

Your 'mangalsutra' remarks have come true

INDIA LOOKS AT WAYS TO NAVIGATE TRUMP'S RECIPROCAL TARIFF

Artiste to impress as a new psycho-thriller: Director RATAN RISHI

QUOTE OF THE DAY  
The BJP won the 'Champion Trophy' of MLC elections. This is through ballot papers and not EVMS. The BJP won two MLC seats through the ballot paper as the Congress crumbled. Be it EVMS or ballot papers, the people will choose the BJP. Now, will Rahul Gandhi, who keeps crying about EVMS, answer? Or will he find another excuse for Congress's failure?  
- Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home

DON'T MISS...  
Completion of Handri Neeva by next season

Minister for Water Resources, Nimmala Ramanaidu, has announced that the government aims to complete the Handri Neeva project by the upcoming season. He criticised former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, stating that while he claims to be a champion of Rayalaseema, he has neglected the vital Handri Neeva project, which is crucial for the region. Minister Ramanaidu said under Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's directives, efforts are being made to fully utilise Handriniva pumps to ensure adequate irrigation and drinking...

'Don't allow anyone to dictate your future'

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday advised students not to allow anyone to dictate their course of action, asking them not to be afraid of failure. Dhankhar made these remarks while addressing a convocation ceremony of Jan Nayak Chaudhary Devi Lal Vidyapeeth (JCV) in Sirsa. Haryana minister Ranbir Gangwa, Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader Abhay Singh Chautala, who is president of the Devi Lal Memorial Trust, and INLD MLA Arjun Chautala, who is chairman of JCV Vidyapeeth...

Meghalaya CM tables deficit budget

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday tabled a Rs 1,970 crore deficit budget for the financial year 2025-26, announcing a Rs 6,000 scholarship for all post-matric students of the state. The Rs 1,970 crore budget is around 2.96 per cent of the projected Rs 66,645 crore GSDP, in line with the targeted USD 10 billion economy by 2028. According to the budget document, the total receipts for 2025-26 are estimated at Rs 30,415 crore, of which revenue receipts are...

Trying to get my rhythm: Shami

Mohammed Shami conceded that operating as India's lone front-line pacer after coming back from a lengthy injury layoff has been a heavy "responsibility" but said he is trying to regain his "rhythm" to suit the team's needs in the ongoing Champions Trophy (CT). Throughout the ICC showpiece here, Shami has shared the new ball duties with either Harshit Rana or Hardik Pandya because of the injury-forced absence of Jasprit Bumrah. Rana is still learning the ropes, while Pandya is an all-rounder and delivering...

# 'Expedite AP's infra projects'

CM Chandrababu meets Union Ministers in Delhi over key State issues  
Discusses water management and interlinking of rivers to prevent wastage  
Urges Centre to clear AP Land Grabbing Prohibition Bill



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/DELHI

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu addressed a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday, highlighting critical issues facing the State and his discussions with Union Ministers. He detailed his meetings with the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari regarding State concerns.

The CM underscored the pressing issue of land grabbing in Andhra Pradesh, stating that six out of 10 legal cases in the State pertained to land disputes. He pointed out that the absence of proper checks and balances in the

land computerisation process has led to large-scale encroachments, with private lands even being included under Section 22E and taken over. Chandrababu explained that both urban and rural areas are affected and urged the Centre to clear the AP Land Grabbing Prohibition Bill, citing Gujarat's existing model as a precedent. He stressed that the burden of proof should rest on the grabber to curb illegal activities.

The CM also addressed

land enforcement concerns, including the prevalence of bootlegging and illicit drug cultivation. He praised the EAGLE force for effectively controlling the cultivation of ganja and reiterated his government's zero-tolerance policy towards drugs and heinous crimes. To support farmers, Chandrababu assured incentives for alternative crops to replace ganja cultivation and pledged continued efforts to eliminate illicit activities.

NAIDU SEES 'OPPORTUNITY' IN US TRADE TENSIONS

NEW DELHI: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday expressed confidence in the country's leadership, asserting that the government would transform the challenges posed by the United States' tariff impositions into strategic advantages. "There will always be some problems. The issue now is how to make use of all the problems to our advantage. I am confident that our prime minister is very capable. He will take advantage and convert the crisis into opportunity," Naidu told reporters here.

CM UNDERScoreD THE PRESSING ISSUE OF LAND GRABBING IN ANDHRA PRADESH, STATING THAT SIX OUT OF 10 LEGAL CASES IN THE STATE PERTAINED TO LAND DISPUTES



## Tourism Minister meets investors in Germany

Provides insights into investment opportunities in AP tourism sector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/BERLIN

Andhra Pradesh Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh, on day two of his Germany tour, met with various investors to discuss opportunities and resources for tourism development in the State. During the interactions, Minister Durgesh provided insights into investment opportunities in Andhra Pradesh's tourism sector to representatives from the global media. He expressed happiness over attending the ITB Berlin 2025 conference, highlighting its potential to position Andhra Pradesh as a prime destination for international tourism investment. Durgesh emphasised that Andhra Pradesh serves as the gateway to

tourism in South India, boasting nearly 1,000 kilometres of extensive coastline, beautiful beaches, elevated hill regions, stunning natural landscapes and renowned pilgrimage sites.

He described Andhra Pradesh as a must-visit destination for European and global tourists, offering adventure tourism, historical heritage, and a beautiful coastal confluence. The Minister noted that the world-famous Tirumala Venkateswara Temple in the State attracts the highest number of visitors.

Additionally, he mentioned several places in Andhra Pradesh that symbolise Buddhist culture, such as Amaravati and Nagarjuna Konda. Durgesh acknowledged the efforts of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan in transforming Andhra Pradesh into a global tourist hub.

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## DSC process soon after committee report: Lokesh

Public already decided against granting Opposition status to Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, RTGS, Electronics, and IT, Nara Lokesh, addressed the media at the Assembly on Wednesday, expressing his views on the current political climate in Andhra Pradesh. "I understand that Jagan Mohan Reddy is very frustrated. During his time in power, he was embroiled in atrocities and corruption. It is surprising to see him now speaking about ethics and values

after moving to the Opposition," he remarked.

Lokesh asserted that the public has already decided against granting Opposition status to Jagan, who he claims continues to act as if he is unaware of this reality. He criticised

"We have initiated development programmes like never before, attracting unprecedented investments to Andhra Pradesh."



Jagan, labelling him a "one-day Chief Minister" who appears only at the beginning of the Assembly session to enquire about the Opposition Leader status before disappearing from the scene. Highlighting the current govern-

ment's achievements, Lokesh stated, "We have initiated development programmes like never before, attracting unprecedented investments to Andhra Pradesh." He listed major projects from companies such as TCS, ArcelorMittal, NTPC Green and Reliance CBG as evidence of this progress. In contrast, he noted that the previous government failed to even repair potholes on the roads.

The Minister stressed the coalition government's welfare initiatives, mentioning the reopening of 198 Anna canteens that were previously closed under Jagan's administration.

Continued on Page 2

## YS Jagan calls budget 'bundle of lies'

YSRCP is the sole Opposition party in Assembly and deserves recognition

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has slammed the State Budget for 2025-26, labelling it a "bundle of lies" with inadequate allocations and inconsistent data. He accused Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu of deceiving the public and announced that the party would hold protests at district collector offices on March 12 in support of the students and their parents who have been unfairly treated.

Speaking to the media persons, Jagan stressed that YSRCP is the sole Opposition party in the Assembly and deserves appropriate recogni-



tion, citing the Delhi Assembly's allocation of Opposition status to the BJP despite its limited representation. He noted that, to effectively implement the "Super Six" schemes

promised during the elections, the government will need to allocate ₹79,867 crore, a figure he claimed was absent from the budget and its speech.

Continued on Page 2

## Minister Narayana addresses traffic issues

Outlines proposals to reduce traffic on the route from Gajuwaka to Bhogapuram Airport

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Narayana, in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, responded to the traffic congestion issues on the route to Bhogapuram Airport, specifically addressing concerns raised by Nellimarla MLA Lokam Madhavi. Narayana outlined proposals aimed at reducing traffic on the route from Gajuwaka to Bhogapuram Airport. He mentioned that alongside the metro project, new road constructions are being planned to facilitate smoother access. Narayana explained that there is



a metro proposal intended to alleviate traffic in Visakhapatnam. The metro line is planned to extend 34.6 km from Gajuwaka through Maddilapalem and Madhurawada to Bhogapuram. The Minister said: "We have sent the metro proposals to the Central government and are ensuring that we receive their approval. As soon as we obtain the approval, the works will commence."

Continued on Page 2

## Goal is to provide quality healthcare at grassroots-level: PM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi participated in a webinar from Delhi with various Central and State officials, focusing on investments in the economy and reforms in the power sector as part of the Union Budget discussions.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister outlined plans to transform India into a \$5 trillion economy as part of the "Viksit Bharat 2047" initiative. He stated that the Central government's goal is to provide quality healthcare services at the grassroots-level and stressed that efforts are underway in this direction. He also highlighted that the Union Budget has allocated significant funds for educational policies incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) and has prioritised health tourism promotion.

K Vijayanand, Chief Secretary, noted the need to provide appropri-



Modi attends webinar on investments and power sector reforms

ate incentives to enhance inter-State transmission capacity in the State. He mentioned that planned renewable energy capacities and green hydrogen projects could be integrated effectively. He described the power sector as the backbone of the nation's infrastructure, essential for eco-

nomic growth and improved quality of life. Vijayanand stated that enhancing the capacity, reliability and efficiency of the power grid across States is crucial for power sector reforms. He pointed out that while electricity production has increased a hundredfold since inde-

pendence, continuous reforms are necessary to meet the growing demand. He called for increased investments in modern transmission infrastructure to reduce transmission losses and enhance grid stability.

To ensure the financial stability of distribution companies (DISCOMs),

he stressed the importance of addressing high losses, improving billing capabilities and ensuring timely tariff revisions.

He noted that expanding renewable energy capacity is vital to achieve climate goals and diversify energy resources and emphasised the need to strengthen India's clean energy transition.

Additionally, he highlighted the importance of increasing public-private partnerships in the energy sector. He urged the promotion of energy conservation and smart metering initiatives under consumer participation. Ultimately, he stated that Andhra Pradesh is committed to leveraging this opportunity to benefit both the State and the nation by driving sustainable development, reducing transmission losses and supporting economic growth.

Transco CMD Keerthi and other officials also attended the meeting.

# Completion of Handri Neeva project by next season: Min

Efforts being made to fully utilise Handriniva pumps to ensure adequate irrigation and drinking water supply in Rayalaseema

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Water Resources, Nimmala Ramanaidu, has announced that the government aims to complete the Handri Neeva project by the upcoming season. He criticised former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, stating that while he claims to be a champion of Rayalaseema, he has neglected the vital Handri Neeva project, which is crucial for the region.

Minister Ramanaidu said under Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's directives, efforts are being made to fully utilise Handriniva pumps to ensure adequate irrigation and drinking water supply in the Rayalaseema region, with a target to finish the work by the next season.

Responding to questions in the Legislative Assembly about the progress of the Handri Neeva project, the Minister noted that despite the State's financial difficulties, a substantial budget allocation of ₹3,243 crore has been made for the project, exceeding that of other projects in the State. He attributed this commitment to the vision of CM Chandrababu Naidu, stressing its significance for the four districts of Rayalaseema.

Ramanaidu pointed out that during the previous TDP administration from 2014 to 2019, ₹4,000 crore was spent on the Handri Neeva project, achieving



over 80 per cent completion. In contrast, he criticised the YSR Congress Party (YCP) government for failing to make any significant progress on the project from 2019 to 2024.

He highlighted that the Handri Neeva project, with a capacity of 3,850 cubic feet, serves as the lifeline for agriculture and drinking water across 40 constituencies in the four combined districts of Rayalaseema. Ramanaidu urged YSRCP leaders, who are criticising the project, to hold protests in front of the Tadepalli palace, where Jagan resides. The Minister con-

demned the inconsistency of YCP leaders, who behave differently when in power versus when they are not, and called attention to the agreement made by the YSRCP government on September 9, 2022, to provide water to 193 tanks in the Puttaparthi constituency for ₹864 crore.

He stated that while they were supposed to complete the work within three years, no construction of pump houses, gravity canals or other necessary structures had been initiated.

Ramanaidu accused YCP leaders of exploiting the project site and collecting ₹200 crore in bills without completing any actual work. He assured that they would consider local leaders' and citizens' requests and would promptly complete the necessary work.



## Naga Babu Jana Sena candidate for MLC election

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan, on Wednesday, selected his elder brother K Naga Babu as the party candidate for the forthcoming MLC elections, the party said.

Babu, who is also an actor, is currently the general secretary of Jana Sena, which is a part of the ruling NDA, including TDP and BJP.

"For the MLC elections under MLAs quota, party president Pawan Kalyan confirmed the name of K Naga Babu as the candidate on behalf of the alliance," said a release from Jana Sena.

Biennial elections for five members of Andhra Pradesh's Legislative Council, who will be elected by MLAs, were notified by the Election Commission recently, with the polling date scheduled on March 20.

# AP MedTech Zone empowers rural disabled communities

Initiative offers training, funding and market access, aiming to foster financial independence

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) has inaugurated a dedicated Empowerment Centre for Divyangjans (individuals with disabilities), aiming to cultivate financial independence among rural residents. This initiative, housed within AMTZ's Assistive Technology Centre, is a collaborative effort with the Inclusive Divyangjan Entrepreneurship Association (IDEA).

The centre's launch featured a five-day Entrepreneurship Development Training Programme, welcoming 30 participants from 14 surrounding villages. The programme focuses on more than just providing assistive devices; it nurtures entrepreneurial skills, offering seed funding, market access, and two years of mentoring.

Experienced instructors are guiding participants through the fundamentals of business ownership. AMTZ is also creating direct employment opportunities within its operations and supporting Divyangjan-owned businesses by purchasing their products, driving economic growth. "At AMTZ, our commitment extends beyond providing assistive technology; we



"At AMTZ, our commitment extends beyond providing assistive technology; we are dedicated to creating sustainable livelihoods, unlocking the inherent potential of Divyangjans"

are dedicated to creating sustainable livelihoods, unlocking the inherent potential of Divyangjans," stated Dr. Jitendra Sharma, Managing Director and CEO of AMTZ.

IDEA, a non-profit organisation with a presence across 11 Indian States, is providing training and mentorship. "IDEA's mission aligns perfectly with AMTZ's vision of empower-

ment," said Mallikarjuna Iytha, Founder and CEO of IDEA. "Through skill development and entrepreneurial opportunities, we aim to elevate Divyangjans and enable them to actively participate in society and the economy."

The initial training programme is just the beginning. AMTZ and IDEA plan to expand this initiative throughout Visakhapatnam and Andhra Pradesh. This partnership highlights the power of strategic collaborations in promoting inclusive economic development, shifting from simple aid to genuine empowerment. Divyangjans interested in participating, or organisations seeking to support this cause, are encouraged to contact the Assistive Technology Centre at AMTZ.

## Women's Day: Min holds conference with collectors

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Gummidi Sandhya Rani conducted a virtual conference with collectors from 26 districts on Wednesday to discuss the ongoing preparations for the International Women's Day celebrations. During the meeting, the Minister emphasised the importance of recognising and honouring the invaluable contributions of women across various sectors.

She urged the collectors to organise the celebrations in a grand, comprehensive and meaningful manner. The focus should be on highlighting women's achievements in governance, education, health, business and social welfare.

Key directives of the meeting include conducting awareness programmes on women's empowerment and rights, honouring women who have rendered exceptional services in diverse fields. Organising cultural and motivational programmes that inspire women, promoting government welfare schemes for women and facilitating opportunities for beneficiaries to share their experiences.

Minister Sandhya Rani asked the district collectors to take proactive steps to ensure this year's International Women's Day is impactful and memorable, fostering the spirit of equality and empowerment.

## Tahsildars can now annul illegal registrations of govt properties

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant move to safeguard government lands, Minister for Revenue, Registration and Stamps, Anagani Satya Prasad has announced a new authority for tahsildars to annul illegal registrations of government properties.

Previously, the power to revoke such registrations rested solely with the collectors. Under the new directive, tahsildars will have the authority to cancel any registration of government, assigned or endowment

## Tourism Minister meets...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister focused on developing international infrastructure, sustainable growth rates, employment opportunities for youth and local community participation in tourism development, along with attracting international investments.

He highlighted Andhra Pradesh's beautiful beaches, including Rushikonda, Ramakrishna, Maipadu and

## Key decision by Revenue Minister to protect government lands

lands, as well as any properties that are not permitted for registration under the law.

If a document has been registered in violation of the law, the tahsildar will send it to the sub-registrar for cancellation. The sub-registrar will complete the necessary procedures to annul the document and will scan copies of the cancelled document to send them to the individu-

als identified by the tahsildar. This decision comes in response to reports submitted to the government by the Commissioner of Registration and Stamps, indicating an increase in fraudulent registrations of government lands. The delegation of authority to tahsildars aims to combat these unlawful activities effectively and ensure the protection of public assets.

## Elections for handloom...

Continued from Page 1

Minister Savitha addressed questions from members of the Assembly on Wednesday.

Savitha revealed that the election process for handloom cooperative societies has commenced.

They have boosted sales through APCO and formed an agreement with Co-Optex from Tamil Nadu to enhance market reach. She lamented the hardships faced by handloom workers due to the previous government's failure to provide margin money for central government schemes. Additionally, she stated that measures are being taken to clear outstanding dues from the previous administration.

She expressed deep concern over the hardships faced by the handloom sector, citing instances of workers committing suicide and many others migrating for better opportunities. She highlighted that the Thrift Matching Grant was increased from eight per cent to 16 per cent under the TDP government, which also allocated ₹5 crore to the Thrift Scheme upon taking office. Despite financial challenges during the state bifurcation in 2014-19, the CM allocated ₹7.15 crore to this scheme.

For the fiscal year 2024-25, an addi-

tional ₹5 crore has been earmarked, benefiting 7,129 recipients.

She underscored the dedication of the CM and Minister Lokesh to advancing the handloom sector.

She noted that the CM personally inaugurated exhibitions to promote handloom sales.

In 2014-19, 59 exhibitions generated sales of ₹53.99 crore. In the upcoming fiscal year, seven exhibitions are planned, with expected sales of ₹7.32 crore. Artisans attending these events receive free meals, accommodation, electricity and transportation. In contrast, the previous government conducted only 28 exhibitions over five years, resulting in sales of just ₹29.26 crore.

The Minister announced a budget allocation of ₹138.08 crore for various schemes in the 2025-26 budget, totalling ₹338.08 crore for providing free electricity to handloom workers.

She noted that a new textile policy was introduced upon Chief Minister's return to power, bringing industries back to the State.

She announced that efforts are underway to revitalise textile parks in Yemmiganur, Rayadurgam and Guntur. She also mentioned plans to visit Assam soon to study initiatives for handloom development there.

## Gold worth Rs 14.62 cr seized from Kannada actress Ranya Rao: DRI

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore were seized from Kannada actress Ranya Rao at Kempegowda International Airport, following which searches were conducted at her residence and gold jewellery worth Rs 2.06 crore and Indian currency amounting to Rs 2.67 crore were also recovered, DRI said on Wednesday.

Rao is the stepdaughter of senior IPS officer Ramachandra Rao, a senior police official said. The DGP-rank officer is currently serving as the Chairman and Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd, he added. The total seizure in the case stood at Rs 17.29 crore, including assets worth Rs 4.73 crore, marking a significant blow to organised gold smuggling networks.

According to DRI (Directorate of Revenue Intelligence) officials, the 14.2 kg haul is one of the largest gold seizures at Bengaluru airport in recent times. In a statement, the Ministry of Finance said the DRI successfully intercepted a passenger carrying foreign-origin gold bars worth Rs 12.56 crore at Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru.

## DSC process soon after committee...

Continued from Page 1

"We have provided one crore gas cylinders free of cost and are offering sand at no charge. Additionally, we will implement the mid-day meal scheme and supply fine rice in welfare hostels. The Talliki Vandanam and Annadata Sukhibhava schemes will be rolled out in May," he added.

Lokesh pointed out that the YSRCP has not conducted a

single DSC in its five-year rule, questioning their credibility on the issue. He announced that the DSC process would commence this month following the report from a one-man committee.

The Minister cautioned that the government would not tolerate any disrespectful remarks directed at the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister from the YSRCP, promising that they would

respond firmly if provoked. "We are not hiding behind curtains or living under Section 144 like Jagan Reddy. We are continuously engaging with the public and providing opportunities for them to meet us, whether they are public representatives or members of various associations. We organise public darbars to address community issues," Lokesh concluded.

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YS Jagan highlighted discrepancies in Chandrababu's claims regarding the ₹10-lakh crore loan taken by the previous government, pointing out that official budget documents reveal a much lower figure and that public debt was obscured in the latest budget.

He accused the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of spreading misinformation to divert attention from its failure to meet electoral promises, asserting that the public is regretting their trust in TDP and believes Jagan delivers on commitments.

Providing detailed evidence, Jagan outlined various budgetary anomalies

## Jagan calls budget 'bundle of lies' .....

that fail to align with election promises, leaving multiple demographics including farmers, women, students and youth disappointed. He criticised the absence of a promised ₹3,000 monthly stipend for unemployed youth, stating that TDP owes each unemployed youth in the State ₹22,000.

Regarding job creation, he pointed out that the coalition government has not delivered on promises made, claiming it has driven away industrialists like Jindal and laid off workers.

Jagan also noted the lack of funds in

the budget for the Aadabidda Nidhi scheme, which promised ₹18,000 annually to women aged 18 to 59, affecting approximately 1.80 crore voters. He mentioned that no allocations were made for free bus services or the "Talliki Vandanam" programme, which mirrors the Amma Vodi initiative.

He further criticised the government for not allocating the necessary ₹13,112 for each of the 87.41 lakh students in the State, highlighting that students should receive ₹30,000 over two years. He pointed out similar unmet promises for farmers, who were to receive

₹20,000 beyond the PM Kisan scheme and criticised the inadequate funding for the Deepam scheme and pension programmes.

YS Jagan accused Chandrababu Naidu of contradicting his election promises, stating that he would uphold all of Jagan's welfare schemes while introducing Super Six. Instead, he claimed that initiatives such as fees reimbursement and Aarogyasri have been diluted or eliminated, with significant negative impacts on the education sector and rural backbone programmes.

He further cited past instances where the Opposition status was accorded to Chandrababu's party during Jagan's tenure.

## 'Expedite AP's infra projects...

Continued from Page 1

Discussing Andhra Pradesh's financial situation with Nirmala Sitharaman, Chandrababu criticised the previous government for leaving behind Rs. 10 lakh crore in outstanding arrears, creating a saturated loan scenario. Despite this, he highlighted the State's recent economic growth, reporting a 12.94 per cent increase overall and a 15.86 per cent growth in the agricultural sector. He stressed the need to boost the service sector and achieve a sustainable 15 per cent growth rate to create wealth rather than relying on borrowing.

Water resource management was another key topic in his discussions. The CM underscored the importance

of interlinking rivers to prevent water wastage and provide irrigation to drought-prone regions like Rayalaseema. He proposed linking Polavaram to Banakacharla, along with the Vamsadhara, Nagavalli, Penna, and Krishna rivers, ensuring efficient water distribution. He stated that 200 TMC of water, which currently goes to waste, could be diverted for agricultural and drinking purposes.

Infrastructure development was also a priority during his talks with Union Ministers. The Chief Minister requested Nitin Gadkari for the completion of the Amaravati Outer Ring Road, spanning 189 km, and emphasised the need for an eight-lane ORR similar to the one built in Hyderabad. He also discussed the importance of an eastern

bypass road in Andhra Pradesh and proposed solutions to address traffic congestion at Srisailem, including the construction of elevated roads. Further discussions included the Vizag to Mulapet coastal road and a direct Hyderabad to Machilipatnam port road, with DPRs currently in preparation.

Answering media queries, Chandrababu criticised the previous administration's handling of prohibition, alleging that liquor income had been mortgaged for 25 years.

He also addressed concerns regarding demographic trends, noting that South India's aging population poses challenges, whereas States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have a younger demographic. He advocated incentives for families to have more children, emphasising the need for long-term demographic

management rather than population control.

Regarding Hindi imposition, the CM reaffirmed that language should be a tool for communication rather than a barrier to knowledge. He encouraged the promotion of multiple languages and highlighted the necessity for education in one's mother tongue while also acknowledging Hindi's role in national integration.

The CM concluded by emphasising Andhra Pradesh's potential as a green energy and hydrogen hub, highlighting Rs. 6.5 lakh crore in upcoming investments. He assured that the State is positioning itself as a prime destination for industries and innovation, reinforcing his commitment to economic growth and sustainable development.

## Speaker rejects Jagan's...

Continued from Page 1

Further, he highlighted that successive presiding officers—both in the Parliament and in various State Legislatures—have preferred to be guided by the 'direction' issued by GV Mavalankar, the first Speaker of the Lok Sabha, which mandates a strength equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House, that is one-tenth of the total number of members of the House.

"This well-established direction has been consistently honoured by both the Parliament and various State Legislatures, including the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly," he said.

Referring to certain recent media reports, he said they have falsely claimed that the High Court has issued summons to the Speaker and 'gave directions to pass orders' pertaining to the LoP demand.

However, Ayyannapatrudu asserted that Jagan Mohan Reddy's writ petition in the High Court seeking LoP status was not even admitted as of today.

"Given that his statements, particularly the false and fabricated references to the High Court, are causing confusion and misunderstanding among the public, I find it necessary to put an end to this malicious propaganda through this ruling," he added.

Governed by the TDP-led alliance, the 175-member Andhra Pradesh Assembly is represented by 135 TDP MLAs, Janasena (21 MLAs), YSRCP (11) and BJP (8)

## Minister Narayana...

Continued from Page 1

He expressed optimism that the introduction of the metro rail would significantly reduce traffic congestion, although he noted that it would take four years to complete the project.

To address immediate traffic issues on AH 45, the Minister instructed officials to ensure that 15 internal roads are completed within a year. Besides, there are proposals for six roads to connect the old highway AH 47 to NH 16.

The Speaker of the Assembly requested the Minister to hold a meeting with MLAs and officials from Visakhapatnam to further discuss these matters. Narayana assured the members of the Assembly that he would convene this meeting next week.

# Ensure smooth drinking water supply in city: VMC chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has said that in view of the summer season, the authorities concerned should take the necessary steps to avoid difficulties in the city's drinking water supply. He said officials should periodically check whether the drinking water bores are in working condition.

As part of visits to various areas in the city, on Wednesday, VMC Commissioner Dhyanchandra toured the 20, 21, and 22 divisions of Metla Bazar, Swargapuri of Krishna Lanka. He inspected a boring pump at Metla Bazar and verified its working condition.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that there should not be difficulties in the water supply in the city. Officials should make advance arrangements to supply drinking water to the peo-



ple in all areas, he said. Also, he directed the officials to keep the city clean and improve the facilities at Puskar Ghats and other areas.

Later, he inspected the Krishna Lanka Drainage

Pumping Station and asked to expedite the renovation work. Also, he visited the Anna Canteen at the APSRM School and inquired about the people regarding the food quality. VMC In-Charge Chief Medical &

Health Officer (CM&HO) Dr Suresh, Superintendent Engineer (Projects) P Satya Kumari, Executive Engineer Samrajyam, Biologist Surya Kumari and others accompanied the VMC chief.



# Officials asked to ensure Upadhi workers get Rs 300 wage

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Mylavarapu Krishna Teja, the Commissioner of Panchayat Raj & Rural Development, has instructed officials of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), also known as the Upadhi Guarantee Scheme, to ensure that all participating labourers receive a daily wage of Rs.300. In light of the summer season, he also emphasised the importance of providing drinking water facilities at workplaces and distributing buttermilk, in collaboration with donors, to safeguard the health and well-being of the workers.

The PR&RD, Commissioner and Director Krishna Teja made a sudden inspection of the MGNREGS

## Provide drinking water at workplaces: PR & RD Commissioner and Director Krishna Teja

work at Pathapadu of Vijayawada Rural Mandal in NTR district along with Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Director Shanmukh on Wednesday. He inspected the construction of the farm pond, ring trenches, and boundaries at a mango garden of B Siva Reddy at Pathapadu. He spoke to the labourers regarding their daily wage details apart from the length of work.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the State government aims to enhance the welfare of labourers under the MGNREGS, ensuring fair compensation and improved working

conditions during the hot summer months. He said that every Upadhi scheme worker should draw a maximum of Rs.300 daily wage and for that, officials should make a plan of action. In view of the summer season, the NREGS department officials should make alternative arrangements for the welfare of workers, he added.

Further, he directed the NTR district officials to create assets by conducting more projects. He asked to increase the number of farm ponds, ring trenches and boundaries in gardens. These would be useful to improve the ground-

water levels, he said. Later, Commissioner and Director Teja verified the labourers' attendance and their facilities. He expressed happiness over the work progress in the Vijayawada Rural Mandal.

NTR District Water and Management Agency Project Director A Ramu, DPO Lavanya, Vijayawada Rural Mandal Parishad Development Officer P Murali Krishna Prasad, EO, PR & RD MDV Prasad, Engineering Consultant K Srinivasa Rao, TA PA Kiranmayi, Pathapadu Secretary Kotlingamma and others were present.

## Call to expand Red Cross Society services

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Indian Red Cross Society's Andhra Pradesh State Chairman, YD Rama Rao has urged the Red Cross Society to expand its activities in order to provide better services to the community.

He praised the NTR District

for setting an exemplary standard in the State for its service delivery.

On Wednesday, a meeting of the NTR District Red Cross Society was held in Vijayawada, chaired by Dr Samararam.

YD Rama Rao attended the meeting as the chief guest and delivered a speech.

## Botsa's capital remarks spark a row

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Following the YSR Congress Party's (YSRCP) electoral defeat in Andhra Pradesh and its subsequent boycott of the Assembly, the party now faces internal turbulence over comments made by senior leader Botsa Satyanarayana. As the Opposition Leader in the Legislative Council, Botsa has assumed a pivotal role in nav-

igating the party's legislative strategy. However, his recent remarks regarding the State capital have sparked controversy, creating ripples within party ranks.

During a council session, Botsa reaffirmed the previous YSRCP government's endorsement of the three-capital policy and hinted at the party's willingness to reconsider its stance.

# HC raps officials over incomplete CRZ demolition

### Orders full removal, cost recovery, and criminal action in Bheemunipatnam case

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has issued a stern rebuke to authorities over the incomplete demolition of concrete structures built in violation of Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules in Bheemunipatnam, Visakhapatnam. The court has demanded stringent action, expressing dissatisfaction with the "negligence" displayed in the dismantling process. The issue stems from a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by Jana Sena Corporator Peethala Murthy Yadav, challenging constructions undertaken by Neha Reddy, daughter of former YSR Congress Party leader V Vijayasai Reddy, within the protected CRZ limits.

During a hearing on Wednesday, the court raised serious concerns over the authorities' submitted report, highlighting that only the visible portions of the illegal structures had been removed. Crucially, it was revealed that walls beneath the sand remained intact, a detail omitted from the official report. "The court was displeased that this crucial detail was omitted," said a legal source familiar with the proceedings, "and has now ordered the complete removal of all illegal structures, including the underground sections."

Furthermore, the Greater



**The court raised serious concerns over the authorities' submitted report, highlighting that only the visible portions of the illegal structures had been removed. Crucially, it was revealed that walls beneath the sand remained intact, a detail omitted from the official report. "The court was displeased that this crucial detail was omitted," said a legal source familiar with the proceedings, "and has now ordered the complete removal of all illegal structures, including the underground sections."**

Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has been instructed to recover the full cost of the demolition from the company owned by Neha Reddy. The Union Environment Ministry has also been directed to establish a committee to assess the environmental damage caused by the illegal constructions. The court emphasised that the financial burden of restoring the damaged ecology should be borne entirely by the responsible company.

In a further escalation of its response, the High Court has instructed authorities to file a police complaint against the pri-

ivate company involved. Officials have also been ordered to conduct a comprehensive survey of other structures, including restrooms, in the Bheemunipatnam region to identify any further CRZ violations. A detailed report of these findings is mandated for the next hearing. This case highlights the judiciary's firm stance against environmental violations and its insistence on strict enforcement of CRZ regulations to protect vulnerable coastal ecosystems. The court's intervention underscores the growing concern over unchecked development in ecologically sensitive areas.



## Surprise inspection at Nuzvid Prohibition and Excise Office

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prohibition and Excise Commissioner Nishanth Kumar, along with Director of Prohibition and Excise Rahul Dev Sharma, conducted a surprise inspection at the Nuzvid Prohibition and Excise Office to review enforcement measures against illicit liquor. During the inspection, officials scrutinised records and evaluated the ongoing crackdown on illegal alcohol production, specifically targeting "natu sara".

Commissioner Nishanth Kumar reiterated the government's commitment to eradicating illicit liquor through the Navodayam 2.0 initiative. This programme focuses on raising awareness in villages and towns about the health, social, and economic dangers associ-

ated with illegal alcohol consumption.

Officials were directed to take stringent action against repeat offenders classified under the ABC category, impose fines for violations, and register cases against suppliers of jaggery used in illicit liquor production. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of reporting illegal activities through the toll-free number 14405.

Accompanying the team during the inspection were State Task Force Assistant Commissioner Vivek Yadav, Eluru Deputy Commissioner B. Sripatha, and Eluru Assistant Excise Commissioner KVN Prabhukumar.

People can report any information regarding illicit activities via the toll-free number 14405.

# Meeting outlines plan for grand Women's Day celebrations

### Collector calls for collective involvement of all departments to make the event successful



NTR District Collector Dr Lakshmiha convening a meeting with all district-level officials regarding the conduct of International Women's Day celebrations at the collectorate in Vijayawada on Wednesday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmiha has directed officials to ensure the success of International Women's Day celebrations on March 8. The district-level event is scheduled to take place at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram. Both Central and State governments are prioritising women's empowerment and security, he added.

On Wednesday, Minister for Women Development & Child Welfare and Tribal Welfare, Gummadi Sandhya Rani, conducted a video conference with all district collectors to provide guidance on organising the celebrations. She emphasised the importance of collective involvement from all departments to make the event successful.

Subsequently, Dr Lakshmiha

convened a meeting with officials from various departments, including the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA), Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA), Medical & Health, Women Development & Child Welfare, and Industries at the collectorate. He outlined a detailed plan for grand celebrations, assigning specific responsibilities to each department. Speaking on the occasion, he said the celebrations would commence from the Gram/Ward Sachivalayam level and extend to district and State levels.

Officials have been instructed to involve people's representatives and organise departmental exhibitions showcasing successful schemes for women's development, awareness programmes, and more, he said.

Besides, he said stalls should be set up to provide valuable resources and raise awareness among women.

DRDA and MEPMA are tasked with arranging stalls featuring bank linkage support, natural farming products, agriculture produce marketing, millets, value addition, women entrepreneur schemes, PM Viswa Karma, PMEGP, Lakhpathi Didi, Drone Didi, and others.

DRDA PD K Srinivasa Rao, VMC Urban Community Development Project Director Venkata Ratnam, DM & HO Dr M Suhasini, Dr NTR Vaidya Seva Coordinator Dr J. Suman, ICDS PD D Srilakshmi, District Industrial Officer B Sambiah, ACPK Latha Kumari, and LDM K Priyanka attended the meeting.

# Kolleru Lake, sanctuary for birds, under threat

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Often referred to as a paradise for birds, Kolleru Lake attracts countless avian visitors each year from across the globe. This natural wetland, which holds immense ecological significance, has become a focal point for ornithologists and bird enthusiasts who flock to witness its diverse bird population.

The significance of Kolleru Lake was underscored during a convention in Ramsar, Iran, where representatives from 116 nations, including India, gathered to discuss wetland conservation. Recognising its international importance, the Government of Andhra Pradesh declared Kolleru Lake a protected area for birds and wildlife on February 2, 2000.

Despite its protected status, Kolleru Lake faces severe threats from illegal fish farming and prawn harvesting activ-

### Despite protected status, Kolleru Lake faces threats from illegal fish farming and prawn harvesting



ities. The construction of fish tanks by organised fish mafias has significantly disrupted the lake's biodiversity, leading to the degradation of this vital

wetland ecosystem. Wetlands play a crucial role in flood control, water filtration, and agricultural fertility, yet alarming reports indicate that these areas

are disappearing three times faster than forests.

Kolleru Lake is home to around 182 species of birds, including a staggering 40 per-

cent of the world's pelican population. Notable migratory birds travel from regions as far as Egypt, Nigeria, Australia, Indonesia, and Siberia to find refuge in this habitat. However, the ongoing encroachment threatens not only the birds, but also the ecological balance of the region.

In a landmark ruling, India's Supreme Court directed the Andhra Pradesh government to remove illegal fish tanks from the lake within three months, highlighting the urgent need for action against the fish mafia. In contrast, fish mafias are working to file counter petitions to resist these orders.

State and Central governments are urged to invest in sustainable tourism initiatives that would not only protect Kolleru Lake but also attract bird lovers and tourists. Essential amenities, including

accommodation, drinking water, and transport facilities, must be established to facilitate eco-tourism.

Drawing a parallel with Peru, where the government has successfully leveraged bird excreta as a source of revenue, experts argue that India could similarly harness its wetlands for economic benefit. The organic fertiliser derived from seabirds, known as "white gold," has become a significant economic driver for Peru, highlighting the potential for India to adopt innovative approaches to wetland preservation and biodiversity conservation.

As Kolleru Lake continues to face threats from illegal activities, it is imperative that national interest prevails over personal agendas. With a concerted effort, India can not only preserve its wetlands, but also enhance its ecological balance and economic prospects.

## 22 SDMSMK students get placement



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A total of 22 third-year degree students from Sri Durga Malleswra Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala (SDMSMK) have been chosen for employment at Infosys during the campus recruitment event held in the Krishna and Guntur districts. Out of approximately 94 students who participated in the written examination, 22 candi-

dates successfully advanced through the personal interview stage and secured positions with the company.

Infosys has offered these students an annual salary package of Rs.2.20 lakh. On Wednesday, the Principal of SDMSMK, Dr N Kalpana, along with Special Officer Dr R Madhavi and Campus Recruitment Officer P Harika, commended the students for their achievements.

# Capital city will be constructed by spending Rs 64,000 crore: Minister

PNS ■ NELLORE

Minister for Municipal Administration P Narayana has made it clear that the Capital city will be constructed in 5000 acres at a cost of Rs 64,000 crore.

Talking to the media here on Wednesday, the Minister said that tenders had already been invited for the works worth Rs 50,000 crore to be carried out in the capital city.

He reiterated that the land for the construction of the capital city was acquired under land pooling scheme. The capital city would come up in 217 square kilometre radius and international standards would be maintained in the construction, he highlighted.



"The burden of constructing the capital city will not be put on people," he assured. Minister Narayana asserted

**Minister Narayana asserted that the public money, collected through taxes, would not be spent for the construction of the capital city. The capital city would be constructed by taking loans from the HUDCO, the World Bank and ADB, he made it clear. The capital city would be self-financed and well planned, he revealed**

that the public money, collected through taxes, would not be spent for the construction of the capital city. The capi-

tal city would be constructed by taking loans from the HUDCO, the World Bank and ADB, he made it clear.

The capital city would be self-financed and well planned, he revealed.

He acknowledged that 1000 acres to 1200 acres are being allocated for the international institutions to establish international universities and schools in the capital city. He also announced that the excess land in the capital region would be sold only when the land value has gone steeply.

There would be no irregularities in the construction of the capital city, he observed. He recalled that Rs 6000 crore allocated in the budget for the construction of the capital city and if needed, more funds would be allocated for the capital city construction.



## DC assures help to children who lost parents with Corona virus

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has assured all help to the children who lost parents due to Corona virus.

The district ICDS organized a programme 'Mission Vatsalya' here on Wednesday in which the Collector interacted with the children who lost parents in the coronavirus pandemic.

The Children told the Collector that they were getting help through the

'Mission Vatsalya' scheme and they are studying well without any problems. The children were saddened when they recalled their deceased parents and their eyes filled with tears. The Collector infused them with courage and assured them of all help. She exhorted them to excel in education.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani promised them to extend the help they required.

She lamented that some of the children lost their fathers,

some lost mothers and unfortunately, some children lost both their mother and father due to coronavirus.

"Under the Vatsalya scheme, Rs 4000 is extended to 358 children who lost parents in Covid pandemic. This Mission Vatsalya scheme will be implemented for three years," the Collector told the children.

ICIDS officer B Sujata Rani, Child protection officer R Rajesh and DEO E Narayana and other officials were present.

## Collector reviews arrangements for IWD programme



PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari district Collector P Prasanthi has said that International Women's Day will be organized in a big way on March 8 here and she reviewed the arrangements for the event with the officials.

Minister for Women and Child Welfare Gummadi Sandhya Rani and Principal Secretary A Surya Kumar held a video conference with the Collector from the Secretariat on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Gummadi Sandhya Rani stated that the International Women's Day celebrations at the district level should be held in a festive atmosphere and the celebrations should be successfully organized with the participation of local public representatives, women and celebrities.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector P Prasanthi said that as per the instructions of the State Government, International Women's Day would be organized at the district level and weekly celebrations would also be held. The Collector observed that various programmes are being undertaken by setting targets under the departments of Medical Health, Police, Industries, Women and Child Welfare, DRDA and MEPMA.

She informed that arrangements are being made to hold district-level celebrations at the local Venkateswara Anam Kala Kendra on March 8. Similarly, programmes would

be held in the mandal centers to celebrate Women's Day in the presence of local public representatives, the Collector explained.

"The Women and Child Welfare Department is planning and preparing to hold various programmes on the day. School level essay writing and oratory competitions will be organized by the Education Department, economic integration of commerce programmes by the DRDA and MEPMA," Collector Prasanthi asserted.

Poverty eradication programmes would be organized and stalls would be set up. The bank linkage with enthusiastic women industrialists by the District Industries Department would also be held during the IWD programme, Prasanthi highlighted.

"Similarly, arrangements are being made to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with SERP and MEPMA departments, Flipkart for the marketing of women-made products, and with the rapido and other agencies for the establishment of MSME units," the Collector revealed.

As per the instructions of the State Government, on the occasion of International Women's Day, services of providers-services through the Home Triangle App, National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS) that helps youth in practical skills would be held.

Moreover, Women and Child Safety App (Shakti) would be unveiled as part of the establishment of a Police Department-based Women and Child Safety and self-defense techniques courses would also be launched for women, Collector Prasanthi noted.

Women and Child Welfare officer K Vijay Kumar, DRDA PD NVVS Murthy and DMHO K Venkateswara Rao were among those who attended the meeting.

## Arrangements for CM's programme inspected



PNS ■ ONGOLE

District Collector A Thameem Ansariya, accompanied by MLA Kandula Nagireddy, Additional SP Nageswara Rao and police officials inspected the arrangements being made for the Chief Minister's programme to be held in Markapuram, on Wednesday.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will participate in the International Women's Day programme to be held in Markapuram on March 8.

District Collector Thameem Ansariya, along with local legislator Kandula Narayana

Reddy, visited places including Rayavaram, SVKP College, Market Yard, Soujanya Convention Hall, Tarlupadu Road Sai Balaji School, Zilla Parishad Boys' High School, Boda Padu and other places and inspected suitable places to organize the Chief Minister's public meeting and to construct helipad.

During the Chief Minister's visit, the officials of the concerned departments should take special care to ensure that security arrangements, dias, barricading, VIP and general public parking arrangements. Stalls should be set up properly to showcase

achievements, the Collector ordered the officials.

Since the state-level programme is being held, women achievers from other districts and HODs of various departments are coming to this program, they should take strict measures to ensure that the people do not face any inconvenience, the Collector directed the officials.

Joint Collector R Kopal Krishna, Sub-collector Venkat Trivinig, Additional SP Nageswara Rao, RDO Lakshmi Prasannad and ZP CEO Chiranjeevi were among those who accompanied the Collector.

## BJP won Champions Trophy in MLC elections, says Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said the BJP had won the 'Champion Trophy' in MLC elections held in Telangana.

He said the MLC election verdict was a lesson for the Congress, which is giving priority to one group. He said that if all Muslims unite to defeat the BJP, the Hindu community would defeat the Congress and give the party a "Ramzan" gift.

Saying hats off to the struggles of BJP workers, Sanjay bowed his head and saluted the voters who



stood by the BJP. He said the Congress candidate was expected to win by distributing money. He said that those who distrib-

uted currency notes will not be spared and that Google Pay details are being calculated.

"India won the Champions

Trophy match a few days ago. Ours is the India team. We said that we would win. They distributed bags of money. We trusted the voters. The bags of notes got lost. The voters won. I challenge Rahul Gandhi, who has repeatedly spread the lie that the BJP will win by managing EVMs. The BJP won the MLC elections through the ballot papers as well. What will be the answer to this?" Rahul said.

After BJP candidate Chinnamail Anji Reddy won the Karimnagar-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Medak graduate elections, former MLA Chintala

Ramachandra Reddy, party state treasurer Shanthi Kumar, district president Gangadi Krishna Reddy, former president Botsa Satyanarayana, former mayor Sunil Rao and others celebrated by flashing the "Victory" symbol.

Speaking to the media, Sanjay said, "Hats off to all workers who worked tirelessly for the BJP's victory. I bow my head and salute the voters who voted for BJP candidates in teachers and graduate elections. This is the fourth victory under Kishan Reddy. Along with 8 MPs and 8 MLAs, we won the Teachers MLC and Graduate MLC seats."

"I am very happy that Modi's ethics, honest governance, the funds allocated by the Centre for Telangana, as well as the struggles of its activists brought about a wonderful victory. We remembered the struggles of our activists as teachers, the unemployed and the people. We remembered the beatings and the incidents of jailings. The Modi Government has implemented many welfare programs including giving tax concessions of up to Rs 12 lakh to employees. We remembered all of them. I am happy that you stood by our side," Sanjay added.

## 492 KGs of cannabis seized, 8 arrested

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police seized 492 KGs of ganja, worth over Rs 30 lakh and arrested eight peddlers in Jagampeta on Wednesday.

Superintendent of police G Bindu Madhav told the media that on a tip off, a police team conducted a raid on a house at Jaganna colony in Jagampeta. The police found seven bags which contained ganja weighing 492 KGs.

The ganja was hoarded in the house to be exported to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka States. The police seized 492 KGs of ganja, worth Rs 30.32 lakh, cash Rs 2.78 lakh, a Mahindra SUV, one motorcycle and seven mobile phones.

Two of the arrested belonged to Tamil Nadu, two belonged to Karnataka and four peddlers belonged to AP. Two peddlers belonging to Tamil and Karnataka were absconding and they would be arrested soon, the SP said.



Two of the arrested were involved in ganja transportation cases previously.

The drug peddlers brought the ganja from Andhra-Odisha border areas and

stocked them in Jagampeta to be transported to other States.

SP Bindu Madhav appreciated CI YSR Srinivas, Sub-inspectors T Raghunath Rao,

Shiva Naga Babu, Satish for the seizure of huge quantities of cannabis and arresting eight peddlers. The SP warned of stringent action against the ganja transporters.



## 700 bags of PDS rice seized while being transported illegally

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police and the vigilance officials seized 700 bags of rice meant to be distributed under the Public Distribution System while being transported in a lorry illegally at Srinivasapuram village in Gopavaram mandal.

Police said that on a tip off, a police team and vigilance officials conducted checking of vehicles. They found 700 bags of ration rice being transported to Chennai illegally in a lorry. The police seized the rice and the lorry. The samples of the rice were sent to the lab for examination, police said.

## Honour killing: Man kills daughter opposing her marriage proposal

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In a shocking incident, a suspected honour killing, a father killed his daughter and burnt the body resenting her marriage proposal with a boy who belongs to another caste.

The incident took place at Kasapuram village in Guntakal mandal a couple of days ago but came to light on Wednesday. The family lives in Tilak Nagar in Guntakal town Police said that the deceased woman Bharati (22) loved a boy and wanted to marry him. She informed her father Ramanjaneyulu about her proposal to marry the boy which she loved. However, father vehemently opposed her proposal. A heated argument took place between the accused Ramanjaneyulu and her deceased daughter Bharati.

Furious over her proposal to marry a boy who she loved,



in a fit of rage, Ramanjaneyulu strangled his daughter, took the body to the outskirts of Kasapuram village and burnt the body in the forest area. The body was completely burnt.

However, after killing his daughter, he started feeling repentance. He went to the police station, confessed to the crime and surrendered himself before the police. He took the police to the place where he burnt his daughter. The police collected the remains and sent to the GGH for postmortem

ACROSS THE STATES



### Annual Amarnath Yatra to start in J-K from July 3

The 38-day annual pilgrimage to 3,880 metres high holy cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir will commence on July 3, an official spokesperson said on Wednesday. The decision to this effect was taken at the 48th board meeting of Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board (SASB) under the chairmanship of Lt Governor Manoj Sinha at Raj Bhawan, he said. "This year, the yatra will commence on July 3, simultaneously from both the routes -- the Pahalgam track in Anantnag district and Baital in Ganderbal district, and it will culminate on August 9 on Raksha Bandhan," the spokesperson said. He said the meeting was attended by members of the shrine board which proposed various measures and interventions to further improve the facilities and services for the devotees. Considering the likely increased inflow of pilgrims for the Amarnath Yatra, the meeting discussed measures for the enhancement of lodgement capacity at centres in Jammu, Srinagar and other locations, operationalization of yatri facilitation centres for e-KYC, issuance of RFID cards, on-spot registration of pilgrims at number of locations including Nowgam and Katra railway stations, the spokesperson said.



### 'Language a reflection of nation's cultural identity'

Union minister Nityanand Rai on Wednesday stressed the role of language as the reflection of a nation's cultural identity, while emphasising the importance of Hindi both as an official language and a "unifying force in India's diverse linguistic landscape". He was speaking at the Joint Regional Official Language Conference and Award Distribution Ceremony for the East and Northeast regions, organised by the Department of Official Language, Ministry of Home Affairs, at Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati. The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs highlighted the significance of the conference as a platform for encouraging the use of Hindi across government departments, offices and banks, an official statement said. He said that government schemes and initiatives must be effectively communicated to all citizens, ensuring equal access and benefits, and underscored the importance of fostering a strong connection between the government and the public through the use of familiar languages, reinforcing Hindi's role in this endeavour.



### Centre, Kerala govt clash over ASHA workers' funds

The Centre and the Kerala government on Tuesday continued to dispute claims over the provision of funds for disbursing incentives to ASHA workers in the state. While state Finance Minister K N Balagopal accused the Centre of not providing funds on time, Union Minister George Kurian refuted the claim, stating that those who hear such allegations will start respecting Narendra Modi once they properly investigate the matter. Talking to reporters in Kollam, Balagopal said that the Centre had yet to release Rs 100 crore in pending payments. He urged the Centre to increase the honoraria for scheme workers, including Accredited Social Health Activist workers. Balagopal said that Kerala had been raising this matter during the pre-budget meetings convened by the Union Finance Minister for the past two years. "In Jaisalmer, I also reiterated our demand that the rate of honoraria for Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, and other scheme workers needs to be appropriately enhanced," the Kerala finance minister said. Earlier, the office of State Health Minister Veena George stated that the claim that the Centre had allocated the full amount due to Kerala for centrally-sponsored health schemes in the last financial year was incorrect.

# Day not far when India will be USD 5 trillion economy: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that the day is not far when India will turn a USD 5 trillion economy as he urged all stakeholders to invest in people, economy, and innovation to create jobs and boost growth. Speaking in a post-Budget webinar on employment, Modi said the government has provided skill training to 3 crore youth since 2014 and decided to upgrade 1,000 ITIs and set up five centres of excellence.



Modi also talked about the government's decision to give infrastructure status to the tourism sector, saying that it will generate jobs for youth. He urged industry to invest in the healthcare sector and also talked about the potential of medical tourism to create jobs

Referring to an IMF report of February 2025, Modi noted that between 2015 and 2025, India grew by 66 per cent, making the country a USD 3.8 trillion economy. Observing that the country's growth surpassed that of several major economies, he said "the day is not far when India will become a USD 5 trillion economy." He also stressed the importance of making right investments in the right direction to continue expanding the economy. Modi underlined the critical role of implementing budget announcements in achieving this vision and acknowledged the significant contributions of all stakeholders. He stated that capacity

building and talent nurturing act as the foundation stone for national development and in the next phase of growth, greater investment in these sectors is essential. "The vision of investment in people stands on three pillars -- education, healthcare, and skill development," he said adding that today, India's education system is undergoing a transformation. He said this year's Budget serves as a blueprint for India's future, and that investments have been prioritized equally across infrastructure, industries, people, economy, and innovation. Modi highlighted the PM Internship Scheme that was launched to provide new opportunities and practical skills to youth. "We must ensure that businesses at every scale actively

participate in this scheme. In this year's Budget, we announced 10,000 additional medical seats, with a target of adding 75,000 seats in the medical field over the next 5 years." Modi also talked about the government's decision to give infrastructure status to the tourism sector, saying that it will generate jobs for youth. He urged industry to invest in the healthcare sector and also talked about the potential of medical tourism to create jobs. Modi also emphasized the establishment of daycare cancer centres and the development of digital healthcare infrastructure to ensure quality healthcare reaches the last mile. Modi highlighted that the tourism sector has the potential to contribute up to 10 per

## CLIMATE-INDIA

### Current multilateral system failing to mitigate climate change: India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday said the current multilateral system is failing to address global challenges like climate change and called for urgent reforms in global governance to ensure that equity, justice and action remain central to climate negotiations.



Addressing TERI's World Sustainable Development Summit, Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Patel Yadav said it is still technically possible to keep global warming within the 1.5-degree Celsius limit, but this would require developed countries to fulfil their commitments on financial and technological support. "Global challenges demand global solutions. The current multilateral system is failing to address trans-boundary issues like climate change. We need urgent, structural reforms to global governance that put equity, justice and action at the core of climate negotiations," Yadav said. He added that the proposed USD 300 billion per year under the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) by 2035 is far below the required USD 1.3 trillion, leaving developing countries underfunded in

their climate efforts. Citing the 2024 UNEP Emissions Gap Report, he said: "It is still technically possible for us to stay on the 1.5-degree Celsius pathway, with solar energy, wind power and forests offering tremendous potential for significant and rapid reductions in emissions. However, to fully unlock this potential, we must act with urgency and developed countries should honour and fulfil their obligations, in particular, on means of implementation," the minister said. He stressed that countries must strengthen their climate action plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), by including measures that maximise social, economic and environmental benefits, with stronger international cooperation as the foundation.

### BJP questions the way Naxalites surrendered in Karnataka

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The opposition BJP in Karnataka on Wednesday questioned the way the Naxalites (Maoists) surrendered in the state, wondering how the members of the outlawed unit turned up soon after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah appealed to them on X to give up arms and join the mainstream of the nation. During the discussion on the Governor's speech, BJP MLA V Sunil Kumar said Naxalites killed several people. People living in the Malnad and coastal region live in fear. Policemen carried out several combing operations, but they could not locate the Naxalites. Several warnings could not deter them and made them surrender, the former minister said. But soon after a tweet by the chief minister, Naxalites surrendered and the state was declared Naxal-free.

### UP bans gutkha, pan masala; Rs 1,000 fine for violators

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana on Wednesday announced a ban on gutkha and pan masala within the Assembly premises. The announcement came a day after Mahana expressed his displeasure over an incident where a member was caught on camera spitting pan masala inside the Assembly premises during the House proceedings on Tuesday morning. The speaker had reportedly asked staff members to clean the mess. Mahana, however, had not named the MLA but said he knew who it was. Expressing strong disapproval, the speaker had reminded all members of their responsibility towards cleanliness as lawmakers elected by the public. After the Question Hour on Wednesday, Mahana announced, "With immediate effect, the use of pan masala and gutkha is banned inside the Assembly premises."



"Anyone, including employees, officials or any other individuals, found consuming gutkha or pan masala within the Assembly premises will be fined Rs 1,000. Necessary action will be taken in accordance with the rules," he added. Some members present in the Assembly suggested that the fine amount should be increased due to inflation. Responding in a light-hearted manner, Mahana quipped, "Note down the names of those honourable members demanding a higher fine. If they are caught spitting, we will charge them extra." His remarks sparked laughter among the Assembly members.

# Your 'mangalsutra' remarks have come true

### Congress chief Kharge slams PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over rise in gold loans and said his remarks during the Lok Sabha polls campaign about 'stealing of mangalsutras' have come true with women forced to mortgage their gold ornaments under his rule. Citing media reports, Kharge claimed that between 2019 and 2024, four crore women mortgaged their gold and took a loan of Rs 4.7 lakh crore. In 2024, 38 per cent of the total loans taken by women are from gold loans, he said. In February 2025, RBI data showed that gold loans increased by a whopping 71.3 per cent in a year, the Congress chief said. "Narendra Modi ji, you had talked about 'stealing of man-



galsutras'. That has now come true. In your rule, women have been forced to mortgage their gold ornaments. First you made women's 'sri-dhan' disappear by implementing demonetization, now due to inflation and falling household savings, they are forced to mortgage their most valuable thing -- their jewelry," Kharge said in his post in Hindi on X. During the Lok Sabha polls campaign last year, Modi had alleged that the Congress will take away 'mangalsutras' and redistribute the wealth of the people. Kharge alleged that the

Modi government has worsened the condition of the economy so much that middle class families who buy two-wheelers are now unable to repay their loans. In view of rising loan defaults, two-wheeler financiers are cutting down on lending for the first time since 2019, he claimed. He said 75 per cent of people buy two-wheelers on loan so that they can repay it slowly, but the financial crunch is so severe that as compared to last year, loans worth about Rs 2 lakh crore are still outstanding till September 2024, which has increased by Rs 40,000 crore in a year. Two-wheeler sales have declined by 6 per cent in February 2025, Kharge added. "Recession, financial crunch and reduction in spending capacity - this is the essence of the economy you run," Kharge said, hitting out at the prime minister.

# Don't allow anyone to dictate your course of action

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday advised students not to allow anyone to dictate their course of action, asking them not to be afraid of failure. Dhankhar made these remarks while addressing a convocation ceremony of Jan Nayak Chaudhary Devi Lal Vidyapeeth (JCD) in Sirsa. Haryana minister Ranbir Gangwa, Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader Abhay Singh Chautala, who is president of the Devi Lal Memorial Trust; and INLD MLA Arjun Chautala, who is chairman of

### V-P Dhankhar advises students



JCD Vidyapeeth, were among others present. At the beginning of his convocation address, Dhankhar told the gathering to always put the nation first, saying, "There can be no interest higher than the national interest. Personal

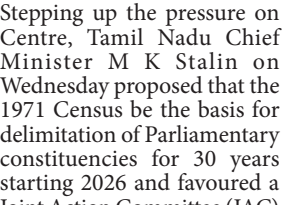
and political interests are insignificant." Dhankhar called upon the students to choose a career in life according to their interests and aptitudes. "Allow your life to go like a river and not like a canal... there was a time when a child was born and parents used to decide what career their child has to choose," he said. The vice president told them that India today offers numerous opportunities to the youth and they must take advantage of it.

"If you look around, boys and girls, your basket of opportunities is ever enlarging, it is there in the blue economy, it is there in the space economy. You are in Bharat at a time when no nation in the last decade has grown as fast and as large as Bharat. "Be it economic upsurge, phenomenal infrastructure growth, digitalisation... Per capita internet consumption of Bharat is more than that of China and USA taken together," he said. About digital transactions, he said these are four times more than the combined transactions of the USA, UK, France and Germany.

## LS DELIMITATION

### TN CM Stalin moots Joint Action Committee of MPs

PNS ■ CHENNAI



Stepping up the pressure on Centre, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Wednesday proposed that the 1971 Census be the basis for delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies for 30 years starting 2026 and favoured a Joint Action Committee (JAC) involving all southern states to press for related demands. At an all-party meeting on delimitation here that was attended by main opposition AIADMK among others, Stalin, moving a resolution, said that in the event of increase in the number of seats in Parliament, the 1971 Census should be the basis for it and that appropriate Constitutional amendment should be done. Also, the 1971 population data should be the basis for delimitation of LS seats for 30 years from 2026 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi should make an assurance in the Parliament, he asserted. The JAC is to take forward such demands and create awareness among the people and the meet unanimously opposed delimitation exercise based on population, which will be a "threat to federalism and the rights of southern states to political representation."

parties including the Edappadi K Palaniswami-led AIADMK, were passed in the meeting to urge the Centre to accept the demands of Tamil Nadu on the issue. One of the key points underscored in the meeting was that there shall not be any reduction in the number of LS seats. The meet underscored that Tamil Nadu is not against delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies. However, the proposed exercise must not become a punishment for implementing well the socio-economic welfare measures during the past 50 years. The Centre declined to heed to the voice of the state, which has 39 Lok Sabha MPs. In case this number was reduced, it would become a big injustice for the state. The CM said that the all-party meeting is for understanding that the state has been pushed to a corner on the issue of delimitation, thereby prompting it to take up a struggle movement to secure its rights. "The delimitation sword is hanging over the head of south India and Tamil Nadu will be severely affected," Stalin alleged.

## CULTURE-FESTIVAL-RB

# Cultural fest at Rashtrapati Bhawan with focus on South India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An annual cultural festival that celebrates India's diverse heritage by showcasing the unique traditions of different regions is set to be held on the premises of the Rashtrapati Bhawan from March 6-9, the government said on Wednesday. The event -- 'Vividhata ka Amrit Mahotsav' -- is being inaugurated by President Droupadi Murmu on March 5 and this year the focus is on South India, according to the Culture Ministry. It will be open to the public

from March 6-9 from 10 AM to 8 PM daily, the ministry said in a statement. Key highlights of this edition include over 500 artisans and weavers showcasing traditional handicrafts and handlooms, including Kanjeevaram and Kasavu sarees, Pochampally ikat, Mysore silk, and intricate brass and wooden crafts, officials said. More than 400 artistes will present folk and classical dance and music, bringing South India's cultural essence to life, they said. "Authentic cuisines will fea-



ture signature South Indian delicacies such as Bisi Bele Bath, Kerala Sadya, Chettinad specialties and Andhra's fiery flavours," it said. "The first edition, held last year, focused on north-east India and received an overwhelming response with 1.3 lakh visitors and over Rs 1 crore in sales for artisans. "Following this success, the second edition highlights south India, featuring the five states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, along with Lakshadweep and Puducherry,"

it said. The festival aims to make the Rashtrapati Bhawan a hub for cultural exchange, bringing India's vibrant heritage closer to its citizens, the ministry said. A Youth Engagement Zone with interactive workshops, storytelling, and cultural activities to inspire the younger generation is also a key attraction. "This festival has been made possible through the support of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Tourism, and all the participating states and Union Territories

which have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting India's diverse heritage," it added. The entry to the venue is from gate no. 35 of the Rashtrapati Bhawan. The festival serves as a platform to connect people with their roots while empowering artisans and performers. This Mahotsav is not just a celebration but a reaffirmation of India's unity in diversity, strengthening cultural bonds and fostering pride in our collective heritage, the ministry said.



## Beginning of a trade war

What began as a threat by Trump is now a full blown trade war as Canada, China and Mexico retaliate the US tariffs

The trade war initiated by President Trump against China, Canada, and Mexico has set off a chain reaction of retaliatory measures, creating uncertainty in global markets and posing risks to economic stability. While the administration aims to address specific national concerns through these tariffs, the broader implications suggest potential harm to both the US and global economies. As the situation evolves, careful consideration of the long-term consequences is essential to mitigate adverse effects on world trade. As promised by him in his campaign President Donald Trump launched a bold series of tariffs aimed at imports from China, Canada, and Mexico, a move that significantly escalated global trade tensions and set off a swift chain reaction of retaliatory measures. The president signed executive orders that imposed a 25% tariff on all goods from Mexico and Canada, and a 10% tariff on Chinese imports. The administration argued that these measures were necessary to tackle issues related to illegal immigration and drug trafficking to protect American industries. In an effort to minimize any disruptive effects, an additional 10% tariff was applied to Canadian energy exports, including electricity, natural gas, and oil.



The response from the targeted countries was swift and forceful. Beijing retaliated by announcing tariffs of up to 15% on key U.S. agricultural products such as chicken, pork, soy, and beef, while also expanding restrictions on U.S. businesses. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau countered with 25% tariffs on \$155 billion worth of American goods. Similarly, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum imposed retaliatory tariffs against the United States, criticizing the unilateral decision and warning of its adverse effects on both national and foreign companies operating in Mexico. Analysts have warned that the tariffs could significantly hinder economic growth, with projections suggesting a contraction of 2.8% in U.S. GDP. The increased tariffs were also expected to drive up consumer prices, adding to existing inflationary pressures and potentially prolonging periods of high interest rates. Global markets reacted negatively, with major U.S. stock indexes and shares in the automotive sector experiencing notable declines. Industries reliant on international supply chains, particularly the automotive sector, braced for production delays and increased costs as a result of these disruptions. The Trump administration maintained that these tariffs were a necessary tool to pressure foreign nations into addressing issues like drug trafficking and to incentivize domestic production. But the reality is different. The tariffs could ultimately have a net negative effect on the U.S. economy by driving up prices, reducing output, and dampening employment growth. In the unfolding saga of international trade, while the US administration's objective remains focused on addressing pressing national concerns, the broader consequences of this trade war hint at potential long-term harm for both the U.S. and the global economy.

## Large-scale dredging and resource extraction projects at Kerala's Quilon Fish Bank have sparked concerns over marine biodiversity loss and ecological stability

India's ambitious Blue Economy vision is reshaping the way the country engages with its vast marine resources. At the heart of this transformation is Kerala, with the Quilon Fish Bank emerging as a crucial player in sustainable fisheries. However, recent concerns over large-scale dredging, resource extraction, and the long-term impact on marine biodiversity have raised important questions about balancing economic growth with ecological stability.

The Quilon Fish Bank, known for its rich biodiversity and high productivity, is among India's most significant fishing grounds. Spread across Kollam and Alappuzha districts, this region is a vital breeding ground for numerous fish species and shrimp. Kerala's fisherfolk have long depended on these waters for their livelihood, making sustainable fisheries management crucial for the state's economy and food security.



However, recent developments, such as the planned dredging of 242 square kilometres of the seabed in Kollam, have sparked widespread concern. Reports indicate that India's Geological Survey has identified 7.45 billion tonnes of sand in Kerala's coastal and offshore areas. While the government sees this as an opportunity for economic development, local communities fear it may lead to habitat destruction, loss of fish stocks, and increased coastal erosion. The controversial dredging project is part of a larger Blue Economy initiative aimed at tapping into the ocean's resources for economic growth.

While this approach has potential, questions remain about its long-term sustainability and impact on Kerala's delicate marine ecosystem. The Blue Economy concept emphasizes responsible and sustainable use of marine resources to drive economic progress. India, with its vast coastline and rich maritime heritage, has identified the Blue Economy as a critical driver of growth in the 21st century. The government's policy framework seeks to integrate economic growth with environmental conservation.

While large-scale resource extraction, such as sand mining and deep-sea fishing, forms part of this vision, efforts are also being made to minimize ecological disruption. Scientific research, eco-friendly technologies, and strict regulations are being implemented to ensure sustainability.

One of the key objectives of India's Blue Economy plan is to modernize the fisheries



sector. Investments in advanced fishing infrastructure, cold storage facilities, and alternative livelihood programs, such as seaweed farming and mariculture, are providing fishermen with new income opportunities. These initiatives aim to reduce dependence on overfished species and promote a more balanced marine ecosystem. Despite the promising aspects of the Blue Economy, concerns remain about its impact on marine biodiversity.

ing not just marine species but also the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families. Experts warn that Kerala's geographical location-between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats-makes it particularly vulnerable to environmental degradation.

To address these concerns, the government has been expanding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to safeguard critical habitats. These conservation zones play a vital role

India refine its own Blue Economy strategy. Kerala's government has also taken steps to enhance coastal resilience. Large-scale coastal protection projects, such as artificial reefs and mangrove restoration, are being undertaken to mitigate the impact of erosion and habitat loss. However, these efforts need stronger support from the central government to ensure long-term effectiveness. The future of the Quilon Fish Bank and Kerala's fisheries sector hinges on finding a middle ground between economic growth and environmental sustainability. While resource extraction and development projects are necessary for progress, they must be undertaken with strict environmental safeguards.

A multi-stakeholder approach involving the government, local fishing communities, environmentalists, and global experts is essential. Policymakers must prioritize scientific research and ecological impact assessments before approving large-scale marine projects. Empowering local communities with alternative livelihood options, enhancing conservation efforts, and enforcing stricter regulations on resource extraction can help ensure a sustainable future for Kerala's fisheries. India's Blue Economy vision holds immense promise, but its success will ultimately depend on how well it balances development with ecological responsibility.

(The writer is associate professor at Centre For South Asian Studies; views are personal)

THE QUILON FISH BANK IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS DILEMMA. DREDGING AND SAND MINING, WHILE ECONOMICALLY LUCRATIVE, HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO DISRUPT FISH BREEDING CYCLES, ALTER OCEAN CURRENTS, AND INCREASE VULNERABILITY TO COASTAL EROSION

The Quilon Fish Bank is a prime example of this dilemma. Dredging and sand mining, while economically lucrative, have the potential to disrupt fish breeding cycles, alter ocean currents, and increase vulnerability to coastal erosion. The fragile balance of Kerala's coastal ecosystem is already under stress due to climate change and unregulated fishing practices.

Further extraction of marine resources could push it to a tipping point, endangering replenishing fish stocks and maintaining biodiversity. Additionally, advanced monitoring systems are being introduced to track fish migration patterns and regulate fishing activities, ensuring long-term marine health.

Countries like Norway, Japan, and Australia have successfully implemented sustainable fisheries policies that balance economic interests with conservation. Learning from these models can help

## PIC TALK



A squirrel perches on a branch of red-silk cotton tree while feeding on flowers in New Delhi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

## When yesterday's children return as tomorrow's hope

SECOND

Time flies. A whole lifetime can sometimes feel like a fleeting frame in the vast reel of existence. Few things make me more aware of this than watching children grow. I have no children of my own to mark the passing years with each birthday they celebrate, but as a mentor and educator, I have been surrounded by young minds in various stages of becoming. I have watched them transition from wide-eyed learners to self-assured adults, carving out their place in the world. Yesterday, one of my earliest students visited me with his fiancée and parents, carrying wedding invitations, gifts, and a bouquet of memories from a time when he was just a six-year-old in shorts and tees. His visit felt like the culmination of a week steeped in nostalgia—a week in which I found myself thinking of all my past students, reaching out to some to check on their progress and well-being.

I was astonished at how they had grown—some still scaling academic heights with degrees and doctorates, others, like the one who visited me, embracing both career and companionship, settling into the rhythms of love and domestication. Not all seem set to become super achievers. Some were slow starters who gained momentum in the later years, some who were primed to blaze the trail, falling short in the end game. As I sat across from my former student, now a confident young professional with clear eyes and measured words, I found



ASHA IYER KUMAR

The rise in youth crime in Kerala is a stark reminder of the challenges this generation faces. Where did we go wrong, and how can we build resilience alongside success?

myself reflecting on the delicate threads that connect our journeys to the broader tapestry of societal evolution.

They carry with them innovative solutions to problems we have long considered intractable. They approach challenges with a fluidity and adaptability that my generation often struggles to comprehend. Their apparent detachment from traditional structures is not apathy, but rather a reconfiguration of priorities, a reshaping of engagement that might prove transformative for our world. Yet this hopeful vision is not with-



out its shadows. The recent surge in youth-involved drug cases and violent crimes in Kerala sends tremors through our collective conscience. Young people, barely past adolescence, find themselves entangled in webs of addiction, exploitation, and criminality that threaten to define their entire existence. The

juxtaposition is jarring—young minds full of promise alongside peers whose potential is squandered in the pursuit of momentary escape or misguided power. This stark contrast forces us to confront uncomfortable questions about the environments we create, the values we embody, and the support systems we provide for our youth. Where exactly have we faltered? Perhaps in our haste to prepare children for success, we have neglected to equip them for struggle.

In our eagerness to protect them from hardship, we may have inadvertently shielded them from the very experiences that build resilience. In our focus on academic achievement, we might have overlooked the cultivation of emotional intelligence and moral courage. It's hard to put a finger on the fault lines that have caused the fractures. In the face of these complex challenges, I find solace in the knowledge that those who have passed through my classroom have largely become contributors to society rather than detractors from it. This is not entirely to my credit. Countless factors shape a person's trajectory, but I take quiet pride in having played some role in their formation. To have contributed, even modestly, to the development of honest, thoughtful, and capable individuals is perhaps the greatest measure of success in a mentor's life. Our purpose in this world is not measured by personal achievements or accolades, but by the lives we touch, the potential we help nurture, and the humanity we help foster.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### Textile industry needs support

Madam — Apropos of the article 'Export Potentials of Punjab ...' (March 5), presents an interesting reading. But the trend in the country remains different. Only slogans galore and solutions are nil. The second largest provider of employment is the cotton industry in India. The direct employment it provides is around 40 million. Besides this, there are micro units and allied feeding industries providing employment to many more millions. The cotton business has been suffering for years due to various internal as well as external factors. In the same way, the spinning mills also feel suffocating due to various factors. Declining exports, unviable cotton prices, growing costs of manufacturing, and a number of such factors are quoted to be disturbing the functioning of mills. It is a pity that a good number of mills are closing their operations, throwing millions of workers out of their jobs, besides their due negative impacts on export earnings.

The industry, with debt-funded capex, finds it too difficult to manage the show anymore. Actually, in most of the mills, the number of permanent workers availing themselves of employee-related benefits is too low, and the vast section of the workforce is made up of contract, outsourced, casual, contingent, and barrack segments, who are paid too little and do not avail themselves of any benefits meant for permanent workers. In spite of such huge savings from the labour component, the mills are closing down due to various reasons that the governments

can alone resolve. For example, the cost of power is felt to be unviable. Export subsidies need to be provided. In the absence of required intervention from the state or the Union governments, a good number of mills are already closed, and many are nearing closure. It is said even banks are not inclined to advance these industries anymore. It is time to attend to this segment as a priority, as slogans are not a solution.

A G RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

### Lasting peace in Manipur

Madam— Apropos of the editorial 'A fresh start or fleeting relief?' (March 4), it is very apparent that the Union Government's efforts and monitoring of Manipur ethnic violence for quite a long time are bearing fruit and steadily succeeding for normalcy. Unless the roots of the ethnic violence and secessionist underground activities are identified and addressed, the violence may erupt again. Drug trafficking, opium cultivation, missionaries' separatist activities, and foreign intervention from across the border must be handled iron-handedly.

The arms and ammunition snatched by warring outfits from the police and paramilitary forces should be recovered, and no mercy should be shown to those who attacked police and armed forces. The Parliament should approve the extension of the President's rule, and rather, Manipur should be directly ruled by the Centre as a Union Territory until complete normalcy is restored. The neighbouring states of Manipur should not feel the heat and face the consequences

of ethnic violence in Manipur. The opposition parties should work in unison with the Union Government in resolving Manipur violence and restoring peace.

VISHAL MAVUR | TUMAKURU

### Supreme Court warns influencers

Madam — The Supreme Court's call for regulating digital content to uphold morality while protecting free speech is crucial. The rise of social media influencers like Ranveer Allahbadia has raised serious concerns about the unchecked spread of vulgarity under the guise of free expression. His content, deemed obscene by many, is a clear example of why stricter guidelines are necessary. While free speech is a fundamental right, it does not give anyone a license to propagate content that corrupts young minds and disrespects societal values.

The court's decision to allow Allahbadia to resume his show was not well received. Although it imposed moral restrictions on incoming content, individuals engaging in vulgarity should be banned for at least a year. This would make them aware of the mistakes they have made in reality shows, ensuring that they feel the consequences of their actions. Such punishment should serve as a lesson for future generations to refrain from committing similar acts. The influence of such YouTubers extends to millions, and their impact on impressionable audiences cannot be ignored. The government must implement robust regulations to ensure that digital platforms maintain ethical standards.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

### INDIA BEATS AUSTRALIA



The other back-to-back victory of Team India in the ICC Champions Trophy semifinals against Australia has filled Indians with extreme aspiration of becoming champions. We are just a step away from the dream of becoming champions. The last time Team India lifted the Champions trophy was in 2013. Despite Australia giving a challenging chaser score of 264 runs to India, the partnership by the batting order, bowling, and fielding has made India win by four wickets. Now that India has made a glittering entry to the finals of the ICC Champions Trophy for the third time, let us all make figures crossed for the victory of

India in the finals as well. Now that the Indian cricket team has done their hat trick of three successive entries in the finals, let's pray that India will lift the trophy by naming the third title to her name as Champions.

It's time for all eyes to be on Dubai International Stadium for the thrilling final match. We really wish to see Rohit Sharma's squad turn champions. Cricket fever will be in full swing on the upcoming Sunday to thrill the whole world of cricket lovers. We are hopeful for India to make the podium finishes with the trophy in hand and joy in the eyes.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR



## FIRST COLUMN

AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI



## Understanding God and the Guru

A true guru recognises his limitations, serving only as a guide who connects disciples to the divine



We must understand the distinction between these fundamental entities in our lives. First, let me enumerate some commonly known qualities of God. He is omnipotent. This word is defined as having unlimited power. Only God fits this description. Is He not the Creator of innumerable galaxies? Similarly, God is omniscient. This word is defined as knowing everything. Who else except God fits this description? How much can a mere mortal know?

Albert Einstein famously said, "The more I learn, the more I realize how much I don't know." Then, God is omnipresent too. This word is defined as being present everywhere at the same time. And God is one and we are many. Lord Krishna states, "An eternal soul is My part only" (The Bhagavad-Geeta 15.7). Let us see how a genuine guru fares in these characteristics. He knows that whatever he has learnt in terms of spiritual knowledge, oratory skills, etc., is due to God's empowerment. God is much pleased by preaching amongst devotees. A genuine guru realizes that the source of his knowledge is God only. As regards omnipresence, a genuine guru humbly accepts that he is severely limited in being present with his disciples. Additionally, a genuine guru never claims any similarity with God except being part of God. Because God is completely different from us.

A genuine guru knows this fact more than others, who are not so knowledgeable. Being an incarnation of God never crosses his mind, because he knows that God incarnates for specific purposes. A guru's role is extremely limited. It is just to help get his disciples connected with God. And he strictly avoids attracting them to himself personally. Adi Shankaracharya is the role model for him, who preached "bhaja govindam". Now I will take up the famous verse, which is, "guru brahma, guru vishnu, guru dev maheshvara, guru sakshat parambrahma tasmai shri gurave namah."

Can any mere mortal claim to be Brahma or Vishnu or Mahadeva, never mind all three of them? It is ludicrous to even imagine. These are manifestations of God, not some ordinary entities; they are eternal, whereas we are subject to repeated birth and death till liberated. So what is the meaning of this verse? It is simply that whatever a guru speaks has sanction from God; he is not deviating from His instructions. He is simply conveying the essence of His teachings.

That is how he represents God. A genuine guru ensures that he protects his disciples from any harm by his inappropriate actions. He does not promise anything more than helping them to establish a good connection with God. He tries to become a role model for taking shelter from God because that is how all can benefit. He knows that he cannot give anything more.

20 He is aware of his severe limitations in this regard. He guides his disciples to get connected to God such that they can get what all God can give. (9.25) The conclusion is to seek help from a genuine guru, who can help in progressing in our eternal journey. And we should never get side-tracked by hopes of easy gains, because there are none. We have to deserve all that we hope to get including liberation by our efforts, not someone else's.

A genuine guru knows this fact and never leaves any doubt in the minds of those who trust him. He thus gets respect from his disciples, which he richly deserves. Additionally, some disciples may serve him personally and some may donate so that the guru can maintain himself.

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

## A model of stability from China

While Western democracies struggle with internal gridlock, economic and stagnation, China's governance model continues to chart a course of long-term strategic vision



The Financial Times recently published an article on the question of who will succeed Xi Jinping. But perhaps the real question is not one of succession but of continuity—of how a governance model rooted in long-term vision, pragmatic adaptability, and national rejuvenation sustains itself beyond the tenure of any single leader. Unlike Western portrayals, often laden with exaggerated spectres from 'debt traps' to 'authoritarianism', there are profound lessons to be drawn from China's trajectory—especially as Western democracies now find themselves gasping for air in the suffocating embrace of their contradictions. "Democracy is a failed joke," Ai Weiwei, the Chinese contemporary artist, remarked in a recent interview with The Independent—and perhaps never has this assertion been more starkly evident than in the shambolic decline of the liberal order. Governance, once regarded as the solemn responsibility of those entrusted with the future of their nations, has in the West deteriorated into little more than a revolving spectacle of populist theatre, corporate capture, and institutional paralysis. It is within this continuum that China now prepares to convene its most pivotal political gathering of the year—the Two Sessions.

The third session of the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) and the third session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), scheduled to commence on 4 and 5 March respectively, are not mere ritualistic formalities but the very engine of governance in a system defined by strategic foresight rather than short-term electoral expedience. The Western world, entrapped in the myopia of its dysfunction, looks upon this grand assembly with bewilderment, unable to comprehend a system where efficiency supersedes obstruction and where governance is an instrument of civilisation rather than a battleground of perpetual paralysis.

As Beijing convenes these pivotal sessions, it does so with a purpose that far surpasses the partisan gridlock that has crippled Washington under Trump and reduced Brussels, under Ursula von der Leyen's leadership, to a stage of waning relevance. History does not bestow hegemony upon the indolent. It is earned through foresight, discipline, and a genuine commitment to civilisation's progress. The Western model, long heralded as the apex of governance, is now fraying



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

resolve. "The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only correct path for building a modern socialist country," Xi Jinping declared in his report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017. What have the last few decades illuminated since China's opening up? "Reform and opening up is the key

at the seams, consumed by internal strife, economic stagnation, and an ever-widening gulf between the governed and their rulers.

Meanwhile, the Chinese model, grounded in the philosophical profundity of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, marches forward with unparalleled resolve. "The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the only correct path for building a modern socialist country," Xi Jinping declared in his report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2017. What have the last few decades illuminated since China's opening up? "Reform and opening up is the key

definitive proclamation for a new global paradigm—one where dialogue supplants discord and where stability is not held hostage to the whims of declining empires. The very existence of Western diplomacy has been predicated upon coercion, economic subjugation, and military adventurism. China, by contrast, has demonstrated that genuine global leadership lies not in the proliferation of conflict, but in its resolution. This year's Two Sessions will reaffirm Beijing's role as an indispensable mediator of international crises, bringing adversaries to the negotiating table in a manner that the West, mired in its moral hypocrisy, has repeatedly failed to achieve. Consider the diplomatic masterstroke that saw China facilitate a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia—two historical adversaries long ensnared in the machinations of Western interventionism. This ethos extends to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, where China,

to the Western penchant for war profiteering. While NATO expands its influence under the guise of security, China constructs bridges of diplomacy, demonstrating that true global leadership lies not in fuelling divisions but in fostering dialogue. But China's vision does not stop at terrestrial affairs. This year's Two Sessions will be held as the next frontier of human progress—space—becomes a new high-tech battlefield. While Western nations hoard technological advancements for geopolitical leverage, China has advanced an inclusive vision of cosmic exploration. The construction of the Tiangong space station, the pioneering lunar projects, and the Mars exploration programme are not mere scientific endeavours; they are emblematic of a civilisation that aspires not merely for national greatness but for the collective progress of humanity.

The essence of the Two Sessions lies in the articulation of a governing philosophy rooted in long-term vision, adaptability, and the pursuit of collective progress. It is not governance dictated by ephemeral political cycles but by a civilisation's deeper consciousness—one that understands its historical responsibility not only to itself but to the broader trajectory of human development. In an era where artificial intelligence and artificial general intelligence are reshaping economies, governance, and even social structures, China does not see these advancements as instruments of control or geopolitical leverage but as elements of a broader mission: ensuring that technological evolution remains a force for human cohesion rather than fragmentation. What China has proven is that reform is not an event; it is the flow of history recognising its potential. Simultaneously, the shifting currents of global trade, exacerbated by protectionist measures and economic fragmentation, have reinforced the necessity of an alternative economic logic—one not shackled to the fluctuations of political expediency but rooted in the principle of enduring equilibrium. True strength is not found in dominance, but in resilience—the ability to absorb, adapt, and outlast. This defines China's approach to trade tensions: rather than engaging in tit-for-tat economic skirmishes, the focus is on structural reinforcement—building self-sufficiency in critical sectors while ensuring that economic interdependence remains a mechanism of stability rather than vulnerability.

(The writer is a journalist and a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

WHILE WESTERN ECONOMIES DROWN IN INFLATIONARY QUAGMIRES AND INSTITUTIONAL CRISES, CHINA HAS CHARTED A PATH OF ECONOMIC REJUVENATION THROUGH INDUSTRIAL UPGRADING, AND THE INDOMITABLE PURSUIT OF TECHNOLOGICAL SELF-RELIANCE

choice that determines the fate of contemporary China," Deng Xiaoping once asserted. This ethos continues to guide China, as the nation refines its developmental trajectory with an adaptability that the West, bound by ideological rigidity, can scarcely fathom. China is not merely asserting its presence but reshaping the very contours of the global order. The Two Sessions have highlighted the profundity of China's economic strategy—one that is not predicated on the ephemeral illusions of speculative capitalism but on tangible infrastructural and technological advancement. While Western economies drown in inflationary quagmires and institutional crises, China has charted a path of economic rejuvenation through high-quality development, industrial upgrading, and the indomitable pursuit of technological self-reliance.

Yet the significance of the Two Sessions transcends economic imperatives. It is also a

in defiance of Western inertia, has actively pursued dialogue among Palestinian factions. The hypocrisy of the liberal order is laid bare when the so-called torchbearers of democracy selectively disregard the suffering of those who do not fit within their geopolitical calculus.

Beijing, undeterred by such duplicity, has asserted itself as an honest broker of peace, proving that a multipolar world is not an abstraction but an unfolding reality. Even in the maelstrom of the Ukraine conflict, where Western powers have inflamed tensions rather than defused them, China's peace proposal has emerged as the only substantive roadmap towards de-escalation.

President Xi Jinping has consistently emphasised that "confrontation, sanctions, and pressure will not solve the problem... what is needed is a mindset of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security," resonating ever more powerfully in contrast

## Healthcare divide: How tier-II and III cities are transforming medical

Investments in advanced medical technology and government initiatives like Ayushman Bharat are making healthcare more accessible in tier II and III cities

Healthcare facilities in tier-II and III cities have long struggled with the disparity between affordability and accessibility of quality healthcare services. These cities often lack well-equipped medical centres, forcing patients to travel to nearby metropolitan areas for advanced treatment. The shortage of trained medical professionals further exacerbates the problem.

The doctor-to-patient ratio in these cities remains significantly below the WHO-recommended standard of 1:1,000, often reaching alarming ratios such as 1:25,000. @The Accessibility Gap One of the major factors behind this situation is the concentration of healthcare resources in metropolitan areas. Government hospitals in smaller cities often grapple with overcrowding, long waiting lines, and outdated infrastructure. Meanwhile, private hospitals that offer advanced treatments are often unaffordable for the majority of the population. This leaves patients with limited options, pushing them to seek care in distant metro cities.

However, in recent years, several hospitals in tier-II cities have made significant strides in bridging this gap. The emergence of well-equipped hospitals outside major metropolitan areas is proving to be a game-changer for patients who previously had to travel long distances for treatment. Health Institutions like Subharti Hospital in Meerut exemplify how tier-II cities are evolving to provide comprehensive and affordable healthcare not only under



KRISHNAMURTY

the Ayushman Bharat Mission but also for uninsured patients, reducing dependence on metropolitan hospitals.

### Ayushman Bharat and Affordability

One of the biggest challenges in tier-II and III cities is making advanced healthcare both available and affordable.

Many private hospitals offer high-end treatment facilities, but their pricing structures make them inaccessible to a significant portion of the population.

To address this issue, some hospitals are designing cost-effective treatment models that prioritize patient affordability without compromising on quality. Additionally, government schemes and insurance programs such as Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY need to be further expanded and better implemented in these regions. Many eligible patients are unaware of their entitlements under schemes like PMJAY, leading to underutilization of available resources. Increased awareness and streamlined implementation of such initiatives can make a significant difference in ensuring financial accessibility to quality healthcare.

Advancements in Medical Technology Traditionally, hospitals in non-metro areas have



been perceived as lacking advanced infrastructure and specialized treatment options. However, this perception is gradually changing.

Many healthcare institutions such as Subharti Hospital in Meerut are now investing in cutting-edge medical technology, including advanced imaging facilities such as digital PET scans, high-resolution MRI and CT scans, and modern oncology treatment options like chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

The availability of these services locally is significantly reducing the burden on patients who would otherwise have to commute to larger cities.

A breakthrough in Meerut is the introduction of comprehensive treatment centres, particularly in fields like oncology. Cancer patients, for example, often face logistical and financial challenges when forced to visit different hospitals for diagnosis, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy.

The integration of these services under one roof in tier-II cities is improving patient outcomes and reducing treatment delays. Subharti Hospital, for instance, has emerged as a reliable healthcare provider in Western Uttar Pradesh, offering a full spectrum of oncology services in a single location, saving patients valuable time and resources.

### The Road Ahead

Ensuring quality healthcare in tier-II and III cities requires a multi-pronged approach that includes expanding medical infrastructure, ensuring equitable resource distribution, increasing investment in medical education to address the shortage of trained professionals, and encouraging partnerships to enhance healthcare accessibility. As healthcare in India evolves, tier-II and III cities are poised to play a crucial role in expanding medical access beyond metropolitan areas.

Continuous efforts are needed to overcome existing challenges and create a healthcare system that is truly inclusive and accessible to all. With a focused approach towards affordability, accessibility, and technological advancements, the future of healthcare in non-metro regions holds immense potential. By addressing these challenges head-on, tier-II and III cities can become the next frontier in India's healthcare transformation.

(The writer is the Deputy Medical Superintendent of Subharti Hospital, Meerut. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



**Volvo to launch electric SUV EX30 in India: Official**

Swedish luxury car maker Volvo is planning to launch its fully electric small SUV EX30 in India this year as part of its plans of launching one electric model in the country every year in line with its global ambition of achieving 90-100 per cent sales from electrified cars by 2030, according to a senior company official. Besides, Volvo Car India is also looking at bringing the new XC60 SUV in India this year, its Managing Director Jyoti Malhotra said. "Our global ambition is that we want to sell electrified cars, 90-100 per cent of our cars should be electrified, which means directionally, we are still going in the same direction that we want to move towards electrification," he said. For India, Malhotra said, "The company is fully aligned with the government's push for faster adoption of electric cars in India, and we are completely aligned to that. If you see, we are very happy." Last year, one in every four cars that we have sold (in India) was an electric car, although we have only XC 40 and C40. With only two cars, we are so close to 25 per cent of our car sales are already electric, and we are aligned to achieve the global ambition of 90-100 per cent by 2030," Malhotra said.

**'Govt to walk the talk on 70pc women in workforce by 2047'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will walk the talk on Viksit Bharat by 2047 with 70 per cent women in the workforce, Union Labour Secretary Sumita Dawra said on Wednesday as she highlighted the importance of mentorship for women entrepreneurs.

Addressing a CII conference on women in the services sector, she also said looking ahead there are sectors which hold great potential for women to participate further. She suggested enhancing education for them under National Education Policy.

For women entrepreneurs and startups she called for increasing venture capital support.

"For women entrepreneurs, (venture capital support) is very critical. Mentorship for women to be in leadership and decision-making roles. While we have provision, we also must have mentorship for women where it is needed," she said.

About challenges faced by women in the services sector, she said there could be biases

which prevent their entry in the workforce. There could be wage disparities, even in the leadership roles, job security concerns and issues like balancing domestic and professional responsibility.

Data shows that about 45 per cent women cite childcare and domestic commitments as reasons for not participating in the workforce, she noted



adding that in the last six years, there is an enhanced engagement of women in economic activities.

There is an upward trend of educated women joining the workforce and also a steady increase in earnings despite some challenges in wage disparity. Today she said, "we see women excelling in services sector, technology, finance and also in manufacturing. The data tells us that Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for women has doubled in the last six years."

**India looks at ways to navigate Trump's reciprocal tariff**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With US President Donald Trump's threat of reciprocal tariff stoking fears of a global trade war, India is looking at finding an amicable solution to the challenge under the broad framework of a trade deal with Washington.

In his latest salvo, the US president, while addressing a joint session of the Congress on Tuesday, mentioned India alongside the European Union, China and Canada for charging higher tariffs on American products.

In line with his "America First" policy, Trump announced during the speech reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on numerous trading partners and nations that impose higher levies on imports from the United States.

He said other countries have used tariffs against the US for decades and now, it is "our turn" to start using them against those nations.

"On average, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Canada -- have you heard of them? And countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them," Trump said.

He added: "It is very unfair.



India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 per cent. China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them. And South Korea's average tariff is four times higher."

India is confident of finding a solution, people familiar with the matter said while referring to the commitment expressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump during their February 13 talks in Washington DC.

At the meeting, the two sides agreed to negotiate a mega trade deal by the end of this year and set an ambitious target of USD 500 billion in annual trade by 2030 to narrow

the trade deficit.

"Recognising that this level of ambition would require new, fair-trade terms, the leaders announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025," a joint statement on the Modi-Trump talks said.

To advance this innovative, wide-ranging BTA, the US and India will take an integrated approach to strengthen and deepen the bilateral trade across the goods and services sector, and work towards increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepening sup-

ply-chain integration, it said.

Both sides made firm commitment to boost the overall trade and India hopes that a mutually-beneficial outcome will emerge on the issue of tariffs, the people cited above said as New Delhi looks at navigating the trade landscape with the Trump administration.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington this week to hold talks with his American counterpart, Howard Lutnick, and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on the proposed deal.

There is an expectation in New Delhi that it may escape the reciprocal tariffs being imposed by the Trump administration on February 2.

Since assuming office on January 20, Trump has on multiple occasions criticised India for higher tariffs and even described the country as a "tariff king" and "tariff abuser".

In its Union budget for 2025-26, India announced its decision to lower tariffs on the Bourbon whiskey, wines and electronic vehicle (EV) segments.

The decisions were seen as an attempt to send a signal to the Trump administration that New Delhi is open to bringing down tariffs in specific sectors.



**Proximus to have GCC in Bengaluru**

Belgian telco Proximus is set to open a global capability centre in Bengaluru soon, a top official said on Wednesday. The state-run company's chairman Stefaan De Clerck said it had a long experience of working with Indian entities or Indians for over two decades, and it is the trust in talent, and its quality, which makes India the ideal place to have such a facility. "We trust Indian talent, we saw the Indian talent. So, it is the beginning of the consideration (of having a GCC) saying ok, that is the country we have to go to," Clerck told reporters here. Speaking at the headquarters of Route Mobile, which is majority owned by Proximus, Clerck said the group which employs over 13,000 people at present has decided to have the facility at Bengaluru. He said the company has had a long-standing relationship with Bengaluru-based Infosys and the Indian IT services major is also helping it in the process of setting up the GCC. Moreover, Bengaluru is also the hub for a slew of GCCs in the country which makes it an ideal place to be in, Clerck said.



**RBI appoints Ajit Ratnakar Joshi as executive director**

The Reserve Bank on Wednesday said it has appointed Ajit Ratnakar Joshi as Executive Director (ED) who will look after Department of Statistics and Information Management and Financial Stability Department. Prior to being promoted as ED, Joshi was serving as principal adviser in Department of Statistics and Information Management. He has an over three-decade experience in the areas of statistics, information technology, and cyber risk management. He has also served as member of faculty at the Institute of Development and Research in Banking Technology, Hyderabad. Joshi has also served as member of several committees and working groups relating to compilation of macroeconomic statistics and policy issues. He has a Master's degree in statistics from Nagpur University, Ph.D. in monetary economics from IIT Madras, Diploma in Economic Policy and Planning from the Institute of Development Growth, Delhi and is a certified associate of the Indian Institute of Banking and Finance.

**Sukhu invites UAE firms to invest in key sectors**

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu has invited the UAE to invest in key sectors, including tourism and hospitality and green energy in the state, a statement said on Wednesday.

Abdulnasser Alshaali, Ambassador of United Arab Emirates (UAE) in India met the Chief Minister and discussed potential investment opportunities in the state. During the meeting, CM Sukhu invited the UAE to invest in key sectors including Tourism and Hospitality, Green Energy, Dairy, Food Processing and Data Storage.

Sukhu said that Himachal Pradesh offers unique investment opportunities as it has breathtaking landscapes including vast snow-bound areas, hills and water bodies.

"To enhance tourism infrastructure, the State Government is developing multiple ropeways, expanding Kangra Airport, constructing new four lanes and heliports to improve connectivity to the visitors which would make Himachal a favourite destination for investment" he said.

**Sensex jumps 740 pts, Nifty breaks losing streak**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex surged by 740 points while Nifty snapped its 10-day losing streak on Wednesday following value buying in utilities and power shares and a strong trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged by 740.30 points or 1.01 per cent to close at 73,730.23. The index jumped 943.87 points or 1.29 per cent to hit an intraday high of 73,933.80.

Cutting short its record 10-day falling streak, the broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 254.65 points or 1.15 per cent to settle at 22,337.30. During the day, it appreciated by 312.25 points or 1.41 per cent to a high of 22,394.90.

Broader markets also closed higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 2.80 per cent and midcap index advancing 2.66 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms appreciated by Rs 7,97,247.7 crore to Rs 3,93,04,041.75 crore (USD 4.51 trillion).

From the Sensex pack, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, Power

Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, ITC, Nestle India, HCL Technologies, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Asian Paints and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the gainers.

Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, and Zomato were the laggards.

India's services sector activity witnessed a sharp uptick in



February boosted by improving domestic and international demand, which resulted in a quicker expansion in output and a substantial increase in employment, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from January's 26-month low of 56.5 to 59.0 in February, indicating a sharp rate of expansion.

**Number of HNIs in India rises to 85,698**

Billionaires count moves up to 191: Knight Frank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Number of Indian high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs), those having assets more than USD 10 million, rose 6 per cent last year to 85,698 while billionaires count increased to 191 due to wealth creation, according to property consultant Knight Frank.

On Wednesday, Knight Frank released its 'The Wealth Report 2025', which estimated the HNWI population in India at 85,698 in 2024, against 80,686 in the preceding year.

The number of HNWIs is expected to rise to 93,753 by 2028, reflecting India's expanding wealth landscape, the consultant forecast.

The increasing trend of the HNWI population highlights the country's strong long-term economic growth, increasing investment opportunities, and evolving luxury market, positioning India as a key player in global wealth creation.

India is home to 3.7 per cent of wealthy individuals globally and currently stands at 4th position after the US (9,05,413



HNWIs), China (4,71,634 HNWIs) and Japan (1,22,119 HNWIs).

Further, Knight Frank stated that India's billionaire population has also seen a strong year-on-year growth in 2024.

"India is now home to 191 billionaires, of which 26 joined the ranks in just the last year, which was pegged at just 7 in 2019," the consultant said.

The combined wealth of Indian billionaires is estimated at USD 950 billion, ranking the country third globally, behind the US (USD 5.7 trillion) and Mainland China (USD 1.34 trillion).

"India's growing wealth underscores its economic

resilience and long-term growth potential. The country is witnessing an unprecedented rise in high-net-worth individuals, driven by entrepreneurial dynamism, global integration, and emerging industries," Shishir Bajaj, Chairman & Managing Director of Knight Frank India, said.

This expansion is not just in scale but also in the evolving investment preferences of India's elite, who are diversifying across asset classes, from real estate to global equities, he added.

"In the decade ahead, India's influence in global wealth creation will only strengthen," Bajaj said.

**Meghalaya CM presents Rs 1,970 cr deficit budget**

PNS ■ SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday tabled a Rs 1,970 crore deficit budget for the financial year 2025-26, announcing a Rs 6,000 scholarship for all post-matric students of the state.

The Rs 1,970 crore budget is around 2.96 per cent of the projected Rs 66,645 crore GSDP, in line with the targeted USD 10 billion economy by 2028.

According to the budget document, the total receipts for 2025-26 are estimated at Rs 30,415 crore, of which revenue

receipts are Rs 25,591 crore and capital receipts Rs 14,324 crore. Excluding borrowings of Rs 24,788 crore, the total receipts are estimated to be 225,627 crore.

Estimating the total expenditure to be Rs 30,003 crore, Sangma said the revenue expenditure is estimated to be Rs 20,556 crore and capital expenditure at Rs 9,447 crore. Excluding repayment of loans of Rs 2,406 crore, the estimated total expenditure is Rs 27,597 crore.

The interest payment for the current fiscal is estimated at Rs 1,347 crore and pension payments at Rs 1,824 crore, he



said. "I am, therefore, presenting the budget for 2015-26 with a fiscal deficit of Rs 1,970 crore, which is around 2.96 per cent

of the GSDP. I am delighted to highlight that the fiscal deficit has been maintained below the permissible limit of 3.5 per cent," the CM said, tabling the budget.

Sangma announced a Rs 6000 scholarship for all post-matric students which would cover 80,000 youths from the next financial year.

He also informed the House that the size of the climate budget is Rs 5,421 crore, an increase of 20 per cent over 2024-25, youth budget stands at Rs 3,329 crore, an increase of 16.6 per cent; gender budget stands at Rs 6,219 crore, an increase of 25 per cent.

**Hike in deposit insurance limit beyond Rs 5 L to hit banks' 'profits'**



issuing new loans, suspending deposit withdrawals and superseding the lender's board.

The rating agency on Wednesday said the recent failure of New India

Cooperative Bank may have prompted the deliberations, but added that such a move could drill a hole of up to Rs 12,000 crore on banks' profit.

"...the potential increase in deposit insurance limits, which has come under focus given the recent failure of a cooperative bank, is expected to have a marginal but notable impact on banks' profitability," Icria's head for financial sector ratings Sachin Sachdeva said.

The agency recalled that the limits were last hiked to Rs 5 lakh from the earlier Rs 1 lakh in February 2020 in the aftermath of the PMC Bank crisis.

As of March 2024, 97.8 per cent of the bank accounts were fully covered because the sums credited in them were

within the Rs 5 lakh limit, it said, adding that going by value of deposits, the insured deposit ratio (IDR) was 43.1 per cent as of March 31, 2024.

Noting that the exact quantum of the hike in deposit insurance is not known, it said the change in IDR adversely impacts banks' profits as they have to shell out more money as premiums.

"...under various scenarios, whereby IDR increases to 47-66.5 per cent, the banks' profit after tax (PAT) could be adversely impacted by Rs 1,800-12,000 crore annually," the agency said.

**Tata Electronics to set up display chip mfg unit in Gujarat**

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

Tata Electronics will set up a display chip manufacturing unit in Gujarat in partnership with Taiwan-based PSMC and Himax Technologies, a top official of the company said on Wednesday.

Speaking at IESA Vision Summit, Tata Electronics CEO Randhir Thakur announced signing of an agreement with the Gujarat government for the plant.

"Today, I am delighted to announce the signing of an MoU between Tata Electronics, PSMC and Himax to revolutionise India's display product and technology ecosystem. With PSMC's proven technology, Tata Electronics will manufacture display chips for Himax in Dholera, Gujarat," Thakur said.

Display chips are widely used in products like television, mobile phone screen, camera image sensors, LEDs, OLEDs etc.

Vedanta Group had also proposed to set up a display fab in Gujarat but the project has not received government approval yet.

With its foray in display manufacturing, Tata Electronics

will have presence in all top three semiconductor manufacturing segments.

Under the project, Tata Electronics, Himax, and PSMC aim to leverage their respective strengths to deliver comprehensive, end-to-end display semiconductor solutions for their mutual customers, from chip design to chip manufacturing and packaging, as well as electronics manufacturing services (EMS) to both the Indian and

global markets. "Through this collaboration, we aim to bring Himax's industry-leading expertise in display semiconductors and WiseEye ultralow power AI sensing to support India's Made in India initiative while enhancing global supply chain resilience. This partnership underscores our commitment to delivering cutting-edge display solutions that cater to the evolving needs of both Indian and international markets," Jordan Wu, Co-Founder and CEO of Himax Technologies said.





# what's brewing?

## Ishaan, Tara discuss 'love, music' of *Pyaar Aata Hai*

Actors Ishaan Khatter and Tara Sutaria are set to mesmerize audiences with their upcoming romantic song, *Pyaar Aata Hai*. Sung by Rito Riba and the legendary Shreya Ghoshal, the track is produced by Anshul Garg under Play DMF and has been shot against the breathtaking landscapes of Kashmir.

On Wednesday, the makers unveiled the teaser of the song on social media, giving fans a glimpse of the enchanting chemistry between Ishaan and Tara. The post was captioned, "A little glimpse of love, a spark before the fire. #PyaarAataHai Teaser OUT NOW exclusively on @playdmfofficial YouTube Channel! Full Song Out on 7th March."

Ishaan Khatter, who marks his first on-screen collaboration with Tara, was immediately drawn to the track. "The moment I heard the song, I knew it was something beautiful. Rito's voice is unique and heartfelt and, of course, Shreya Ma'am adds an ethereal touch. Shooting in Kashmir with Tara was an



absolute joy, and the breathtaking visuals truly enhance the emotions of the song," he shared.

Tara Sutaria, who has often expressed her deep love for music, was equally thrilled to be a part of the project. "Music has always been such a big part of my life and being part of a song sung

by Shreya Ma'am and Rito is incredibly special. The melody is enchanting and I can't wait for the audience to experience the magic we've created on screen. Shreya Ma'am has always been my favorite artist and to be the face of a voice so divine is a dream come true," she said.

## KUBBRA SAIT REVEALS SHE AUDITIONED FOR SURPANAKHA IN NITESH TIWARI'S RAMAYANA

Actor Kubbra Sait had revealed that she auditioned for the role of Surpanakha in Nitesh Tiwari's highly anticipated film, *Ramayana*. The project, which boasts a star-studded cast including Ranbir Kapoor, Sai Pallavi and Yash, has been generating immense buzz. Although she didn't land the role, Kubbra remains upbeat about the experience. Speaking about her audition, Kubbra shared her lighthearted take on why she felt she would have been an ideal choice. "I was perfect for the role of Surpanakha because of my nose," she joked. "I would have been a perfect fit for it, but they did not cast me. Now I am curious to know who they have given this role to."

Despite not bagging the part, the actress maintained a positive outlook, emphasising that rejections are part of an actor's journey. "I did audition for Surpanakha, but you don't get

everything you try for and that's okay. It doesn't mean you lose everything. I'm grateful for the experience," she said. While *Ramayana* may not have worked out for her, Kubbra has an exciting slate of projects lined up. She is set to appear in *The Trial Season 2*, where she will share screen space with Kajol. Additionally, she will feature in *Son of Sardar 2*, starring Ajay Devgn and Mrunal Thakur. Kubbra is also part of an upcoming comedy film directed by David Dhawan, where she will be seen alongside Varun Dhawan, Mrunal Thakur and Maniesh Paul. With a diverse mix of roles in her pipeline, Kubbra Sait continues to carve her own path in the industry, embracing every opportunity that comes her way.



## Sparsh Shrivastava on the allure of rural-inspired characters in cinema

Although Sparsh Shrivastava had appeared in a handful of films and shows earlier in his career, his portrayal of Deepak Kumar in Kiran Rao's *Laapataa Ladies* transformed him into a household name. A closer look at his filmography reveals a consistent pattern: many of his memorable roles draw inspiration from rural India. In a latest interview, the actor shared insights into why he is so drawn to characters that echo the spirit of rural life. From his portrayal of Sunny Mondal in *Jamtara: Sabka Number Aayega* to his performance as Deepak Kumar, Sparsh has consistently gravitated toward roles that bring the authenticity and diversity of rural India to the forefront. He explained that the filmmakers behind these projects are not only creative but also present stories that are uniquely engaging. "Many stories resonate because rural India forms the backdrop of 70 percent of our country," he noted, emphasising the universal connection that audiences share with such narratives.

Sparsh also acknowledged the subtle pressures of typecasting in the industry. While the scripts that delve into rural themes naturally appeal to him, there is a conscious effort from some quarters to pigeonhole him into a particular mold. Despite this, the actor remains unyielding in his pursuit of compelling and well-crafted characters. "When you look at these roles side by side, you see how distinct each character is," he stated, underlining that it's the depth of the story and the uniqueness of each role that ultimately win him over. In conclusion, Sparsh Shrivastava's affinity for rural-inspired characters is driven by the rich, diverse narratives they offer. While some may view these stories as merely tales of village life, for Sparsh, they are a celebration of authenticity, creativity and the vibrant tapestry of rural India. This approach not only enriches his own career but also contributes to a broader, more inclusive representation of Indian cinema.



## Kevin Bacon raises hell in official trailer of *The Bondsman*

Prime Video released the official trailer for the highly anticipated new series, *The Bondsman*, from Blumhouse Television and Amazon MGM Studios, starring Kevin Bacon. All eight episodes will be available on April 3, 2025, exclusively on Prime Video in more than 240 countries and territories worldwide.

Kevin Bacon stars as Hub Halloran, a murdered bounty hunter, who's back from the dead after being resurrected by the Devil to trap and send back demons that have escaped from the prison of Hell. By chasing down those demons, with the help and hindrance of his estranged family, Hub learns how his own sins got his soul condemned — which pushes him to seek a second chance at life, love, and country music. The series also stars Jennifer Nettles (*The Righteous Gemstones*), Damon Herriman (*Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, *Justified*), Beth Grant (*No Country for Old Men*, *Donnie Darko*), Maxwell Jenkins (*Arcadian*, *Lost in Space*), and Jolene Purdy (*The White Lotus*, *Orange is the New Black*).

## RICHA CHADHA & ALI FAZAL LAUNCH SECOND EDITION OF UNDERCURRENT LAB 2025

Ahead of Women's Day, industry stalwarts Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal have unveiled the second edition of Undercurrent Lab 2025—a groundbreaking initiative aimed at empowering women to carve out a niche in cinema. The program, which first made headlines with its inaugural edition, is set to expand its horizons beyond cinema lighting to encompass comprehensive training across various facets of film production.

The first edition of Undercurrent Lab was a pioneering, hands-on workshop that rigorously selected ten talented women to master the art of cinema lighting. Over the span of a week-long crash course, these emerging professionals received direct mentorship from seasoned gaffers and cinematographers, gaining invaluable on-field experience by working as trainees on active film sets. Their journey not only honed their technical skills but also ignited a passion for the creative spirit of filmmaking.

Reflecting on the success of the initial edition, Richa Chadha remarked, "The success of the first edition of Undercurrent Lab has been nothing short of inspiring. We witnessed incredible talent and passion as these women not only learned the technical intricacies of lighting but also embraced the creative spirit of cine-

ma." She added that the remarkable achievements of the participants—especially those who have since joined the nearly all-women crew of *Girls Will Be Girls*—reinforce their commitment to nurturing female talent across all aspects of filmmaking.

With Undercurrent Lab 2025, Richa and Ali Fazal are taking a bold leap forward. "We are introducing a new department that will offer comprehensive training in various aspects of film production, ensuring that more women get the chance to break into this competitive industry," Richa explained.

She emphasised that this initiative is not only about skill development but also about creating opportunities, building confidence and providing a supportive platform for aspiring women professionals. "I am incredibly excited about this next chapter and I believe it will be a catalyst for more inclusive and innovative storytelling in cinema," she added.

In addition to her work with Undercurrent Lab, Richa is also focusing on her personal well-being as she embarks on 2025. Returning to her fitness regimen, she is preparing for her upcoming projects by rebuilding her strength, stamina, and overall well-being.



### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



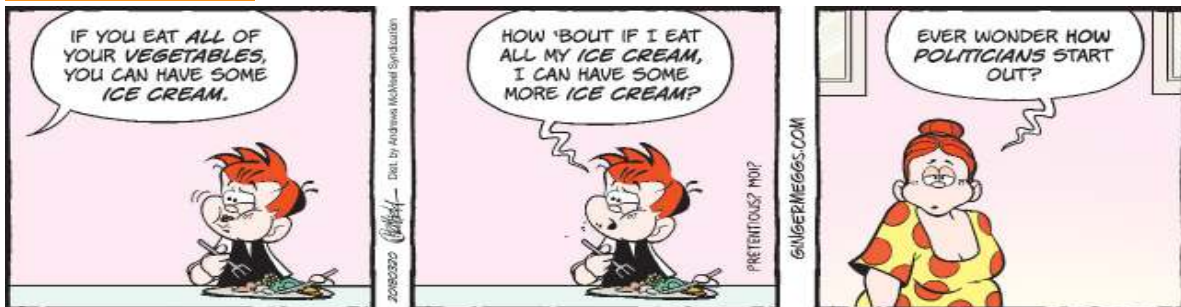
#### GARFIELD



#### NANCY



#### GINGER MEGGS



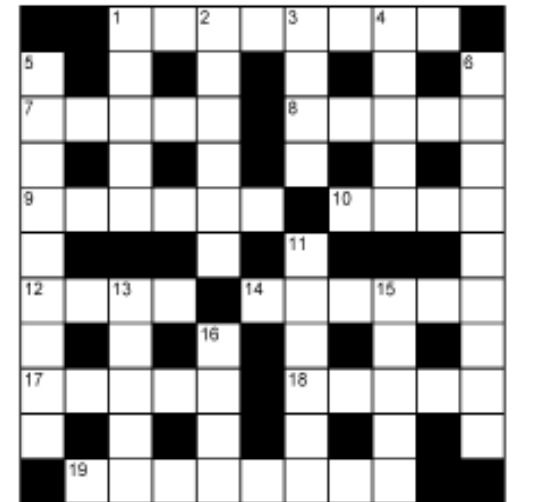
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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- 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

- Use these for cutting paper
- A smelly vegetable
- Rest and take it easy
- Stop working because you are too old or ill
- A curved support
- Hurry
- Not working; out of order
- A keyboard instrument
- A female relation
- An offer of marriage
- You will find a judge and jury in here
- Swapped
- Machines for lifting things
- A sweetener
- Rest on your knees
- Break in two

#### DOWN

- Move
- Take no notice of
- Painful to touch
- Measuring stick



## How NGOs can drive lasting change in rural areas

A few years ago, if you had walked into a Gram Sabha meeting in Rajpur block of Madhya Pradesh, you might have seen mostly empty rooms and a handful of Panchayat officials conducting the Gram Sabha. People—especially women—rarely participated in the Gram Sabhas and the idea of village development felt distant, controlled by Panchayat representatives and bureaucrats. But things changed over the years. Today, those same Gram Sabha meetings see more than 85% community participation and women's voices leading the discussions. Local women, once side-lined, are now Sarpanches and Ward Members, shaping the future of their villages through participatory and comprehensive Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPD). So, what sparked this transformation?

It wasn't just because of another external intervention. It was mostly due to a shift in approach—empowered communities driving their own development. In 2017, Transform Rural India (TRI) introduced the Localisation Model, a new way of doing rural development. The model created a locality compact—coordination mechanism between Panchayat, Community and local administration—to address the existing gaps in the community-led development approaches. Going beyond planning, the localisation model created environment for local community to translate plans into reality, demand better services, and hold local leaders accountable. The Localisation Model approach in Rajpur—with improved governance and service delivery—demonstrate the critical need to include design solutions and community-led development approach for real and lasting rural change.

### Role of NGOs in rural transformation

The NGO sector in India has come a long way. In the post-independence era (1950s-70s), NGOs primarily acted as service providers, stepping in where government programs failed to reach. In the 1980s-90s, as rural India grappled with unemployment, social inequalities, and environmental issues, NGOs transitioned into community mobilizers—organizations like MYRADA and PRADAN pioneered Self-Help Groups (SHGs), microfinance and watershed programs, developing local leadership and accelerating economic gains. The 2000s saw NGOs partnering with the government on large-scale rural schemes like MGNREGS, NRHM and NRLM. However, with digital governance and CSR funding changing the landscape, the role of NGOs must now shift from implementers to enablers. To ensure sustainable rural transformation, NGOs must focus on strengthening local governance and developing community ownership. Instead of focusing on delivering services, they should empower rural communities to take ownership of their development, ensuring long-term, systemic change.

### Power of design thinking in rural development

Rural development isn't just about building infrastructure or providing development services. More than funding or government schemes, rural India needs solutions that actually work for people. Too often, well-intended programs fail because they don't consider the real needs, behaviours and aspirations of rural communities. That's where design thinking comes in. Instead of imposing pre-decided solutions, design thinking encourages communities to co-create, prototype, and refine ideas that truly fit their context. It's about making development people-centered, practical and sustainable. Design workshops have helped Self-Help Group (SHG) women, youth and local Panchayat representatives rethink solutions for economic growth, leading to initiatives like Mini Grammen Marts, high-value agriculture and digital tools for

financial management. Similarly, IDEO has also championed design thinking in rural development, particularly in Africa and Latin America. The "Human-Centered Design for Social Innovation" projects have effectively tackled issues like sanitation, financial inclusion and healthcare by working directly with communities to design and test solutions before scaling them up. This reinforces the importance of grassroots participation in designing solutions that truly work.

### Importance of grassroots activism in sustaining change

Real change seldom comes from top-down policies or big budgets—it happens when people take charge of their own development. That's why grassroots activism is so important. When rural communities actively participate, they push for better program implementation, demand accountability and make sure development efforts actually work for them. A strong grassroots movement creates local leaders who step up, solve problems and keep progress going long after NGOs or government programs leave.

As discussed above, the community-led development in Rajpur Block in Madhya Pradesh turned passive communities into active changemakers. In just a few years, Gram Sabha participation improved to 85%, 600+ SHG women contested elections, 531 got elected and 31 became Sarpanches. The model didn't just improve governance—it enhanced leadership skills among community, integrated community plans with Panchayat plans, and made sure public funds were used effectively. Grassroots activism is the backbone of sustainable rural development. The Localisation Model in Rajpur provides evidence that when communities organize, demand, and participate in governance, development becomes more effective and sustainable. Therefore, NGOs today need to reposition from being direct implementers and instead invest in grassroots leadership, advocacy, and participatory governance.

### Synergy between design & activism for lasting impact

Rural areas, with their intricate social, economic and environmental interdependencies, are dynamic and capable of evolving in response to internal and external stimuli. Therefore, NGOs looking to bring rural transformation need to bring design thinking and grassroots activism in their work. On their own, each has its strengths—design thinking brings structure, creativity and problem-solving methods, while grassroots activism mobilises people, builds momentum and ensures long-term accountability. But when we combine the two, we get something even more powerful: solutions that are not just well-designed but also deeply rooted in community ownership. Design thinking gives NGOs the tools to build solutions that actually work. Instead of jumping to conclusions, it helps them break down problems, test ideas, and refine solutions based on real feedback. But even the best-designed solutions won't create change unless people actually use and sustain them. That's where grassroots activism comes in—it ensures that these solutions don't just remain ideas but are scaled, adopted, and championed by the community itself.

NGOs today can play a crucial role as bridge-builders. They can connect design experts who understand problem-solving frameworks with local leaders who know the realities on the ground. This synergy is what makes models like the Localisation Model in Rajpur and Prosperous Many model in Jonha successful. When NGOs empower communities with both the structured thinking of design knowledge and the mobilizing force of grassroots activism, we can truly think of rural transformation.

## Redefining beauty beyond the crown

**Breaking away from traditional beauty norms, Marvelous Mrs. India is not just about glamour—it's about self-discovery, empowerment and proving that aspirations don't have an expiration date. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Dr. Aditi Govitrikar opens up about her mission to redefine beauty pageants through *Marvelous Mrs. India*, a platform dedicated to empowering women beyond societal labels**



Determined to change the narrative, she created *Marvelous Mrs. India*, a pageant that goes beyond conventional beauty standards to truly embrace empowerment and self-expression. Through this initiative, she is helping women break barriers, rewrite their narratives, and step into their power with grace and purpose.

In a world where marriage is often seen as a turning point that shifts a woman's focus solely to family responsibilities, *Marvelous Mrs. India* emerges as a beacon of change. Founded by Dr. Aditi Govitrikar, the platform challenges the long-held belief that personal aspirations must take a backseat after marriage. With a vision to celebrate and empower women—regardless of their marital status—Aditi has redefined the essence of beauty pageants, making them about confidence, individuality and self-discovery rather than just appearance. For decades, beauty pageants have been seen as platforms for celebration and recognition, but they have also faced criticism for being selective and exclusionary. As India's first and only Mrs. World (2001), Aditi experienced firsthand the power of representation and the need for greater inclusivity in the industry.



"There wasn't a single defining moment that led me to create this platform. It was a realisation that built over time. The beauty industry often talks about inclusivity, but historically, pageants have been selective, making many women feel undeserving. I wanted to change that." With *Marvelous Mrs. India*, the *Thamudu* fame has created a space where married, divorced and widowed women are celebrated for who they are—beyond societal labels. "This isn't just about crowning a winner; it's about empowering women to rediscover themselves," she emphasises. The essence of *Marvelous Mrs. India* lies in its ability to go beyond traditional pageantry and create meaningful change in the lives of participants. She recalls her own journey of winning Mrs. World in 2001, a moment that shattered the notion that marriage limits a woman's aspirations. "That victory was groundbreaking because it proved that married women could still dream big. But *Marvelous Mrs. India* goes a step further—it's about empowering all women who've been conditioned to believe that personal ambitions must take a backseat," she explains.

The competition helps women rediscover their confidence, redefine their identities and embrace new opportunities. It serves as a reminder that marriage and personal responsibilities should never mean sacrificing one's dreams. Many women hesitate to step into the limelight after marriage due to societal expectations. *Marvelous Mrs. India* is designed to challenge those norms. "That's exactly why this platform exists," Aditi asserts. "Marriage comes with responsibilities, but it shouldn't mean giving up on personal aspirations. Many women hesitate because they feel that pursuing dreams after marriage is frowned upon. *Marvelous Mrs. India* acts as an icebreaker, showing them that it's normal—and necessary—to have ambitions beyond family life."



The transformation she has witnessed in participants is proof of the competition's impact. "The biggest change is personal. Many women enter feeling hesitant and unsure of their worth, but they leave with newfound confidence. They become more vocal about their needs, value their independence and embrace self-expression. This mental transformation fuels success in every other aspect of their lives." Inclusivity is at the heart of *Marvelous Mrs. India*. Unlike traditional pageants that often adhere to rigid beauty standards, this platform celebrates individuality. "We don't judge participants based on outdated beauty norms. Instead, we focus on confidence, personality, and personal journeys. Every contestant is assessed based on her unique strengths, ensuring fairness while maintaining our commitment to inclusivity."

She also challenges the conventional definition of glamour. "Glamour isn't just about physical appearance—it's about personality, kindness and how one carries herself. At *Marvelous Mrs. India*, we redefine glamour to include grace, empathy, and self-growth," she explains. The real sense of community, she adds, comes from mutual respect and shared experiences. "Success is not just about individual achievement but uplifting others along the way."

The impact of *Marvelous Mrs. India* extends far beyond the competition itself. Many winners and participants have gone on to become content creators, motivational speakers and social advocates. Aditi finds immense joy in seeing them use their newfound confidence to inspire others. "Knowing that *Marvelous Mrs. India* played a small role in their transformation is what makes this journey so rewarding," says the *Mismatched* actress.

However, building the platform was not without challenges. "The biggest challenge was convincing people that this pageant was truly inclusive and not just a token gesture. Changing mindsets takes time, but through consistent effort, transparency and leading by example, we've built a credible and respected space where women genuinely feel empowered. Once that trust was established, there was no looking back."

Initiatives like *Marvelous Mrs. India* are gradually shifting societal perceptions of married women and their potential. Aditi firmly believes that marriage should never define or limit a woman's ambitions. "Marriage is simply a relationship status—it doesn't mean a woman has to give up on her dreams. Responsibilities are important, but so are aspirations. Slowly but surely, we're seeing a shift, with more acceptance of the idea that women can have fulfilling personal and professional lives post-marriage."

As someone who has successfully balanced multiple roles—doctor, model, actress, and mentor—she knows firsthand that it is possible to pursue dreams while fulfilling responsibilities. Her message to women who feel torn between the two is simple: You don't have

to choose. "Balance is the key. Every woman's journey is different, and the way she manages her responsibilities and dreams will be unique to her. But one thing is universal: you can do both. Never let self-doubt hold you back. Chase your dreams, fulfill your duties and know that efforts driven by passion and purpose never go in vain."

**THIS ISN'T JUST ABOUT CROWNING A WINNER; IT'S ABOUT EMPOWERING WOMEN TO REDISCOVER THEMSELVES**

PNS|HYDERABAD

### EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW:

**These days, luxury encompasses more than just extravagance; it also includes exclusivity, customisation and life-changing events. What does luxury mean to you?**

Luxury is more than just extravagance; it's about meaningful, personal and intimate experiences that help visitors connect with wellness, culture and the natural world. At the remote Ananta Spa & Resort in Ajabgarh, architecture and nature coexist together. The resort, which is encircled by the magnificent Aravalli Hills, offers private villas that are elegant and secluded and are inspired by the elements of fire, earth, bamboo and water! Visitors can tour Sariska Tiger Reserve and Pratapgarrh Fort, or they can just relax in wellness activities surrounded by nature. The spiritual energy of Pushkar, a town renowned for its fragrant rose gardens and holy lake, is embodied by Ananta Spa & Resort, Pushkar. The resort blends centuries-old customs with contemporary luxury to create a location for introspection and relaxation with its beautiful grounds, modern cottages and wellness programs. With its individual plunge pools, Balinese-style villas and ecological design, the 98-acre Ananta Udaipur redefines eco-luxury. Every feature, from private dining under the stars to solar-powered equipment, is designed to create a unique and restorative haven in the middle of the Aravalli Hills.

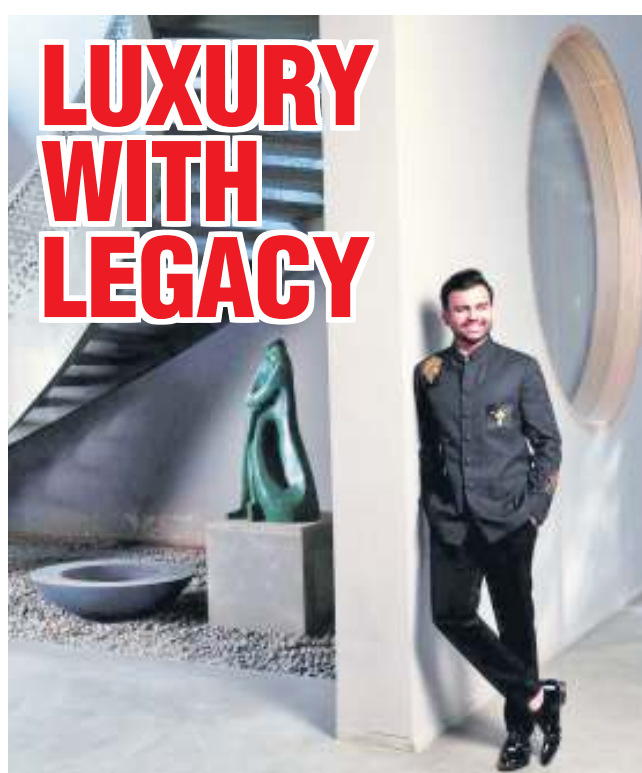
**The contemporary tourist looks for both luxury and authenticity. How can you strike a balance between the upscale amenities and standards of upscale hospitality and immersive, culturally rich experiences?**

True luxury, in my opinion, is found in genuine experiences that are expertly paired with top-notch comfort. Every one of my hotels is made to provide a close relationship with the environment while

upholding the highest standards of hospitality. Guests are taken to the center of Rajasthan's unspoiled splendour. Every activity, whether it's touring the ancient Pratapgarrh Fort, interacting with regional craftspeople, or taking in the abundant wildlife of Sariska Tiger Reserve, is designed to offer a genuine cultural immersion. However, exclusive luxury homes and excellent dining combine this rustic appeal, guaranteeing that visitors never have to sacrifice comfort! While enjoying a sumptuous getaway, visitors can interact with the town's spiritual and cultural legacy at Pushkar. Visitors can tour Pushkar Lake's colorful bazaars, observe the religious rites there, or partake in a wellness treatment filled with roses, which pays homage to the town's well-known rose gardens. In the meanwhile, my resort offers a tranquil haven from the outer world with its vast vistas, well-decorated villas and fine dining options.

**Luxury and sustainability are sometimes seen to be mutually exclusive, but the most progressive hotels are showing that this is not the case. In what ways does your offerings without sacrificing elegance?**

Sustainability is not an afterthought; it is a fundamental component of my opulent experience. My mission is to provide environmentally friendly accommodation that complements the destinations' natural beauty rather than detracts from it! Sustainability is ingrained in the design and management. The resort in Ajabgarh reduces its environmental effect while improving its aesthetic appeal by using natural stone materials, energy-efficient buildings and native landscaping. Because of its closeness to Sariska Tiger Reserve, conservation initiatives have been sparked, guaranteeing that visitors enjoy nature in a responsible manner. Using locally sourced materials, water-saving methods and



**LUXURY WITH LEGACY**

ecological eating practices, Pushkar resort adheres to a low-impact design concept. The resort promotes the use of local, organic foods in its food and places a strong emphasis on wellness programs that honour natural healing customs. It demonstrates through efforts that luxury and sustainability can coexist harmoniously!

**The Soul Festival combines entertainment, culture and wellness. What motivated its development?**

The increasing desire for intense, life-changing travel experiences served as the impetus for Soul Festival. Today's visitors want more than just luxury; they want

**characteristics of luxury accommodation. However, these days, having a strong online presence is as important. In what ways are you rethinking online experience?**

I am aware that a flawless online experience is equally as crucial as a luxurious in-person encounter. Using cutting-edge booking systems, AI-powered concierge services and interactive virtual tours, we aim to improve guest convenience, personalisation and engagement. To highlight the distinctive experiences at our locations, we make use of digital storytelling, influencer partnerships and social media. We make sure visitors feel a connection to it both before and after their stay by using technology-driven personalisation, loyalty programs and immersive digital content.

**Nowadays, a lot of upscale tourists are looking for "transformational travel"—experiences that alter viewpoints and leave a lasting impression on the individual. What actions are you taking to provide accommodations that are more than just comfortable and genuinely connect with visitors on a deeper level?**

We design experiences that stimulate the senses, encourage self-improvement and provide enduring memories. Our facilities provide nature-based experiences that promote strong bonds, carefully planned wellness retreats and immersive cultural outings. For example, visitors can explore historic ruins, unspoiled landscapes and conservation initiatives at Ajabgarh, while Pushkar provides spiritual experiences interwoven with age-old customs. The Udaipur property blends solitude, sustainability and wellness to make sure that each visit is about more than just luxury—it's about self-discovery and rejuvenation.

**Food plays a crucial role in luxury travel, from experiential dining to hyper-local**

**culinary storytelling. How do you design its culinary offerings to satisfy a changing, pickier global base?**

The culinary concept ensures a dining experience that is both sophisticated and grounded in tradition by fusing local authenticity with global elegance. Using seasonal, organic and sustainably sourced foods, our chefs create dishes that highlight local flavours and provide a more sophisticated farm-to-table experience. From Pushkar's rose-infused treats to Udaipur's stargazing private dining, we craft unique, unforgettable and engrossing culinary experiences. Every meal tells a story, making food an essential component of every visitor's trip, whether it's fine dining with global influences or hyper-local tasting menus.

**In the world of luxury hospitality, tradition and modernisation frequently clash. What difficulties have you encountered?**

The idea is based on striking a balance between contemporary luxury and traditional authenticity. With fort-inspired designs and natural stone accents, Ajabgarh embraces Rajasthan's architectural legacy while providing private villas, spa centers and modern dining that meets current standards. In addition to immersing visitors in the town's spiritual legacy, Pushkar enhances the experience with carefully planned cultural walks and indigenous flora. We make certain that visitors may enjoy the unadulterated splendour of nature without upsetting nearby ecosystems at our wildlife-focused resorts, like Baagh Ananta Elite in Ranthambore and Jagira Ananta Elite in Gir. In addition to offering luxurious lodging, fine dining and expertly led safaris by naturalists, lodges are built with ecological materials and blend in with their surroundings. This equilibrium guarantees the harmonious coexistence of luxury, tradition and conservation.



# Smith announces retirement from ODI cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith on Wednesday announced his retirement from ODI cricket following his team's four-wicket loss to India in the Champions Trophy (CT) semifinal here but the star batter will continue to play Tests and T20 Internationals. The 35-year-old, who was leading the world champion side in the absence of an injured Pat Cummins, informed his teammates after the match that he would be stepping away from the 50-over format with immediate effect.

Reflecting on his decision, Smith said it was the right time to step aside as Australia builds itself for the 2027 ODI World Cup. "It has been a great ride, and I have loved every minute of it," Smith said. "There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories. Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic team-mates who shared the journey," he added



in a media release shared by Cricket Australia. A key member of Australia's victorious 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup-winning teams, Smith was named Australia's men's ODI Player of the Year in 2015 and 2021 and earned a place in the ICC men's ODI Team of the Year in 2015. He took over the ODI captaincy in 2015 and, fittingly, led the side one last time in his final match. "Now is a great opportunity

for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup so it feels like the right time to make way," he said. The veteran of 170 ODIs said Test cricket remains a priority and he is looking forward to the World Test Championship Final in June. "I feel I still have a lot to contribute on that stage," he said. "Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup, so it

feels like the right time to make way," he added. Smith leaves behind a stellar ODI legacy built over a period of more than 15 years, since making his debut as a leg-spinning all-rounder against the West Indies in 2010. Over the years, he transformed into one of Australia's most dependable batters, accumulating 5,800 runs at an average of 43.28, including 12 centuries and 35 half-centuries. He also

chipped in with 28 wickets at 34.67.

**Tributes pour in from CA**  
Tributes poured in for the star with CA chief executive Todd Greenberg and chairman of selectors George Bailey hailing Smith's immense contribution to Australian cricket. "Congratulations to Steve on an amazing One Day International career during which he has made a vast contribution to Australia's performances in the 50-over format," stated Greenberg. "Right up until his final ODI innings Steve exhibited an incredible ability to accumulate runs in all conditions and his astute leadership has been crucial in the team's ongoing success including the 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup victories. "We're fortunate Steve still has much to offer in the Test and T20 arenas and I look forward to witnessing the next stage of one of cricket's great careers," Greenberg added. Bailey echoed the sentiment. "We fully understand and support Steve's decision to retire from One Day International cricket.

# We still have not played perfect game: Gambhir

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Not the one to be easily pleased, India head coach Gautam Gambhir said his team is still searching for that "perfect game" despite entering the Champions Trophy (CT) final with an all-win record and he is hopeful that it would come in the summit clash on Sunday. India trounced Australia by four wickets in the first semifinal here on Tuesday, with senior batter Virat Kohli making a well-paced 84. "See, in international sport, you want to keep improving. You don't say that you've ticked all the boxes. We still haven't played a perfect game. I will never be satisfied with the performances," Gambhir said in the post-match press conference. Gambhir hoped that India can produce that "perfect game" in the Champions Trophy title clash on March 9. "We still have one more game to go. Hopefully, we can play a perfect game. We want to keep



improving, we want to be ruthless on the cricket field but absolutely humble off the field as well," he added. India have taken some bold calls such as playing four spinners, promoting Axar Patel to No.5 and pushing down KL Rahul to No. 6 to suit the team's needs. It may look illogical from outside but for Gambhir they were minor pieces in the grand plans of keeping the players "out of the comfort zone" to extract the best out of them.

"I think cricket is all about being out of your comfort zone, and that is how you grow. If everyone is in their comfort zone, then there is stagnation. So, I believe, and you've seen the results. I know you guys will keep going back to 3-1 in Australia. "But everyone in the dressing room is staying out of the comfort zone be it the coaching staff, be it the players and hopefully we continue to do what is important for Indian cricket," he said.



# Praggnanandhaa draws with Shankland in Prague Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PRAGUE

Grandmasters Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram continued to remain in joint lead after drawing their sixth-round games in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here. Praggnanandhaa was held to a draw by Sam Shankland of the United States, while Aravindh split the point with Quang Leim Le of Vietnam to be on four points out of a possible six, on a day when all the games were drawn for the first time in the tournament. Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh continued to be followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Vincent Keymer of Germany and Quang Leim, all of whom are on three points apiece. Another half-point behind are the Czech duo of Nguyen Thai Dai Van and David Navara, Gurel Ediz of Turkey and Shankland. With three more rounds to come, Praggnanandhaa holds the edge over Aravindh as he is set to play the next two games with white pieces. Aravindh, on the other hand, has only one game with white left. The seventh round will be crucial for Praggnanandhaa as he takes on Wei Yi, while Aravindh will meet Anish, who has drawn all his games so far. Praggnanandhaa was under pressure for some time in the middle game against his American opponent, who played white. The opening featured a regular Italian game and Shankland threw

open the position with a knight sacrifice on the king side. Soon after, Praggnanandhaa had to part with one of his rooks for a minor piece, and what resulted was a very complex position. Navigating between better and equal thereon, the Indian allowed Shankland to go for a forced repetition and the game was drawn after 43 moves. Playing white, Aravindh faced the Queen's gambit declined – one of the most classical setups for decades now – and had his forces around the centre right from the word go. However, as the game progressed, Quang Leim remained impregnable, and by the 19th move itself the players had exchanged as many as three minor pieces and two pawns. The pawn structure took a small turn when Aravindh decided to part with his last bishop for a knight but black had nothing to worry about. The players soon arrived at a rook-and-pawns endgame where the draw was a just result after 32 moves. In the Challengers section, the fortunes of Divya Deshmukh did not change as she suffered another defeat and was pushed to the sole last spot among 10 players. Vaclav Finel defeated Divya in a rook-and-minor-piece endgame leaving the Indian on 1.5 points. Jonas Buhl Bjerre of Denmark regained the joint lead by beating MarcAndria Maurizzi of France. The Dane shares the top spot with Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan.

# Sreesanth backs India to win Champions Trophy final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Team India simply looks unstoppable, exuding confidence, energy and dominance and World Cup-winning former India pacer Sreesanth feels no side can stand in their way in the Champions Trophy final on Sunday.

The Rohit Sharma-led side trounced reigning world champions Australia by four wickets in the first semifinal here on Tuesday to make it four wins out of four in the ICC showpiece. They now await the winners of New Zealand and South Africa for the Sunday's summit clash. "Doesn't matter who the opponents are in the final – India are going to win," the 2007 T20 World Cup and 2011 ODI World Cup winner told PTI Video. "There is so much positive energy. They are playing some wonderful cricket. The way



Virat Kohli anchoring the chase, the way Shreyas Iyer has stepped up – let's just keep our fingers crossed." Sreesanth also emphasised the importance of staying grounded. "Let's be humble in our process. That's what Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) used to say – one of the best captains I've played with. "Even Sourav Ganguly used to say the same. Dada always used to say, let's be humble and trust the process. That's exactly what the Indian team

marked his last appearance before the injury layoff. "Shami 'one of the biggest fighters. I remember seeing him bowl at the nets. I used to tell him, 'Shami, you will go a long way', and I like it a lot because of the way he has upgraded himself. "Playing for the country, forgetting the past, looking ahead, even after coming back from injury and doing well, getting the wicket in the first over... Sreesanth also believes India's domination in world cricket has well and truly arrived. "Absolutely, there's no doubt that India will dominate world cricket for years to come. The talent pipeline is incredible – from domestic cricket to Under-19 tournaments to women's cricket, the system is flourishing. We have to thank the BCCI and Jay Shah for building such a strong foundation. The support system, the sponsorships, the structure – India are well ahead of the rest of the world."



# Trying to get my rhythm, says Shami

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DUBAI

Mohammed Shami conceded that operating as India's lone front-line pacer after coming back from a lengthy injury layoff has been a heavy "responsibility" but said he is trying to regain his "rhythm" to suit the team's needs in the ongoing Champions Trophy (CT). Throughout the ICC showpiece here, Shami has shared the new ball duties with either Harshit Rana or Hardik Pandya because of the injury-forced absence of Jasprit Bumrah. Rana is still learning the ropes, while Pandya is an all-rounder and delivering 10 overs in an ODI is not precisely his territory. Shami has so far picked eight wickets in the tournament. "I am trying to get my rhythm back and contribute more for the team. It is a responsibility when there are no two proper fast bowlers and I have to shoulder more responsibility," Shami said in a mixed zone interaction after India's semifinal victory over Australia here on Tuesday night. Shami said his workload is heavier without Bumrah steaming in at the other end but he is trying to give more than a 100 per cent to the role. "There is a load when you are the one main fast bowler and the other is an all-rounder. You have to pick wickets and lead from the front. "I have become used to this load and am trying my best to make it easy for others and

give more than 100 per cent," he said. Shami was sidelined for over a year with an ankle injury that he picked during the 2023 ODI World Cup. The veteran said he is now ready to shoulder the responsibility of bowling long spells. "The trust debate ends when you get selected in the team. I don't think that one should worry about his fitness too much. We just need to put in the effort and see how your body takes it. After all, we are labourers. "I am now ready to bowl long spells. Short spells are anyways easy – 6 balls or 12 balls – and in limited-overs cricket it doesn't matter whether it's 10 or six overs," he noted. The 34-year-old has bowled his full quota of 10 overs against Bangladesh and Australia, while he bowled just eight and four overs against Pakistan and New Zealand respectively in the earlier matches, primarily because spinners bowled nearly 35 overs in those games. Being at one venue helped me Shami said it is an advantage for him that all of India's Champions Trophy matches are being played in Dubai. "It has definitely helped us because we know the conditions and the behaviour of the pitch. It is a plus point that you are playing all the matches at one venue. "The main thing is to gauge the conditions and know how the pitch behaves because you are playing at one venue and you can get to know it well," he said.

# You cannot build pressure on Kohli: Agar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Batting stalwart Virat Kohli can be a bowler's nightmare when on song and his repertoire of strokes make it nearly impossible to "build pressure on him", said Australian spinner Ashton Agar following another masterclass from the Indian ace in the Champions Trophy semifinal. Kohli added to his match-winning unbeaten century against Pakistan in the group stage by slamming a fluent 84 against Australia in Dubai to guide India into the final of the marquee tournament. "It is not the damage that he can do to the fence, it's just the fact that you cannot build pressure on him. So it's really hard to get him out in a sense. You never really feel like you're on top of him unless the ball is really spinning. And you don't get a lot of pitches in one-day



cricket like that," left-arm spinner Agar, who has taken 79 wickets across formats for Australia, said on ESPNcricinfo's Match Day. Kohli's ability to find the gaps and squeezing ones and twos with ease too drew praise from the Australian cricketer, who said that for a bowler it's really "frustrating". "That's the frustrating part about bowling to him. He has this fantastic ability to hit your best ball, the top of

middle stump, slightly spinning away, he holds the bat's face slightly longer than other batters do, opens it in the last second, and hits it in the cover point gap. He's probably the best in the world at doing that and he's very difficult to build pressure on." Agar added that Kohli was the fulcrum around which the Indian team built the innings to overcome Australia. "India batted around Virat

beautifully. The guys who came in kept pushing the rate and allowed Virat to do his thing, hit the odd boundary and just keep ticking over. I saw a stat that Virat has scored the most singles since the year 2000, which is phenomenal. It was a bit of a masterclass from him and all the batters contributed nicely." Kohli's effort included 56 singles and four twos, indicating his exemplary fitness level. Former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar added, the fact that Kohli is able to find the gaps despite five fielders inside the circle is a testament to his mastery over batting. "Now you have five fielders inside the circle, so it's not easy as it used to be -- like during our times -- when you had four fielders. Very rarely has he hit the ball straight to the fielder and hasn't got a run," said Manjrekar.

# Playing fearless cricket while remaining calm has worked for me: Rahane

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MUMBAI

Kolkata Knight Riders captain Ajinkya Rahane has credited his success in the Indian Premier League and domestic T20s to playing "fearless cricket" while remaining calm. The 36-year-old topped the batting charts in the previous edition of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy with 469 runs, including five half-centuries, at a strike rate of 164.56. His aggressive approach also paid off in the IPL where he was the batting mainstay for Chennai Super Kings in the last two editions. "It was always about being an anchor and the others would play around me. (But the) last 2-3 years, it's always about playing with freedom, fearless cricket and go out and back my game," Rahane, the brand ambassador of Skillhub Online Games Federation, said here on Tuesday.

"I am trying to do that (play fearless cricket) but it's (also) about following my processes and routines and staying loyal and truthful to the game." Rahane, who led Mumbai into the Ranji Trophy semifinal and scored 467 runs, said he would carry the confidence from domestic cricket into the upcoming edition of the IPL. "For me, personally, batting-wise I am doing really well. Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy was really good for me. I had a really good domestic season. So, I am really confident about myself," he said. "It is just about staying in the moment, staying calm and keep backing myself, not to think too much ahead and not to think about the past. It's always about improving and enjoying my game," he added. Rahane felt that India's victory in the Champions Trophy semifinal in Dubai on Tuesday could also be attributed to the side not



dwelling into the past record against Australia in the knockouts of ICC tournaments. Before Rohit Sharma's side won the match by four wickets, India had never beaten Australia in the knockouts of ICC tournaments since the quarterfinal of the 2011 World Cup in India. India had lost to Australia in the 2015 Cricket World Cup semifinal, the 2023 World Cup final and the 2023 World Test Championship final. "Very happy that India has won the semifinal against Australia and have entered the final. I want to congratulate the team and I am sure they will do well in the final," Rahane said. "What happened in the past is gone, the team must be thinking about the present and their aim was to beat Australia... To beat them in the semifinal. "Obviously, what has happened in the past keeps playing on the mind but, as a cricketer, your

mind is always in the moment, in the present, to do well in that game to win the match," Rahane said. Rahane, who has been appointed KKR captain ahead of the upcoming IPL season, said he would like the defending IPL champions to keep it simple. "Our team is really good, everyone is playing really well. We had a camp in Mumbai, all the domestic players were here but international players are also playing which is really good," he said. "We won the championship last year but again this year it is about starting from the scratch, starting from zero. T20 is a funny format and IPL is a challenging tournament. "I am happy and humbled to be captain of the KKR team. We would like to keep it simple, take one game at a time and stay in the moment and enjoy the format," Rahane added.



## ARTISTE TO IMPRESS AS A NEW PSYCHO-THRILLER: DIRECTOR RATAN RISHI

Another small film, *Artiste*, is hitting the screens on March 21. Directed by Ratan Rishi and produced by James Watt Kommu, the trailer for this psychological thriller was released on Tuesday. "This is a psycho-thriller that blends elements of suspense, fear, comedy and romance. The story carries a lot of emotion and the last 20 minutes of the movie are especially intense," said director Ratan Rishi. He added that the audience will definitely feel good about the film after leaving the theater. "Suresh Bobbili has composed a new background score that perfectly matches the emotional tone of the story," the director said.

He also noted that the film doesn't contain much violence, as the trailer may suggest. "In typical psycho-thrillers, the plot revolves around finding the killer after a murder, but in our film, we build suspense by revealing the villain early on," he explained.

"Making a film and bringing it to release is not an easy task; it requires a lot of hard work. I've traveled back and forth from the USA for this film, and my goal is to provide opportunities to new talent and encourage them," said producer James Watt Kommu.

This is his second film and he worked mostly with newcomers. He added that Mythri Movie Distributors is handling the film's release.

"We've made a film with strong content and I hope the audience enjoys it," he said.

## Vikranth and Chandini Chowdhary explore a new take on parenthood in *Santhana Prapthirasthu*

Vikranth and Chandini Chowdhary play the lead roles in the film *Santhana Prapthirasthu*. Produced by Madhura Sreedhar Reddy and Hariprasad Reddy, the film is directed by Sanjeev Reddy, who previously directed *ABCD* starring Allu Sirish and the web series *Aha Na Pellanta* with Raj Tarun in the lead. The teaser of the film was recently launched by director Sandeep Reddy Vanga, who expressed his admiration: "The teaser looks promising. This film seems like a great entertainer, and I wish the movie great success."

While a few films in Hindi have tackled the topic of infertility, *Santhana Prapthirasthu* is the first attempt in Telugu to explore this theme. Vikranth plays a software engineer dealing with work pressure while trying to build a life. He falls in love with Chandini Chowdhary and marries her, but their happiness is short-lived as her father disapproves of their marriage. The couple's struggles grow when Vikranth discovers his low sperm count, which prevents them from conceiving. Determined to become parents, Vikranth embarks on a 100-day journey to increase his sperm count, following medical advice and a strict regimen.

The makers describe the film as a blend of humour, emotion and fun. The chemistry between Vikranth and Chandini Chowdhary is expected to be a highlight. The screenplay, written by Sheikh Dawood G (known for his work on films like *Venkatadri Express*, *Express Raja* and *Ek Mini Katha*), adds depth to the story. *Santhana Prapthirasthu* is a youth-driven family entertainer, set for a grand theatrical release soon.



tollywood

## Mrunal shares BTS from *Dacoit* shoot

Actress Mrunal Thakur took to social media to give a sneak peek into her ongoing shoot for the upcoming film *Dacoit* in Hyderabad.

Taking to her Instagram handle, the Jersey actress shared behind-the-scenes moments from the set. She posted a couple of photos and tagged Adivi Sesh and producer Supriya Yarlagadda. The photos depict two hands making a heart pose.

Recently, Mrunal Thakur has been sharing behind-the-scenes moments from her shoot on Instagram. Just yesterday, she posted a fun video of herself singing along to Dhanush's hit song *Why This Kolaveri Di* while cruising in her car. She explained that she and her team decided to groove to the track since they missed out on doing their usual pack-up dance.

Mrunal also shared a couple of photos featuring her head draped in a stunning organza dupatta. In the pictures, she was seen showcasing her green bangles while applying her makeup. Another photo featured a close-up portrait of Thakur, highlighting her expressive eyes and calm demeanor. She was



partially veiled with the delicate, sheer dupatta, adding a touch of elegance and tradition to the shot. "Channelling my inner *swarg se utri kokil kanthi apsara*," Mrunal Thakur captioned the post.

Directed by Shaneil Deo, the film is produced by Supriya Yarlagadda, co-produced by Suniel Narang, and presented by Annapurna Studios. *Dacoit* follows the story of an enraged convict bent on taking revenge against his ex-girlfriend, who has betrayed him. As he devises a dangerous plan to ensnare her, the narrative unfolds into a gripping and emotionally charged journey of love, betrayal, and vengeance.



## Mahesh Babu and Rajamouli's film shifts to Odisha for new schedule

Mahesh Babu and Rajamouli's much-anticipated film is currently in the spotlight. Although the makers have kept tight-lipped about updates or the shooting schedule, videos circulating on social media show Mahesh Babu leaving for Odisha, hinting at the next phase of filming.

The film had recently been shot in Hyderabad at the Aluminium Factory, with Priyanka Chopra also participating. Now, the team has shifted to Odisha, where they are shooting in the Koraput forest area.

Rajamouli, known for his love for adventure settings, had visited Koraput a few months ago to select this location. The film, set in an adventure backdrop similar to Indiana Jones, will feature a story that draws inspiration from this thrilling environment.

Though no official cast details have been confirmed, reports suggest that Malayalam star Prithviraj Sukumaran and Tamil actor Chiyan Vikram will be part of the film. The film is produced on a grand scale by KL Narayana, with the story penned by Rajamouli's father, Vijayendra Prasad.

## Is this the reason for *Robinhood* delay?

The film *Robinhood*, starring Nithiin and Sreeleela, is set to hit screens on March 28. Directed by Venky Kudumula and produced by Mythri Movie Makers, the film was originally scheduled for release in December last year but was postponed to March. According to a source, the delay occurred because the makers were not satisfied with the film's output and decided to rework it before its release.

Although the makers initially announced December 25 as the release date and began promoting the film, they unexpectedly chose to postpone it without offering an official reason. They were under pressure to release the film by Sankranthi in January but

opted against it due to the heavy competition from other films. The delay has reportedly been caused by concerns over the film's content, leading to some patch-work and reshoots in the last couple of months.

Sreeleela plays the female lead in *Robinhood* and this film is expected to provide a significant break for her, especially as many of her earlier films did not perform well at the box office.



## Shiva Rajkumar joins Ram Charan's film, *RC16*

Ram Charan's film with director Buchi Babu Sana is currently underway. This marks Buchi Babu's second project after his successful debut with Uppena a few years ago. Janhvi Kapoor is playing the female lead, and the makers have already roped in Jagapathi Babu for a key role. Now, Kannada star Shiva Rajkumar, also known as Shivanna, has been cast for a pivotal role.

Recently, the team completed Shivanna's look test for the film, and he will be joining the shoot soon.

Tentatively titled *RC16*, the film has already completed two shooting schedules. Shivanna, known for his commanding screen presence, is expected to bring his unique aura and majesty to his role. This will be the first time Shivanna and Ram Charan share the screen together. Along with Shivanna and Jagapathi Babu, Bollywood actor Divyendu, known for his role in *Mirzapur*, is also part of the cast. The film features music by AR Rahman, cinematography by Ratnavelu, and production design by Avinash Kolla.

## Finally, Akhil Akkineni's *Agent* Is Streaming on OTT

Akhil Akkineni's *Agent* has finally set its OTT release date after almost two years. Sony Liv announced that the spy-action film will premiere on March 14. Directed by Surrender Reddy, *Agent* was released in 2023 but failed at the box office, disappointing many, including producer Anil Sunkara, who had high expectations for the film. The film also features Malayalam superstar Mammooty in an important role, along with Sakshi Vaidya as the female lead and Bollywood actor Dino Morea as the antagonist. *Agent* follows the story of

an ambitious RAW agent, Rickey (Akhil Akkineni), assigned a mission by RAW chief Colonel Mahadev (Mammooty) to track down a former agent, Dharma (Dino Morea), who has a dangerous plan to destroy India. The film promises an adrenaline-pumping action ride. The story was written by Vakkantham Vamsi, with the project jointly produced by Rambrahmam Sunkara, Ajay Sunkara and Deepa Reddy. Akhil Akkineni has yet to begin work on his next project following *Agent*'s failure.

