

Mr Chief Minister, it's not Telangana rising, but rather Telangana's tax collections falling. Telangana's economic performance has raised several concerns, contradicting claims of the state's rising prosperity. Revanth Reddy government's inability to boost GST revenues, coupled with the decline in registration and vehicle tax collections, exposes the shortcomings of its economic policies

- Harish Rao, BRS MLA

P4

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Trump's multipolarity move suits India:
Jaishankar

BREAKING
BARRIERS & BLENDING GENRES WITH NIKHIL-SIDDHESH'S BOLD SOUNDSCAPE

'I got 50 offers after Cinemabandi, but I didn't want to do same kind OF ROLE'

'India to lead world by 2047'

CM Naidu hails PM Modi as the right leader for nation's growth

PNS ■ DELHI/VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday expressed confidence that India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will emerge as the world's leading nation by 2047. Speaking at the 'Limitless India' plenary summit organised by a news channel in New Delhi, he asserted that Indians would attain the top position globally in various sectors.

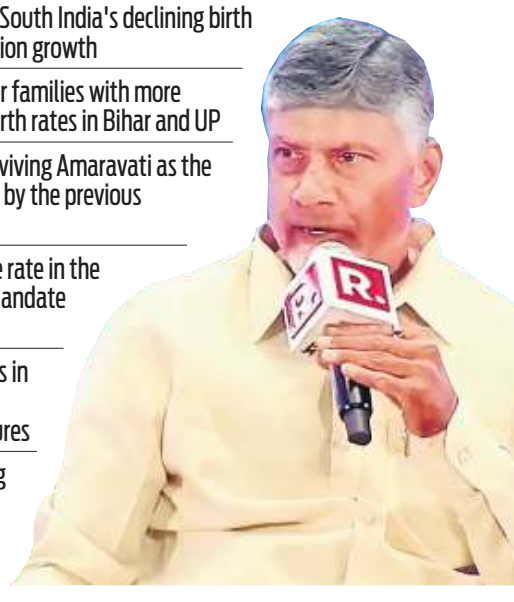
"Indians now reside in the most affluent localities worldwide, much like the Jewish community in earlier times. In the United States, the average per capita income of Indians is double that of any other nationality," Naidu remarked.

Hailing Modi as the "right leader for the right country," he said India is fortunate to have him at the helm. When asked about his key focus areas, Naidu listed Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a priority over traditional Information Technology (IT), followed by green energy and skill development. He stressed that strengthening these sectors would ensure India's global supremacy.

He also highlighted the importance of population management, pointing out that while countries like China, Japan, and those in Europe face declining populations, India has a demographic advantage. "By 2047, 65% of India's population will be under 35 years of age, a strength no

- Naidu says Indians have secured top positions globally, with high per capita income in the US
- Lists AI, green energy, and skill development as key focus areas for India's future
- Emphasises India's demographic advantage with 65% of its population under 35 by 2047

- Suggests corrective steps for South India's declining birth rate and encouraged population growth
- Mentions welfare schemes for families with more children and praises higher birth rates in Bihar and UP
- Reiterates commitment to reviving Amaravati as the State capital after its neglect by the previous government
- Highlighted TDP's 93% strike rate in the recent elections as a public mandate against the previous regime
- Stresses the role of politicians in wealth creation before implementing welfare measures
- Recalls global protests during his arrest as proof of his vision's impact



other country possesses," he noted. Referring to South India's early implementation of population control measures, Naidu suggested corrective steps to balance growth. "I have already announced my keen interest in promoting population growth," he stated, adding that his government is offering more welfare schemes to families with more children. He even congratulated the people of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

for maintaining higher birth rates. Naidu also reiterated his commitment to rebuilding Amaravati as the state capital, lamenting that it was "completely neglected" by the previous government. "Amaravati is a visionary project that benefits everyone, and now the entire state stands with me in supporting its revival," he said.

Reflecting on the recent elections, Naidu noted that the Telugu Desam

Party (TDP) achieved a 93% strike rate, a historic feat driven by public dissatisfaction with the previous administration. He emphasised that the primary responsibility of politicians is to create wealth and generate revenue before implementing welfare measures.

"When I was arrested, people in 60 countries protested for 53 days in solidarity. That shows the impact of my vision," he concluded.

Amaravati to rise without public funds: Narayana

Asserts that the AP Capital is a self-financed project to be completed in three years



The Minister noted that land values in the capital region would rise significantly once key infrastructure projects, including roads, drainage, and water pipelines, are completed. The government will sell excess land at a higher value to generate funds for debt repayment.

invited for various works in the capital region. Of these, 27 tenders have already been opened, and contract agencies have been finalised.

Narayana emphasised that Amaravati is being developed as a self-financed project, eliminating the need to utilise public funds. The government plans to secure loans from the World Bank, HUDCO, and ADB to finance the construction, he explained.

He further noted that land values in the capital region would rise significantly once key infrastructure projects, including roads, drainage, and water pipelines, are completed. The government will sell excess land at a higher value to generate funds for debt repayment, he added.

Criticising the previous YSRCP regime, Narayana accused it of deliberately undermining the capital project by converting the land bank area into an R-5 zone. He also dismissed allegations by YSRCP MLCs regarding Amaravati's construction, stating that they were making baseless claims out of frustration following their electoral defeat.

"The people of Andhra Pradesh rejected the YSRCP's anarchic rule, reducing them to just 11 seats. This itself is a testament to the public's disillusionment with their governance," Narayana remarked.

PNS ■ NELLORE

Minister for Municipal Administration P. Narayana has reiterated that the construction of Amaravati, the State capital, will not be funded by public money, asserting that it will be completed within three years.

Speaking to the media at the Municipal Office here on Thursday, the Minister stated that tenders worth over Rs 50,000 crore had been

DON'T MISS...

Mini A'wadi centres to be upgraded

Women and Child Welfare Minister Gummidi Sandhya Rani addressed issues concerning Anganwadi employees during the question-and-answer session in the Legislative Council on Thursday. She emphasised the vital role of Anganwadi centres in child health, nutrition, and early education, acknowledging the dedicated service of workers and helpers. The Minister highlighted that during its tenure from 2014 to 2019, the TDP government not only established 18,301 Anganwadi centres but also significantly increased...

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'Linguistic equality is not chauvinism'

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President M K Stalin on Thursday said demanding linguistic equality is not chauvinism and alleged that the "true chauvinists and anti-nationals are the Hindi zealots" who believe their entitlement is natural but resistance is treason. Stalin, in a social media post said: "When you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. I am reminded of this famous quote when some entitled bigots brand us chauvinists and anti-nationals for the 'crime' of..."

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Tariffs, defence surge loom over EU meet

The impact of a potential trade war with the United States and massive increases in European defence spending and government borrowing loom over a policy meeting Thursday at the European Central Bank, which is expected to cut interest rates by a quarter percentage point. Analysts are widely expecting a cut in the European Central Bank's (ECB) benchmark deposit rate to 2.50 per cent, a step to lower borrowing costs for consumers and businesses in an economy that's struggling to get...

-PAGE: 8

We will play as per situation: Ravindra

Dashing New Zealand opener Rachin Ravindra feels adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an "unknown" Dubai surface in the Champions Trophy (CT) final against India on Sunday. Except the group match against India in Dubai, New Zealand have played all their games in Pakistan. The Kiwis had also played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa. India, on the other, have played all their matches in Dubai and are familiar with the conditions....

-SPORTS

VIZAG & V'WADA METRO PROJECTS

CM seeks full Central funding



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/DELHI

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has urged the Centre to provide 100% financial assistance for the Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada Metro Rail projects. In a meeting with Union Minister for Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar, he emphasised the need for expediting approvals and securing central support for these key urban transport initiatives.

The Chief Minister highlighted that while Hyderabad's Metro Rail was approved before bifurcation, Andhra Pradesh's metro projects remain pending. He stressed that Visakhapatnam, a major industrial hub, is facing increasing traffic congestion, which will intensify further with the upcoming Bhogapuram International Airport set to be operational by June 2026. Integrating the metro corridor with national highways, he said, is essential for seamless connectivity.

Naidu also underlined the importance of the Vijayawada Metro in enhancing regional connectivity and supporting economic growth, particularly as the gateway to Amaravati. He called for swift approvals and land acquisition support for Phase 1 to ensure timely execution.



4 killed as private bus rams lorry

PNS ■ ELURU

In a tragic road accident, four people, including two women, were killed and 21 others injured when a private travel bus rammed into a stationary lorry at Chodimella village near here on Thursday.

According to the police, a Ramana Travels bus was heading to Kakinada from Hyderabad when it crashed into a stationary cement-laden lorry at Chodimella village. Continued on Page 2

Jagan directs YSRCP MPs to raise State issues in Parl

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ahead of the second phase of the Parliament Budget Session set to begin on March 10, YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the party's MPs to strongly advocate for Andhra Pradesh's interests in Parliament.

At a meeting with Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members at his Tadepalli camp office, Jagan emphasised that there should be no compromise on state issues. He instructed



MPs to raise concerns over the Polavaram Project, the privatisation of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, support prices for chilli farmers, the "One Nation, One Election" propos-

al, privatisation of new medical colleges, and constituency delimitation.

He criticised the Centre's decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram Project, calling it detrimental to Andhra Pradesh. He also accused the two Telugu Desam Party (TDP) ministers in the Union Cabinet of remaining silent on the issue. On the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, he urged MPs to oppose privatisation, calling it a hard-earned asset of the state. Continued on Page 2

Naidu launches Prapancha Charitra

Daggubati Venkateswara Rao's work covers human evolution, governance

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu praised the remarkable effort of documenting thousands of years of human history in Telugu. He launched the book Prapancha Charitra (World History) by Daggubati Venkateswara Rao at GITAM University. Naidu highlighted the importance of learning history and appreciated Rao's work, despite him not being a professional writer. He said the book is a valuable addition to homes and libraries.

Naidu expressed interest in reading the book fully when time permits. He noted that it covers various aspects of history, including customs, agriculture, wars, empires, religion, social structures, governance, and technological revolutions. It also discusses the impact of the printing press and future predictions. Calling it an intellectually enriching event, he congratulated Rao on his literary contribution.

Daggubati Venkateswara Rao, a former minister and MP, is also a medical professional. Naidu described him as an analytical thinker, shaped by NTR's discipline and leadership. He also shared humorous anecdotes about Rao's active lifestyle, including playing badminton, storytelling, and even playing poker.

Naidu spoke about India's youth advantage over developed nations facing labour shortages. He stressed that India is poised to make history with its young population. He



recalled his political journey alongside Venkaiah Naidu, who was elected as an MLA in 1978, and praised his rise to Vice President.

The Chief Minister also recalled the struggles of MVVS Murthy in

establishing GITAM University, revealing that Murthy's determination came from his son's rejection by another institution. He praised Murthy's vision for creating a top educational institution.

Referring to India's economic reforms under former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991, Naidu said that while the U.S. was once seen as the top economy, Indians—especially Telugu people—are now making a mark globally. He expressed confidence that Telugu people will play a key role in India's growth into the world's largest economy, in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision. Continued on Page 2

Nirmala Sitharaman lauds historical book

FinMin stresses need for value-based literature

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted the importance of value-driven literature in shaping perspectives and stressed the need for accurate historical records. She was speaking at the launch of Prapancha Charitra (World History), written by Daggubati Venkateswara

Rao, at GITAM University on Thursday. She appreciated the author's effort in presenting a detailed and insightful historical account.

Sitharaman acknowledged the challenges in documenting history and praised Rao for condensing vast historical events into a 350-page book with unique insights. Quoting Aristotle, she noted that victors usually write history, but its real value lies in how it is recorded. Continued on Page 2

Swachhandhra Day every month: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move to advance the Swarnandhra 2047 vision, Chief Secretary K Vijayanand has announced that Swachhandhra Day will be observed on the third Saturday of every month across all government offices and public areas in the state.

During a virtual conference with department heads from the State Secretariat, the Chief Secretary emphasised the need for the regular and effective organisation of these events. He urged officials to build on the experiences from Swachhandhra Day celebrations held in January and February and adopt a more structured approach for the upcoming event on March 15. He also directed departments to actively participate and upload details of the programmes on the official website.



Vijayanand outlined plans to make Andhra Pradesh a clean, healthy, and green state under Vision 2047. Stressing the need to phase out single-use plastics, he called for eco-friendly alternatives like biodegradable cups, plates, and bags. He urged the Handloom and Textiles Department to propose suitable

eco-friendly products for promotion through MSMEs and the Khadi and Village Industries Board.

Principal Secretary of Municipal Administration S. Suresh Kumar noted that Swachhandhra is the ninth pillar of the Swarnandhra vision. He stressed the need to implement best practices in waste management and cleanliness in both rural and urban areas. He also announced the appointment of nodal officers at the state and district levels to oversee the initiatives, along with the establishment of command centres for effective monitoring.

As part of the programme, a Mega Urban Clean-up Drive will be conducted to clean streets, parks, and markets, along with campaigns promoting plastic-free environments and better maintenance of public toilets. Continued on Page 2

Bhuvaneshwari lays stone for NTR Trust bldg

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR Memorial Trust Managing Trustee Nara Bhuvaneshwari reaffirmed the Trust's commitment to serving those in need as she laid the foundation stone for a new Trust building in Vijayawada's Teachers Colony on Thursday. The new facility, set for completion by February 2026, will house offices, a blood bank, and a thalassaemia centre, enhancing the Trust's reach in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Bhuvaneshwari recalled the Trust's 28-year journey, emphasising its dedication to public service. "We fulfil this responsibility with sincerity, supported by a dedicated team and generous donors. It is not the size of the donation that matters, but the intent to uplift the underprivileged," she stated.

Inspired by the vision of Dr NT Rama Rao and supported by former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu,

the Trust has undertaken numerous service initiatives. Plans are underway to establish 24/7 thalassaemia centres in Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, and Rajahmundry. Besides, skill development centres run by the Trust have trained over 7,531 individuals, with 2,500 securing employment. Women in Kuppam have also

received training in tailoring and jewellery making.

Highlighting the Trust's healthcare efforts, Bhuvaneshwari stated that Sanjeevani health clinics have provided free medical services to over 1.6 lakh people for Rs 4.02 crore. Furthermore, 14,056 health camps have benefited 20 lakh people at an

expenditure of Rs 22.43 crore. The Trust also runs a school and a women's degree college in Gandipet, with profits supporting a school in Challapalli that offers free education to 2,020 underprivileged children.

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) and other dignitaries attended the event.



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Nirmala unveils digital credit assessment model

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move aimed at revolutionising lending to the crucial Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector, India's Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, unveiled a new digital credit assessment model during a post-budget interaction in Visakhapatnam.

The initiative, announced in the Union Budget 2024-25, seeks to empower Public Sector Banks (PSBs) to conduct in-house creditworthiness assessments of MSMEs, moving away from reliance on external evaluations. This digital model leverages a comprehensive array of data, automating the loan appraisal process for both existing and new bank clients.

The system will analyse digital footprints including Name and PAN authentication, mobile and email verification, GST data, bank statement analysis, ITR uploads, and commercial and consumer bureau checks. Fraud detection mechanisms will also be integrated, ensuring robust due



The Union Finance Minister launches a data-driven credit evaluation system, empowering public sector banks to assess MSMEs in-house and streamline loan approvals

diligence. "This is a significant step towards democratising access to credit for MSMEs," said Sitharaman. "By utilising digitally verifiable data, we are enabling faster, more efficient, and objective loan assessments."

The new model promises to streamline the loan application process, allowing MSMEs to submit applications online, reducing paperwork and branch visits. Instant in-principle approvals, seamless credit proposal processing, and end-to-end straight-through

processing (STP) are expected to significantly reduce turnaround times for credit decisions.

A key feature of the initiative is the shift from traditional asset or turnover-based credit eligibility assessments to a more data-driven approach, focusing on transactional behaviour and credit history. Critically, loans covered under the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) will not require physical collateral securities.

"This will be particularly beneficial for enterprises lacking formal accounting systems, broadening financial inclusion," stated Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, who also attended the launch. The government hopes that this digital transformation will strengthen the MSME ecosystem, a vital component of the Indian economy. By providing inclusive and efficient credit availability, the initiative aims to fuel growth and create employment opportunities across the country.

Officials urged to prepare DPRs for overall development of V'wada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni), NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha, and Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu have directed officials to prepare Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for the city's comprehensive development. They stressed the need for coordination among various departments to implement projects that align with Vijayawada's growth, particularly as it serves as the gateway to the state capital, Amaravati.

At a meeting held on Thursday at the collectorate, officials from the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC), Roads & Buildings, and Revenue Departments reviewed proposed projects in the Vijayawada East, West, and Central Assembly constituencies. With the Mahanadu Road-Nidamanur flyover and the first phase of the Gannavaram Metro Corridor nearing completion, the officials discussed the need for alternative routes to ease congestion before these projects are operational.



Plans for improving road connectivity, constructing bridges and junctions, developing parking facilities, and undertaking beautification initiatives. Key proposals included river bund landscaping, installing railings on hill roads, upgrading Gandhi Hill, enhancing the Kaleswara Rao Market Junction, and expanding the Kedareshwaraopet-Tunnel Road

The meeting also covered plans for improving road connectivity, constructing bridges and junctions, developing parking facilities, and undertaking beautification initiatives. Key proposals included river bund landscaping, installing railings on hill roads, upgrading Gandhi Hill, enhancing the Kaleswara Rao Market Junction, and expanding the Kedareshwaraopet-

Tunnel Road. Officials were instructed to assess feasibility and promptly prepare proposals, estimates, and DPRs.

Additionally, the city's development through the Urban Development Fund (UDF) and Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models was discussed. Plans to upgrade existing parks and create new ones, develop small parks along canals, and set up food courts in green

spaces were also considered. The officials reviewed disaster preparedness, including the establishment of cyclone centres in all three constituencies.

Vijayawada RDO Kavuri Chaitanya, VMC Additional Commissioner D Chandrasekhar, Superintendent Engineer (Projects) C Satya Kumari, and other officials attended the meeting.

4 killed...

Continued from Page 1

Three passengers died on the spot, while the bus driver succumbed to injuries while undergoing treatment at the Government General Hospital (GGH).

The deceased were identified as Bondu Bhimeswara Rao, Mattaparthi Bhavani, Juttiga Bhavani, and the bus driver, Madhusudhan.

Following the accident, the bus overturned, blocking vehicular movement.

The police used a crane to remove the bus and restore traffic flow. Injured passengers told the media that the bus was being driven at high speed before it crashed into the lorry.

A case has been registered, and the bodies have been shifted to GGH Eluru for post-mortem.

District Collector K. Vetri Selvi visited the injured passengers at GGH and inquired with the doctors about their condition. District in-charge Minister Nandendra Manohar expressed shock and grief over the accident. He conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families and assured them and the injured of all possible assistance.

Land acquisition for Polavaram Main Canal accelerated

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

District Collector Dr. BR Ambedkar has issued urgent directives to revenue officials to expedite the land acquisition process for the construction of the Polavaram main canal within the district. This initiative forms a critical part of the Uttarandhra Sujala Sravanti project, aimed at bolstering water resources in the region.

During a comprehensive review meeting held on Thursday with officials from the Irrigation Department and land acquisition officers, Dr. Ambedkar stressed the paramount importance of prioritizing land acquisition in villages slated for the initial phase of main canal construction. He instructed the land acquisition officers and staff from the three district land acquisition units to commence the process immediately, adhering to the designated land allocation, starting from Friday.

"An immediate assessment of land values in the affected villages is crucial," stated Dr. Ambedkar. He directed officials to determine the current market value of both assigned and government lands and to provide accurate cost estimates. The project, as per the Irrigation Department's proposals, requires the acquisition of 3,314 acres across 59 villages. The Collector emphasized that acquisition costs must reflect the latest land prices as of April 1.



Furthermore, he instructed the Irrigation Department to ensure the timely deposit of necessary funds to facilitate a swift acquisition process. "Land acquisition will proceed in a phased manner, prioritizing villages based on the Irrigation Department's requests. Immediate fund allocation will significantly accelerate the process," he noted. Dr.

Ambedkar also announced that the appointment of additional land acquisition officers and the recruitment of supporting staff for the respective units would be undertaken promptly to streamline operations.

The review meeting was attended by key officials, including Uttarandhra Sujala Sravanti Project Executive Engineer Umesh Chandra Kumar, Land Acquisition Officer Nukaraju, Principal Canal Construction Company representative Lakshmana Prasad, DAO Paidiraju, and Collectorate department officers Srikanth, Suryalakshmi, and Deputy Tahsildars.

'Private lands to be removed from prohibited list'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Revenue, Registration, and Stamps, Anagani Satya Prasad, announced that private lands erroneously included in the 22A prohibited list will be removed to ensure justice for poor and genuine landowners. A memorandum detailing the removal process was issued on February 17, and officials have already been directed to act accordingly.

Speaking during the Question Hour in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday, the Minister stated that private properties within 'Grama Kantakams' in panchayat areas would also be



excluded from the prohibited list.

He cited a 2015 Government Order (GO) from the then-coalition government, which permitted the removal of various properties from the list

except for social properties owned by panchayats.

Satya Prasad highlighted that the previous government's resurvey mistakenly placed 4,157 acres across villages under the prohibited category,

creating hardships for landowners. The present government has initiated a review to rectify these errors and remove such lands from restrictions.

Additionally, the Minister announced that houses built on government land without objections would be regularised, with residents given a year to formalise their claims. He criticised the previous government for mishandling the land resurvey, calling it a flawed exercise that focused on trivial details instead of accurate assessments. He assured that a comprehensive resurvey would be conducted to safeguard the rights of genuine landowners.

Jagan invited to Bhumi Puja of world's tallest Ardhanarishwara statue

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Spiritual leaders from Karnataka's Vijayanagara district met the former chief minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at the party's central office in Tadepalli to invite him to the Bhumi Puja of a 108-foot-tall Ardhanarishwara Swamy statue. The event is scheduled for April 30, 2025, in Nandipura.

The invitation was extended by Peethadhipathi Dr Maheshwara Swamiji (Nandipura Purna Kshetram), Panchakshari Shivacharya Swamiji (Heere Math,



Bennihalli), Jadeshwara Tata (Shakti Peetham, Veerapura), and Krishnapada Swamiji (Bhujanga Nagar, Sandur).

YSRCP leaders YV Subba Reddy and Dr A Madhusudan, along with Ardhanarishwara

Foundation founder Ramachaitanya and co-founder Veeresh Acharya, were present at the meeting. The Ardhanarishwara Foundation is leading this significant spiritual initiative.

Naidu launches...

Continued from Page 1

Naidu also praised Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for her journey from a modest background to a key role in shaping India's economy. Since joining the Rajya Sabha in 2014, she has overseen eight Union Budgets and contributed to India's rise from the 10th to the 5th largest economy, with projections to reach 3rd place soon.

Concluding his speech, Naidu acknowledged India's economic progress and emphasised the need for further development in Andhra Pradesh. He expressed confidence in Prime Minister Modi and Sitharaman's commitment to the state's growth and a prosperous future.

Ambati slams govt for dodging Jagan's budget queries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister Ambati Rambabu criticised the coalition government for failing to address former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's detailed queries on the state budget. Speaking in Tadepalli, he accused the government of lacking transparency and misleading the public with underfunded schemes while mismanaging state resources.

Rambabu alleged that Chief

Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Minister Nara Lokesh were distorting facts about state debts to escape accountability. He pointed out that the 'Super Six' welfare initiative, which requires over Rs 80,000 crore, has been allocated only Rs 17,179 crore, leaving crucial schemes underfunded. He also claimed that promises such as 'Aadabidda Nidhi' (Rs 18,000 per year), 'Talliki Vandanam' (Rs 15,000 per child), and 'Annadata Sukhbihava' (Rs 20,000 per



farmer) were not being fulfilled as per commitments.

Further, he criticised the reduction of four lakh pensions

in nine months, compared to the 66 lakh distributed under the YSRCP regime. He also questioned the government's decision to borrow Rs 26,000 crore for the Amaravati project despite branding it as "self-financed."

Rambabu attacked the ruling alliance, calling the TDP a "father-son party" and Janasena a "brothers' party," accusing Pawan Kalyan of nepotism for appointing his brother Nagababu as an MLC and minister.

Nirmala Sitharaman...

Continued from Page 1

Encouraging Rao to continue his literary work, she suggested he explore historical developments after the tenure of former U.S. President Donald Trump. Former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu echoed similar views, pointing out how history is often distorted to suit different narratives. He commended Rao's thorough research and factual approach. He expressed happiness that the book was written in Telugu and said it would reach a wider audience, especially students. He stressed the importance of preserving history clearly and engagingly for future generations.

Naidu also criticised the British for misrepresenting Indian history and called for a more accurate portrayal of the past. He highlighted India's contributions to mathematics, particularly the numerical system later adopted by the Arabs. He lamented the loss of ancient learning centres like Takshashila due to partition and urged a revival of India's rich heritage.

He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for strengthening India's role in global affairs and acknowledged Chandrababu Naidu's vision for development. Author Daggubati Venkateswara Rao expressed gratitude, recalling his initial doubts about how his book would be received since he was a former MLA. However, he was encouraged by the positive response from readers.

Swachhandhr...

Continued from Page 1

The Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Department will focus on cleanliness drives in rural areas and model villages, while the Tourism Department will take up cleanliness initiatives at heritage sites and tourist destinations.

Additionally, mass cleanliness drives, tree plantation initiatives, and community composting activities will be undertaken to promote a cleaner environment.

The meeting was attended by Swachhandhra Corporation MD Anil Reddy, Director of Municipal Administration G. Sampath Kumar, and various other department heads who participated virtually.

Jagan directs...

Continued from Page 1

Jagan expressed concern over constituency delimitation, alleging that southern states might be deprived of proportional representation. He also directed MPs to advocate for elections using the ballot system instead of electronic voting machines.

YSRCP MPs raised objections to the state government's alleged move to privatise newly established medical colleges, stating that these institutions were initiated under the previous government to enhance healthcare access. They also condemned what they described as inadequate security arrangements for Jagan, citing a recent visit to a Guntur chilli yard.

The meeting was attended by YSRCP Parliamentary Party leader YV Subba Reddy, Lok Sabha party leader Peddireddy Mithun Reddy, Rajya Sabha leader Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose, and other MPs.

Durgesh woos global investments in tourism

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/BERLIN

Tourism, Culture, and Cinematography Minister Kandula Durgesh has invited global investors to explore opportunities in Andhra Pradesh's tourism sector, assuring them of full government support. Speaking at the ITB Berlin 2025 conference, he highlighted the state's investor-friendly policies and growing potential in the tourism industry.

On the third day of his visit to Germany, Durgesh showcased Andhra Pradesh's diverse attractions, including mangrove forests, coastlines, historical sites, pilgrimage centres, and Buddhist monuments. He emphasised the state's robust infrastructure, including well-developed road, air, and water transport facilities, which make it an ideal investment destination.

At the Andhra Pradesh stall at ITB Berlin, Durgesh, along



with Tourism MD Amrapali Kata, briefed attendees on investment opportunities in luxury resorts, wellness centres, high-rise hotels, and tourism infrastructure meeting international standards.

He also distributed literature on the state's new tourism policy and investment incentives, underscoring that the

tourism sector has been granted industrial status.

The minister urged investors to seize this opportunity and collaborate with the government to boost Andhra Pradesh's tourism sector, reaffirming the state's commitment to facilitating investments and enhancing its global appeal.

Min: 6,837 mini Anganwadi centres to be upgraded soon

Says CM will announce an increase in gratuity for Anganwadi workers tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Women and Child Welfare Minister Gummidi Sandhya Rani addressed issues concerning Anganwadi employees during the question-and-answer session in the Legislative Council on Thursday. She emphasized the vital role of Anganwadi centres in child health, nutrition, and early education, acknowledging the dedicated service of workers and helpers.

The Minister highlighted that during its tenure from 2014 to 2019, the TDP government not only established 18,301 Anganwadi centres but also significantly increased salaries. In 2014, Anganwadi workers earned Rs 4,200, which was raised to Rs 10,500 under Chandrababu Naidu's leadership. Salaries increased by Rs 6,300 for workers in two phases, while mini Anganwadi



She criticised the previous YSRCP government for failing to honour its promise to further increase salaries, stating that workers received only a Rs 1,000 hike in five years, with no additional welfare measures. The government currently bears an annual burden of Rs 20 crore for gratuity payments to retiring workers

workers received a 103% hike, and helpers saw a 172% rise. She criticised the previous YSRCP government for failing to honour its promise to further increase salaries, stating that workers received only a Rs 1,000 hike in five years, with no additional welfare measures.

The government currently bears an annual burden of Rs 20 crore for gratuity payments to retiring workers. At present, Andhra Pradesh has 48,770 Anganwadi centres and 6,837 mini centres. The Minister shared the current salary structure: Anganwadi workers receive Rs 11,500, helpers Rs 7,000, and mini Anganwadi workers Rs 7,000.

She announced that all 6,837 mini Anganwadi centres are being upgraded to full-fledged centres.

She further revealed that on International Women's Day (March 8), the Chief Minister will announce an increase in gratuity for Anganwadi workers, enhancing their financial security upon retirement.

Malladi demands immediate hike in honorarium for ASHA workers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader and former MLA Malladi Vishnu has demanded an immediate increase in the honorarium for ASHA workers, highlighting their crucial role in community healthcare. He alleged that since the current government took office, these workers have not been receiving even minimal wages.

Vishnu recalled that during the previous YSRCP regime, the honorarium for ASHA workers was raised from Rs 3,000 to Rs 10,000, with former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy approving the hike as his first official order. He expressed disappointment that the present coalition government has neglected these workers, leaving them in dire straits.

He emphasised the invaluable contributions of ASHA workers, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis, and criticised the government for failing to recognise their efforts.



Intl meet on visual communication & mass media gets underway

Eminent scholars and industry experts taking part in the event hosted by Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A two-day international conference on New Frontiers in Visual Communication & Mass Media commenced at Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala in Vijayawada on Thursday. The event, organised by the Department of English, featured eminent scholars and industry experts.

Prof. Usha Reddy, retired Director of the AV Research Centre at Osmania University, Hyderabad, was the chief guest, while Prof. Nargis Abraham from BCIT University, British Columbia,

Canada, was the guest of honour. Delivering the keynote address, Prof. Usha Reddy underscored the importance of ethical practices in online communication. She cautioned against plagiarism, cyberbullying, and unethical social media usage, urging students to uphold professionalism.

Prof. Nargis Abraham highlighted the significance of building a strong online presence for career advancement. She advised students to optimise their job profiles on platforms like LinkedIn, Naukri.com, and Indeed,

stressing that recruiters typically spend only six seconds reviewing a résumé.

The conference featured paper presentations and panel discussions on emerging trends in visual communication and mass media. College principal Dr. S Kalpana lauded the event as a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and networking.

The conference convenor, Dr. K Sailaja Rani, along with Special Officer Dr. R Madhavi and faculty members K Sasi, Y Sri Sindhu, and S Hindola, played key roles in organising the event.



ASSCOM boosts tech skills in tier 2/3 cities, says COO

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Chief Operating Officer of The National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM), Dr Upmith Singh, said that the organisation is intensifying its efforts to bridge the skills gap and enhance industry readiness among students in Tier 2 and 3 cities through government-backed learning initiatives.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of a career fair at GITAM Deemed to be University, where he distributed offer letters to successful candidates, Dr. Singh underscored NASSCOM's commitment to empowering Indian

youth with cutting-edge skills. "NASSCOM, through its foundation, is actively promoting skill development programs to equip young professionals with industry-relevant expertise," Dr. Singh stated. He emphasized the organization's dedication to facilitating access to the burgeoning tech industry and advocating for policies that foster job creation within the IT sector.

Recognizing the growing significance of Tier 2 and 3 cities as vital talent hubs, NASSCOM has launched the Talent Connect Portal. This initiative aims to connect recruiters with digitally skilled and certified candidates, effectively bridging the gap between

talent and opportunity in smaller urban centers. "These cities are emerging as major sources of skilled workforce," Dr Singh noted, highlighting the portal's success in expanding employment prospects for young people in these areas.

The career fair at GITAM University saw a significant number of students secure job offers, reflecting the growing demand for skilled professionals in the region. GITAM Career Guidance Center Head, Umadevi, alongside other senior officials, congratulated the students on their achievements and encouraged them to capitalize on the industry-driven opportunities available to them.

'Govt determined to curb ganja menace'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha has asserted that the coalition government is taking strict measures to eradicate ganja and drug-related activities in the State. She alleged that the first cocaine case in Andhra Pradesh was registered during the previous YSRCP regime and blamed the previous government for failing to curb ganja cultivation, which harmed society.

Speaking in the Legislative Council, Anitha highlighted the government's efforts, including the establishment of a robust EAGLE system with advanced technologies such as drones and CCTV cameras.

She stated that a five-member ministerial sub-committee has been formed to tackle the issue and claimed that ganja cultivation has already been reduced by 90%. She noted that while 1,995 people were arrested in ganja cases from October 2023 to May 2024 under the previous regime, the coalition government has already arrested 2,513 individuals within a short span.

The Home Minister also revealed that assets have been seized in three major ganja-

related cases. She responded to queries from YSRCP MLCs P Ravindrababu, Israel, Md Ruhullah, Sivarama Reddy, and Bharat, stating that discussions are underway to withdraw government welfare benefits from those caught in ganja cases. She warned that medical shops selling drugs without prescriptions would face stringent action, including seizure.

Anitha announced that awareness campaigns, in collaboration with Education Minister Nara Lokesh, have already reached one million children.

Schools will form committees led by teachers and principals, and mega parent meetings will be organised to educate families about the dangers of drug abuse. She stressed the need for advance intervention to prevent innocent tribal youth from being falsely implicated in ganja-related cases and called for collective efforts across all political parties to eliminate marijuana from the state.

To counter the negative portrayal of ganja use on social media and OTT platforms, the government will take special measures.

Couple killed as auto hits scooter

PNS ■ NELLORE

A couple was killed, and their daughter sustained injuries when their scooter was hit by an auto-rickshaw at Saidapuram village in Gudur mandal on Thursday. According to the police, the deceased, Doddaga Munayya (40) and his wife Jyothi (30), were travelling on a scooter when an auto-rickshaw collided with them, killing them on the spot. Their daughter, Vaishnavi, who was riding pillion, suffered injuries.

The police have registered a case and shifted the bodies to the Government General Hospital (GGH) for post-mortem.



'P4' survey in Krishna from March 8 to 18: Collector

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government will conduct the Public, Private, and People Participation (P4) Survey in Krishna district from March 8 to 18 to identify and address poverty-related issues, said District Collector DK Balaji. The survey will be carried out by Gram and Ward Sachivalayam staff, and officials have been directed to expedite the process.

To ensure smooth implementation, Collector Balaji conducted a training session for Municipal Commissioners, Mandal Parishad Development Officers (MPDOs), and Special Officers at the Meekosam meeting hall in Machilipatnam on Thursday.

He instructed them to train Sachivalayam staff and raise public awareness about the survey's objectives. He emphasised that

The Collector emphasised that the survey aims to identify the needs of underprivileged families and develop targeted welfare projects without affecting the benefits of existing schemes. He urged officials to study the Survey Manual for a better understanding and to clarify public doubts regarding the process.

Chief Planning Officer (CPO) Ganesh Krishna, Deputy CEO Anand Kumar, and Sachivalayam District Coordinator K Ravikanth were among those present.

Brahmotsavams at Vishweshwaraswamy Temple to be held from from March 12 to 14

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The annual Brahmotsavams at the historic Sri Kashi Vishweshwaraswamy Temple in Nunna of NTR district, will be held from March 12 to 14. The temple, which has a 123-year-old legacy, will host a grand three-day celebration, including the Brahmotsavams and Kalyana Mahotsavam, under the guidance of Sri Lalita Tripura Sundari Devi Peethadhipati Munindra Maharaj, announced Executive Officer S. Hemalatha Devi.

On Thursday, temple's chief priest, Shivacharya Dr Mamillapalli Phani Kumar, along with priests Rompicharla Mohana Krishnamacharyulu and junior assistant B.V. Subbarao, joined EO Hemalatha Devi in



unveiling the event brochures. Speaking to the media, EO Hemalatha Devi said the festivities will include Sankirtans, Kolatas, devotional dances, and

Mangalavaidhyas, with various programmes taking place near Shivacharya Gudur Gopikrishna. The celebrations will commence on March 12

with Gopuja, Ganapati Puja, Punyahavachanam, Panchagavya Prashanam, Rakshabandhanam, and other initiation rituals.

On March 13, the temple will host the grand Divya Kalyana Mahotsavam and Rayabaram programmes for Sri Kashi Vishweshwara Swamy. The following day, March 14, the Rathotsavam (chariot festival) will be conducted with great devotion in the village, accompanied by Dwaja Arohanam, Deepotsavam, Dwadasa Pradakshina, Ekantha Seva, and Harathi. EO Hemalatha Devi also announced that on March 13, the Shanti Kalyana Mahotsavam of Sri Venugopala Swamy will be performed at the Sri Venugopalaswamy Temple in the village.

Intl Women's Day celebrated at AP Secretariat

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government celebrated International Women's Day at the State Secretariat in Velagapudi on Thursday. Ministers S Savitha, Vangapudi Anitha, Gummidi Sandhya Rani, and Nimmala Ramanaidu participated in the event, emphasising the role of education in women's development.

Minister for BC Welfare Savitha highlighted the importance of girls' education, stating that women's progress is closely linked to educational empowerment. She reiterated Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's commitment to women's economic upliftment and recalled former CM NT Rama Rao's legacy of ensuring equal property rights for women. She also outlined various welfare schemes introduced by the CM



to promote women's advancement across all sectors.

Home Minister Anitha underscored the need for mothers to act as guardians within their families and stressed the importance of instilling moral values in boys. She called for greater respect for women both at home and in society and encouraged parents to raise girls with confidence and independence.

Minister Gummidi Sandhya Rani lauded NT Rama Rao for prioritising women's education, which has enabled many women to hold key positions such as IAS and IPS officers today. She urged families to support girls without restrictions and ensure they receive equal opportunities. She also assured that any complaints of workplace harassment or discrimination would be addressed promptly.

AP signs MoU for urban development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has signed a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) to implement the CITIIS 2.0 climate action plan. The agreement was formalised during the 12th Regional 3R and Asia-Pacific Economy Forum in Jaipur, Rajasthan, in the presence of Principal Secretary (MA&UD) S Suresh Kumar and Union Minister for Urban Development Manohar Lal Khattar.

Under this initiative, Andhra Pradesh will receive Rs 23.1 crore to set up a 'State Climate Center for Cities,' establish climate data observatories, and develop data-driven climate action plans. Municipal officials will also be trained in Low Carbon City Management (LCCM). A key feature of CITIIS 2.0 is a 'Climate Budget' for cities, ensuring financial support for conservation projects, backed by a three-tiered technical assistance framework involving domestic and international experts.

Speaking at the forum, Suresh Kumar highlighted Andhra Pradesh's efforts in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reducing carbon emissions. The state also plans to introduce 'Green Employment' initiatives, providing training in waste management and recycling to promote green entrepreneurship.

Huge response to Women's Empowerment Week by AP police

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Police Department is witnessing an overwhelming response to its "Women Empowerment Week" celebrations, held from March 1 to 7, ahead of International Women's Day. DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, speaking on Thursday, highlighted the enthusiastic participation of women, girls, and students in various events aimed at promoting women's empowerment and safety.

The week-long celebrations began with medical camps conducted at 587 locations across the state on March 1,

benefitting 26,512 women and girls. A total of 1,286 police personnel and 974 officials from other departments played a key role in organizing the camps. On March 2, the department hosted 405 "Happy Hours" events, attracting 18,907 participants, with the involvement of 1,119 police officers and 285 other officials.

Essay writing competitions were held at 759 centres on March 3, drawing 32,277 women and girls, supported by 1,947 police personnel and 1,106 officials. The following day, debate competitions took place at 639 centres, where 30,140 participants engaged in



discussions on various topics, aided by 1,614 police officers and 1,051 other officials. On March 5, painting and gender

equality programs were conducted at 613 locations, with 24,851 women and girls showcasing their creativity under the

guidance of 1,376 police personnel and 944 officials.

March 6 featured an "Open House" event, allowing women,



DGP Harish Kumar Gupta noted the success of the initiative and announced that winners of various competitions will be felicitated on International Women's Day on March 8 in their respective districts. He reiterated the Andhra Pradesh Police Department's commitment to women's empowerment and safety, stressing its strict stance against crimes targeting women and children.

safety measures. The celebrations will conclude on March 7 with discussion forums, flash mobs, and exhibitions showcasing women's empowerment and safety videos.

DGP Harish Kumar Gupta noted the success of the initiative and announced that winners of various competitions will be felicitated on International Women's Day on March 8 in their respective districts. He reiterated the Andhra Pradesh Police Department's commitment to women's empowerment and safety, stressing its strict stance against crimes targeting women and children.

Officials directed to ensure free flow of water in canals

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K. Vetri Selvi has directed officials to remove hyacinths and other creepers from irrigation canals to ensure the smooth flow of water and mitigate drinking water shortages in rural areas.

On Thursday, the Collector, accompanied by officials, inspected the summer storage tank near the Denduluru Market Committee Check Post, which supplies water to Eluru city. She also reviewed the ongoing silt removal work in the Eluru canal at the Denduluru foot overbridge.

She emphasised that the Irrigation and Municipal Departments must work in coordination to ensure a steady supply of drinking water to Eluru city while also providing irrigation water for agriculture. She instructed officials to monitor the filling of the summer storage tank through the Eluru canal and prevent unauthorised use of irrigation water.

"The officials should ensure that there is no illegal diversion

"The officials should ensure that there is no illegal diversion of water to fish ponds. The tahsildars of Unguturu, Bhimadole, and Denduluru must regularly inspect the field and keep a watch on the canal. Teams comprising officials from the Revenue, Police, Irrigation, Agriculture, and Fisheries Departments should monitor canal embankments and sluices to prevent unauthorised diversions"



of water to fish ponds. The tahsildars of Unguturu, Bhimadole, and Denduluru must regularly inspect the field and keep a watch on the canal. Teams comprising officials from the Revenue, Police, Irrigation, Agriculture, and Fisheries Departments should monitor canal embankments and sluices to prevent unauthorised diversions," she said.

The Collector also directed officials to ensure that all fresh-water tanks and canals in the district are filled before their closure and to take measures to prevent water shortages.

Irrigation SE P. Nagarajuna Rao informed the Collector that water would continue to be released until March 11, with a

resumption from March 25 to April 25. He said the current water level in the Eluru canal stands at three and a half feet.

RDO A. Ambarish, Municipal Commissioner Bhanu Pratap, Agriculture Officer Habeeb Bash, and Fisheries JD Nagalincharyulu were among those who accompanied the Collector.

'P-4' survey launched in Parvathipuram-Manyam dist

The district-wide initiative aims to reach 265,000 households in a week, focusing on uplift of the most vulnerable

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

To combat poverty and bolster socio-economic well-being, Parvathipuram District Collector, A. Shyam Prasad, has launched a comprehensive survey under the "P-4" framework – a collaboration between Public, Private, and People sectors – slated to begin on March 8th. This ambitious undertaking will see 265,000 households across the district assessed within seven days, with secretariat personnel primed through training on March 7th.

During a review meeting held at the Collector's office on Thursday, Prasad underscored the critical need to pinpoint the 20% of the population facing the most severe economic hardship. He mandated that municipal commissioners, revenue officers, development officers, and

regional special officers spearhead this vital operation.

The Collector explained that the P-4 strategy is designed to foster a synergistic partnership between government bodies, private enterprises, and the community, aiming to elevate living standards for those lacking essential amenities through support from more affluent individuals. "This effort is fundamentally about empowering the disadvantaged through collective action," Prasad asserted. Surveyors have been directed to conduct assessments when residents are available and to complete a minimum of 90 surveys each. All collected data will be digitally recorded on an online platform, ensuring accountability and transparency.

Beyond the poverty assessment, the Collector addressed the imminent challenge of



summer water scarcity. He instructed officials to implement immediate preventative measures, guaranteeing a consistent water supply until the end of June. Local development officers have been tasked with inspecting water infrastructure, and rectifying any issues promptly. New boreholes will be drilled and repairs executed using funds from government schemes.

Regular water quality checks will be conducted and documented.

The meeting also addressed plans for future initiatives, including the potential establishment of cold storage facilities in partnership with NGOs, and the progress of the national rural employment scheme. With a budget of Rs 215 crore allocated, and Rs. 158 crores already spent, officials were urged to complete ongoing projects by March 20th.

The rising demand for small-scale animal shelters was also noted, with officials directed to accelerate their construction. The meeting was attended by key district figures, including the Special Deputy Collector, the District Animal Husbandry Officer, the Municipal Commissioner, and other departmental leaders.

SP directs police to enhance property recovery, night patrolling



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari Superintendent of Police (SP) Adnan Nayeem Ashmi has instructed district police officials to strengthen property recovery efforts, enhance night patrolling, and intensify vehicle checks during night hours to curb crime.

At a crime review meeting held on Thursday with DSPs, CIs, and SIs, the SP emphasised the need for visible policing and proactive crime preven-

tion. He directed officials to step up regular patrols and night vehicle checks to tackle thefts and chain-snatching incidents.

Reviewing pending cases, including grave and non-grave offences, property crimes, road accidents, and non-bailable warrants, the SP sought updates on old cases, arrests, and investigation progress. He urged officials to expedite case resolutions, avoid delays in arrests and charge sheets, and

ensure thorough investigations. "Presenting strong evidence in court is crucial to securing convictions and preventing criminals from escaping justice," he added.

To prevent road accidents, the SP advised analysing accident data through the Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD) and implementing preventive measures in high-risk areas. He instructed officials to conduct vehicle inspections, impose fines under the Motor Vehicles Act, and enforce road safety regulations strictly.

The SP also ordered stringent measures against drunk driving, public alcohol consumption, and the illegal transportation and sale of cannabis in the district.

Additional SP (Admin) V Bhima Rao, along with DSPs R Ganesh Jagasurya, G Vedha, D Viswanath, and other officials, attended the meeting.



23 red sanders logs seized, three smugglers arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) seized 23 red sanders logs and arrested three smugglers at Chavatapalyam village on the Nellore-Gudur highway.

RSASTF DSP J Balireddy informed the media that, following the instructions of SP P Srinivas, a task force team led by RI B Sai Giridhar and RSI T Vishnuvardhan Kumar

conducted combing operations in the area.

During vehicle checks, the team found 23 red sanders logs hidden in Bolero vehicles being transported illegally. On spotting the police, the three smugglers attempted to flee but were chased down and apprehended by the task force personnel. The seized logs and vehicles were shifted to the RSASTF police station in Tirupati, where CI Suresh Kumar registered a case.

Lineman electrocuted while working on transformer

PNS ■ ELURU

A 29-year-old electrical lineman was electrocuted while carrying out repairs on a transformer at Gandigundam in Kamavrapukota mandal on Thursday.

The deceased, identified as Gandiboina John, was working as an electric shift operator in the power department. According to police, the incident occurred when another lineman, unaware that John was working on the line, switched on the mains, resulting in a fatal electric shock.

Tragically, John's body remained entangled in the wires until the power supply was disconnected and he was brought down. The incident has left his family devastated, as he had been married only a few weeks ago.

Heart-rending scenes



unfolded as grieving family members mourned the untimely loss. Electricity

department officials assured support to the bereaved family.

Rs 1.47L steel plant to come up in Anakapalli: TG Bharat

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh will host a major steel manufacturing facility by Arcelor Mittal-Nippon Steel in Nakkapalli mandal of Anakapalli district, with an investment of Rs 1,47,162 crore. The project will be implemented in two phases—Rs 61,780 crore in the first phase and Rs 85,382 crore in the second.

Industries Minister T.G. Bharat, speaking in the Assembly, said the plant will have a total capacity of 17.8 million tonnes per annum (MTPA), with the first phase contributing 7.3 MTPA and the second phase 10.5 MTPA. The project is expected to create around 1,00,000 jobs.



Bharat stated that the company initially considered Odisha but later finalised Andhra Pradesh. He attributed this to Minister Nara Lokesh's discussions with company officials during the World Economic Forum in Davos. He further noted that the plant will be the largest steel manufacturing facility in India and a major boost to the state's industrial development.

Harish slams TG govt for falling tax revenues

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao criticised the Revanth Reddy Telangana Government, stating that the state's economy is in a downward spiral with tax collections declining sharply.

Contradicting claims of Telangana's prosperity, he asserted that economic indicators paint a grim picture of stagnation and mismanagement.

"Mr Chief Minister, it's not Telangana rising, but rather Telangana's tax collections falling," Harish said, pointing to the slump in the GST growth rate. While Telangana maintained a consistent GST growth rate of over 6% in the last six years—barring the pandemic period—under the Congress government, the



growth rate in February crashed to just 1%.

"This decline is not just a statistic. It signals a slowdown in economic activity, reduced consumer spending and dwindling business confidence," he warned.

He said vehicle tax collections recorded negative growth

between April and November 2024, indicating a weakening auto sector. Registration tax revenue slumped after August 2024, which he attributed to the government's reckless handling of HYDRRA and the Musi Project.

Harish criticised the government's failure to sustain Telangana's momentum in revenue generation.

"The inability to boost GST revenues, along with declining vehicle and registration tax collections, exposes the shortcomings of Revanth Reddy's economic policies," he said.

He called upon the state government to acknowledge its failures, apologise to the people and focus on reviving Telangana's economy before more damage is done.

NTR Vikasa to hold job fair on March 12

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Under the leadership of NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmiha, NTR Vikasa is preparing to host a job fair designed to provide opportunities for the unemployed youth. The event is scheduled to occur at the NTR Vikasa Office situated within the collectorate premises in Vijayawada on March 12.

In a press release issued on Thursday, K Achha Rao, the Project Director of NTR Vikasa, announced that Virtusa Consulting Services Private Limited will be recruiting for Content

Analyst positions. The company is seeking graduates from both engineering and non-engineering backgrounds who have completed their education between 2021 and 2024. He noted that both male and female fresh graduates, as well as candidates with up to six months of experience possessing strong communication skills, are eligible to participate in the job fair.

Besides, he mentioned that Virtusa Consulting Services Private Limited would offer an annual salary package of Rs. 2,11,473 to the selected candidates.

Those residing in the Hyderabad and Chennai will be required to work in offices located in these cities, while candidates from other regions will have the option to work remotely, as the company will provide a laptop.

He encouraged interested candidates to attend the job fair with the necessary copies of their certificates at the NTR Vikasa Office in the collectorate in Vijayawada on March 12. For more information, candidates can contact 8297400777, 7799376444, or visit www.vikasajobs.com.

76,854 MT of PDS rice seized during 2019-24: Manohar

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendra Manohar has stated that 76,854 metric tonnes of Public Distribution System (PDS) rice was seized between 2019 and 2024.

Replying to a question in the Assembly on Thursday, he said that during the YSRCP regime, 9,664 people were arrested for illegally transporting PDS rice, and criminal cases were registered against them.

"After the coalition government took charge, 60,000 metric tonnes of PDS rice has been seized, and the Preventive Detention (PD) Act was invoked against some of those involved in illegal transportation. Additionally, 512 vehicles used for smuggling PDS rice have been confiscated across the State," he



said. The Minister revealed that 50,000 metric tonnes of rice was seized at Kakinada port, of which 25,386 metric tonnes was identified as PDS rice. Cases were registered against 13 agencies in connection with the seizure. He further informed that the Civil

Supplies Department has 122 godowns across the State with a storage capacity of 18 lakh metric tonnes of rice.

"The Government procures each kilogram of rice at Rs 46.10 to distribute it to ration card holders under the PDS. The rice is provided free of cost to beneficiaries," he said.

NHRC member urges women to drive India's tech and economic growth

Equal rights guaranteed by Constitution must be fully implemented across every sector

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Ahead of International Women's Day, S. Vijayabharathi, a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), called upon women to take a leading role in propelling India's technological and economic development. She emphasised women's inherent strength and potential, urging them to claim their rightful place in all aspects of nation-building.

Speaking at the "Accelerator Jet Action" programme held at the YVS Murthy Auditorium on the Andhra University Engineering College campus, Vijayabharathi stressed the importance of women actively participating in all areas of progress. "Now is the crucial time for women to step up and contribute their unique talents," she stated. "The equal rights guaranteed by our Constitution must be fully

implemented across every sector." While acknowledging that societal discrimination has diminished compared to previous times, she cautioned that it has not been completely eliminated. She encouraged women to overcome remaining obstacles and pursue leadership roles in education and politics, calling on intellectuals and social reformers to support this effort.

Prof Narasimha Rao, Principal of AU Arts College, echoed the call for gender parity, highlighting the significant strides women have made in various fields. He cited globally recognised figures such as former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Sri Lankan President Bandaranaike, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and astronaut Kalpana Chawla, as prime examples of female leadership and influence.

Rao also drew upon historical and cultural references,



reiterating the well-known adage, "Behind every successful man, there is a woman," and quoting ancient Vedic texts that underscore the diverse and vital roles women play in society. He recounted the historical hardships faced by women in India, including the now-abolished Sati practice, and praised reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Kandukuri Veeresalingam for

their advocacy of women's rights. He also honoured Savitribai Phule, a pioneer in women's education, and Mother Teresa, whose selfless service inspired countless individuals.

Dr. Parikipanda Sridevi, a professor at AP Tribal University, pointed out the stark differences between urban and rural areas. While she noted a decrease in oppo-

While acknowledging that societal discrimination has diminished compared to previous times, NHRC member S Vijayabharathi cautioned that it has not been completely eliminated

sition to women in cities, she emphasised that discrimination remains a serious problem in rural communities, demanding its urgent and complete eradication.

The event, which celebrated women's achievements and highlighted the ongoing fight for gender equality, was also attended by Andhra University faculty, students, and members of the public.

ACROSS THE STATES



BSF recovers gold dust worth Rs 49 lakh from man at Petrapole

Gold dust worth over Rs 49 lakh was found concealed inside the anal cavity of a man by BSF personnel at Petrapole, near the Indo-Bangladesh border, the paramilitary force said in a statement on Thursday. Jawans from the 145th Battalion of South Bengal Frontier apprehended the man—who claimed to be a fashion designer based out of Dubai—after discovering 564 grams of gold dust wrapped in polythene and hidden in his anal cavity on Wednesday, the statement said. The seized gold dust has an estimated market value of Rs 49,13,624, it added. The man, attempting to cross into India from Bangladesh, identified himself as a Mumbai resident. "Driven by greed and the lure of quick money, he devised a plan to smuggle gold from Dubai to India via Bangladesh. However, his plan was foiled due to the vigilance and alertness of BSF jawans, leading to his arrest," the statement added. The accused has been handed over to relevant authorities along with the seized gold dust.



WAI signs pact with J&K govt to boost river cruise tourism

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (WAI) on Thursday signed an agreement with the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) government to boost river cruise tourism on three national waterways in the Union Territory, according to an official statement. The agreement aims to further bolster tourism, generate employment, boost economic growth and provide a new mode of leisure/budget tourism on local rivers. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on the sidelines of Chintan Shivir being held in Srinagar in the presence of Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal. Of the 111 national waterways in the country, the Union Territory has three declared national waterways, i.e., River Chenab (NW-26), River Jhelum (NW-49) and River Ravi (NW-84). As part of the pact, WAI, which is under the Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, will provide waterside infrastructure, i.e., ten floating jetties and landside infrastructure comprising of waiting hall and other amenities for cruise passengers.



JU protests enter 4th day, officiating VC still in hospital

Protests at Jadavpur University continued for the fourth consecutive day on Thursday as protesters from the Students' Federation of India (SFI), All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO) and ultra-left outfits held rallies inside the campus and staged a sit-in before the administrative building. They demanded action against the alleged assault on their peers and legal proceedings against West Bengal education minister Bratya Basu in connection with the March 1 incident where two students were injured after the minister's car allegedly grazed past them. The protesting students also demanded that senior university officials, including the pro-vice chancellor, registrar, comptroller of examinations and deans immediately engage in discussions with them to resolve the impasse and take concrete steps to restore confidence in the administration following the incident. Members of SFI, the student wing of CPI(M), beat drums and played 'dafli' (hand-held tambourines) while chanting slogans such as 'dhikkar' (condemnation) and 'hok kolorob' (let there be a roar of protests) outside the administrative building.

Trump's multipolarity move suits India: Jaishankar

PNS ■ LONDON

The US administration under President Donald Trump is moving towards multipolarity, which suits India's interests, and the two nations have agreed on the need for a bilateral trade pact, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said. India's role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the trajectory of the BRICS grouping of nations and relations with China were among the other major foreign policy issues touched upon during a session titled 'India's role and role in the world' at the Chatham House think-tank here Wednesday evening. "We have been one of the few countries who have been regularly talking to both Moscow and Kyiv at various levels... Wherever there's been a sense that India can do something, we have always been open-minded about it. Our consistent position has been that they need to do direct negotiations," he said. Jaishankar was asked about his thoughts on the first few weeks of the new US government and, specifically, about Trump's reciprocal tariffs. "We see a president and an administration which, in our parlance, is moving towards



multipolarity and that is something that suits India," said Jaishankar, who is on a six-day visit to the UK and Ireland. "From President Trump's perspective, the one big shared enterprise that we have is the Quad, which is an understanding where everybody pays their fair share... There are no free riders involved. So that's a good model which works," he said. The Quad alliance consists of the US, India, Australia and Japan. On the specific issue of tariffs, the minister noted that Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is currently in Washington to discuss a bilateral trade pact, following discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump at the White House last month.

"We had a very open conversation about it (tariffs) and the result of that conversation was that we agreed on the need for a bilateral trade agreement," he said. During the exchange with Chatham House Director Bronwen Maddox, he covered a broad spectrum of issues, including his "cautious optimism" over the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations after his ministerial discussions over the past few days. "It's a very complicated process. So, given the complexity, it's natural that it would take time... from my discussions with Prime Minister (Keir) Starmer, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and [Business] Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, I got a consistent message that the British side is also interest-

ed in moving forward. I had a few points to convey on behalf of my concerned colleagues as well. So, I'm cautiously optimistic and hope that it doesn't take that long," he said. On China, Jaishankar noted some positive movement since October 2024, including the opening of the Mount Kailash pilgrimage route in Tibet. "We have a very, very unique relationship with China as the only two billion plus populated countries in the world... we want a relationship where our interests are respected, sensitivities are recognised and works for both of us," he said. Responding to an audience question on "solving" issues in Kashmir, the EAM stated: "On Kashmir, actually we have done, I think, a good job solving most of it. Removing Article 370 was step number one, restoring growth and economic activity and social justice in Kashmir was step number two, and holding elections with a very high turnout was step number three. "I think the part we are waiting for is the return of the stolen part of Kashmir which is under illegal Pakistani occupation; when that is done, I assure you Kashmir will be solved."

UK condemns Jaishankar security breach in London

PNS ■ LONDON

The UK on Thursday strongly condemned the security breach involving a pro-Khalistan extremist rushing towards External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's convoy, saying such attempts to "intimidate, threaten, or disrupt" public events are "completely unacceptable". It came after the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had called on the UK to "live up to their diplomatic obligations" after a man from a small group of protesters chanting pro-Khalistan slogans and waving separatist flags attempted to breach the security perimeter as Jaishankar left the Chatham House think tank in London on Wednesday evening. The protester was swiftly taken aside by officers of the Metropolitan Police, with no arrests being confirmed so far. "We strongly condemn the incident that took place outside Chatham House yesterday (Wednesday) during the External Affairs Minister's visit to the UK," a Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) spokesperson said. "While the UK upholds the right to peaceful protest, any attempts to intimidate, threaten, or disrupt public events are completely unacceptable. The Metropolitan Police acted



swiftly to address the situation, and we remain fully committed to ensuring the security of all our diplomatic visitors, in line with our international obligations," the spokesperson said. It follows Jaishankar's talks with UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy at Chevening House over Tuesday and Wednesday, when both leaders covered the "entire gamut of bilateral ties", including the relaunched Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, regional and global issues. The protesters opposite the Royal Institute of International Affairs, commonly known as Chatham House, had been barricaded and monitored by a significant police presence outside the venue. Officers rushed to restrain the man as he ran past the barricade in an attempt to block the path of the minister's car while pulling at an Indian flag.

Demanding linguistic equality is not chauvinism, says TN CM

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President M K Stalin on Thursday said demanding linguistic equality is not chauvinism and alleged that the "true chauvinists and anti-nationals are the Hindi zealots" who believe their entitlement is natural but resistance is treason. Stalin, in a social media post said: "When you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. I am reminded of this famous quote when some entitled bigots brand us chauvinists and anti-nationals for the 'crime' of demanding Tamil's rightful place in Tamil Nadu." Further, he said: "The very people who glorify Godse's



ideology have the audacity to question the patriotism of DMK and its government that contributed the highest amount of funds during the Chinese aggression, Bangladesh liberation war, and Kargil war, while their ideological forefather is the one who assassinated 'Bapu' Gandhi." Also, he said: "Demanding Linguistic equality is not chauvinism. Do you want to know what Chauvinism looks like? Chauvinism is naming the

three criminal laws that govern 140 crore citizens in a language that Tamils cannot even pronounce or comprehend by reading. Chauvinism is treating the state that contributes the most to the nation as second-class citizens and denying its fair share for refusing to swallow the poison called #NEP. Imposition of anything breeds enmity. Enmity threatens unity. Hence, the true chauvinists and anti-nationals are the Hindi zealots who believe their entitlement is natural but our resistance is treason." Separately, writing to party workers flaying Hindi imposition, he said the people of Pakistan and Bangladesh, though united by religion are different by language.

Engineering student found dead in hostel washroom

PNS ■ DHANBAD (JHARKHAND)

A third-year engineering student of IIT-Indian School of Mines (ISM), Dhanbad, was found dead in the washroom of his hostel on Thursday morning, police said. He was identified as Tanmay Prajapati (21) from Indoor in Madhya Pradesh, they added. IIT-ISM security officer Ram Manohar said that Prajapati was living in the ninth floor of the institute's Aquamarine Hostel. "Around 9.45am, his washroom was found locked from inside. When it was broken, Prajapati was found lying unconscious on the floor. He was taken to a private hospital where doctors declared him brought dead," Manohar



said. DSP (law and order) Naushad Alam said the actual cause of death could be ascertained only after post-mortem. "The body has been kept in the hospital's mortuary. It will be sent for post-mortem only after the arrival of family members from Indoor," he added.

Ashwini Vaishnav launches IndiaAI compute portal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Marking a year of the IndiaAI Mission, Union IT minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Thursday launched the IndiaAI compute portal and dataset platform AIKosha, among a slew of other initiatives under the IndiaAI Mission, aimed at improving access to AI and fostering innovation. The compute portal will provide access to compute more than 18,000 GPUs, cloud storage and other AI services to students, startups, researchers, academia, and government departments. The platform aims to streamline access to high-quality non-personal datasets for AI innovation. The Minister for Electronics and IT also launched AIKosha -- an all-in-one dataset platform providing resources, tools, and expert mentorship to help transform potential ideas into industry solutions. Datasets will be available for model builders and developers to work with and launch India-specific AI models. The compute portal will be used to develop India's own foundational model, Vaishnav said, adding that the preparedness for India's own foundation model is progressing well and as many as 67 applications have been received. Citing India's mission to the moon, he said the mission was conducted at a fraction of the cost of other countries' moon missions and the same model will be followed for the foundational model and India will build it at a fraction of cost of what other countries are doing it.

Court gives Rs 10 lakh to rape survivor; convict gets lifer

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has sentenced a man to life-term imprisonment in a case of kidnapping and rape of a minor in 2021 and said a clear message had to be sent out that violators of POCSO law will be held accountable. Additional sessions judge Susheel Bala Dagar heard the case against the 31-year-old convict punished under Section 6 (aggravated penetrative sexual assault) of the POCSO Act and IPC for the offences of rape, kidnapping and criminal intimidation. On the compensation scheme for POCSO survivors, the court said a survivor's suffering had no price tag. "In any beneficial scheme or legislation, there cannot be a concept of maximum. How can there be a price tag on the suffering of the survivor? No



amount of compensation can undo the trauma. The least that can be done to help the survivor is to get his/her life back on track," the court said. The court awarded a Rs 10.5 lakh compensation, saying it would assist in the survivor's rehabilitation. Additional public prosecutor Yogita Kaushik Dahiya argued the convict deserved no leniency for the reprehensible and despicable act as he kidnapped the girl on by luring her with eatables on July 26, 2021. Dahiya argued the convict raped the minor while threatening her with a knife.

Babulal Marandi appointed BJPLP leader in Jharkhand Assembly

PNS ■ RANCHI

The BJP on Thursday appointed Dhanwar MLA Babulal Marandi as its legislative party leader in the Jharkhand Assembly. During a meeting here, Marandi, also the party's state president, was unanimously chosen as the BJP legislative party leader. The BJP parliamentary board on Wednesday announced two central observers -- Union Forest and Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav and the party's OBC Morcha national president K Laxman -- for the election of the leader of the BJP legislative party in the Jharkhand Assembly. Yadav said senior MLAs such as Naveen Jaiswal, Neera Yadav, Raj Sinha and Prakash Ram proposed the name of Marandi as the leader of the



legislative party during the meeting, and it was unanimously approved by all. "Under the leadership of Marandi in the state assembly, legislators will be working for the benefit of Jharkhand and its people," he told reporters. Former Jharkhand chief minister Marandi thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the party's

national president J P Nadda for the responsibility he was given. "I will be working 24x7 with full dedication to strengthening the organisation and will make all efforts to take everyone together inside and outside the assembly," he said. He alleged that the Speaker had deliberately delayed the matter of the leader of the opposition in the previous assembly, despite the name being recommended by the party. "But our legislators kept fighting the government both inside and outside the assembly," he said. Marandi said they would continue the fight for the interest of the state and its people. "We will also look to address the flaws which resulted in the defeat of the party (in the assembly elections last year)," he said.

'Trump, Modi displaying 'far-right' characteristics'

PNS ■ KOLLAM (KERALA)

CPI(M) Politburo coordinator Prakash Karat on Thursday attacked the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre and US President Donald Trump, accusing them both of displaying "far-right" characteristics. Speaking on the first day of the four-day long state party conference held here, Karat termed Trump as an imperialist, whose focus was on establishing American hegemony in the world and expanding its territorial sovereignty, and the Modi government as a "Hindutva Corporate regime" which was displaying "neo-fascist" characteristics. This is the last state conference of the party in the country



ahead of its 24th CPI(M) congress scheduled from April 2 to 6 in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Karat further said that due to the close association with America, India was standing with the oppressors as it had exported arms to Israel and also supported it, during its war with Palestine. Karat claimed that

India also allied with the US to constitute the quadrilateral alliance or Quad, which also includes Japan and Australia, whose sole purpose was to act as a "security alliance against China". He warned that as the US under Trump goes forward on its "more and more aggressive

path", India, being allied with it, will be cut off and isolated from the developing nations. "So, the path this government is taking and its external policies are a reflection of its character, which we in our political resolution have termed as a Hindutva Corporate regime that is displaying neo-fascist characteristics," he contended. Karat also lashed out at the opposition Congress in Kerala for criticising the CPI(M) for using the term neo-fascist to describe the BJP and RSS. The veteran CPI(M) leader alleged that the Congress was "distorting" the Left party's efforts to fight against the neo-fascist trends and accused it of playing "cheap politics". "We do not need a certificate

from the Congress leadership here on how to fight the BJP and the RSS," he said. He further said that the number of CPI(M) workers allegedly killed at the hands of RSS activists over the years in the state shows who was fighting the BJP in Kerala. He said that CPI(M) used the neo-fascist term, for the first time in its draft political resolution, as it is not the same phenomenon as classical fascism seen in the past. "It is modified, has elements of the old fascism, but has incorporated other features like neo-liberalism, and in India, the Hindutva ideology of the RSS is a distinctive feature. That is why we use the term neo-fascism instead of fascism," he said.

UP aims to nurture 10 lakh young entrepreneurs: Yogi

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Emphasising the role of youth in India's growth, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said that efforts are underway to prepare 10 lakh young entrepreneurs in the state. "India is moving in a new direction under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Over the past ten years, the country has emerged as a global economic powerhouse, with the youth playing a key role in making India the world's fifth-largest economy. In the next two years, India will become the third-largest economy, and

young entrepreneurs will drive this growth," the CM said while addressing a gathering at Baba Gambhirmath auditorium here. According to an official statement, Adityanath distributed loans worth Rs 100 crore to 2,500 beneficiaries from Gorakhpur and Basti divisions under the CM Yuva scheme and toolkits under the One District One Product (ODOP) to 2,100 people at the event. At the event, the CM said that the CM Yuva scheme, also known as Mukhyamantri Yuva Udyami Yojana, received over 2.54 lakh applications in just over a month of its launch, far

exceeding the target of one lakh entrepreneurs for the entire year. So far, one lakh applications have been sent to banks, with Rs 931 crore loans sanctioned for 24,000 beneficiaries and Rs 410 crore already distributed to 10,500 applicants, he informed the gathering. We will prepare 10 lakh young entrepreneurs in Uttar Pradesh, and a campaign is underway for that, Adityanath said. He said that initiatives like Startup India, Stand Up India, and Make in India have been promoted, enabling the youth to drive the vision of a self-reliant India.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A game changer

The strengthening of EU-India ties offers a promising path towards stability, prosperity and technological advancement

The European Union's outreach to India has gained significant momentum, marking a new chapter in their strategic relationship. In the wake of global disruptions, including the shifting stance of the United States under Donald Trump—characterised by tariffs, the withdrawal of support for Ukraine, and disengagement from Gaza—the strengthening of EU-India ties emerges as a stabilising force in global geopolitics. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's recent visit to India underscores the EU's commitment to deepening ties with New Delhi. Meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Hyderabad House, von der Leyen expressed the EU's high regard for India as a partner. She emphasised that as the two enter the third decade of their strategic partnership, "the best is yet to come." This sentiment reflects the EU's vision of India as a key player in shaping global economic and political landscapes. A focal point of their discussions was the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a crucial initiative aimed at boosting connectivity, trade and energy cooperation.



Given the evolving geopolitical dynamics, this corridor could serve as a counterbalance to China's Belt and Road Initiative, ensuring a more diversified and resilient global supply chain. A significant highlight of the India-EU partnership is its deepening engagement in digital and technological arenas. With India emerging as a technological powerhouse and the EU striving for digital sovereignty, collaboration in these areas can create a formidable synergy. The EU's focus on clean energy aligns with India's ambitious renewable energy goals. Such initiatives can help India and the

EU lead the global transition towards a sustainable future. Beyond technology and energy, trade remains a cornerstone of EU-India ties. Both sides are actively negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that could unlock significant economic potential. The EU is India's second-largest trading partner and a comprehensive trade agreement would not only boost exports but also enhance supply chain resilience, particularly in a world grappling with economic volatility. With Trump's protectionist policies disrupting global trade, an EU-India trade pact could serve as a counterweight, ensuring that both economies remain competitive and open to global commerce. The collaboration on supply chain resilience will also be crucial in mitigating risks associated with overdependence on specific markets. With Trump's policies creating uncertainty in trans-Atlantic relations and global trade, the EU's pivot towards India reflects a strategic recalibration. The EU recognises India's growing role as a stabilising force in global affairs—both as a democratic counterweight to authoritarian regimes and as a crucial player in maintaining a rules-based international order. The EU-India partnership stands at a defining moment. With digital collaboration, green energy initiatives, and robust trade negotiations at the forefront, this relationship could reshape global economic and political alignments.

PICTALK



An Indian myna perches on a red silk-cotton tree (Bombax ceiba), in Nadia

When no solution is the only solution



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Whether due to ego or rivalry, certain disputes become intractable, spanning generations. The irony is that winning does not always make one a winner

One of the bigger challenges in life is to find an answer to a question dealing with life itself.

The glib belief is that every problem has a solution. A wise-crack has rightly commented that every problem has a solution but the solution creates a problem of its own. If it were a simple, straightforward dimension, such as that, there would be nothing to worry about because problems and solutions would be in a dyadic relationship.

The problem arises when a problem is not solvable because two sides want a solution on their terms or indeed have no solution at all. This need not necessarily be an act of mischief, but it may be a simple case of jealousy/envy or indeed a bitter competitiveness that brooks no solution at all. The first exposure to such an intractable jungle-like situation today is that the two parties concerned themselves do not see a solution worth pursuing. This may be because of many reasons, one of them being that the person concerned may genuinely believe he has an upper hand and that he is not going to lose that advantage. Very often, this gets intertwined with ego, worth, or dislike.

If there are stakeholders beyond this, of a variety which see an advantage in the contending parties being maintained as contending parties, or there is a personal dislike between the two people concerned, then also a solution becomes well-nigh impossible. Thus, it is that certain problems have subsisted beyond generations and led to devastating wars which ultimately wiped out both parties, and there was nothing for the winner to take away at all.

The story of the Mahabharata is a telltale story of the winners ultimately having nothing to gain, at least for the generation in play. In more recent times, World War I and World War II did not produce any obvious winners, and the world went



back to a full circle. The better-known cases of history have similar dots on a lesser scale and indeed, this can be true also in personal lives.

The long and short of it is, it takes more than a 'win' to become a winner. At a different scale altogether, personal dislikes and prejudices can be so large that one adopts an attitude where one concludes that, irrespective of the nuances, one will simply not work towards a solution. Here again, the resolution of the conflict becomes difficult. Hence, it is a fortunate situation where both sides want a situation of solution and therefore are open to it. This is so often a given in this set of circumstances that to pray for it would be to hope for the near impossible.

To expect divine grace to sort out the situation may be the only route forward. Other factors prevent a meaningful resolution of a conflict, one being a gender dimension and another as sibling rivalry. Be that as it



THUS, IT IS THAT CERTAIN PROBLEMS HAVE SUBSISTED BEYOND GENERATIONS AND LED TO DEVASTATING WARS WHICH ULTIMATELY WIPED OUT BOTH PARTIES AND THERE WAS NOTHING FOR THE WINNER TO TAKE AWAY AT ALL

may, it is necessary to recognise that no conflict can be eternal either. While it is true that generations have transferred the conflict from one to another, the nature of the conflict itself became an impediment to solutions, and if nothing else, the ego factor may become a primary determinant of the way forward.

Under such circumstances, the generational transformation of the rivals involved alters the nature of the solution that is feasible. Indeed, no solution is feasible unless it is doable and sustainable. People often align together because of their own needs and then find arguments to sustain their position. In many cases, logic gives way to simple impulses and a non-thinking solution takes hold of the operationally powerful. The operationally powerful impose their solution, and the predictable happens.

The flawed solution is subverted by the party whose basic need for advantage

flowing out of the conflict was not met. Under such circumstances, it may be useful to suspend the conflict and learn to live with it rather than solve the problem. Avoiding a problem or indeed learning to live with it may at times be a solution. This can follow many routes including not letting the problem escalate.

The enigmatic context is that very often, as the needs of the combatants change, the search for solutions also becomes elusive. This is because one has no use for "the solutions".

The times have changed, and the solutions are passive because there is nothing left to enjoy in becoming a winner. It is therefore important to realise, in many cases, that a solution is only a solution if it makes winners of all concerned. However, that may be another matter altogether.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BLUE ECONOMY NEEDS PROTECTION

Madam — Kudos for 'Balancing growth and conservation' (March 6) for highlighting the most sensitive issue of conservation at Kerala's Quilon fish bank. This is only one of the several aspects of conservation, and its ignorance has a massive, devastating effect on the blue economy and fishing community. Fifty-six percent of our coastal population is directly and indirectly dependent on the blue economy. The conservation aspect of sustainable growth and development has long been ignored by the policymakers. The political ecosystem is insensitive to conservation. In fact, extensive conservation projects need to be conceived and implemented on all river fronts, particularly in the hilly areas. In the absence of geological studies and research and conservation, mass destruction of life and property in hills is caused by torrential rains and floods.

Several rivers are disappearing fast, causing mass annihilation of flora and fauna as well as cultivation. The Geological Survey of India should carry out wide-ranging and widespread surveys and research in hills, riverbeds, and coastal regions to ascertain and fetch fresh data. The Archaeological Survey of India should engage conservation architects for carrying out conservation of excavation sites, historic places and buildings, ancient temples, river fronts, and coastal regions. Against all beliefs and perceptions, the conservation projects are potential employers and sources of revenue. Unfortunately, our engineering colleges are producing fewer conservation architects. Urban development is incomplete without conservation. Oceanic studies and research institutions should be established in all potential regions for sustainable growth and development.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

US IMPOSES HEAVY TARIFF

Madam — US President Trump launched trade war against America's three biggest trade partners, drawing immediate retal-

PM Modi inaugurates Vantara



The recent visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the inauguration of Vantara - Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Gujarat's Jamnagar has hit the headlines with heart warming pictures of the PM spending happy moments with the animals there. Spread over 3,000 acres, Vantara—a brain child of Anant Ambani of the Reliance group is all set to become the world's largest zoo and

rehabilitation centre. The world class rehabilitation centre is equipped with modern veterinary technology, including ICU, MRI, CT scan, X-ray, dialysis, ultrasound and endoscopy units, besides research institutions and academic hubs.

Vantara which received the prestigious 'Prani Mitra' national award focusses on rescue, rehabilitation and protection of animals globally. The facility has through its various operations rescued abused, injured and endangered animals from different parts of the globe. The rehabilitation center has been designed to recreate a natural and nurturing environment akin to the lush habitats from which the rescued animals hail from.

M Pradyu | Kannur

proceedings against US at the WTO on the additional tariffs. Trump's new tariff Imposition will certainly rattle financial markets, raising concern about renewal inflation and business uncertainty in US and abroad.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

CONG LEADER COURTS CONTROVERSY

Madam — Congress spokesperson Sharma Mohamed stirred controversy by calling Rohit Sharma "fat for a sportsman" and the "most unimpressive" captain India has had. Congress is already losing deposits and the recent debacle at Delhi elections proved their worth and the high command must have decent control over the cadres by teaching them how to talk on a public platform. In a historic achievement, India captain Rohit has become the first captain to lead his team to the final in all four major Men's ICC tournaments.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

A parent's reflection on society and the next generation



SANJAY CHANDRA

I was raised with the values of respect, resilience and financial prudence principles. yet, I sometimes wonder if these values still carry the same significance

I was born in a middle-class family 66 years back, less than 12 years after independence. My father was an engineer in a state government department. I came across my mother's diary a few years back. She had spent her life painstakingly balancing a low government income against the rising expenses of bringing up three children. My parents inculcated in us the value of money. Another value that was deeply ingrained into our psyche by them was to respect everyone. I was taught that relationships were more important. A look of reproach from my mother was enough for me to realise my mistake if I was disrespectful.

This is what I tried to pass on to my children. I often look at them with pride. Having lived a better part of my life trying to hold on to these values, I now find myself at crossroads. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in concentration of bigger population in apartments. Technology has evolved like never before to provide faster modes of communication. Society WhatsApp group is unfortunately used by a few people at the expense of har-



monious relationships. Recently, I found myself at the receiving end of a vitriolic diatribe. My fault was that I had taken the initiative of organising a cultural and literature festival.

I sincerely believe that our youngsters need more exposure to the arts to navigate an increasingly fast-paced and more stressful world than what we grew up in. The language used by a few of these persons, who have claimed to be my good friends and neighbours over the past eight years, left me nonplussed at best and painfully hurt at worst. It should not have surprised me. These very people have been habitually doing the same followed by profuse apologies as it suits them. It just seems expedient to them in the murky world of society

politics. It does not matter to them if their actions are derogatory.

The condominium seems to be mirroring the happenings beyond the residential complex. I am left wondering that the politics and religion, the two factors that should create a unified society, are used to divide.

It is at times like these that I start doubting the values inculcated by my parents, and that in turn, I expect my children to follow. I talked to many other residents working with me for the festival. They were also indignant and sad about the way things were turning out to be.

They had their own stories to narrate. One lady was rudely told to curb her flair for taking good initiative. Another lady was left with only four

other friends when it was time to pitch in. The majority suffers in silence at the hands of the minority. It made me rethink if our parents were wrong in turning us what many may call timid to suffer mental anguish. I also debated if we passed the right values to our children.

We were unanimous in our shared belief. I derived strength as I looked around, and talked to these parents, many of whom were younger. We have been right in teaching our children to be better humans.

Our children are better than us. They are putting the same technology to better use. #Me Too, Girls' Right to Education, Let's Talk, Good Touch Bad Touch are only a few of the initiatives that they are pursuing with single-minded devotion to make this a better world. I am confident that they will set better examples for the next generations to raise their voices and not suffer in silence against the bullies

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE OF EU-INDIA DIGITAL COOPERATION

The EU and India are strengthening ties in digital governance, AI and semiconductor resilience



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Even as President Trump of the USA was busy being the world's most popular content creator, the global forces were turning the gears of a strategic realignment. After the televised, admonishment of Ukrainian President Zelensky by US President Trump and his VP JD Vance, the former was seen with several leaders of the European Union. As the case may be European leaders didn't have much to offer to Ukraine, except a subtle message to make peace with the US President. It may be a matter of time, before, Ukrainian President Zelensky has to evacuate his bunker office in Kyiv and perhaps make way for a more, current US head of state worldview representative. The message for the world was clear, the US would no longer be happy to bankroll, what it considers vague political narratives, potentially considered to be the hallmark of a free liberal world order.

This world order, incidentally a post-World War creation, by the US, ensured free fair open markets, meant for the prosperity of all. What this free world order has achieved in the past many decades can be debated, however, it has ensured the US retains its supremacy in the economic prosperity index and so have many of the aligned nations including India (since the 1990s). Just before the US and Ukraine visible spat, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen led a large delegation of senior ministers to Delhi to re-establish the high-level EU India Trade and Technology Council conversations. Given the current geo-political landscape, one of the major focus areas was Digital Economy and Governance.

The European Union (EU) and India reaffirmed their commitment to deepening digital cooperation, emphasising shared values through their Working Group 1 on Strategic Technologies, Digital Governance, and Digital Connectivity. Both sides pledged to accelerate human-centric



digital transformation and advance key technologies, including AI, semi-conductors, High-Performance Computing and 6G, to benefit both economies and societies. The two parties agreed to enhance research and innovation to improve competitiveness and economic security while promoting a cyber-secure global digital ecosystem. They also stressed the importance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in fostering inclusive digital economies. Both sides committed to ensuring interoperability between their respective DPIs, safeguarding human rights, and protecting personal data and intellectual property. They also discussed mutual recognition of e-signatures to facilitate cross-border digital transactions.

On semiconductor collaboration, the EU and India focused on strengthening the resilience of supply chains and expanding joint research in areas such as chip design and sustainable technologies.

The two sides underscored their shared commitment to the responsible development of AI, agreeing to further cooperation through joint projects and the development of frameworks for ethical AI. They also plan to enhance cooperation on large language models and AI applications in sectors like climate change and bioinformatics. They also committed to implementing the Global Digital Compact, which was endorsed at the UN General Assembly in September 2024, and ensuring continued global support for multi-stakeholder internet governance at the upcoming World Summit on Information Society +20. It may be the right click for both the EU and India. The EU and India are seizing the opportunity to strengthen their digital and technological ties. Their renewed partnership signals a commitment to fostering a resilient, secure, and inclusive digital future, underpinned by shared values and mutual economic interests. As old alliances shift, new partnerships may define the contours of the evolving world order.

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

Namaste at Oscars: Indian cinema has arrived



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

Indian storytelling captivates and inspire audiences worldwide. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future of Indian cinema



The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 has reinforced the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: "The world is one family," a vision that transcends borders yet thrives on respect, mutual interdependence and a shared spirit of creativity. This symbolic gesture was not merely a greeting but a powerful moment of inclusivity, reflecting cinema's unique ability to bring together artists, audiences and creators from across the globe.

This moment at the Academy Awards highlights how soft power is no longer confined to diplomacy alone; it now permeates events, institutions, and cultural exchanges. Cinema, often regarded as the perfect brand platform for fostering relationships, stood at the centre of this phenomenon.

The Namaste was a gateway, introducing the legacy of Indian storytelling to a diverse global audience and reinforcing the deep cultural interconnect between nations through the lens of cinema. Beyond its immediate impact, this gesture has set the stage for the future of the Oscars and similar global platforms.

It paves the way for cultural ethos to play a larger role in how nations and their creative industries collaborate and connect. A simple, well-timed Namaste has given Incredible India a renewed global identity, transforming its participation in world cinema from occasional recognition to strategic influence.

Conan O'Brien's decision to open the Oscars with Namaste was not accidental. It was a statement, an acknowledgement that Indian cinema is no longer at the periphery of global storytelling. This was not a token mention of India, nor was it a cursory reference to its billion-strong audience.

This was a recognition of India's growing cinematic legacy and influence. India has long been part of Oscar history, but often through an external gaze. Films like Gandhi (1982) won big, Lagaan (2001)



A SIMPLE, WELL-TIMED NAMASTE HAS GIVEN INCREDIBLE INDIA A RENEWED GLOBAL IDENTITY, TRANSFORMING ITS PARTICIPATION IN WORLD CINEMA FROM OCCASIONAL RECOGNITION TO STRATEGIC INFLUENCE.

came close, and Slumdog Millionaire (2008) swept the Academy Awards, yet these narratives were largely shaped by Western filmmakers. The paradigm began to shift with R (2022), which not only won an Oscar for Naatu Naatu but also forced global audiences to acknowledge the unapologetic, high-energy storytelling of Indian filmmakers.

This shift was further cemented when Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine as Light (2024) won the Grand Prix at Cannes, a rare honour for Indian cinema. Films like Chaitanya Tamhane's The Disciple (2020), Rima Das's Village Rockstars (2017), and Nandita Das's Manto (2018) have been steadily breaking barriers, proving that Indian cinema is no longer defined by stereotypes but by diverse, powerful narratives.

The power of this Namaste must be harnessed beyond the Oscars. As India gears up for Cannes 2025, this moment should serve as a launching pad for stronger positioning. India's representation at global film festivals must be strategic; ensuring that films sent to these platforms reflect the depth, diversity, and dynamism of Indian storytelling.

The Cannes Film Festival has already been a crucial stepping stone for Indian cinema. From Neecha Nagar (1946) winning the Palme d'Or to Masaan (2015) winning the Un Certain Regard prize, India's legacy at Cannes has been long-standing. However, now is the time to transition from isolated wins to sustained influence.

The government and industry stakeholders must work together to ensure that Indian cinema is

not just participating but actively shaping the conversation. One powerful example of how such moments create ripples is Life of Pi (2012). When director Ang Lee won the Oscar for Best Director, he greeted the audience with a Namaste, acknowledging the deep Indian cultural influence on the film.

That moment reinforced India's storytelling traditions, but the Namaste at the Oscars 2025 is even more significant; it wasn't just about one film, it was about the entire Indian cinematic movement.

India must now leverage this momentum through platforms like WAVES, the country's film export initiative. WAVES has the potential to push Indian cinema into untapped markets, ensuring that films from independent, regional, and mainstream creators reach wider international audiences.

By riding the wave of this Namaste moment, WAVES can position Indian cinema not just as entertainment, but as a formidable cultural force. Strategic collaborations, international distribution networks, and dedicated Oscar campaigns must now be part of the plan.

If South Korea could orchestrate a global push for Parasite (2019), resulting in its historic Oscar win, India must now do the same, systematically pushing its best films into the international awards circuit.

This is not just about recognition; it's about claiming a rightful place in world cinema. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 should serve as a wake-up call, a reminder that Indian cinema has evolved from

a land of fantasy to a nation of action. It is no longer a question of whether Indian films will win the Oscar; it is now a matter of when and how often. India is no longer a guest at the global film table-it is a host, a creator, and an influencer.

The Namaste was not just a greeting; it was an invitation for the world to recognise Indian cinema's true potential. The time to capitalise on this moment is now. With the right vision and action, this could be the defining decade when Indian cinema not only participates in global storytelling but leads it.

The world has acknowledged India. Now, Indian cinema must ensure that every frame, every story, and every festival presence echoes the power of that Namaste. The Namaste at the Oscars 2025 was more than a greeting-it was a defining moment for Indian cinema on the global stage. It symbolised India's growing influence in storytelling, marking a shift from sporadic recognition to strategic presence. To sustain this momentum,

India must leverage platforms like WAVES, push for global collaborations, and ensure strong representation at festivals. The world has acknowledged India's cinematic potential; now, it is time for Indian cinema to lead. With the right strategy, this moment can shape the future, ensuring that Indian storytelling continues to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

(The writer is former civil servant writes on cinema and strategic communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

Ganges dolphin resurfaces in Charikadia river after 25 years

The conservation of the Gangetic dolphin is not just about protecting a single species; it is intrinsically linked to keeping the Ganga clean

The recent sighting of the endangered Ganges dolphin (Platanista gangetica) in Assam's Charikadia River at Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur district, has sparked immense interest. Locally known as Sihu, this marks the first recorded presence of the species in the river since 1998, ending a 25-year absence. The prolonged disappearance of the Ganges dolphin from this waterway had fueled concerns over its dwindling numbers and possible extinction.



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

The disappearance of the species from the Charikadia River has been attributed to several factors, including hunting, habitat destruction, and depletion of food sources. Historically, Ganges dolphins thrived across major river systems in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh, including the Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems. However, their population has now become fragmented, with significant numbers surviving only in isolated sections of these river systems. The Ganges dolphin is a unique freshwater species that is functionally blind and relies

on echolocation to hunt. Despite its remarkable adaptations, the species faces severe threats, primarily due to habitat degradation from large-scale development projects, including dam construction, drainage works, and embankments. Pollution further exacerbates the risks to their survival. Recognizing the urgent need for conservation, India has taken steps to protect the Ganges dolphin. The National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC), the country's first dedicated research facility for this species, was inaugurated on March 4, 2024, in Patna, Bihar. Located on the Patna University campus, near the Ganges River, the center spans 4,400 square meters and aims to conduct in-depth research

on dolphin behavior, survival, and threats. It also provides training to fishermen, equipping them with conservation techniques to protect dolphins during fishing activities. Despite conservation efforts, human infrastructure projects continue to pose significant challenges. The collapse of a four-lane bridge under construction over the Ganga River at Sultanganj-Agwani in Bihar for the third time has drawn attention to the environmental impact of such developments. In 1990, the Bihar government declared a 60-km stretch of the Ganga River from Sultanganj to Kahalgaon as the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary, aiming to protect the species while promoting eco-tourism. Recognizing the ecological

significance of the Ganges dolphin, the Government of India designated it as the national aquatic animal in October 2009 during the inaugural meeting of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), chaired by then-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

The Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary currently hosts approximately 250 dolphins, frequently observed between Shankar Talkies and Manik Sarkar Ghat. While government agencies have made efforts to protect the species, conservationists emphasize that illegal sand mining must be curbed to ensure its survival. Large-scale sand extraction disrupts river ecosystems by altering water flow and destroying the dolphins' habitat and food sources, such as small fish. Mechanized sand mining further exacerbates environmental damage, creating deep trenches that negatively impact



river health. Experts warn that unless illegal activities are controlled, the already fragile dolphin population will continue to decline. On a more optimistic note, Union Water Resources Minister C.R. Patil has stated that the Namami Gange Mission-a large-scale initiative aimed at rejuvenating the Ganga-has contributed to a rise in the dolphin population. Experts view this as an encouraging sign of improving environmental conditions. According to the Wildlife Institute of India, approximately 4,000 Gangetic dolphins currently inhabit the Ganga and its tributaries, with nearly 2,000 residing in Uttar Pradesh alone. In response, the Uttar Pradesh government has introduced a tourism policy designating a dolphin sanctu-

ary within the Chambal Sanctuary to bolster conservation efforts. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's launch of Project Dolphin has significantly increased public awareness of the species. This initiative strengthens conservation measures while promoting the ecological health of the Ganga River. Further emphasizing its commitment to protecting the species, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife has designated October 5 as National Dolphin Day. With increasing awareness and conservation initiatives, there is renewed hope that these remarkable creatures will continue to thrive in their natural habitat.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Five officials settle regulatory violation case with Sebi

As many as five current and former officials of Add-Shop E-Retail Ltd (ASERL) and White Organic Agro Ltd (WOAL) on Thursday settled a case with Sebi pertaining violation of regulatory norms and made a payment of Rs 95.55 lakh towards the settlement amount. ASERL is into the business of manufacturing, marketing and distribution of Ayurveda products and WOAL is engaged in the business of organic food items. The case was settled by Dadhania Vivek Gopalbhai, audit committee member of ASERL; Niraj Kumar K Malaviya, company secretary and compliance officer of ASERL; Jigna V Thakkar, audit committee member of WOAL; Dharmesh Bhanushali, audit committee chairman of WOAL; and Chandresh Regulations, former audit committee chairman of WOAL, each contributed to the settlement amount, Sebi said in its order. Of the total payment, Malaviya paid Rs 40.95 lakh, while the other four remitted Rs 13.65 lakh each.



Turkiye's central bank lowers interest rate as inflation slows

Turkiye's central bank lowered its key interest rate by a further 2.5 percentage points on Thursday, days after official figures indicated a slowdown in inflation that has eroded households' purchasing power. The bank's Monetary Policy Committee said it was reducing its benchmark one-week repo rate from 45 per cent to 42.5 per cent. It was the bank's third rate cut in a row and came after official data indicated that annual inflation has dipped to below 40 per cent for the first time in nearly two years. In a statement released after the committee meeting, the bank said, however, it would review inflation trends and adjust rates cautiously in upcoming policy meetings. "While inflation expectations and pricing behaviour tend to improve, they continue to pose risks to the disinflation process," the bank said. "Monetary policy tools will be used effectively in case a significant and persistent deterioration in inflation is foreseen." Annual inflation in Turkiye slowed to 39.05 per cent in February from 42.12 per cent in the previous month, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute.



ED arrests man for extorting money by impersonation

The Enforcement Directorate Thursday said it has arrested a Gurugram-based man for "impersonating" as a senior officer of the federal probe agency and "extorting" money from people. Raviraj Kumar, a "conman", was taken into custody under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the agency said in a statement. He was involved in "extorting money by cheating, fraud and impersonating himself as a senior officer of the ED", it said. A Gurugram court sent him to ED custody for five days on Wednesday. He was earlier arrested by the Haryana Police after a case was registered at Sector 100 police station in Gurugram on these charges and the ED took cognisance of this FIR to book him under the anti-money laundering law. "Raviraj is a habitual offender and has been involved in extortion of money for many years," the ED said.

Federal Bank Welcomes Vidya Balan as its first brand ambassador

- This association marks a significant milestone in the Bank's brand evolution journey
- A balanced approach by the Bank to cut across geographies, genders and generations

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Federal Bank, one of India's leading private sector banks with an impressive legacy over the years, today announced the appointment of acclaimed actress, Vidya Balan, as its first-ever brand ambassador. The announcement was made during a special ceremony in Mumbai, where Ms. Balan was presented with a commemorative memento by Mr. K.V.S. Manian, Managing Director & CEO of Federal Bank.

This association is an important milestone in the brand's journey as it continues to enhance its market position. The Bank's senior team in a recent analyst meet had laid out clear directional path for the Bank, and brand transformation was one of the significant themes.

M V S Murthy, Chief Marketing Officer of the Bank, said that Ms. Balan was a very strategic choice to capture the attention across geographies, genders and generations. He said, "We are super-stoked to have Ms. Vidya Balan cham-

brion Federal Bank. She is versatile, appeals across demographics and gender, has a pan-India fan following, and is multi-faceted. An actor's actor, she becomes the character on camera while continuing to charm us in her interpersonal interactions off-screen. Her preparation, desire to understand nuances, and consideration of various scenarios all contribute to her ability to



bring out the essence of every role she plays. We have experienced this as we sought to bring her on board. At Federal Bank, too, empathy is our segue to understanding and servicing our customers. It's a universal trait that transcends geographies, generations, and customer demographics. Our NPS scores and Peer Comparison in the Nielsen studies, clearly indicate the stripes we have earned by being a Human at The Core, Digital at The Fore" Franchise. Much like Vidya, we too make light of our chores and celebrate the wins created through the collective effort of our teams.

Trump, tariffs, defence surge loom over EU Central Bank meet

PNS ■ FRANKFURT

The impact of a potential trade war with the United States and massive increases in European defence spending and government borrowing loom over a policy meeting Thursday at the European Central Bank, which is expected to cut interest rates by a quarter percentage point.

Analysts are widely expecting a cut in the European Central Bank's (ECB) benchmark deposit rate to 2.50 per cent, a step to lower borrowing costs for consumers and businesses in an economy that's struggling to get out of first gear.

The bank's monetary policy statement and post-meeting news conference by President Christine Lagarde will be scrutinised for hints about how far the bank will cut rates amid concerns about weak growth. The bank has already reduced the benchmark rate by 1.25 percentage points since June.

Meanwhile new concerns that would massively reshuffle the economic picture are likely to intrude: the potential impact of new tariffs on European imports from US President Trump, which could slow growth, and plans for massive new defence spending and borrowing, which could mean more growth but also more inflation.

Those two forces could push the ECB in opposite directions: a hit to growth would call for



lower rates, while more persistent inflation would argue for keeping rates higher in coming months.

Growth estimates for Germany, the eurozone's largest economy, shot up overnight and long-term interest rates rose following an agreement by the two parties that will form the country's next government to loosen constitutional limits on borrowing and exempt defence spending.

That is a major turnaround in German budget policy and opens the way for a trillion or more in new borrowing and spending over the next decade.

Also in the mix are concerns that Trump will impose new tariffs on European goods,

hurting growth in an export-dependent economy.

The 20 countries that use the Euro currency and for which the ECB determines interest rate policy stagnated in the last three months of the year, showing zero growth. Consumers burned by an earlier outbreak of inflation remain cautious, while businesses have been unsettled by concerns about what Trump may do.

"Christine Lagarde will most certainly be asked about how the ECB intends to respond to these moves and the support that the central bank may provide to the bloc," said Julien Lafargue, chief market strategist at Barclays Private Bank.

Traders struggling due to poor infra, says Delhi CM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday said that traders and business owners across the city have expressed frustration over inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation and lack of development, adding that they have been troubled by mismanagement and impractical policies of the previous government. Speaking on the sidelines of an event related to the upcoming Delhi Budget 2025-26, Gupta said her government has received valuable suggestions from traders and industrialists and assured them of concrete action.

"For years, traders and business owners have been suffering due to impractical policies, bureaucratic hurdles and negligence by the last government. There has been no real development -- roads and drainage systems remain in poor condition, and even basic civic amenities like washrooms are lacking in major markets," she told reporters.

She highlighted issues faced by both small and large commercial hubs such as Chandni Chowk, Karol Bagh and Lajpat Nagar, which are reeling from inadequate sewer systems, poor road conditions and overall neglect of infrastructure.

BIZ-ICAI-INTERNSHIP SCHEME

ICAI looks to be part of PM Internship Scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has expressed its interest to the government to be part of the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme whereby youth can be offered opportunities in various areas of accounting and finance.

The scheme, being implemented by the corporate affairs ministry, was launched on October 3, 2024 and aims to provide internship opportunities to 1.25 lakh youth in the current financial year. An ICAI official on Thursday said the institute has written to the ministry seeking to be part of the scheme.

After getting the ministry's in-principle approval, the ICAI Central Council will discuss on the modalities related to participating in the scheme, the official said and added that the aim is to provide internship opportunities for the youth at chartered accountant firms in



the areas of accounting and finance.

The scheme, announced in the 2024-25 Budget, aims to provide internship opportunities to 1 crore youth in top 500 companies in 5 years.

Meanwhile, ICAI President Charanjot Singh Nanda on Thursday said 'VISHWANITYA' will be the vision statement for the 2025-26 council year. The current council year will end on February 11, 2026.

It will focus on the vision for Viksit Bharat, integrity and

ethics, sustainability and social impact, holistic professional and leadership development, and wellness and work-life balance.

Other aspects that will be in focus are accelerating digital transformation, stakeholder engagement, nation-first approach, innovation and entrepreneurship, youth and women-led development, accountability, trust and transparency.

ICAI has more than four lakh members.

HT Media & NewsReach Present: Crafting Bharat Awards 2025

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India has become the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, with over 1.6 lakh DPIIT-registered startups driving innovation, creating jobs, and transforming industries. These startups are not just businesses—they're shaping the country's future by solving real-world problems and supporting initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India. Sectors like fintech, health tech, deep tech, and sustainability are seeing breakthroughs, making India a key player in the global startup space.

HT Media Crafting Bharat Awards 2025: Recognizing Real Impact

The HT Media Crafting Bharat Awards 2025, an initiative by NewsReach (Vyomeen Media Pvt Ltd) and curated by Fever Network, was all about celebrating people and organizations driving change. What started as the Crafting Bharat Podcast, a platform to share startup journeys, has grown into a space that not only tells these stories but also acknowledges the work behind them.

Held on 21st February 2025 at the ITC Grand Central, Mumbai, the event brought together entrepreneurs, innovators, and industry leaders for a night of recognition, meaningful conversations, and insights.

It wasn't just another startup awards event—it went beyond traditional categories to celebrate those shaping



Bharat in different ways. From founders and technocrats to artists, scientists, and social impact leaders, the awards highlighted individuals making a real difference in India's growth story. With leaders from diverse sectors in the room, the event became more than just a ceremony—it reflected how far India's startup ecosystem has come and where it's headed next.

Pvt capex unlikely to pick up despite near decadal-high profitability: Crisil

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Private sector capital expenditure is unlikely to pick up in a sustained way despite India Inc's profitability being near decadal high, domestic ratings agency Crisil said on Thursday.

The profitability of India Inc is set to increase for the third year in a row in FY26 on the back of soft commodity prices, the agency said.

An analysis of 800 companies excluding ones in the banking and finance and oil and gas sectors revealed that the pre-tax profit margins are set to widen to up to 20 per cent in FY26.

It can be noted that the government is leading the investments in the economy for the last few years, and there have been calls for a revival in the corporate capex as well. However, rather than investing to create new capacities, India Inc has deployed money to retire debt and other measures rather than investing it even though the capacity utilisation levels are high.

'Packaging meet to discuss sustainable solutions'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 400 industry stakeholders from over 20 countries are participating in the international packaging industry summit here to discuss sustainable solutions, waste reduction and recycling and other industry-related issues, a statement said on Thursday.

Around 50 foreign participants from over 20 countries are taking part in the three day event which started on Thursday with a focus on sustainability and consumer safety, organiser Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP)

said in the statement.

"The main objective of the summit is to highlight the latest trends and technologies of various packaging materials, conversion technologies and packaging machineries with automation to increase the productivity and to reduce the wastage," IIP Chairman Sunil Jain said.

Minister of State for Road, Transport and Highways Harsh Malhotra who was present at the inauguration urged packaging companies to learn about best practices and the latest innovations that improve product safety and longevity.



IIP Director Tanweer Alam said that Indian packaging industry is growing at an annual 15 per cent growth against global growth of nearly 4 per cent and is on course to emerge as the third-largest industry in the country. Packaging industry has been aiding to boost the coun-

try's exports through innovative solutions, he said at the 5th International Summit for Packaging Industry here.

He said that participants will deliberate on ways to reduce waste generation, recycling of packaging material and steps to make circular economy.

APEDA-sponsored export packaging solutions which reinforces the commitment to innovation and quality in packaging for agricultural exports were also launched at the event. The solutions have been developed by IIP students.

Fear of work-life row holds back women from leadership roles

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A significant percentage of women feel encouraged to pursue leadership roles, however, fear over work-life imbalance holds them back from actively pursuing their goal, a report said on Thursday.

According to Naukri's "The Unfiltered Truth: What Women Professionals Really Want" report, over 66 per cent of women feel encouraged to pursue leadership roles, challenging perceptions about professional ambition.

However, 44 per cent of women ultimately hold back, citing concerns about work-life balance, which indicates a complex decision-making



process beyond simple career progression, said the report.

Struggle with unclear or biased promotions (35 per cent), limited leadership programs (14 per cent) and lack

of visible role models (7 per cent) were some other roadblocks holding back women from pursuing leadership roles, it added.

The report was based on responses

from 70,000 women across 50 cities. Further, the report found that 34 per cent of women professionals rank menstrual leave as their number one workplace policy request - surpassing traditional equal pay discussions.

Nearly half of early-career professionals consider it non-negotiable, yet 75 per cent report their workplaces still don't support such policies, it added. While 75 per cent of early-career professionals (between 0-2 years) push for equal leadership representation, nearly a third of senior professionals (over 15 years) prioritise pay transparency, the report noted.

The report stated that the perception of pay disparity intensifies as women advance in their careers.

While only 11 per cent of women earning Rs 2-5 lakh per annum (LPA) perceive a gender pay gap, this increased to 26 per cent among those earning between Rs 50 LPA and Rs 1 crore -- suggesting more complex dynamics at higher salary levels, it said. According to the report, the gap is the widest in cities like Mumbai (28 per cent), Bangalore (27 per cent) and Delhi (24 per cent), and in sectors like BFSI (28 per cent), FMCG (27 per cent) and IT (24 per cent).

"This report is our way of ensuring their voices are heard. From menstrual leave becoming a top priority to the evolving expectations from leadership, the insights challenge some common assumptions.

Sensex rallies 610 points to end above 74K on buying in RIL

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 610 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while Nifty closed above 22,500 on Thursday following heavy buying in Reliance on easing crude oil prices and firm global trends after US President Donald Trump softened stand on tariffs.

Recovering from early losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 609.86 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 74,340.09, marking its second straight day of gains. During the day, it surged 660.57 points or 0.89 per cent to hit a high of 74,390.80.

The broader Nifty of NSE advanced 207.40 points or 0.93 per cent to close at 22,544.70. In the session, the 50-share barometer jumped 219.15 points or

0.98 per cent to hit an intraday high of 22,556.45.

From the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, NTPC, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Adani Ports & SEZ, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Zomato, Tata Motors, and IndusInd Bank were the laggards.

"The Indian indices exhibited resilience, owing to positive global cues following Trump's softened tariff stance on automakers from Canada & Mexico amidst the weakening dollar index," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.



what's brewing?

'Independent music is giving healthy competition to mainstream norms'

From ghazals, folk hits to Indi-pop, non-film music has offered a counterpoint to film scores across decades. "Today, every aspiring musician can potentially churn out music independently thanks to platforms like Spotify, YouTube, and Apple Music. This has created a formidably powerful alternative industry," says actor, producer and music entrepreneur Jackky Bhagnani. His company Just Music has been making inroads into the music industry with an expanding portfolio of diverse offerings and he says, "We intend to play a key role in steering the shift towards independent music by supporting talented artists. We are offering them a platform that prioritizes creative freedom and expands the reach of clutter-breaking music."

He also discusses evolving musical tastes and says, "Gen Z is changing the way music is created and consumed. They want music which is personal, original as well as diverse and fortunately, today there are many avenues which can help them to create as well as access music that resonates with them. This is why independent music is giving



healthy competition to mainstream norms." Just Music, says Jackky, is doing its bit to spur this evolution by giving emerging artists the space to experiment with new sounds, styles, and themes without creative restrictions. He says, "We offer access to high-quality production, marketing strategies, and distribution networks, ensuring that independent artists can reach a wider audience and join the mainstream while maintaining their unique artistic identity."

He hopes independent musicians will also be celebrated on international platforms soon and concludes "We are actively working towards this goal by facilitating collaborations with global artists, exploring cross-cultural music projects, and leveraging digital platforms to amplify Indian music beyond geographical boundaries."



Shweta Tripathi announces her first film as a producer — a Queer Love Story

Acclaimed actress Shweta Tripathi is set to make her mark as a producer, with four exciting projects in the pipeline spanning diverse genres. Among them, her debut production is a queer love story between two women, a project she initially joined as an actor before deciding to back it as a producer. The film, which celebrates LGBTQIA+ representation, is a deeply personal and significant step in her journey as a storyteller.

Speaking about her decision, Shweta Tripathi shared, "When this script came to me as an actor, I was instantly drawn to its honesty, sensitivity, and the way it portrayed love in its purest form. As I delved deeper, I realized how important it was for this story to be told the right way. That's when I decided to step in as a producer. This is not just a film; it's a celebration of love, identity, and the courage to be oneself. As a producer, I now

have the creative freedom to tell stories, and I couldn't have asked for a better beginning."

Apart from this queer romance, Shweta's production slate includes, a horror film, a drama and a psychological thriller.

Beyond these, Shweta is also keen to produce children stories, a genre close to her heart. She believes that the films we grow up watching shape us in profound ways, and she hopes to create stories that leave a lasting impact on young minds.

Shweta adds, "Children's films played a huge role in shaping my personality. They teach empathy, curiosity, and courage in ways that stay with you for life. As a producer, I want to create films that not only entertain but also inspire the next generation."

With her bold storytelling choices and unique vision, Shweta Tripathi is all set to bring fresh and meaningful narratives to Indian cinema.



'I NEVER SOLD MY SOUL OR COMPROMISED MY ETHICS TO MAKE IT BIG'

Actress Kritika Kamra has opened up about the philosophy that has followed through her journey in the world of acting and said that she has never sold her soul or compromised her ethics to make it big. "I have always believed that staying true to myself is the key to long-term success," said Kritika. "I never sold my soul or compromised my ethics to make it big. For me, my journey has always been about being proud of the choices I make."

It's not just about fame for Kritika. "It's not just about the fame or the spotlight; it's about being able to sleep peacefully at night knowing I haven't betrayed my values. That's what keeps me grounded, no matter how challenging or glamorous the industry might be," she added.

From her portrayal in the web series Bambai Meri Jaan to her performances in projects like Gyaarah Gyaarah, Kritika has made it clear that she prioritizes substance over surface-level appeal.

She added: "I don't want to chase trends or conform to the pressures of the industry. I want my body of work to reflect my beliefs, my taste, and my growth. The roles I pick are an extension of who I am. For me, it's about telling stories that resonate with people and leave a lasting impression."

On the work front, Kritika will next be seen in 'Matka King'. It delves into the intricate world of Matka gambling that started in Mumbai. The

series also features Vijay Varma, who will be seen in the titular role of the Matka King. In January Kritika shared that she believes in making bold choices and that she has consciously steered away from projects that prioritise the male gaze.

Speaking about her ethos, Kritika shared, "I've always consciously steered away from projects that prioritize the male gaze. My focus is on meaningful narratives that celebrate real stories and authentic characters."

"I want to bring life to roles that resonate with my beliefs and contribute positively to the larger narrative of cinema. It's never been about how many projects I do; it's about the kind of impact they have."

"I believe in making bold choices and staying true to who I am as an artist, and I feel fortunate to have found stories that allow me to express myself authentically," she added.

'Maybe there was something about Diwakar that they saw in themselves' says Nishant

The Sanya Malhotra-led family drama Mrs. has become one of the most talked-about films since its release on a popular streaming platform. Directed by Arati Kadav, the film is a Hindi adaptation of the acclaimed Malayalam movie The Great Indian Kitchen. It sheds light on deep-seated patriarchy through the journey of a talented dancer (played by Malhotra) who is forced to abandon her dreams to conform to her new family's traditional expectations.

While Mrs. has been widely praised for its bold storytelling, actor Nishant Dahiya, who plays the role of Diwakar Kumar—a husband who fails to stand up for his wife against his controlling family—has found himself at the center of an unexpected social media storm.

In an exclusive conversation with Hindustan Times, Nishant opened up about receiving extreme reactions for his portrayal of Diwakar. While many viewers appreciated his performance, a significant number of men lashed out at him online, with some going as far as sending him death threats. Revealing some of the shocking messages he received, Nishant shared, "You dumb**k actor, go and eat rat poison! Die somewhere, you mother**r!" Expressing his disbelief, he admitted that he expected criticism from female viewers, given the nature of his character, but was surprised by the intense backlash from men.

Reflecting on why his role triggered such hostility, the 83 actor suggested that his character may have struck a nerve among male viewers. "Maybe there was something about Diwakar that they saw in themselves and didn't like," he speculated.

On the other hand, Nishant received appreciation from female audiences, who messaged him to say they hated his character but loved his



performance. However, not all criticism was about the role itself—some viewers even questioned his career choices. "There were messages saying I don't deserve to be an actor because I accepted this part. Some people feel I don't have a good sense of choosing roles," he added.

Despite the mixed reactions, Nishant remains unfazed, acknowledging that Mrs. has sparked important conversations about gender roles and societal expectations. With a powerful narrative and hard-hitting performances, the film continues to leave a lasting impact on audiences, proving that cinema has the ability to challenge deeply ingrained mindsets.

As Mrs. garners more attention, it is evident that the movie—and its characters—have struck a chord, forcing viewers to confront uncomfortable truths. And for an actor, perhaps there's no greater testament to a performance than evoking such raw, unfiltered reactions.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



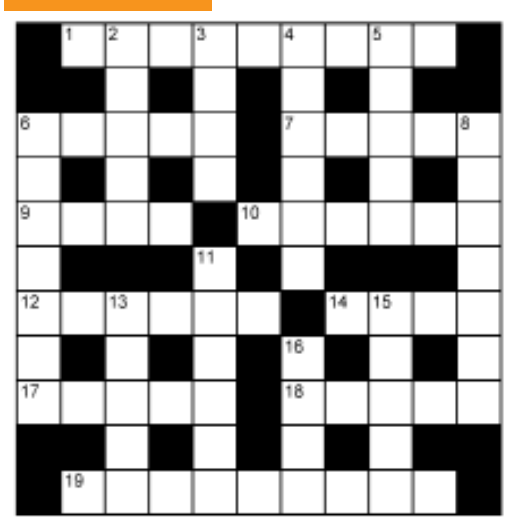
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

7	5			3				
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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

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**
- An exact copy
 - Someone who decides who won
 - Tiny bread scrap
 - Young woman
 - Shout this to attract attention (3-3)
 - A frozen drip
 - Went quickly
 - Dirt
 - Sea
 - Tried
- DOWN**
- Beneath
 - Told a fib
 - This type of clock has a mechanical bird in it
 - Hard to chew
 - Slow running for exercise
 - Make wider
 - An arm cover
 - Very foolish person
 - Fragment
 - Use this when washing
- SOLUTION**
- | | | | | | | | | | |
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| S | C | I | T | S | O | R | S | | |
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| R | U | S | H | B | R | O | K | E | N |
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| M | A | A | L | E | D | | | | |
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GINGER MEGGS



BREAKING BARRIERS & BLENDING GENRES WITH NIKHIL-SIDDHESH'S BOLD SOUNDSCAPE

In an exclusive conversation with **The Pioneer**, the composer duo **Nikhil-Siddhesh** takes us through their journey, the challenges of staying true to their sound, and their creative process. Their latest track, **Front Seat Honsla**, is an energetic anthem of resilience, blending humor and motivation with a punk-rock edge

think, and just embrace the ride.' The song carries that mix of frustration, humor, and determination that we've experienced firsthand."

The duo wanted to keep the track relatable, which is why the lyrics draw inspiration from everyday life. "We wanted listeners to feel like they're in the middle of their own chaotic yet hopeful journey—whether that's chasing a dream, dealing with setbacks, or just navigating daily struggles," adds Nikhil.

One of the most distinctive aspects of their music is its ability to fuse high-energy punk rock with deeply rooted Indian sensibilities. How do they strike that balance?

"We never set out to stick to a particular genre," Nikhil shares. "Instead, we focus on storytelling and let the music shape itself naturally. Growing up, we were exposed to everything from Indian folk and ghazals to rock and pop. That diversity is something we carry into our music."

Siddhesh adds, "Our compositions are about capturing emotions. Sometimes, that needs the raw energy of punk rock; other times, it needs the depth of Indian classical influences. Our goal is always to make the music relatable and honest."

The song's artwork is as dynamic as its sound, featuring two contrasting characters. Siddhesh breaks down the visual concept: "From the start, we knew the track had



two distinct personalities—one that's anxious and hesitant, and another that's fearless and ready to take on anything. That's why we brought in two vocalists to represent them."

Nikhil elaborates, "The artwork visually captures the internal battle between fear and courage. It ties back to the song's core message: 'Honsle ko front seat de, dar ko back seat'—which means, give courage the front seat and let fear sit in the back. The design reflects that push and pull we all feel in life."

The duo has worked with some of the biggest names in the industry, from Mahesh Bhatt to impactful campaigns like Jaago Grahak Jaago. Reflecting on those experiences, Siddhesh says, "Each project had its own challenges and learnings. Working with legends taught us to adapt while staying true to our sound."

"These experiences shaped us as independent artists," Nikhil adds. "They opened our minds, made us more fearless in our approach, and taught us that music isn't just about creating a tune—it's about crafting an emotion that connects with people."

The EP explores themes of empowerment and freedom, particularly through the lens of the emotional and societal challenges women face.

"We want this project to be more than just music—it's a statement," Nikhil shares. "It's about breaking free and finding your voice. We're blending rock with Indian classical, electronic, and even drum & bass to create something truly unique."

Siddhesh adds, "We're collaborating with incredible vocalists like Rupali Moghe and

Ayesha Mukherjee. Their voices bring a powerful emotional depth to the songs. This EP is about pushing creative boundaries while telling a story that resonates."

For a duo that started composing for theater, moved into advertising, and then into film and independent music, pinpointing one defining moment is difficult.

Siddhesh reflects, "Rather than a single moment, our journey itself has been the biggest highlight. The decision to start composing together was the first step that set everything in motion. From working on background scores for plays at the Indian National Theatre to composing for the award-winning short film Obscured, every phase has been a stepping stone." Nikhil agrees, "Each project has brought new opportunities and challenges, shaping us into who we are today. The growth and the learning never stop."

Having known each other since nursery school, their bond goes beyond just music.

"We've grown up together—same school, same college, same music institute," says Nikhil. "That shared history plays a huge role in our collaboration. It's like we instinctively know what the other is thinking musically."

Siddhesh adds, "Our influences are also deeply connected. We both admire artists like Hans Zimmer and A.R. Rahman—composers who redefine themselves with every project. That's something we aspire to do in our own work as well."

For those trying to break into the music industry, the duo offers simple yet powerful advice.

"Stay true to your sound," Siddhesh emphasizes. "It's easy to get lost in trends or compare yourself to others, but what sets you apart is your authenticity."

Nikhil adds, "Be open to learning. Every project, every rejection, every challenge is a lesson. And don't underestimate collaboration—it's where unexpected magic happens. The journey isn't always easy, but if you truly love music and stay patient, the rewards will be worth it."

With Front Seat Honsla setting the tone for their bold and energetic storytelling, and an upcoming EP that promises to push boundaries, Nikhil-Siddhesh are poised to make an even bigger impact in the indie music scene. Their journey is a testament to perseverance, evolution, and the power of music to inspire.

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

From composing for theater to creating viral singles, the Mumbai-based composer duo Nikhil-Siddhesh have carved out a unique space in the indie music scene. Known for their energetic blend of punk rock and Indian sensibilities, the duo recently released Front Seat Honsla—a track that encapsulates perseverance, humor, and motivation in the face of life's struggles. In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, the duo reflects on their journey, their signature sound, and the defining moments that have shaped them.

Speaking about Front Seat Honsla, Siddhesh explains, "This song is very personal to us. As composers, we've faced our share of struggles—tracks we believed in not landing as expected, rejections that made us question ourselves. Front Seat Honsla is our way of saying, 'Keep going, don't over-

Women in the spotlight, breaking the mold

As we celebrate International Women's Day, it is important to reflect not only on the progress women have made in various spheres of life but also on how they are represented in the media. Over the years, Indian television and cinema have witnessed a significant transformation in the way women are portrayed. From being confined to stereotypical roles of dutiful wives and mothers, women are now being shown as complex, powerful, and multifaceted figures who occupy spaces previously dominated by men. From taking on cop roles in shown like Candy, Dahanu and Delhi Crime to navigating grey areas in shows like Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar and Aarya and leading drug cartels in Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo and Dabba Cartel, there are increasing female characters who defy traditional stereotypes and reflect the evolving representation of women in the entertainment industry.

This showcases the broader trend of women moving beyond passive or secondary roles, highlighting their agency, strength, and complexity. The portrayal of female gangsters and criminals is one facet of a much larger movement where women are presented in diverse roles that demonstrate their multifaceted nature—be it as leaders, survivors, or powerful figures who assert control in traditionally male-dominated spaces.

Women in Male-Stereotyped Roles

The changing landscape of females is visible in roles traditionally dominated by men. Shows like JioHotstar's Candy feature Richa Chadha as a fierce, independent female cop, demonstrating that women are just as capable of leading in law enforcement roles. Similarly, in Delhi Crime on Netflix, Shefali Shah's portrayal of DCP Vartika Chaturvedi presents a female police officer leading an intense investigation, breaking the mold of male-dominated crime dramas. In The Trial on JioHotstar, Kajol's character, a strong-willed lawyer navigating the complexities of the legal world, adds another layer to this evolution, showing women excelling in professions once predominantly occupied by men. These roles not only defy traditional stereotypes but also provide nuanced portrayals of women who are not limited by gender expectations, further reflecting the broader cultural shift toward female empowerment.

Female-Led Cartels and Criminal Empires

A significant shift in Indian crime dramas has been the portrayal of women as leaders of criminal enterprises. Shows like Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo, on JioHotstar, are pushing boundaries by placing women at the center of high-stakes crime. The narrative of Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo follows a group of women from diverse backgrounds who come together to run a criminal empire. Each character is complex, driven by their ambitions, personal struggles, and unique ways of exercising power within both their families and their illicit businesses. These women are not secondary characters or accessories



to male-dominated plots—they are the masterminds, making crucial decisions, managing power dynamics, and controlling a complex world of crime.

The show presents a stark departure from the traditional portrayal of women in crime, who were often depicted as passive victims or moral anchors in contrast to their male counterparts. Instead, these women are proactive, resilient, and strategic, willing to take the risks necessary to maintain control. Saas, Bahu Aur Flamingo encapsulates the new wave of female characters who break free from conventional boundaries and emerge as powerful figures with agency and autonomy.

Similarly, Netflix's Dabba Cartel explores the rise of women in the drug cartel business, focusing on their leadership and dominance in this high-pressure environment. The show highlights a group of women who run the operations, navigate personal rivalries, and manage the intricate dealings of the business. Rather than presenting them merely as participants in a male-driven world, Dabba Cartel gives these women the agency to shape their own destiny, making them powerful forces within the narrative. These portrayals chal-

lenge the one-dimensional tropes often associated with women characters—vulnerable, sidelined, or simply side-kicks to male antiheroes. Instead, Dabba Cartel showcases their strength, ruthlessness, and determination, revealing the emotional and psychological toll that a life of crime can take on women.

Complex Female Characters in Crime Dramas

Among the notable shows to explore female gangster narratives is Aarya (JioHotstar), a gripping crime drama starring Sushmita Sen. Aarya is the story of a woman who, after her husband's sudden death, is thrust into the brutal world of organized crime. What makes Aarya particularly compelling is the emotional depth and internal conflict of its central character. Initially, Aarya is a loving wife and mother, unaware of her husband's criminal dealings. However, upon his death, she must step into his shoes, protect her family, and take over his illicit empire. Aarya's transformation from a grieving widow to a calculated and powerful figure is central to the show.

Another show that has made waves in portraying powerful female characters in crime is Mirzapur on Amazon Prime Video. In Mirzapur, Rasika Dugal plays the role of Beena, a pivotal figure who defies conventional expectations of women in the gangster world. Initially introduced as a quiet and seemingly passive character, Rasika undergoes a dramatic transformation as she rises to prominence in the violent, chaotic world of Mirzapur. Her character does not conform to the traditional trope of being subjugated by men or dependent on them. Instead, Rasika's ambition and resilience propel her to take control and navigate the treacherous landscape of crime with calculated decisions and strategic maneuvers.

Redefining stereotypical roles

In addition to taking on roles in traditionally male-dominated spaces, women on screen are also challenging the stereotypical roles that have long been associated with femininity, particularly those of the dutiful housewife or supportive spouse. In Mrs. on Zee5, the protagonist, played by Sanya Malhotra, begins as a typical housewife but takes charge of her life as she uncovers deeper secrets and embraces her own strength and independence. Similarly, in Killer Soup on Netflix, the central character also evolves from a seemingly passive figure into someone who takes control of her circumstances, challenging the notion that women must stay within the boundaries of conventional roles.

The Power of Moral Ambiguity in Female Characters

What makes these roles so intriguing is the moral ambiguity they present. Unlike traditional heroes and villains, the female characters in these shows are neither entirely good nor bad. Instead, they exist in a complex gray area where right and wrong are often blurred. These women make difficult choices driven by survival, ambition, and the protection of their families, all while operating in a morally compromised world.

This shift towards portraying morally ambiguous female characters is significant because it challenges the long-standing notion that women must always be virtuous and self-sacrificing. The complexities of these characters reflect a broader cultural shift in how women are represented in media. It shows that women can be multifaceted individuals, capable of navigating power, morality, and survival in ways that do not conform to traditional stereotypes. This evolution in storytelling allows for more realistic, nuanced portrayals of women and highlights the diversity of experiences they can embody.

BALANCING INVESTMENT, INNOVATION, AND PROFITABILITY

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, achieving sustainable growth is a formidable challenge. Companies that successfully integrate strategic investment, relentless innovation, and financial prudence can build resilience, enhance market leadership, and create sustained value for stakeholders. However, striking this balance is often complex, particularly in industries where technological advancements and market fluctuations create unpredictable shifts.

Strategic Investment: The Foundation of Growth

Investment is the cornerstone of any growth strategy, but indiscriminate spending without a clear roadmap can erode profitability. A well-planned investment strategy involves allocating capital to areas that yield high returns while maintaining financial discipline. For industrial businesses like Roto Pumps, capital expenditure in technology, infrastructure, and talent acquisition is critical. Investing in advanced manufacturing capabilities, automation, and digital transformation ensures operational efficiency and cost optimization. Additionally, expanding into high-growth markets through strategic partnerships or acquisitions provides a competitive edge. The key lies in aligning investment decisions with long-term business goals while maintaining financial prudence. Businesses must also balance short-term capital expenditure with long-term strategic investments. While immediate gains are essential to maintain investor confidence, long-term investments in sustainability, digital transformation, and workforce development lay the foundation for future profitability.

Innovation: A Catalyst for Competitive Advantage

Innovation is the driving force behind long-term sustainability. In a rapidly evolving technological landscape, businesses must prioritize R&D to stay ahead. At Roto Pumps, our focus on innovation has been instrumental in creating energy-efficient, cost-effective, and high-performance pump solutions, strengthening our market position and delivering value to customers. Embracing continuous innovation helps businesses stand out and build brand loyalty. Innovation extends beyond products to include process improvements like lean manufacturing and supply chain optimization, which boost efficiency and reduce costs. Additionally, digital innovations such as AI, machine learning, and IoT enhance production, predictive maintenance, and customer experiences, helping businesses stay competitive in the age of Industry 4.0.

Profitability: Ensuring Financial Sustainability

While investment and innovation drive growth, profitability defines success. Businesses must



balance reinvestment with strong financial metrics.

Cost management is critical to sustaining profitability. Data-driven decisions, resource optimization, and economies of scale—ensures efficiency without sacrificing quality. Customer-centric pricing, after-sales services, and high-margin segments further contribute to a robust bottom line. Financial resilience is key. Managing liquidity, debt, and risks helps sustain stability amid market uncertainties, attracting long-term investors. Beyond cost control, revenue diversification is vital. Expanding markets, subscription models, and aftermarket services boost earnings, while a strong customer experience enhances retention and long-term profitability.

Achieving the Right Balance

Balancing investment, innovation, and profitability requires a strategic mindset and an adaptable approach. Businesses must assess their financial health, set clear priorities, and continuously evaluate the impact of their initiatives. At Roto Pumps, we believe that sustainable growth is not about short-term gains but about building a legacy of excellence. Smart investments, innovation, and financial discipline create a resilient business model. Leaders must also recognize that achieving this balance is an ongoing process. Regular audits, market research, and data-driven insights help businesses stay agile, responsive, and competitive.

Sustainability: The Fourth Pillar of Growth

As industries evolve, companies that balance investment, innovation, and profitability will drive financial success while advancing economic, technological, and environmental progress. In today's ESG-focused world, integrating sustainable practices—such as resource efficiency, renewable energy, and responsible sourcing—offers both risk mitigation and a competitive edge. Roto Pumps' experience in sustainable growth highlights the importance of financial prudence, customer-driven innovation, and responsible business strategies. Our deep understanding of market demands, operational efficiencies, and technology adoption has enabled us to navigate challenges while consistently delivering value.

(The author, Pradeep Jain, is the CFO, at Roto Pumps Ltd.)



We will play according to situation: Ravindra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

Dashing New Zealand opener Rachin Ravindra feels adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an "unknown" Dubai surface in the Champions Trophy (CT) final against India on Sunday. Except the group match against India in Dubai, New Zealand have played all their games in Pakistan. The Kiwis had also played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa. India, on the other, have played all their matches in Dubai and are familiar with the conditions. "We do not quite know what the Dubai pitch is. We saw in our (group) game against India the ball turning but the other day didn't turn so much. We found ourselves adapting and playing according to situations, which we will need to do on Sunday again. "We will see in the next couple of days and hopefully it's a good cricket wicket," said



Ravindra after an emphatic 50-run win over South Africa in the semifinal here on Wednesday. Ravindra scored only six against India in the group, falling to Hardik Pandya while going for an upper cut, but the left-hander hopes for a better outing in the final. "You get out pretty much every time you bat. Hopefully I can bat for a longer period of

time and continue to play well for my team," he said. He is also aware about the expectations from the side in any big ICC event. "Whenever you approach a tournament, you expect hopefully to be among the top four teams and lucky enough we have been consistently good over a period of time. "We are happy with our preparation, coming here

early, we can see we are cooking reasonably well. Trust and ability around the group is great." Ravindra (108) smashed his second century of the tournament on Wednesday and together with Kane Williamson (102) starred in New Zealand's win. Senior middle-order batter Daryl Mitchell, who made 49 off 37 balls in the semifinal,

said the loss to India in the group stage is a thing of the past not and the final will be a new day. "The final is a new day and really excited to stuck into that challenge and adapt to whatever conditions and surfaces we get on the day and find ways to win moments throughout that game. "Hopefully, we can put some pressure on them and walk away with white jacket," he said. Mitchell is not interested in poking his nose in the talks surrounding an unfair advantage to India because of playing all their matches at one venue. "Just really happy with winning the game today and moving onto the final, it's an exciting opportunity," Mitchell said. "That's the nature of international cricket. We do a lot of travelling and we are used to that. It's not for me to decide how the tournament should be planned. I am just excited to be in an ICC final and looking forward to play in a few days time."

300 women boxers to compete in national championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 300 pugilists will compete for glory at the 8th Elite Women's National Boxing Championship in Greater Noida from March 21-27. Organised in association with the UP Boxing Association, the tournament returns to the venue that hosted its last edition in 2023. Held under the World Boxing and Boxing Federation of India (BFI) competition guidelines, the championship is open to boxers born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 2005. Each state unit can field a maximum of 10 boxers, with entries by numbers closing on March 10 and final name confirmation due by March 15. The action officially begins on March 20 with the arrivals, draw, and technical meeting. The opening rounds will take place from March 21 to 24, followed by the quarter-finals



on March 25 and the semi-finals on March 26, leading up to the finals on March 27. The tournament will follow a three-round format, with each bout consisting of three-minute rounds with a one-minute rest period. The ten-point must-scoring system will be in place, and all matches will adhere to World Boxing Technical & Competition Rules. Boxers will also be required to undergo a daily weigh-in throughout the competition. Beyond the 300 competing boxers, the championship will

also bring together over 100 coaches and support staff, along with 60 technical officials, ensuring a top-tier spectacle. Defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) will be looking to retain their title after a dominant performance in the previous edition, where they clinched five gold medals, one silver, and two bronzes. RSPB nudged Haryana by eight points, the latter finishing second with seven medals, including three golds, three silvers, and a bronze.



We are still evolving as a team: Rob Walter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

Yet another knockout stage heartbreak at yet another ICC event. But perennial bridesmaid South Africa remains on the right track two years before the ODI World Cup at home, feels the team's head coach Rob Walter after its semifinal exit from the Champions Trophy here. Having topped their group, South Africa came up short in the second semifinal against New Zealand here on Wednesday night and went down by 50 runs in a chase of 362. Walter said there are enough positives to take back home notwithstanding a tough loss. "You know, in the wins, we managed to put some significant partnerships together. We had guys contributing significantly with the bat. From a bowling point of view, I think our biggest development was our accuracy. We were able to be very accurate as a seam unit," said Walter in the post-match press conference. "And that's something that we have been working really hard on. Every game we play is a learning opportunity. We just keep trying to take the little lessons. Today is a hard lesson, you feel it a little bit more, because it's the end of a campaign. "But we certainly continue to keep learning from things, little bits here and there, that we can do better. We're still evolving as a team; there's no doubt in my mind. Two and a half years to 2027 and that's

the eyes on the prize," he added. The 2027 ODI World Cup will co-hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Walter was expectedly asked about South Africa going down in a knockout game of another global event. Last year, the Proteas lost the T20 World Cup final to India from a commanding position. "I don't think it was any one particular thing that resulted in the loss, probably a couple. We could have handled the last 10 overs (while bowling) a little bit better. They got away from us a little bit. "There was a period sort of in the middle of the innings where Kane (Williamson) and Rachin (Ravindra) started to up their rates a bit. And we missed a few opportunities there," he explained. "...When we were batting. We were just starting to get going and that partnership got broken and really slowed us down in the middle and obviously we saw Dave (Miller) play unbelievably well in the end to get a hundred...You know you're just one partnership away from doing something special," said Walter. With Williamson and Ravindra easily manipulating the bowlers, it seemed South Africa ran out of ideas. However, Walter did not agree to that. "No, I don't think that's entirely accurate. We certainly tried to change it up, we tried to change the pace. I think the ball wasn't really gripping at that stage in the early phases, so the ball kept sliding on."

Gujarat Giants eye on WPL playoffs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LUCKNOW

With two consecutive wins firming up their bid for a spot in the Women's Premier League (WPL) playoffs, Gujarat Giants will look to carry forward the momentum in their top-of-the-table clash against Delhi Capitals here on Friday. Gujarat Giants were languishing at the bottom of the WPL points table but two big wins — by six wickets over Royal Challengers Bengaluru and by 81 runs against UP Warriorz — have propelled them to the second position in the five-team points table. On Friday, the second-ranked Giants, with six points in as many games, will have the perfect opportunity to put their recent ascent to test against a formidable Delhi Capitals, who sit atop the table with 10 points. Delhi Capitals, who have already booked a place in the playoffs, would be keen to record a win and take their tally to 12 points and, in the



process, also better their net run rate to seal their spot in the final. It seems like things are falling in place at last for the Giants, who showed determination against all odds to beat RCB in a low-scoring thriller, with skipper Ashleigh Gardner (58 not out) and Phoebe Litchfield (30 not out) taking the side over the line. The Giants then demolished UP Warriorz by 81 runs in their previous outing, riding on Beth Mooney's stunning 96 not out and a collective show from their bowlers to

restricted the opponents to a mere 105 in pursuit of 187. The huge win not only lifted the Giants from the last spot but also improved their NRR to 0.357 from -0.450, better than the third-placed Mumbai Indians (0.166) with whom they are tied on six points. Additionally, with MI having three more games left, the Giants will be keen to keep their fate in their hands and not depend on the outcomes of other games. Giants' pacers, in particular, exploited the new ball and

conditions to good effect, blowing away UP Warriorz's batting after Mooney missed recording the first-ever ton by any player in this WPL. Their recent performances would surely fuel their fire but the Giants will have to be wary of the all-round strength of the Delhi Capitals, who too would be keen for a win, for it would help them finish at the top and qualify directly for the final. Currently, Delhi Capitals hold the top spot with 10 points from seven matches. They are in pole position to finish first, which would ensure direct entry into the title round. The teams finishing second and third will face off in the Eliminator next week. Meg Lanning has blown hot and cold this season but still remains dangerous, while India batter Shafali Verma (260 runs) has lit up the tournament with her aggressive stroke-play. Jess Jonassen has made all-round contributions for Delhi with 128 runs and joint second-highest nine wickets.



PSG lose to Liverpool in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) wasteful finishing came back to haunt the French team in a 1-0 loss to Liverpool in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16. Harvey Elliott's late goal on Wednesday punished PSG at Parc des Princes. It was only Liverpool's second attempt on target compared to a whopping 28 for PSG. Wasted chances galore hampered PSG during the group stage — where it lost to Arsenal, Atletico Madrid and Bayern Munich, scoring just one goal in those three games. But coach Luis Enrique's side had turned the corner in fine style with 40 goals scored in 10 straight wins before this game. PSG had 12 attempts on goal in the first half alone where Liverpool could not cope with PSG's pace, movement and constant positional switches on a night where Liverpool's 30-goal top scorer Mohamed Salah was kept quiet. Luckily goalkeeper Alisson was at his defiant best, however, making nine saves overall. The imposing Brazilian twice denied Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and kept out attempts from Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé. There were also bad misses from Barcola and midfielder João Neves, who both shot over from good positions. Kvaratskhelia thought he had

scored with a brilliant curling shot from the right of the penalty area in the 20th minute but the Georgia star's effort was ruled out for a razor-thin offside following a video review. VAR went in Liverpool's favour a second time minutes later, when referee Davide Massa checked for a red card check to see whether Ibrahima Konaté had pushed Barcola in the back. But no foul was given. Kvaratskhelia went close with a free kick early in the second half and had another low shot saved. Former England captain David Beckham was among the crowd at Parc des Princes. He played half a season for PSG after joining in 2013 during the start of the club's Galactico era and then retired. It was turning into a night of frustration for this PSG side. A corner almost went in, until Liverpool midfielder Dominik Szoboszlai stuck a leg out on the line. Then, with the clock ticking, Alisson made the save of the night when he somehow got both hands at full stretch to substitute Désiré Doué's bending shot from 20 meters. Luis Enrique said before the game that Liverpool were Europe's counterattack specialists and he was proved right. The return leg is on next Tuesday at Anfield and the winner faces either Aston Villa or Club Brugge in the quarterfinals.

India have 'real clarity' on how they want to operate in Dubai: Williamson

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ LAHORE

New Zealand batting mainstay Kane Williamson reckons India have "real clarity" on how they want to operate in Dubai, having played all their Champions Trophy (CT) games at the same venue but his team will also be reasonably well-prepared for the tournament finale due to its limited past familiarity with conditions. Williamson did not specifically say that India had an advantage of playing at one venue, choosing to compare it to New Zealand's understanding of conditions in Lahore, where they beat South Africa on Wednesday to set up a final clash against the Rohit Sharma-led side in Dubai on Sunday. New Zealand had played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa. "I suppose having played there on a number of occasions; there's real clarity in how they want to operate," said Williamson when asked if India go into the final with an advantage of knowing the



conditions. "A little bit like our opportunity here, having played a number of times at this venue as well and I think that's part and parcel in cricket," he added. Having scored a hundred in the semifinal, Williamson is high on confidence and looking forward to the final. "It is what it is (India play all games in Dubai). Our focus is the next match, the location of that match, the opposition,

they're all factors. Obviously, we played India once there," he said. "The conditions are different, so it's important that we try and take away some of those positives and be nice and clear in how we're trying to operate come two or three-days' time in the final," he said referring to New Zealand's loss to India in the group stage. Both Williamson and Rachin Ravindra struck hundreds to fashion New Zealand's emphatic win. Williamson called Ravindra, who has score two hundreds in three games, a special talent. "It's a final, so it's exciting. If we go back to Rachin, an incredibly special talent. It's always great to bat with him. He goes out and he puts the team first and he plays with that freedom. "When we were out there batting together, there were moments where there were some good spells and it was a little bit challenging. We tried to feed off each other and keep each other focused on the job," Williamson said.

Aravindh defeats Giri in Prague Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ PRAGUE

Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defenses of super-solid Anish Giri to jump in to sole lead after the end of the seventh round of Prague Masters chess tournament now underway here. It was Aravindh all the way while R Pragganandhaa played out a draw with pre-ent rating favourite Wei Yi of China. Aravindh took his tally to five points out of a possible seven and now enjoys a half point lead over Pragganandhaa who needs to catch up. With just two rounds to come, Sam Shankland of United States defeated Quang Leim Le of Vietnam. Interestingly, both Quang Leim and Giri had drawn the first six games and the axe fell on them at the same time. In the other decisive game 16-



years old Gurel Ediz of Turkey scored over local Nguyen Thai Dai Van to reach a fifty percent score while David Navara of Czech Republic played out a draw with Vincent Keymer of Germany. Aravindh on five and Pragg on 4.5 are now followed by Wei Yi, Ediz, Keymer and Shankland on 3.5 points each and these four are a half point adrift of the trio of Giri, Navara and Le.Dai Van is alone at the bottom now with 2.5 points in his kitty. The

battle lines are drawn between the two Indians only. Aravindh is a cool customer in normal positions with a deep eye for tactical complexities and a rare chance against Giri provided him to dismantle the king side and enter record books. There are as many as five Indians in top 15 live world rankings and Viswanathan Anand stands at number 15. Aravindh at 14, entered the top fifteen for the first time ever. It was a Queen's gambit

declined wherein Giri overestimated his chances and pushed his king side pawns in trying to secure a space advantage. Aravindh came up with a shocker on his 24th turn when he put his knight in front of a pawn and it was a one-way tide thereon. Black's attack was soon impossible to handle and Aravindh won in 39 moves. Pragganandhaa started with the English opening against Wei Yi and the game took shape in a Tarrasch defense wherein the Chinese was under some pressure but never really out of the game. The Indian won a pawn to reach a rook and pawns endgame and despite having a passed pawn deep outside the position was technically drawn. The game lasted 61 moves. In the challengers' section, Jonas Buhl Bjerre added to the woes of lone Indian Divya Deshmukh who remained at

the last spot on 1.5 points from seven games. The lead in this section is shared by Bjerre and Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan on 5.5 points each. Results round 6: Quang Leim Le (Via, 3) lost to Sam Shankland (Usa, 2.5); R Pragganandhaa (Ind, 4.5) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 3.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 3) lost to Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 5); Gurel Ediz (Tur, 3.5) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5); David Navara (Cze, 3) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3.5). Challengers: Richard Stalmach (Cze, 3) drew with Finel Vaclav (Cze, 3); Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5) lost to Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den, 5.5); Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 5.5) beat Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 3.5); Marc'andrea Maurizzi (Fra, 4) beat Nemec Jychym (Cze, 2); Ma Qun (Chn, 4) drew with Stamatis Kourkoulous-Arditis (Gre, 3).

Mushfiqur Rahim retires from ODIs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ DHAKA

Veteran Bangladesh wicket-keeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim has retired from ODI cricket with immediate effect. The 37-year-old was part of Bangladesh's squad that exited the Champions Trophy (CT) from the group stage. He made the announcement on social media. "I am announcing my retirement from the ODI format as of today. Alhamdulillah (Thank God) for everything. While our achievements may have been limited on a global level, one thing is certain: whenever I stepped onto the field for my country, I gave more than 100 per cent with dedication and honesty," Rahim wrote on his official Facebook page. "The last few weeks have



been very challenging for me, and I have come to realise that this is my destiny. "Lastly, I would like to deeply thank my family, friends and my fans for whom I have played cricket for the last 19 years," he added. Rahim made his ODI debut almost 20 years ago and ended up representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has

scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh. He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s. In the team's disappointing Champions Trophy campaign, Rahim failed to score against India before making just two runs against New Zealand. Rahim has already retired from the shortest format but in the longest format, he is on course to become first from his country to play 100 Tests.

'I GOT 50 OFFERS AFTER CINEMABANDI, BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO DO SAME KIND OF ROLE'

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Rag Mayur is a name that has been making waves in Telugu cinema. From his recent hit web series Sivarapalli, which has remained in the top 10 even after seven weeks, to his acclaimed roles in Gandhi Tatha Chettu and Veeranjaneyula Vihara Yatra, the young actor is proving his mettle with every project. His versatility has left a lasting impression, leading many to believe that he has the potential to excel in a variety of roles if given the right opportunities.

"I want to explore all shades—positive, negative, or grey. But my only condition is that each role should be different from the previous ones. That's why I am selective about my projects," says Rag Mayur.

Rag Mayur's journey from a boy growing up in Hyderabad's RTC Cross Roads to becoming a sought-after actor in Telugu cinema is nothing short of inspiring. Known for his versatility and ability to take on unconventional roles, he has carved a niche for himself in the industry

Born and raised in Hyderabad, Rag Mayur completed his degree in Computer Science from Osmania University. Growing up near RTC Cross Roads, a hub for cinema enthusiasts, he was constantly surrounded by the magic of movies. "Every day, I used to see the theaters—Sandhya, Sudarshan, Devi, Odeon—and watch films of Chiranjeevi and Shah Rukh Khan. Maybe that's what ignited my passion for cinema," he shares. Despite being a bright student, the allure of films remained strong in his mind.

After earning his degree, he moved to the USA for his Master's but soon realized he wasn't happy there. "I missed home, so I returned to Hyderabad and started working," he recalls. Around 2014, he began his professional journey in Bengaluru as an IT employee. With weekends free, he joined a theater group and started writing about films for a website. He also

experimented with film-making, directing and

acting in short films. One of his projects, Rama Kanavemira, went viral in 2016, garnering over a million views. That success reinforced his decision to focus solely on acting, prompting him to send portfolios and attend auditions.

His big break came when director Praveen Kandregula cast him in a demo film for Cinemabandi. "Usually, demo films are made to pitch the concept to production houses, and when a project gets approved, established actors

are brought in. But producers Raj & DK insisted that the original cast remain intact. That's how Cinemabandi became my debut, and it turned out to be a major success, staying at the top for two weeks," says Rag Mayur.

Following Cinemabandi, he received nearly 50 offers from both small and big films. However, he was careful not to get typecast. "Many wanted me to play similar village-based roles, but repeating the same character is the fastest way to fade out in the industry. So, I made a conscious decision to be selective," he explains.

One of his standout performances came in Keedaa Cola, directed by Tharun Bhascker, where he played a unique role that earned him critical acclaim. His next project, the web film Veeranjaneyula Vihara Yatra, released on ETV Win, was both commercially and critically successful. "I played a serious role in this film. Interestingly, the director had seen my short film years ago and

remembered me for this part," he says.

His latest hit, Sivarapalli, streaming on Amazon, is an adaptation of the Hindi series Panchayat, but with a fresh take in Telugu. "I watched the original three times to understand its essence but made sure not to copy the acting. Bringing my own interpretation was a big challenge, but I'm grateful for the appreciation," he shares.

A standout aspect of Rag Mayur's journey is his ability to master regional accents. In Cinemabandi, he perfected the Royalaseema dialect, in Keedaa Cola, he adopted a Telangana accent, and for his upcoming film Garividi Lakshmi, he trained rigorously for 40 days to nail the challenging Srikakulam dialect. "I play a Burrakatha artist in this one," he reveals.

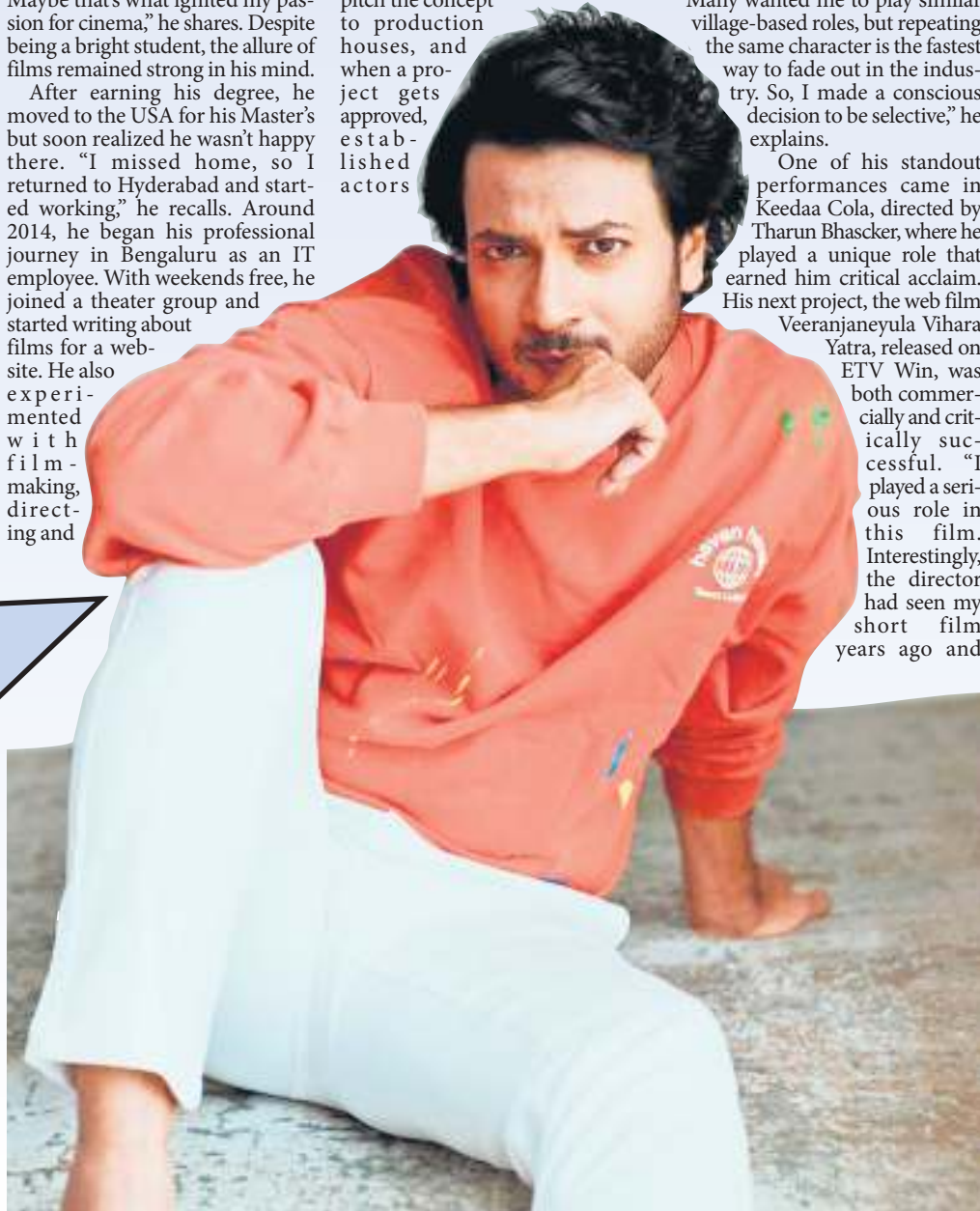
Stepping into villainous territory, Rag Mayur took on a negative role in Gandhi Tatha Chettu, directed by Padmavathi. "Initially, they wanted a 50-year-old actor, but the director felt I could do it. The team had doubts, but after seeing my audition, they were convinced," he shares.

He is meticulous in preparing for his roles, maintaining a notebook where he jots down details about each character. "I don't consider myself a spontaneous actor. I prepare thoroughly, consult with directors, and adapt as needed. That preparation allows me to make last-minute changes effortlessly," he explains.

With roots in both Vijayawada and Hyderabad, Rag Mayur attributes his ease with different accents to his family background. "My grandparents are from Andhra, which might be why I can adapt to different regional tones easily," he says.

Looking ahead, he plays Anupama Parameswaran's love interest in Paradha, directed by Praveen Kandregula. He has also signed a film with Geetha Arts 2. "It's a completely different role from anything I've done before, and I'm excited for audiences to see it," he concludes.

With his dedication to craft, keen script selection, and ability to bring diverse characters to life, Rag Mayur is undoubtedly a rising star to watch in Telugu cinema.



MAKERS CLARIFY

Janhvi's b'day post isn't her film look

Usually, when an actor or actress celebrates their birthday, the makers release a glimpse of their look from an upcoming film. However, on Thursday, as Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor celebrated her birthday, there was no such reveal from her highly anticipated film alongside Ram Charan, directed by Buchi Babu. Despite the film's shooting having begun weeks ago, with a schedule completed in Mysore featuring both Ram Charan and Janhvi, the makers chose not to unveil her look. Instead, they shared a casual picture of Janhvi on the film's set.

Apart from her Hindi films, Janhvi Kapoor has now entered

Telugu cinema with her debut film Devara opposite Jr NTR. She is already in high demand and has signed her second Telugu film, this time opposite Ram Charan. On her birthday, the makers shared a picture from the set to extend their wishes, which led to speculation that it was her look from the film. However, they clarified that the image was not her official look but a candid shot taken during the first schedule in Mysore.

Janhvi took part in the first schedule in Mysore in November 2024 and will soon be joining the ongoing shoot in Hyderabad, which began on Thursday. This 12-day schedule will focus on filming crucial sequences.

Raa Raja is an experimental film: Shiva Prasad

Director B. Shiva Prasad is set to introduce a unique cinematic experience with his experimental film Raa Raja, in which the actors' faces are never shown—a concept rarely explored in mainstream cinema. "These days, content-driven films are doing well, and audiences are supporting them. So, I decided to make a story-driven film without showing the actors' faces," said Shiva Prasad.

Initially a producer, Shiva Prasad started his career with Maathru. However, while working on that project, he conceived the idea for Raa Raja and decided to direct it himself. "That's when I chose to take on this project as both producer and direc-

tor," he shared. Despite not revealing the actors' faces, the film aims to capture all kinds of emotions. "Audiences will still experience love, comedy, horror, and every other emotion. The film will keep them engaged and entertained until the end," he assured. He further added, "We made this film to offer a unique theatrical experience. Even though the actors' faces aren't shown, the film won't feel incomplete. I hope audiences support this experimental project."

Raa Raja is set to release on Friday, March 7. The filmmaker also revealed that he has several projects lined up, including one with veteran actress Suhasini Maniratnam.



I AM A BIG FAN OF PAWAN KALYAN: DIVYA BHARATHI

Music director-turned-actor GV Prakash Kumar is gearing up for the release of Kingston, which hits screens on March 7 in Tamil and Telugu. The film stars Divya Bharathi as the female lead. Having played a small role in Maharaja, a film that turned out to be a massive success, she is now reuniting with GV Prakash after their previous collaboration in Bachelor.

"Compared to Bachelor, Kingston is completely different. It's India's first sea adventure thriller. I am also excited that this is GV Prakash Kumar's first film as a producer. He has put in immense effort, and I'm really happy to be a part of this project," said Divya Bharathi.

The actress also performed action sequences for the first time. "Doing action scenes was a thrilling experience. I even performed rope sequences, and that's when I realized how tough action scenes can be! I've already watched the film, and I'm really happy with the final result," she said.

Playing a village girl in the film, she revealed that Kingston is set to become a franchise. "Yes! My character will continue in the upcoming sequels," she confirmed.

Divya Bharathi has also ventured into Telugu cinema with GOAT opposite Sudigali Sudheer and is improving her Telugu-speaking skills. "My assistant is Telugu-speaking, so I practice with him. That's how I'm learning the language," she shared. The actress further revealed that she has completed two Tamil films and is currently in talks for two Telugu projects. She ended on an enthusiastic note, expressing her admiration for Power Star Pawan Kalyan. "I'm a huge fan of Khushi! And, of course, I love Pushpa Raj, Allu Arjun," she said.



Telangana Speaker Supports Mr. Reddy Team at Teaser Launch

T. Narasimha Rao (TNR), popularly known as Gold Man Raja, is making his acting debut in Mr. Reddy, a film that he is also producing. The teaser was launched by Telangana Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad, who extended his best wishes to the team.

Lead actor TNR expressed his gratitude to the Speaker and other dignitaries at the event. "We have all worked hard on this film, and I hope everyone supports our efforts," he said, adding that the release date will be announced soon. Directed by debutant Venkat Voladhri, the film brings together a team of fresh talents. "Most of us are newcomers, and we have put in our best efforts to make this film a success," the director shared.

Several politicians, including Patnam Sunitha Reddy and Nalgonda Gaddar, praised the team's dedication. The film also stars Anupama Prakash, Mahadev, Deepthi, and Bhaskar in key roles.