitharaman said.

She said the government's "unprecedented" push for infrastructure development helps create jobs, strengthen industries, and also lays the foundation for greater private sector participation in India's growth story.

"The pathway for reforms are complemented by the government's unwavering focus on capital expenditure as a driver of economic growth," Sitharaman said.

World looking at India as trusted partner: PM

Stresses industry should take advantage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday nudged the Indian industry for "big steps" to take advantage of global opportunities at a time when the world is looking at India as a trusted partner, saying the government will launch two missions to promote manufacturing and exports.

Addressing a post-budget webinar on Regulatory, Investment and Ease of Doing Business Reforms, Modi asked the industry to identify new products that can be manufactured in the country to meet global demand.

"Our country is capable of doing this, all of you (industry) are capable, this is a great opportunity for us. I want our industry should not look at these expectations of the world as a mere spectator. We cannot remain spectators, you will have to look for your role in this, you will have to seek opportunities for yourself," Modi told the industry players.

The Prime Minister also stressed the need to develop new modes of credit delivery to ensure access to timely and low-cost funds to over six crore micro, small and medium units across the country.

He said five lakh first-time women and SC&ST entrepreneurs will be provided loans of up to Rs 2 crore.

"Today, India is a growth



engine for the global economy. India has proved its resilience even in difficult times... Today, every country wants to strengthen its economic partnership with India. Our manufacturing sector should take advantage of this partnership," Modi added.

The Prime Minister said the industry has gained new self-confidence due to the government's consistency and assurance for reforms.

Sensex sinks below 73,000 amid global equity rout

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Falling for the third straight day, benchmark BSE Sensex declined by 96 points to close below the 73,000 mark on Tuesday amid global equity rout on tariff war worries and persistent foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,989.93, down by 96.01 points or 0.13 per cent, as 18 of its components declined and 12 settled with gains. During the day, it dropped 452.4 points or 0.62 per cent to a low of 72,633.54 but recovered some of the losses in the second half.

Extending the losses for the 10th straight session, the 50-share Nifty of NSE fell by 36.65 points or 0.17 per cent to close at 22,082.65. The index opened below the 22,000 level at 21,974.45 but managed to recover some losses later.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Nestle India, Asian Paints, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Infosys, Maruti Suzuki India, Titan, Hindustan Unilever and Reliance Industries were

among the laggards.

On the other hand, State Bank of India, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Tata Steel and HDFC Bank were the gainers.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, "The domestic market exhibited a recovery from today's lows but remained in negative territory due to adverse global cues related to



escalating global trade tensions."

"Weak global cues continue to weigh on sentiment, but selective buying is limiting the downside," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said. "Despite the market ended in the red zone, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.28 per cent, and midcap index rose 0.08 per cent.

Abhishek Jaiswal, Fund Manager at Finavenue, said

Cement prices fall 7% amid weak demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cement prices declined around 7 per cent year-on-year in April-January FY25, amid weak demand, and increasing competition due to large supply additions by leading companies, according to a report by rating agency IInd-Ra.

Though prices of cement (a bag of 50 kg) have increased sequentially from November 2024 with construction activities picking up pace following the monsoon and festive season, they remained low year-on-year, it said.

"While the prices are likely to improve in the seasonally stronger Q4, large capacity additions are likely to keep the overall pricing environment weak; FY25 is likely to witness a high single-digit decline - the highest in the past decade," it said.

It further said the volume ramp-up from some of the acquired capacities that were operating sub-optimally earlier would keep the prices under pressure over the near term. "In 10MFY25, the cement industry saw around 45 million tonne of capacity changing hands across five deals, majority in the southern region.

Auto component industry targets US\$ 100 bn from exports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's auto component industry is expecting USD 100 billion in exports over the next 7-8 years, according to a report by Boston Consulting Group.

The country's auto component exports reached USD 21.2 billion in FY24, marking a significant turnaround from a USD 2.5 billion deficit in FY19.

The report 'Revving Up Exports: The Next Phase of Export Growth for the Auto Component Industry', conducted in association with the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), presents a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy to achieve this ambitious target.

"We have not only achieved a positive trade balance, but for auto-specific use cases, the surplus is even more pronounced, reaching approximately USD 0.5 - 1.5 billion. We are committed to sustaining this growth trajectory and have set an ambitious target of USD 100 billion in exports over the next 7-8 years," ACMA President Shradha Suri Marwah said.

As per the findings, doubling down on classical components, India can potentially



The report 'Revving Up Exports: The Next Phase of Export Growth for the Auto Component Industry', conducted in association with the Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), presents a comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy to achieve this ambitious target

add another USD 40-60 billion in incremental exports by prioritising 11 product families with a focus on the US and European markets.

Besides, capitalising on emerging EV and electronic value chain through localisation today, India can look to tap into additional USD 15-20 billion exports in components like battery management systems, telematics units, instrument clusters, and ABS, it stated. "We are at a pivotal juncture, with immense poten-

tial to scale. To fully capitalise on this opportunity, major Indian players must aim to expand their exports by 5-10 times and achieve deeper penetration into global supply chains," ACMA Director General Vinnie Mehta said.

This expansion necessitates building closer proximity to customers, enhancing testing and tooling capabilities, and gearing up for ESG compliance-key areas where ACMA can facilitate industry transformation, he added.

Sebi's total income rises 48 pc to Rs 2,075 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi's total income rose 48 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2,075 crore in 2023-24, driven by increased earnings from fees and subscriptions.

Of the total income, the regulator earned a fee income of Rs 1,851.5 crore, which was way higher than Rs 1,213.22 crore garnered in the preceding financial year, according to Sebi's annual statement of accounts 2023-24 made public on Tuesday.

Additionally, income from investments widened to Rs 192.41 crore from Rs 161.42

crore and other income increased to nearly Rs 18 crore from close to Rs 15 crore.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) acknowledged that fees and subscriptions are the major sources of its income.

This category of income included earnings from annual fees and subscriptions, listing fees contribution from stock exchanges, income generated from registration, renewal, application and offer documents filed by companies and market infrastructure institutions.

Overall, the market watch-

dog's total income rose to Rs 2,075 crore in the financial year ended March 31, 2024 from Rs 1,404.36 crore in the preceding fiscal, indicating a growth of 48 per cent, the annual accounts showed.

Apart from total income, the total expenditure of the regulator rose to Rs 1,006 crore for the year ended March 31, 2024, from Rs 851.33 crore in the previous fiscal.

The establishment expenses grew to Rs 696.43 crore during the period under review from Rs 576 crore in the preceding fiscal and other administrative expenses increased to

Rs 218 crore from Rs 172.42 crore.

Sebi said its general fund has a closing balance of Rs 5,573 crore including an amount of Rs 1,065 crore as surplus income over expenditure transferred from Income and Expenditure Account for financial year 2023-24. Earmarked funds include Investor Protection & Education Fund (IPEF) and Disengagement fund.

IPEF has a closing balance of Rs 533.17 crore including income from investment of Rs 27.66 crore and Disengagement Fund has Rs 7.38 crore for FY24.

Penalty on Reliance for missing battery deadline

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has slapped a penalty on a unit of Reliance Industries Ltd for failing to meet the deadline for setting up a battery cell plant for which it was granted production-linked incentives, the firm said on Tuesday.

In a stock exchange filing, Reliance said its step-down subsidiary, Reliance New Energy Battery Storage Ltd on March 3 received "a letter from the Ministry of Heavy Industries levying liquidated damages at the rate of 0.1 per cent of the performance security (Rs 50 crore) for each day of delay from January 1, 2025."

The penalty was for the "delay in achievement of Milestone 1 under the programme agreement executed with MHI in connection with 5 GWh manufacturing capacity awarded under the Performance-Linked Incentive Scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell," it said.

The liquidated damages or penalty computed till March 3, 2025 was Rs 3.1 crore.

"RNEBSL has requested for an extension of time for achievement of the said

Milestone 1," it said.

The firm, however, neither disclosed the reasons for the delay nor the new timelines for meeting the target.

RNEBSL had in 2022 signed an agreement to build 10 gigawatt-hour (GWh) battery capacity with production-linked incentives for an estimated USD 400 million.

The contract was part of government initiatives to get domestic manufacturing for a new energy supply chain developed in India. Besides R N E B S L , Rajesh Exports and the unit of Ola Electric Mobility Ltd too had won bids to build the battery cell plants.

Manufacturers were eligible for Rs 181 crore worth of programme-linked incentives on meeting milestones for the project that sought to create a cumulative 30 GWh capacity of advanced chemistry cell battery storage.

The firms winning the PLI were required to achieve a minimum 'committed capacity', along with local value addition of 25 per cent within two years of the agreement, and 50 per cent within five years.

Non-tariff barriers and 'red tape' should go: USIBC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Non-tariff barriers and "red tape" that slow market access should be dismantled with haste to boost India-US trade ties, the US-India Business Council (USIBC) said as the two sides are holding initial negotiations for a trade deal.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington to hold the talks with his American counterpart Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer. India and the US agreed to begin negotiations for a trade deal following talks between

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in Washington DC last month.

"We wish both governments success in their negotiations, and urge both sides to leverage the trade relationship for shared growth," (USIBC) President Ambassador Atul Keshap said on Tuesday (Monday US time).

"Meaningful trade facilitation through a sweeping bilateral trade deal is long overdue, and would be instrumental in boosting the GDPs of both America and India and bind our two mighty economies



closer together," he said. It is expected that a major focus of the trade negotiations will be on tariff.

Trump's policy on "reciprocal tariff" for all trading part-

ners of the US has stoked global concerns.

For years, the US and Indian businesses have invested in each other's countries without a formal investment or trade

framework, Keshap said. India represents only 2.5 percent of America's trade volumes, and that number can and should increase substantially, he said.

Keshap said both sides should now work with focus to formalise a level playing field, full and open market access, swift dispute arbitration, and predictable tax and regulatory policies to boost investment, growth, and job creation in both countries.

"Non-tariff barriers and red tape that slow market access should be dismantled with haste. The opportunity for

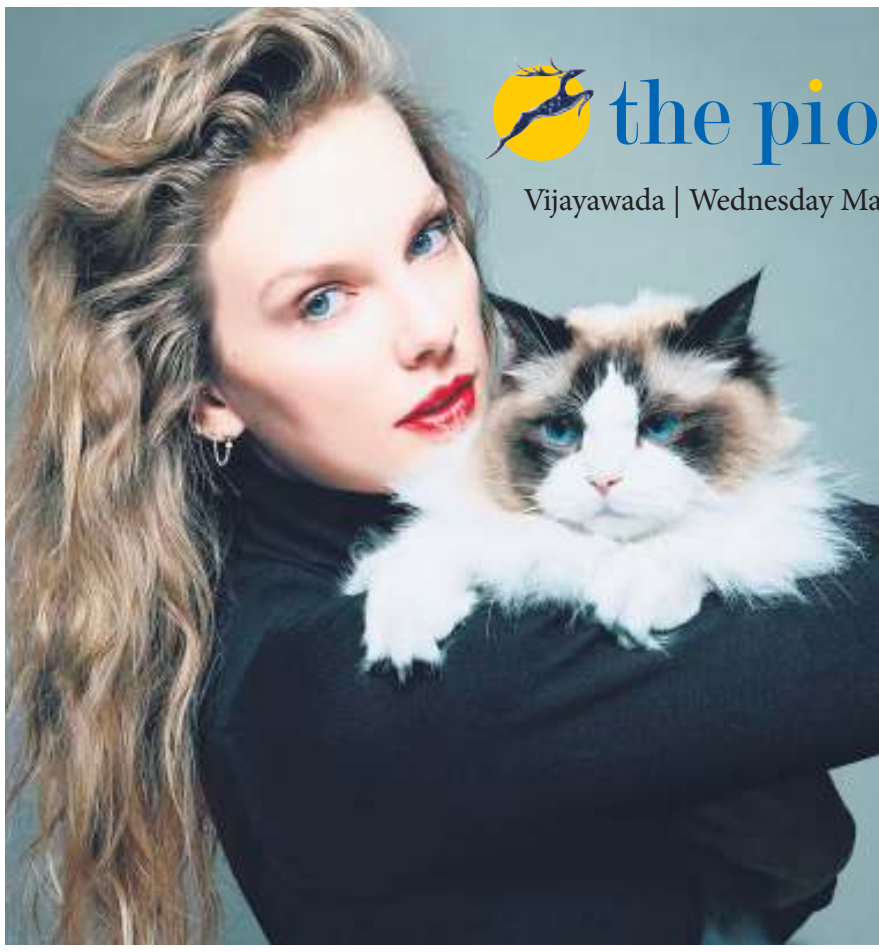
both sides is a landmark bilateral agreement that can further unleash entrepreneurship and GDP growth in both countries," he said.

"Now is the time for ambitious outcomes between Washington and Delhi."

"Our USIBC member companies - American and Indian - enthusiastically applaud the efforts of both governments and wish them productive talks that deepen the strategic, economic, and technological partnership between the people of the United States and the people of India," he added.

what's brewing?

FLORIDA ARTIST FILES \$25 MILLION LAWSUIT AGAINST TAYLOR SWIFT



Florida-based artist Kimberly Marasco has escalated her legal battle against Taylor Swift, filing a fresh lawsuit that expands her claims of copyright infringement across multiple albums. This time, she has named Swift's longtime collaborators—producers Jack Antonoff and Aaron Dessner—along with Universal Music Group and Republic Records as additional defendants. Marasco is seeking \$25 million in damages, significantly increasing her original demand of \$7 million.

Marasco first filed a lawsuit against Swift in April 2024, alleging that the pop superstar had used elements of her work without permission. That case, which targeted Swift and her production company, Taylor Swift Productions, Inc., ran into procedural hurdles. In December, Judge Aileen Cannon dismissed Swift from the lawsuit due to Marasco's failure to serve her on time, though the case against Swift's production company remained active.

Undeterred, Marasco has now refiled her complaint

under a new judge, Jose E. Martinez and broadened its scope. Her latest lawsuit includes additional allegations related to songs from Swift's highly anticipated album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, including *Who's Afraid of Little Old Me?* and *I Can Do It With a Broken Heart*.

Beyond *The Tortured Poets Department*, Marasco's lawsuit cites alleged infringement in earlier Swift songs such as *The Man (Lover)* and *Midnight Rain (Midnights)*, which were also part of her original complaint. With the new filing, Antonoff and Dessner—both of whom have played key roles in shaping Swift's sound in recent years—are now under legal scrutiny. Antonoff is specifically named for his work on *Illicit Affairs (Folklore)* and *Down Bad (The Tortured Poets Department)*, while Dessner is mentioned for his contributions to *Hoax (Folklore)* and *Death by a Thousand Cuts (Lover)*.

The lawsuit acknowledges that the legal battle against Taylor Swift Productions remains unresolved but clar-

ifies that this latest complaint focuses on new defendants. Marasco's filing states that she will attempt to serve Swift again, though she has not included her production company in this new case.

Marasco has faced procedural challenges in her legal fight against Swift. Last month, Judge Cannon struck down a response she had filed, citing non-compliance with court rules. Meanwhile, Swift's legal team continues to push for the dismissal of the case against her production company, arguing that the claims lack merit.

As the new lawsuit unfolds, the defendants have 21 days from the date of service to formally respond. With a new judge overseeing the case, it remains to be seen whether Marasco's legal battle will gain traction or face the same fate as her previous attempt.

For now, Swift and her team have yet to issue a public statement on the latest lawsuit. Given Swift's history of successfully defending her creative work, industry experts will be watching closely to see how this high-profile copyright dispute plays out.

'I KNOCKED ON DOORS AND ASKED FOR WORK'

Bobby Deol, who is currently enjoying a remarkable career resurgence, recently opened up about the challenging phase in his life when opportunities were scarce. In an latest interview, the *Aashram* star revealed that he actively sought out work, introducing himself to filmmakers and producers without any hesitation.

Recalling the struggles he faced, Bobby admitted that he knocked on doors and personally requested work, a stark contrast to the early days of his career when offers came to him effortlessly.

"When I was going through a bad phase, I knocked on doors and said, 'I am Bobby Deol and please give me work.' I don't think there's anything wrong with that. You need work and at least they will remember that Bobby Deol had come to meet them. Sometimes,

this even translates into opportunities. There is nothing to be ashamed of," he shared.

He noted that when he began his career, opportunities were more readily available, but with time, competition intensified.

"Back then, it was different. When I started, people would approach me with work. But the number of actors has increased significantly and it's important to acknowledge that the industry will continue to welcome new talent," he explained.

Meanwhile, in another interview Deol was asked whether he still experiences jitters before a new release. The *Animal* actor admitted that *Aashram* was a turning point in his career, as it marked his first time playing a full-fledged antagonist. The anticipation and pressure took a toll on him.

"I remember the day I was promoting, I got a vertigo attack because I have vertigo issues. I guess there was a lot of nervousness and fear about how people would react to me playing a character like this," he revealed.

Deol explained how actors often fall prey to external influences, with people around them attempting to brainwash them into making "safe" career choices. He acknowledged that this vulnerability is a major challenge for actors, as it can lead to self-doubt and hesitation.

Despite the risks, Deol stood by his decision to take on the role of Baba Nirala. He described the experience as a career restart, as he was venturing into uncharted territory with a character unlike anything he had played before.



The heist is on! Saif Ali Khan and Jaideep Ahlawat's *Jewel Thief* drops soon on Netflix

Saif Ali Khan is back in action, teaming up once again with filmmaker Siddharth Anand for an adrenaline-fueled heist thriller. Titled *Jewel Thief - The Heist Begins*, the much-anticipated film is set to make its Netflix debut on March 27, 2025. With less than a month left for its release, anticipation is soaring as fans gear up for a high-octane cinematic experience.

The film's teaser was unveiled during Netflix's 'Next on Netflix' event, offering an electrifying preview of what's in store. Clocking in at just over a minute, the teaser introduces audiences to a daring heist mission led by Saif Ali Khan, alongside the formidable Jaideep Ahlawat.

Saif, known for his effortless charm and versatility, takes on multiple disguises, adding an intriguing layer of mystery to the heist. The teaser also showcases Kunal Kapoor and Nikita Dutta in pivotal roles, hinting at a web of deception, action and unexpected alliances.

From jaw-dropping chase sequences to a dazzling dance number, the teaser is packed with edge-

of-the-seat moments. Amplifying the thrill is a gripping background score, setting the perfect tone for an intense and stylish crime drama.

Helmed by directors Kookie Gulati and Robbie Grewal, *Jewel Thief - The Heist Begins* marks Siddharth Anand's streaming debut as a producer. Known for delivering blockbusters like *Pathaan* and *War*, Anand brings his signature flair for stylish action and compelling narratives to the OTT space.

Producers Siddharth and Mamta Anand expressed their excitement about the project, calling it a "labor of love" designed to keep audiences on the edge of their seats. With high-intensity action, intricate storytelling, and visually stunning sequences, the film aims to redefine the heist thriller genre in Indian cinema.

As the premiere date draws closer, *Jewel Thief - The Heist Begins* is shaping up to be one of the most awaited releases of the year. With a star-studded cast, gripping plot and the promise of an exhilarating ride, this heist thriller is set to leave a lasting impact.

Elnaaz Norouzi: 'In Hollywood, if you fit the role, you get it—unlike in Bollywood'

With roots in Iran and Germany, Elnaaz Norouzi embarked on her acting journey in India, where she had to learn a new language and adapt to an unfamiliar industry. Now, she is set to take a major leap in her career, making her Hollywood debut as a lead in *Hotel Tehran*, starring alongside Zachary Levi and Liam Neeson.

When asked whether navigating Bollywood or Hollywood was more challenging, Elnaaz candidly admitted that Bollywood posed greater obstacles for her as an outsider.

"Honestly, it's Bollywood. Here, the industry isn't always welcoming to outsiders. Getting in is one challenge, but then there's also learning the language and dance. Hindi is my sixth or seventh language and I started acting in a language that wasn't my first. That was my biggest challenge—and it still is."

Elnaaz also highlighted a stark difference between the two industries, noting that Bollywood often relies on factors beyond talent when casting actors.

"Over there (Hollywood), when you give a good audition, they see you as a great actor. But here, that's not always the case. You don't get chosen purely based on an audition—there are so many other factors at play. In Hollywood, it feels fair: if you fit the role, you get selected. Unfortunately, I don't feel the same fairness exists here."

The actress also acknowledged that she has felt sidelined in Bollywood. "Of course, I have. That's very normal because people aren't always accepting of outsiders. But that's a whole different conversation," she added. As she makes her mark in Hollywood, Elnaaz finds inspiration in Priyanka Chopra Jonas, who successfully transitioned from Bollywood to becoming a global star. She met Priyanka at her brother Siddharth Chopra's wedding and couldn't help but praise her journey. "I'm a big Priyanka fan. She is amazing and has been so brave in everything she has done—whether in Bollywood, Hollywood, or in her personal life. She is our lady, and she's doing everything right," Elnaaz said.

With *Hotel Tehran* on the horizon, Elnaaz Norouzi is determined to carve her own path in Hollywood, proving that perseverance and talent can break barriers—no matter the industry.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



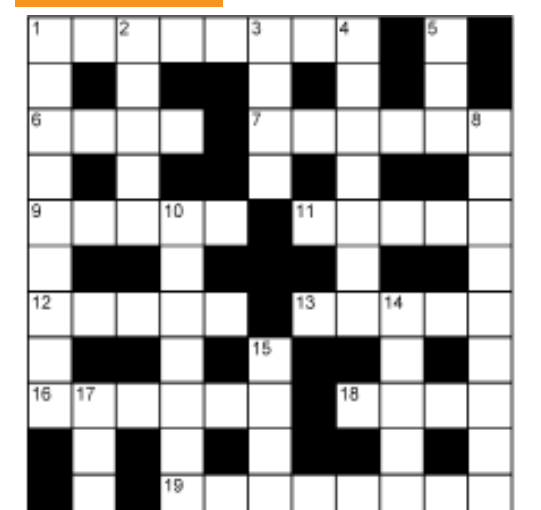
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

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

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 happy sound
- This supports your head
- Goes rotten
- Tiny mark
- A liquid measure
- A house made of hard snow
- This makes dough rise
- Follows seventh
- Final
- A long strip of paper used as a decoration

DOWN

- Avalanche
- A male relation
- Neat
- Take delivery of

SOLUTION

E	S	O	R	A
S	N	A	T	T
G	N	A	T	T
B	U	N	N	E
S	I	A	G	E
T	R	A	N	S
I	T	E	E	U
N	I	G	H	T
A	O	R	I	E
T	R	A	V	E
E	T	E	M	E

GINGER MEGGS



'I APPROACH EACH REMIX LIKE A FULL SONG, NOT JUST AN ALTERED VERSION'

In a fascinating conversation with **The Pioneer, Kazinama**, who's redefining the boundaries of music, we dive into the heart of his creative process, where classic melodies meet cutting-edge innovation, the success of his latest *Ahista Ahista* and more

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Kazinama's musical journey is nothing short of extraordinary, blending the soulful essence of classic melodies with a bold, modern twist. A master of fusing genres, *Ahista Ahista*, for instance, has not only captured global attention but also resonated deeply with audiences around the world. His ability to weave together vintage sounds with fresh, innovative production techniques has made him a true trailblazer in the music industry. "Generally, how I make music can vary," he begins this exclusive chat with **The Pioneer**, noting that there is no one right or wrong way to approach music production. For *Ahista Ahista*, his process started with crafting the music first. The influence of Bollywood music is apparent in *Ahista Ahista* and Kazinama saw the fusion of the two genres as a way to create something unique. "The song gradually transitions to different music and I really liked that flow," he adds, describing it as a journey. The track was not just a song for him; it was an evolving experience, one that he described as a journey, reflecting his deep personal connection to the music. When asked about his creative process for *Ahista Ahista*, he delves into the core of what made the track stand out. "I never thought it would resonate on such a global scale. I started with the drum groove, and I'm heavily influenced by soul, R&B and jazz elements. The music was already rooted in soul, but adding

Hindi lyrics created something unique for Indian audiences," he says. As he worked through various chord progressions and synth elements, Kazinama approached the track as a puzzle, with each new musical element fitting into the larger picture. His ability to strike a balance between honoring the essence of a song while giving it a fresh twist is also a hallmark of his remixes. When discussing his approach to remixes, he reveals that his goal is always to preserve the original soul of the track. "If you see my remixes, they're a bit different from the typical DJ or producer remix. Most DJ remixes use a four-on-the-floor beat, but I don't see myself as just remixing a track—I see it as an opportunity to tell my version of the song." Kazinama's approach is rooted in storytelling, treating each remix as a full-fledged song rather than just an altered version of the original. This mindset allows him to preserve the emotional essence of the track while giving it his personal twist. "I arrange music from a song perspective, not just a remix," he reflects.

His extensive experience as a session guitarist and bass player has undoubtedly influenced his musical choices, especially in terms of instrumentation and arrangement. He shares that his love for live music has played a significant role in his sound. "I've been in the industry for 15 years and I've played nearly 2,000 shows with artists across the globe," he says. Despite being primarily a guitar player, his deep connection to bass shines through in his music. Despite not anticipating the track's massive reception, he has some insights into why the song resonated so powerfully with listeners, particularly on platforms like Instagram. "I think the virality comes from the fact that the music is novel. It's packaged in a fresh way—soul music with vintage elements," he says. He believes that the song's lyrics also played a crucial role. The poetic nature of the words, which explore themes of travel and journey, resonates with listeners in a personal way. "Poetry is all about different interpretations, and I think people saw the lyrics through their own lens, which helped them connect to

the song," he adds. The visual component of the video, which integrates Japanese anime elements, further amplified the song's appeal to the younger generation, particularly the 18-25 age group. Kazinama notes that these visuals, combined with

the familiar melody, created a unique and compelling experience. "The melody was already embedded in their subconscious from Bollywood's past renditions, but my version brought something new," he explains.

As we transition into the next segment of the conversation, Kazinama reflects on how his work has been shaped by his deep love for classic melodies and timeless hits. He points to his ongoing exploration of vintage sounds, drawing inspiration from iconic figures like Lata Mangeshkar, but with a modern twist. "I always find people subconsciously connected to these melodies. The challenge is to put them in the right context, creating something that feels fresh yet familiar," he shares. For *Ahista Ahista*, he created the music first before searching for the right melody, choosing a lower pitch for the original vocals to blend better with the modern arrangements. "It's not rocket science," he says modestly, "it's just about feeling what works best."

While discussing the challenges that arose during the production process, he candidly opens up about the technical

hurdles he encountered. "In the second part of the song, there's a chord progression I heard in a sample library that I really wanted to use," he recalls. To replicate the chord exactly, he spent two hours on guitar, painstakingly figuring out the exact sound before modifying the sample to match his vision. "That was probably the biggest challenge in the song. The rest of the journey was pretty fun for me, though."

Kazinama's remixes, such as *Je Tu Akhiyan De Samne* and Gulam Ali Classics, are celebrated for preserving the essence of the original songs while offering something new. Reflecting on his approach to reimagining these timeless tracks, he says, "I see music as storytelling. I don't just remix; I create a fresh perspective, using elements that speak to me while preserving the heart of the original piece." He also shares the personal story behind his remix of Gulam Ali's songs, revealing how his father's love for Gulam Ali's music inspired him during the

"I SEE MUSIC AS STORY-TELLING. I DON'T JUST REMIX; I CREATE A FRESH PERSPECTIVE, USING ELEMENTS THAT SPEAK TO ME WHILE PRESERVING THE HEART OF THE ORIGINAL PIECE."

lockdown. "I thought, maybe I can give this a new perspective, something that connects the younger generation to the depth of the original poetry," he says. His collaboration experiences with renowned artists like Kailash Kher, Raeth, Farhan Saeed and Suryaveer, have also left a lasting impact on his musical journey. Most of these collaborations happened during live shows, where he was deeply inspired by the artists' stage presence and their ability to engage the audience.

Over the years, Kazinama has expanded his musical influences, which range from heavy metal to neo-soul and jazz. He attributes his sound to a combination of various genres and artists. "From Metallica to Robert Glasper, Daft Punk and Gulam Ali, I've been influenced by so many different styles," he says. His musical exploration has allowed him to grow and experiment, drawing inspiration from both Western and Indian music. "I'm not confined to any genre—I like whatever resonates with me. If it sounds good to my ear, it's good for me." Despite his success, he remains grounded and humble about his journey. He reflects on some of the challenges he faced as a guitarist, particularly when he wanted to experiment with keyboard-based chord progressions. "Being a guitarist, I always faced a challenge when it came to working with keys," he shares. "But I found a way around that by using a midi guitar converter, which allowed me to play keyboard chords on my guitar. It was a breakthrough for me." Through trial and error, Kazinama has found ways to overcome these technical hurdles, which has only fueled his creativity and passion for music.



'Stop watching reels, make movies in your head,' urges Atul Sabharwal

PNS| EXCLUSIVE

Atul Sabharwal, the acclaimed screenwriter and director, returns as a jury member for the second edition of the Jury for Red Lorry Film Festival, bringing with him an insightful and passionate perspective on cinema. Known for his thoughtful storytelling and masterful direction, Sabharwal's involvement in the festival is driven by his love for diverse, untold stories and his desire to explore films that transcend borders.

Atul Sabharwal expressed his enthusiasm for being part of the jury at the film festival for a second consecutive year. He highlighted that the festival provides a rare opportunity to explore diverse films that might not be seen at other festivals. "What motivated me to take on this role was the opportunity to watch different kinds of films. Red Lorry's selection last year was very different from other festivals," the *Berlin* filmmaker explained adding, "Since I've received the screenings for this year as well, I can see that these films mostly were not there at other festivals. So, it's my chance to watch these films, which I otherwise might not have gotten a chance to watch."

He shared his hopes for this year's festival, saying, "I'm just hoping that it continues the tradition of being a very organised festival, where people can interact in a warm, informal way, shedding the class divide that festivals unfortunately come to inhabit."

When asked about the role of platforms like this festival in promoting international cinema, the *Aurangzeb* filmmaker emphasised their importance not only in promoting films but also in expanding cultural awareness. "I think it's very important not just for the promotion of international films, but also it enhances our awareness." He believes films have the power to transcend political borders and language barriers, helping viewers recognise shared emotions across cultures.

He cited the global success of *Parasite* by Bong Joon Ho as an example, saying, "Movies are these magical works of art that can transcend political borders and language barriers." He also noted the reciprocal benefits of showcasing international films, which open new markets for filmmakers while offering fresh perspectives to local audiences. "Watching international films and having Indian films showcased abroad is a great chance for cross-pollination and bilateral business," he said.

Reflecting on his role as a jury member, he acknowledged the expertise of his fellow jury members but emphasised his own passion for cinema. "I am watching the films as a film buff more than anything else," he said. He explained that his enthusiasm for movies, rather than a purely technical or academic perspective, is what he hopes to bring to the panel. "I've now started watching the screenings as a film buff rather than a filmmaker," added the *Jubilee* writer.

As a seasoned filmmaker with both writing and directing experience, he shared his approach to evaluating films in the competition segment. "I think only the emotional connect," he said, focusing on how well a film resonates emotionally with him. He stressed the importance of experiencing a film as a whole rather than analysing it by departments like cine-

matography or writing. "If it impacts me emotionally in its first viewing, then that's the quality I'm looking at," he explained.

He further highlighted the importance of the first viewing experience, noting that it's rare to find a film that leaves a strong emotional impression at first glance. "I'm just hoping these unknown bunch of films give me that," he remarked.

His film *Berlin*, which is set against the backdrop of the Cold War era, draws from his own experiences

growing up during that period. "I grew up in this period, so I saw a lot of Delhi visually in that period from my own eyes," he explained. He mentioned how his exposure to Eastern European cinema and espionage novels helped form an emotional and visual connection between the city of Delhi and the world of Cold War-era espionage. "It just also sort of amalgamated itself into my head that it became a movie," he said, reflecting on how these influences converged into his directorial project.

Looking back on his directorial debut with *Aurangzeb* in 2013, Sabharwal reflected on how his approach to filmmaking and storytelling has evolved over the years. "I think what I have learned to do is minimise my over-explanation and overstay my welcome," he noted. He revealed that he's become more confident in letting the story breathe, focusing on pacing while still maintaining the emotional depth of his work. "I am now at a stage where my story moves at a much faster pace than it used to, but it also is told unhurriedly. It's told with confidence," he added.

In discussing the current trends in Indian cinema, the *Class of '83* director shared his belief that the industry has stagnated rather than evolved. "I don't think it's evolving in any sense. The only time I felt that our cinema was evolving was in my first year in Bombay when I moved to join the film industry," he reminisced, pointing to the early 2000s when films like *Company*, *Lagaan* and *Dil Chahta Hai* reshaped the industry. "That was the point I felt that something is evolving. I think as of now, we have devolved."

He also discussed the cyclical nature of trends in culture and cinema, where periods of progress are often followed by regression. Despite this, he sees opportunities for filmmakers to be subversive and break from the mainstream. "As long as you have the desire to be subversive, you can find something which breaks the norm," he remarked, highlighting how filmmakers can still push boundaries even in a landscape dominated by action-driven blockbusters.

Looking forward, Sabharwal expressed excitement about exploring themes of romance and family in his future projects. "The only genre that I'm excited to explore as of now is romance and family," he said. He suggested that these themes might be incorporated into a variety of genres, whether espionage or action films, but emphasised that romance remains a central focus for him.

Sabharwal offered a piece of valuable advice to emerging filmmakers: "Stop watching reels. Make movies in your head," he urged. He stressed the importance of developing a deep connection with creativity and story before jumping into the fast-paced world of social media. "We have started living our creativity in spurts, but we need to allow things to ferment and gestate inside us, then react to them," he said, lamenting how the rush to instantly share thoughts on platforms like Twitter or Instagram can hinder creative development. He likened the current generation's approach to creativity to a chef who only eats quick snacks like pani puri but never immerses themselves in the full process of culinary art. "You can't become a great chef just by eating pani puri," he quipped, suggesting that filmmakers must allow their emotions and ideas to build up before bringing them to life in the form of a film.

In an exclusive chat with **The Pioneer, Atul Sabharwal**, the renowned director and screenwriter, opens up about his return as a jury member for the second edition of the jury of Red Lorry Film Festival, reflecting on his filmmaking journey and also urges emerging filmmakers to focus on cultivating creativity away from the distractions of social media



GROOMING NEXT-GEN LEADERS

Family businesses form the backbone of global economies, accounting for nearly 79% of enterprises worldwide. They are not just economic entities but custodians of legacies built over generations. However, sustaining these businesses across multiple generations comes with its own set of challenges—navigating succession, maintaining continuity and ensuring that core values remain intact while adapting to modern business landscapes. In this delicate balancing act, mentorship emerges as a crucial element, facilitating the transfer of knowledge, leadership skills and strategic thinking from one generation to the next.

A structured mentorship program plays a defining role in succession planning. Studies suggest that family businesses with well-established mentorship frameworks are 30% more likely to experience smooth leadership transitions. Senior leaders bring decades of experience, while the younger generation often introduces fresh perspectives, digital fluency, and innovative problem-solving approaches. When effectively guided, this synergy enhances decision-making, emotional intelligence and strategic vision—ensuring that successors are equipped to lead in an evolving business environment.

Beyond preparing the next generation for leadership, mentorship preserves the company's legacy. The values and principles on which a business was built are not always documented but are embedded in everyday operations, relationships and decision-making. Without deliberate mentorship, these intangible assets risk being diluted over time. A strong mentor-mentee relationship fosters this continuity, helping successors internalise the ethos of the business while finding ways to align it with contemporary challenges.

At the same time, knowledge transfer extends beyond philosophy—it encompasses technical expertise, industry insights and operational best practices. A well-mentored successor benefits not only from the wisdom of senior leadership but also gains access to invaluable business networks and strategic alliances.

Mentorship also acts as an important guiding force in navigating family dynamics within the workplace. The intersection of personal and professional relationships in family businesses often leads to conflicts and having a mentor helps young leaders strike a balance between business decisions and familial expectations. However, for mentorship to be truly effective, it must be structured rather than informal. One of the most common pitfalls in family businesses is the blurring of lines between parenting and mentoring.

The transition from a familial role to a leadership role requires clear differentiation to ensure that guidance remains professional and goal-oriented.

Open communication is another cornerstone of effective mentorship. Successors must feel empowered to share ideas, ask questions and challenge the status quo without any fear of judgment. Equally important is the willingness of the senior leaders to recognise that learning styles and capacities differ across generations.

Despite the significance of mentorship, many family businesses still lack structured leadership training initiatives. In India, 44% of family-run enterprises report an absence of formal mentoring programs. This gap presents an opportunity for businesses to institutionalise mentorship as a long-term investment. Global studies indicate that companies with dedicated mentoring programs witness a 45% higher success rate in leadership transitions. Indian business families, such as those behind Infosys and the TVS Group, have demonstrated how mentorship fosters continuity and growth. A Deloitte study further highlights that 70% of family business successors consider mentorship as a critical factor in their leadership readiness.

Yet, challenges persist. Generational differences can lead to resistance to change and balancing professional growth with family expectations is never straightforward. In addition, ensuring diversity and inclusion in leadership roles remains an ongoing concern.

Overcoming these challenges requires a cultural shift—one that embraces mentorship not as an obligation but as a strategic priority for business sustainability. Mentoring by the Senior Leadership requires them to understand the psyche of the younger generation, while also restraining themselves from constant references to past laurels. Hence the Mentors need to be open to accepting effective. Engaging external mentors, where necessary, can also provide unbiased perspectives and technical expertise that complement internal mentoring efforts.

Looking ahead, mentorship will be instrumental in shaping the future of leadership in family businesses. It is not just about preparing successors to take over but about equipping them to evolve the business while staying rooted in its foundational values. HR and senior leadership must actively foster a mentorship-driven culture that enables businesses to remain competitive across generations. Investing in structured mentoring today ensures that family enterprises continue to thrive, seamlessly bridging the past with the future.

(The author, Kavita Nigam, is the CHRO of KARAM Safety.)



India to host second Asian Yogasana Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 16 countries will participate in the second Asian Yogasana Championship, scheduled to be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium here from March 29 to 31.

The championship, being organised in collaboration with the Sports Ministry and Yogasana Bharat, aims to showcase Yogasana at the international level while embracing its rich heritage and deep-rooted cultural significance.

The event, being supported by the Olympic Council of Asia, World Yogasana, Asian Yogasana and Yogasana Indraprastha, will also help create a roadmap towards inclusion of the discipline in the Olympic curriculum.

"India, the birthplace of yoga, is honoured to host the second Asian Yogasana Championship. This event is more than just a competition; it is a celebration of our ancient wisdom evolving into



a modern competitive sport," Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said in a release. "We are committed to making Yogasana a global sporting discipline, and this championship is a significant step toward that goal. Through this event, we will showcase not just the athleticism of Yogasanas but also its power to transform lives, both physically and mentally."

Asian Yogasana president Sanjay Malpani emphasised

the championship's impact, saying, "The Yogasana Championship is a defining moment in our mission to establish Yogasanas as a globally-recognised sport. We are witnessing the fusion of tradition with modern athletic excellence. "This championship is proof that Yogasana is not just a practice but a competitive sport that demands precision, endurance, and artistry. With every athlete who competes, we take one step closer to

Yogasanas' rightful place on the world stage."

World Yogasana secretary-general Jaideep Arya added, "The championship in New Delhi marks a significant milestone in our mission to promote Yogasana as a global competitive sport."

"This championship brings together exceptional athletes from across Asia, showcasing the strength, flexibility, and discipline that define this ancient practice. We are proud to witness the growing enthusiasm for Yogasana and remain committed to its development as a mainstream sporting discipline."

Yogasana Bharat president Udit Sheth said India is committed to shaping the future of the ancient sport.

"Our mission is to provide young athletes with a platform to shine, to elevate Yogasanas to premier sporting events, and to reinforce India's commitment to sharing this invaluable heritage with the world," he added.

Mental strength matters, not size: Gavaskar backs Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ DUBAI

Backing India captain Rohit Sharma, who was subjected to fat-shaming, cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday said that slim guys are for modelling and in cricket, mental strength is what matters, not physical size.

Addressing the unnecessary criticisms directed at India skipper in the middle of Champions Trophy by a politician, Gavaskar reminded how Mumbai's big-hitting Sarfaraz Khan also faced body shaming, but it didn't affect his performance at all.

"I have always said, if you want only slim guys, then you should go to a modelling competition and pick all the models. It's not about that," Gavaskar said.

"It's about how well you can play cricket. We talked about Sarfaraz Khan, he was vilified for a long time because he was on the heavier side. But if he scores 150 for India in a Test match and follows it up with another two or three fifty-plus scores, then what's the



Rohit Sharma prays as he walks to open the innings during the ICC Champions Trophy semi-final cricket match between India and Australia in Dubai

issue?" "I don't think size has anything to do with it. It's your mental strength - whether you can last the distance-that's the most important thing. Bat well, bat for long, and

score runs." Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed called Rohit "fat for a sportsman" and described him as "the most unimpressive Captain India has ever had." However, she faced backlash

on social media for her unwarranted comment and was forced to delete her post from the 'X'. Congress also distanced itself from Shama's comment and requested her to delete the post.

India honors Shivalkar with black armbands in Champions Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ DUBAI

The Indian team players on Tuesday wore black armbands during their Champions Trophy semifinal against Australia in the memory and honour of domestic cricket legend Padmakar Shivalkar, who passed away due to age-related illness.

Shivalkar was one of the finest spinners who did not get to play for India as he played in the era of greats like Bishan Singh Bedi.

He was 84 and breathed his last in Mumbai on Monday. In the 124 First Class matches he played for Mumbai, Shivalkar took 589 wickets with his left-arm spin. Shivalkar was conferred with the prestigious CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award by the BCCI.

The current India skipper Rohit Sharma also hails from Mumbai.

Aaqib Javed to continue as Pakistan's head coach

PTI ■ LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has asked former pacer and national selector, Aaqib Javed, to continue as interim head coach for the white-ball tour of New Zealand.

A PCB official said due to time constraints between the Champions Trophy and New Zealand tour, Aaqib will continue as interim head coach.

"The PCB meanwhile has started the process of finding a new head coach for the national team and due process would be followed," he said. The official said Pakistan should have a new head coach when they begin their new cycle of the World Test Championship (WTC) in August.

Last year, the PCB had appointed Jason Gillespie and Gary Kirsten as the red ball and white ball coaches respectively, but both resigned within six to eight months of their appointment citing issues with the Pakistan board.

Aaqib, a senior selector, was then asked to take over as interim head coach of the white ball squad and then also the red ball team for the Test series in South Africa and against West Indies at home.



Pakistan interim head coach Aaqib Javed, left, speaks as Salman Ali Agha watches during a press conference in Lahore

He also continued in the post in the three-nation event in Pakistan and the Champions Trophy from which the team bowed out without registering a win.

Former Pakistan captain, Mohammad Yousuf, will now work as batting coach of the national side. The PCB also said that it has appointed Salman Ali Agha as captain and Shadab Khan as vice-captain of the T20 squad keeping in mind the T20 World Cup next year.

"The decision to appoint Salman and Shadab as T20I captain and vice-captain, respectively, has been made with an eye on two major upcoming tournaments - the ACC Men's T20 Asia Cup 2025 (September 2025) and the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 (February or March 2026)," the board said. Salman has previously led Pakistan in a T20I series against Zimbabwe, winning it 2-1. As part of preparations for the

T20 World Cup, Pakistan are set to play a minimum of five T20Is in the Asia Cup 2025 and three T20Is each against West Indies (away in July), Afghanistan (home in August), Ireland (home in September), South Africa (home in September/October), Sri Lanka (home in November) and Australia (home in January 2026).

The board said that Mohammad Rizwan will continue leading the ODI side as Pakistan build for the 2027 ODI World Cup, which will take place in Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The board also confirmed that opens Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub were not considered for either format for the New Zealand tour on medical advice.

"Fakhar suffered a left lower intercostal muscle sprain during Pakistan's ICC Champions Trophy opener against New Zealand, while Saim is recovering from a right ankle fracture sustained on the first day of the Cape Town Test against South Africa in January," the board said.

It confirmed that both are expected to be fully fit for the Pakistan Super League 10, starting in Rawalpindi on 11 April.

Babar, Rizwan dropped from Pakistan's T20 squad



Babar Azam plays a shot during the Champions Trophy 2025 cricket match

PTI ■ LAHORE

Captain Muhammad Rizwan and Babar Azam were on Tuesday dropped from the Pakistan squad for the five-match T20 series in New Zealand. Salman Ali Agha replaced Rizwan as captain of the T20 outfit with all-rounder Shadab Khan being recalled and named his vice-captain.

Rizwan has been retained as captain of the ODI squad after the team's disappointing show in the Champions Trophy. The

selectors have avoided an overhaul in the one-day squad and retained majority of the players who flopped in the ongoing ICC event.

Babar is also retained in the ODI squad but batters Saud Shakil and Kamran Ghulam have been axed. The selectors have also sidelined fast bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf from the one-day squad.

Pakistan play five T20s and three ODIs in New Zealand starting March 16. Pakistan will still be without

dashing opener Saim Ayub, who is yet to recover from an ankle injury while opener, Fakhar Zaman has also been ruled out of the tour with an injury he sustained in the first match of the CT.

His injury came after making a comeback to the Pakistan squad last month in the three-nation event while Saim got injured while fielding during the Test series in South Africa earlier this year.

Pakistan squads: ODI: Muhammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (VC), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Akif Javed, Babar Azam Faheem Ashraf, Imam ul Haq, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Wasim junior, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah Sufyan Muqeem, Tayyab Tahir.

T20: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Shadab Khan (VC), Abdul Samad, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Hasan Nawaz, Jahandad Khan, Khushdil Shah, Muhammad Abbas Afridi, Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Haris, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Omaid Bin Yousuf, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Sufyan Muqeem, Usman Khan.



South Africa's Ryan Rickelton celebrates after scoring century during the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match

South Africa has more class than NZ: Ponting

PTI ■ LAHORE

South Africa have a "bit more class and power" in their lineup, which makes them favourites in the Champions Trophy semifinal against New Zealand, feels Ricky Ponting, though the Australian leader added that if someone like Kane Williamson comes to the party he could get the job done for the Black Caps.

New Zealand are coming into the knockouts on the back of a big defeat against India in Dubai, while South Africa are on a roll following their massive seven-wicket win against England in the group stage. While momentum could play a big role in the contest, Ponting said with a deep batting line-up, just like India, South Africa enjoy an edge.

"If I look at both the sides, I think there's that little bit more class in the South African lineup. They bat deep. I think they might have a little bit too much power for New

Zealand," Ponting opined on ICC Review on Tuesday. "I'm actually going with South Africa (to win the contest) as much as I've praised New Zealand," he added.

The former Australian captain added that New Zealand top-order batter Williamson will have to play a leading role in the contest as every team relies on its big players to guide them in crunch games.

"Williamson, I think, needs to make runs for them in this game. Every team needs their big players standing up in big moments. Big games mean big names. It doesn't get bigger than the Champions Trophy semifinals. And, Williamson is a big-game player, he will understand the enormity of his role going into the game and I won't be surprised if he gets the job done," Ponting said. Williamson, after hardly making any contribution against Pakistan (1) and Bangladesh (5), struck a 120-ball 81 against India in the

final group game, which would have given him some confidence.

However, Ponting feels the likes of opener Ryan Rickelton, skipper Temba Bavuma, Aiden Markram, David Miller and Heinrich Klaasen could make things difficult for the Kiwis.

"He's (Klaasen) very important because he is such a dangerous player of spin bowling. He's such a great, clean hitter of spin. He is important to the middle order but South Africa bat deep like India. And, with a world-class all-rounder like Marco Jansen and obviously Aiden Markram, (Temba) Bavuma, David Miller. Their batting is really strong. That middle order. "I think Klaasen has been the No.1 T20 batter for long and if he brings that sort of stuff to the 50-over game. If he goes in around the 30-over mark and South Africa are 2-3 down, then he can be truly dangerous," he said.

NZ, SA aim to shed underachiever tag in Champions Trophy semifinal

PTI ■ LAHORE

Loaded with world-class talent but haunted by the underachievers tag at ICC events, New Zealand and South Africa will square off in an evenly-matched second semifinal of the Champions Trophy here on Wednesday.

South Africa and New Zealand have won the Champions Trophy once each in 1998 and 2000 respectively but the tournament was called the ICC Knockout Trophy at that time and didn't carry the significance which it has now.

While South Africa would look to shed their big tournament "chokers" tag, the Kiwis will also be desperate to lay their hands on a title after having finished second best twice in the ODI World Cup (2015 and 2019) and once in the T20 World Cup (2021). Led by Mitchell Santner, New Zealand finished behind India in Group A, while South Africa topped Group B ahead of



New Zealand players celebrate the wicket of Virat Kohli during ODI match of the ICC Champions Trophy in Dubai

Australia. But there is little to separate the two sides. Both are evenly-matched in most departments but the Proteas look to be slightly ahead on the bowling front because of variety. The two teams have enough

firepower in their batting line-ups and have quality fielders but the contest is expected to be decided by the spinners. Although the pitches here are a bit on the slower side but they haven't spun as much as the surfaces in Dubai and it will be inter-

esting to see how the spinners of both the teams fare.

The 44-run loss to India in their last group match notwithstanding, New Zealand will take confidence from their win over South Africa in the tri-series here last month.

Recently, New Zealand successfully chased 305 against South Africa here and then went on to win the tri-series, beating Pakistan in the final, and senior batter Tom Latham feels those experiences will hold them in good stead.

"Yeah, the (South Africa) team that we played potentially will be slightly different, they had a lot of guys that that weren't in that side. They were still playing in their SAT20 back in South Africa so will be slightly different. "But I guess from our point of view, we'll lean back on those experiences of Lahore in playing against South Africa," Latham had said.

"We'll do everything that we do leading up to a game. It's obvious-

ly going to be a reasonably quick turnaround, but it is what it is. And, we'll be looking forward to the challenge of a semifinal," he added referring to the hectic travel schedule. New Zealand were in Dubai on Sunday to play against India and headed to Lahore the next morning.

Latham has been New Zealand's best batter so far with 187 runs from three matches, but Kane Williamson's return to form with a classy 81 against India also augurs well for the Kiwis.

On the bowling front, Matt Henry stood out and is currently the highest wicket-taker with eight scalps and has good support from Will O'Rourke (six wickets). In skipper Mitchell Santner, Michael Bracewell, Rachin Ravindra, Glenn Phillips and Mark Chapman, New Zealand boast of a good spin attack. South Africa too are in red-hot form. The Proteas have fielded one of their most prolific squads in the tournament and have all their bases covered.

It has been a different Varun Chakravarthy since his comeback: Suryakumar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav on Tuesday said mystery spinner Varun Chakravarthy has been a different player since his comeback to international cricket, for he has become mentally tougher and plays with a smile on his face. Chakravarthy returned excellent figures of 5/42 in India's convincing victory over New Zealand in Dubai on Sunday, which helped the team to top their group on way to the semifinals of the tournament. "The way he left in 2021 and the way he has come back, there are

two different Varun Chakravarthys," Suryakumar, the brand ambassador of Moha, told the media here at an event. "He has become a little tough mentally, yet he is smiling a lot and taking everything in his stride irrespective of what happens on the field which is very good from a cricketer's point of view." The selection of Chakravarthy, who did not feature in the first two group matches, proved to be a masterstroke. "I am really happy for him. He deserves everything (for) what he has been doing and all the recognition for what has been happening with him,"

Suryakumar added. "He has been a really hard working athlete since 2021. I have been watching him and have spoken with him a lot of times since he made his comeback to international cricket." Suryakumar said it is important for teams to pick players with specific skill set even though the focus has primarily been on all-rounders in the shortest format. "At the end of the day it's all about your skill and what skills you offer to the team. If it's in the best interest of the team, then you have to pick those bowlers." Suryakumar also said that

Mumbai Indians will not face any leadership conundrum in the IPL given that they have each of the current Indian captains in their side.

"As soon as we go to our house, it's like a family, so we don't think about that, that we have three captains or we have four captains. We think that we are one team," he said. "It's as good as an institution where we have learned a lot, grown over there, and gone on to play for India. We work as a unit when we get into that dressing room," he added. While Hardik Pandya is Mumbai Indians' captain, the five-time winners also boast of

India's Test leader Rohit Sharma, T20I skipper Suryakumar and also Jasprit Bumrah, who had led India in two Tests on the Australia tour. "Yes, there are a lot of captains in the team, but (when) we sit together, (be it) five people, seven, (or) ten, we take a call. How do we want to take the ship forward?" The 34-year-old Suryakumar said he wants to continue focusing on all formats for now. "When I started playing my cricket, it was all red ball. Slowly, I came into white ball formats and then I was introduced to ODIs and then T20Is," he said.

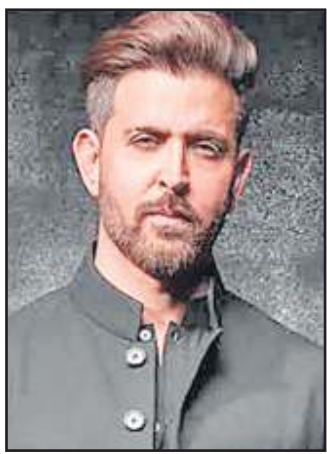
NTR and Hrithik Roshan set to deliver a dance showdown in *War 2* climax



After *RRR*, N.T. Rama Rao Jr. (NTR) is making his Hindi debut with *War 2*. Bollywood actor Hrithik Roshan stars as the lead actor, while NTR plays the antagonist. Reports suggest that the two actors are currently shooting a song for the film. Both NTR and Hrithik are renowned for their dance skills and when these two stars share the screen for a dance sequence, it promises to be a major treat for the audience.

Director Ayan Mukerji is filming this dance sequence in a studio in Mumbai, which also features Kiara Advani. Bosco Martis is the choreographer for this song, which is being shot with 500 artistes. The song will appear in the film's climax, adding to the elevation of *War 2*. Reports indicate that both actors underwent 15 days of rehearsals for the dance, which will showcase their on-screen rivalry. Hrithik Roshan plays a RAW agent, while NTR portrays the antagonist. Producer Aditya Chopra is taking every precaution to prevent any leaks from the shoot, including ensuring that no one with a mobile phone is allowed on set. This move has generated curiosity among fans and the media, making it a highly anticipated moment. The shoot for the song is expected to continue until March 10.

War 2 is slated for release on August 14. NTR's dance performance alongside Ram Charan in the hit song *Naatu Naatu* from *RRR* gained global acclaim, further building excitement for the duo's collaboration in this upcoming film.



ANURAG KASHYAP AND MANJU WARRIER'S LONG-DELAYED COLLABORATION BACK ON TRACK

Renowned filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has shared intriguing details about the casting process for *Sacred Games*, revealing that he initially approached Malayalam film star Manju Warriar for the role of RAW agent Kusum Devi Yadav. Known for her exceptional performances in films like *Rani Padmini*, *Ennum Eppozhum* and *Odiyan*, Warriar was initially considered for a key role in the critically acclaimed Netflix series. Kashyap also suggested Tamil star Nayanthara for the part while collaborating with the streaming platform.

Despite these efforts, the role ultimately went to Amruta Subhash in the second season of *Sacred Games*, which premiered in 2019.

Kashyap discussed the behind-the-scenes process during a recent roundtable interview, where he mentioned that the casting team was initially considering various actors for the role. "We were trying to get Manju Warriar for Amruta Subhash's role. We were auditioning for *Sacred Games* and gave Netflix three options—her, Nayanthara and one more person," he revealed. Kashyap also explained the logistical challenges of working with Netflix at the time, particularly because the streaming giant didn't yet have an office in India. "At that time, Netflix didn't have an India office. Everything was going to the US and OTTs weren't looking at the South market. Their choices were mostly driven by algorithms to attract subscribers from Maharashtra or other regions," he said.

Kashyap and Warriar share a special bond, dating back to their first meeting between 2011 and 2013, where they connected through mutual friends, including *Moothon* director Geetu Mohandas and cinematographer Rajeev Ravi. Kashyap also shared an interesting personal fact: he and Warriar share the same birthday, further cementing their connection.



Footage, directed by debutant Saiju Sreedharan, tells the story of Vishak and Gayatri, a couple known for their mysterious YouTube vlogs. Trapped indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic, they become intrigued by the strange story of their maid's mute employer who resides in the same complex. With a gripping plot and fresh storytelling, *Footage* marks a major step in Malayalam cinema's exploration of cross-linguistic markets.

As an avid fan of South Indian films, Kashyap made sure that *Footage* was treated with the same level of respect as a Hindi film during its post-production. He mentioned that he insisted the film not be dubbed in the usual rushed, poor-quality manner. "I reached out to a dubbing agency and told them to treat it like a Hindi film, not just a Malayalam film dubbed into Hindi," he said. Kashyap's passion for quality translation underscores his belief in the

importance of accurate, high-quality dubbing for films from diverse languages. He also emphasised his distaste for poorly dubbed films, citing *Maharaja* as an example of a poor dubbing experience that hindered his enjoyment of the film.

Meanwhile, during the roundtable interview, Warriar spoke candidly about her wish to work in Hindi cinema under the direction of Anurag Kashyap. "I am really looking forward to working in Hindi with Anurag sir. It depends on Anurag sir. If he does a film with me... I have to wait for it," she said, highlighting her admiration for the filmmaker and her excitement about the prospect of a future collaboration.

Warriar's connection with Kashyap has already begun with *Footage*, a found-footage genre thriller directed by debutant Saiju Sreedharan. Kashyap came on board as the presenter for the Hindi version of the film, which is set to explore the eerie world of a couple who, during the pandemic, uncover unsettling truths about their neighbor's silent, mysterious life. Warriar expressed her gratitude to Kashyap for his involvement with the project, saying it was an honor to have him lend his expertise to the film.

In addition to her anticipation for a Hindi film collaboration with Kashyap, Warriar also reflected on an unfinished project she was working on during the COVID-19 pandemic. She was shooting a film alongside actor Madhavan, but the production was disrupted when Madhavan contracted COVID-19. "We shot half of the film, but then it was during COVID. I was working on a film with Madhavan, and we had to wrap the shoot when Madhavan got COVID. Later, he was busy with post-production and the release of *Rocketry*, so we couldn't finish the shoot of the film," Warriar explained. She added that, due to various reasons, the shoot could not be resumed after that.



Nani's *The Paradise*: A bold statement or a strategic move for OTT deals?

On Monday, the much-anticipated promo for *The Paradise*, starring Nani and directed by Srikanth Odela, was released. However, in an unusual move, none of the film's key members—Nani, the director, or the producer—attended the launch event. The promo was instead

labelled as a 'Raw Statement,' showcasing intense violence and introducing Nani in a never-seen-before avatar. While the promo generated buzz, industry insiders have mixed reactions. Some feel Nani's rugged look doesn't suit him, while others believe the promo was strategically released to secure an OTT deal before platforms close their acquisition windows at the end of March. A producer, speaking on the condition of anonymity, revealed, "OTT platforms will pause new acquisitions by the end of March and

resume after three to four months. The makers of *The Paradise* may have released this promo now to lock in an OTT deal before that deadline." Despite Nani's consistent filmography, his recent releases have struggled to achieve blockbuster success. His attempts to expand into Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi markets have not yielded the expected results. Given the rising budgets of his films and the reliance on digital rights for revenue recovery, *The Paradise* faces a critical test—will it bring in the returns its makers are hoping for?

Karthi injured on *Sardar 2* set, film's release likely to be delayed

Tamil star Karthi, who has a strong fan base in both Tamil and Telugu cinema, has suffered an injury while shooting for *Sardar 2*, the sequel to his 2022 hit *Sardar*. The action-packed film, directed by PS Mithran, has been filming in Mysore for the past few days.

During an intense sequence, Karthi sustained a leg injury, leading the crew to rush him to a nearby hospital. According to reports, doctors have advised him to rest for at least two weeks.

The film features Malavika Mohanan as the female lead, with SJ Suryah, Ashika Ranganath and Rajisha Vijayan in pivotal roles. Music is composed by Yuvan Shankar Raja, and the film is produced by S. Lakshman Kumar and Siddharth Srinivas.

Initially slated for a May 31 release, *Sardar 2* might face a delay depending on Karthi's recovery. A source close to the production stated, "It all depends on how soon Karthi heals and can resume shooting." In the film, Karthi reprises his dual roles as a police inspector and a RAW agent. Fans are eagerly awaiting an official update on whether the injury will impact the film's release schedule.



Adarsh Gourav takes the plunge into tollywood with a dark psychological thriller



gripping storyline and a unique narrative, instantly attracted Adarsh, who was eager to dive into this darker, more intense genre.

Talking about his upcoming venture, Adarsh shared his excitement about exploring the South Indian film industry. He said, "I've always believed that great stories transcend language. As an actor, the most exciting part of my career is to dive into diverse narratives, irrespective of industry or language. The South film industry has been known for its bold, innovative and powerful storytelling and I'm thrilled to be a part of that legacy. This particular project is very different from anything I've done before – a psychological horror film with a story that immediately captivated me. The experience of working with a visionary team and debuting in Telugu cinema under Jahnavi's production is truly special."

Adarsh's decision to enter Tollywood further exemplifies the growing trend of Bollywood stars embracing the South Indian film industry, which has increasingly become a hub for creative collaborations and regional crossovers. His entry into the Telugu film industry adds another layer of excitement for both his fans and the Telugu cinema audience, eager to witness the actor's signature depth and emotional intensity in a new light.

As Bollywood actors continue to make their mark in South Indian cinema, Adarsh Gourav's debut stands as a testament to the rising trend of cross-regional collaborations. His ability to seamlessly move between different film industries showcases not only his versatility as an actor but also the broader movement of diverse storytelling that is reaching audiences across India and beyond.

Sreeleela spotted at Kartik Aaryan's house—What's brewing?

Actress Sreeleela is set to make her Bollywood debut opposite Kartik Aaryan in Anurag Basu's upcoming film. Though rumored to be titled *Aashiqui 3*, the official name hasn't been confirmed due to potential legal issues. Off late, a video of Sreeleela at Kartik Aaryan's house went viral, fueling speculations. In the clip, she is seen dancing at a party while Kartik records another video on his phone. However, she suddenly stops after a few steps, leaving fans curious.

Reports clarify that Sreeleela was attending a celebration hosted by Kartik's family for his sister, Dr. Kritika, who recently completed her medical studies. Netizens have pointed out an inter-



esting coincidence—Kartik's mother, a doctor, once mentioned in an interview that she wished for a doctor daughter-in-law. Interestingly, Sreeleela, who hails from a family of doctors, recently completed her MBBS exams. Sreeleela made her Telugu debut with *PellisandaD* and quickly gained popularity, though her career hasn't reached the expected heights. Her latest, special song, *Kissak*, in *Pushpa 2*, received a good response.

Additionally, she is making her Tamil debut with *Parasakti*, directed by Sudha Kongara. Now, with Bollywood calling, she is reportedly in talks for multiple Hindi projects.



TUK TUK RELEASING ON MARCH 21



Young actors like Harsh Roshan, Karthikeya Dev, Steven Madhu, Saanve Megghana and Nihal Kodati are starring in a film titled *Tuk Tuk*. Directed by C. Supreeth Krishna and produced by Rahul Reddy, the film is set to release on March 21. On Tuesday, the makers unveiled the teaser of the film, which includes a supernatural element alongside plenty of entertainment.

Speaking about the film, Saanve Megghana, who previously starred in *Pushpaka Vimanam* and *Prema Vimanam*, said, "After the two *Vimanam* (aeroplanes), I've now come to this auto to entertain," referring to the change in her roles. She added, "There are many surprises in the film. I can't reveal much about the story, but the supernatural element, along with loads of entertainment, will definitely captivate the audience." Harsh Roshan, who previously played a child artist in *Salaar* (starring Prabhas), plays an important role in *Tuk Tuk*. Karthikeya Dev, who portrayed a young Prudhviraj Sukumar in *Salaar*, also plays a significant role in this film. These young actors are excited about the movie and eagerly await its release.