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Future of cooperatives bright under Modi's leadership:

## Shah

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## INDIA, EU

TO HOLD FTA TALKS AMID TRUMP TARIFF THREATS



8

Inspired by Chiranjeevi, director Viswa Karun gears up for

## DILRUBA



P12

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

The data collected by the KCR admin said that upper castes constituted 21 per cent of the population, while the caste census found that it was only 15.28 per cent. The opposition hatched a conspiracy to suppress the rights of weaker sections and throttle their voices. Some people are trying to block the government's move to provide 42 per cent reservations to BCs at the initial stage itself. The BCs must defeat these conspiracies

— A. Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister

P4

### DON'T MISS...

#### AI centre to be set up in Vizag

Union Minister Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma has stated that Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has agreed to establish an Artificial Intelligence (AI) centre in Visakhapatnam at the request of IT Minister Nara Lokesh. Union Minister Srinivasa Varma, along with Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu, performed 'bhoomi pooja' and unveiled a plaque for the construction of additional classrooms and other facilities at Dasari Narayana Rao Mahila College in Palakollu on Sunday. The project, estimated...

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#### 'Modi changed political culture'

BJP national president J P Nadda on Sunday asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has changed the country's political culture by transforming anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency in the electoral landscape. Nadda, addressing a rally here, also pointed to the increasing vote share in favour of the BJP during the past three Lok Sabha elections. "Now, Modi has changed the country's political culture by transforming anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency. Pro-incumbency means that people..."

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#### US tariff to hit pharma segment

Enhanced tariffs on pharma imports in the US can severely impact Indian drug manufacturers as it would lead to higher production costs, making shipments less competitive against products from other countries. Smaller drug firms operating on thin margins can face severe pressure potentially forcing consolidation or closure. The automobile sector, on the other hand, is expected to have a very minimal impact owing to the US being a small export market. Terming India as...

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#### Mumbai Indians to face Gujarat Giants

With two games left in the league stage, Mumbai Indians will look to make the most of the opportunity and push for a first-place finish on the WPL points table, starting with the clash against in-form Gujarat Giants here on Monday. UP Warriors' win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 12 runs knocked the defending champions out from the race to the playoffs on Saturday, confirming the qualification for Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants in the process. But what remains is the final...

-SPORTS

## TDP announces MLC candidates; Varma left out



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday announced the party's candidates for the MLC elections under the MLA quota. The TDP finalised BT Naidu, Bida Ravichandra, and Kavali Greeshma for the three MLC seats. The last date for filing nominations is March 10.

Of the five MLC posts falling vacant on March 29, 2025, the ruling coalition has allocated one seat each to the Jana Sena and BJP, while the TDP has retained three. Jana Sena has nominated K. Nagababu, who filed his nomination on Friday, while the BJP is expected to announce its candidate soon.

The MLC terms of Yanamala Ramakrishnu, Janga Krishnamurthy, Duvvarapu Rama Rao, BT Naidu, and Ashok Babu will end on March 29. Continued on Page 2

### Ruling party bets on BC/SC leaders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has announced the three MLC seats it recently declared that will be allocated exclusively to candidates from weaker sections of society. This decision reinforces TDP's longstanding commitment to supporting backward classes. As part of an alliance arrangement for five MLC seats, two positions were designated for Janasena and BJP, while TDP revealed its candidates for the remaining three. Of these, two candidates belong to the Backward Classes (BC) and one to the Scheduled Caste (SC). TDP has selected candidates from three different regions. Notably, BT Naidu, a BC community leader from Kurnool district in Rayalaseema, has been given another chance to serve as an MLC.

Continued on Page 2

## ROHIT, RAHUL SHAPE INDIA'S THIRD TITLE TRIUMPH India clinches Champions Trophy



### Beats New Zealand by four wickets

PNS ■ DUBAI

India sealed an unprecedented third Champions Trophy triumph with an unblemished record as Rohit Sharma combined his inherent freedom with steely resolve to inspire his side to a four-wicket win in a closely-fought final against New Zealand, here Sunday.

India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance in the tournament which they won back in 2002 and 2013.

No other team has won the event thrice.

Well-timed fifties by Daryl Mitchell (63) and Michael Bracewell (53) steered the Kiwis to 251 for seven after Indian spinners led by Kuldeep Yadav applied the squeeze for a large part of their innings. Indian batters needed to capitalise on that fine effort of the bowlers,

and Rohit, who many believe was featuring in his last ODI match for India, led from the front, slipping into his turbo-charged version almost immediately.

The chase of 252 grew tight in the business end while the Blackcaps spinners were operating on a sluggish pitch, but skipper Rohit's ebullient 83-ball 76 had already given them the cushion to overhaul the target in 49 overs. Continued on Page 2

## Pawan's move over Nagababu sparks debate

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief Pawan Kalyan's unexpected decision to nominate his brother, Nagababu, for a Member of Legislative Council (MLC) seat has sent shockwaves through political circles, fueling intense discussions on party loyalty, internal strategy, and leadership priorities.

The move, which deviated from widespread expectations, has particularly unsettled JSP loyalists who anticipated veteran leader Pithapuram Varma to be the natural choice for the nomination.

Former MLA Srivatsavai



Satyanarayana Varma, widely respected within JSP, had previously stepped aside from contesting the Pithapuram Assembly seat in deference to Pawan Kalyan, a gesture that underscored his dedication to the JSP-Telugu Desam Party (TDP) alliance.

His exclusion from the MLC nomination has now

triggered discontent among party cadres, who believe that his commitment warranted due political recognition. Many within the party ranks are now questioning whether merit and loyalty are being sidelined in favor of familial considerations.

Political observers suggest that Pawan Kalyan's decision is a calculated effort to consolidate control within the party's core leadership.

By selecting his brother, he ensures that key power remains concentrated within his inner circle, preventing the emergence of alternative leadership centers.

Continued on Page 2

### JSP chief pulls up party leader for misconduct

VIJAYAWADA: Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan has expressed strong displeasure over the alleged misconduct of the party's Prathipadu in-charge, Varupula Tammayya, towards a local doctor. The incident has sparked widespread discussion on social media. Upon learning about the matter, Pawan Kalyan responded swiftly, criticising Tammayya's behaviour and stressing the need to follow legal procedures and maintain decorum. He has directed party authorities to conduct an inquiry and submit a detailed report. In a directive to the party's Kakinada district in-charge, Pawan Kalyan emphasised the need for appropriate action if any wrongdoing is established. His response highlights his commitment to upholding ethical standards within the party and addressing grievances effectively.

## MP's incentive for third child draws attention

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vizianagaram MP K. Appalanaidu's announcement aligns with similar state-level measures. On International Women's Day, the Chief Minister declared that maternity leave would now be granted to women employees for every child, removing the earlier restriction of full-paid leave for only two deliveries.

Amid calls for population growth from both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Andhra Pradesh Chief



Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Appalanaidu's announcement aligns with similar state-level measures.

On International Women's Day, the Chief Minister declared that maternity leave would now be granted to women employees for every child, removing the earlier restriction of full-paid leave for only two deliveries.

Speaking at a gathering at Rajiv Sports Complex in Vizianagaram, Appalanaidu reiterated his commit-

ment to the initiative. He announced financial incentives for women giving birth to a third child—Rs 50,000 for a girl and a cow for a boy. His proposal has gone viral, particularly among party activists and supporters in his native Ranasthalam mandal, who have actively shared the news on platforms like WhatsApp.

The initiative has not only resonated with the public but has also drawn appreciation from Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, signalling a coordinated effort to encourage family growth in the state.



'Govt, industry must share responsibility for worker safety'

P3

## AP burdened with Jagan's debts: Anam

PNS ■ NELLORE

Endowments Minister Anam Rammarayana Reddy has expressed concern over the massive debts incurred during former Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure, stating that even 20 years may not be enough to repay them.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, the Minister criticised Jagan Mohan Reddy for his lack of respect towards legislative institutions and the public. He accused the former CM of raising questions in press conferences instead of addressing them in the Assembly, alleging that he had no faith in legislative procedures.

He lauded Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for working to rectify the damage caused by the previous YSRCP government and ensuring the implementation of welfare schemes promised to the people. He announced that the coalition government's flagship scheme, 'Thaliki Vandanam', would be launched in the next academic year, providing Rs 15,000 per child in a family.

Highlighting the government's financial management, Anam stated that Naidu is simultaneously repaying the debts left by the YSRCP regime while implementing welfare programmes. He also revealed that under the 'Annadata Sukhibhava' scheme, farmers would receive Rs 20,000 in three instalments as assured earlier.



Highlighting the government's financial management, Anam stated that Naidu is simultaneously repaying the debts left by the YSRCP regime while implementing welfare programmes.

He further noted that funds from the 15th Finance Commission are being directly transferred to gram panchayats. Regarding the Polavaram project, he asserted that it would be completed with the support of the Prime Minister and the Union Finance Minister.

Taking a dig at the Opposition, Anam criticised the YSRCP for boycotting the Assembly session and claimed that the people of Andhra Pradesh would permanently reject the party. Later, he distributed financial assistance under the CRF to 28 beneficiaries.

## Showdown over Waqf, Trump likely

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament's Budget session resumes on Monday amid indications of an 'EPIC' showdown between the government and the opposition which is planning to raise issues such as the alleged manipulation of electoral rolls, the fresh bout of violence in Manipur and India's handling of the Trump administration.

The focus of the government will be on getting Parliament nod for the demands for grants, completion of the budgetary process, seeking approval for the Manipur budget and passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill. Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to move a statutory resolution seeking Parliament approval for the proclamation of President's Rule in Manipur.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is also scheduled to table the budget for Manipur on Monday.

### Parliament Budget session from today



Manipur has been under President's Rule since February 13 after the resignation of Chief Minister N Biren Singh. The opposition said it is set to corner the government over the issue of duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers.

The Trinamool Congress has taken the lead in flagging the issue, following which the Election Commission declared that it would take corrective measures within the next three months.

Continued on Page 2

## Intl airport to come up in Amaravati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has initiated preparations for the construction of two greenfield international airports, one in the capital region of Amaravati and the other in Srikakulam district.

To assess the feasibility of these projects, the Andhra Pradesh Development Corporation (APADC) has invited tenders for consultancy firms to prepare a Technical and Economic Feasibility Report (TEFR). The deadline for online tender submissions is set for March 21, with technical bids to be opened on March 24, followed by financial bids on March 27. The consultants will also suggest suitable locations for the Amaravati International Airport.

The proposed airport in Srikakulam district is planned to be

located northeast of the city, around 70 km away, near the coastline. The consultancy firms will evaluate technical and economic factors influencing the construction and operation of the airports. They will also prepare a master

plan aligning with the latest guidelines, develop financial models, and conduct environmental and social impact assessments.

Additionally, the consultants will estimate construction costs, project phases, potential public-private

partnerships, and revenue forecasts. The APADC has also sought recommendations on opportunities for aviation and defence manufacturing industries near existing airports, keeping in mind future demand and air traffic growth.

The consultants are required to outline the necessary transport infrastructure to ensure seamless connectivity to the airports. They will develop a concept master plan addressing traffic requirements for the next 35 years, including runway and taxiway specifications, aircraft parking needs, terminal designs, and land requirements for non-aeronautical revenue generation.

The APADC has emphasised that all critical details must be included in the consultancy reports for a comprehensive assessment of the projects.





# Monday Mirchi

## GV REDDY VS DINESH KUMAR: CMO LINKS AND POWER PLAY

The drama surrounding GV Reddy's resignation from AP FiberNet had more layers than what met the eye. The real conflict? His complaints against MD Dinesh Kumar, an IAS officer who remained untouchable thanks to strong backing from a key officer in the Chief Minister's Office. Despite serious concerns raised by GV Reddy, nobody could lay a finger on Dinesh, as the CMO officer's close ties shielded him. Adding to the intrigue was the involvement of a 6-foot-tall IAS officer from the CMO, who also lent support to the IAS officer. This standoff reached a boiling point, culminating in GV Reddy's resignation. But the twist came later - after GV Reddy stepped down, Dinesh himself was transferred. Bureaucrats couldn't help but wonder why this wasn't done earlier. Many believe that had the CMO officer's influence not been in play, the situation wouldn't have escalated this far. The larger fallout? The entire episode brought unnecessary controversy, with murmurs in political circles that the way Dinesh handled the situation ended up creating trouble for the ruling TDP party and even the Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

## MINISTER NARAYANA AND IAS OFFICERS AT ODDS, CRDA AND AMARAVATI SLOWED DOWN

Tensions are brewing between Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister Narayana and IAS officers, and the impact is showing - CRDA and Amaravati's progress have slowed down. Though the exact reasons remain behind closed doors, insiders say the working relationship between the minister and the bureaucracy is far from smooth. A little bird tells us that the pace of Amaravati's development has noticeably slackened, with key decisions getting delayed. While both sides continue to engage, there seems to be a disconnect in approach, leading to prolonged processes. With the projects now moving slower than expected, Narayana is said to be growing serious about getting things back on track. Whether this means renewed discussions or a push for faster execution remains to be seen. For now, CRDA's plans are moving cautiously, with Amaravati's progress closely watched.

## CM REVANTH STUCK IN 'SUB-COLLECTOR MODE'? BLAME THE CMO

In Telangana's bureaucratic circles, there's a running joke—Chief Minister Revanth Reddy isn't operating like a CM but more like a sub-collector than a collector. But the finger isn't pointed at him. Instead, all eyes are on the Chief Minister's Office, which seems to have turned his role into a sub-collector-level job. A little bird tells us that the CM is sharp, quick to grasp issues, and politically savvy. But thanks to a sluggish set of officials

around him, his full potential isn't being utilized. One bureaucrat, with a smirk, remarked, "If things don't change, he might soon be an assistant collector under training." The growing concern is that instead of focusing on major policy decisions, the CM is getting bogged down with administrative and media management. Whether this is intentional or a case of poor management remains to be seen. For now, insiders are waiting to see if he reshuffles his team—or continues to be the highest-ranking sub-collector in the state.

## CM REVANTH REDDY'S 'ONE IAS, ONE IDEA' FLOPS

Back in July 2024, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy made a grand announcement—One IAS Officer, One Flagship Idea. Every IAS officer was ordered to submit a flagship initiative within two weeks, a move that was supposed to drive innovation in governance. But months later, these ideas have vanished into thin air. When yours truly went ahead asking officials, many just smiled. A little bird tells us that some IAS officers were never even informed about the CM's directive in the first place. Anyways those who give ideas, found those gathering dust at the Chief Minister's Office. The frustration is real, and murmurs in the corridors suggest that the flagship idea plan was never meant to take off in the first place. So, was this just another headline-grabbing gimmick? Or did someone at the top decide these ideas weren't worth pursuing? Either way, officers have moved on, and the so-called flagship ideas remain just that—ideas.

## TELANGANA'S VANISHING GLOBES: ORDERED, BUT NEVER SEEN

More than a year ago, the Telangana government had a grand idea - every head office should have a globe. Orders were issued, a contractor was assigned, and then... silence. The globes were supposed to arrive, but before they could even grace the offices, they simply disappeared. Now, nobody seems to know where they went. A senior official, half amused and half resigned, quipped, "I can only feel sorry for the contractor." Whether that means the payment got stuck or the globes vanished into an unknown bureaucratic black hole is anyone's guess. Normally, a babu's office is incomplete without a globe perched on a shelf, but in Telangana, even that basic symbol is mysteriously absent. A few officials have noticed the missing globes, but most seem to have forgotten they were even ordered in the first place. So, did someone pocket the globes? Or did they never exist to begin with? Either way, the only thing round in this whole episode is the cycle of government orders disappearing without a trace.

--Yours truly

## Upanayanam event for Brahmin boys praised

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party Central constituency coordinator and former MLA Malladi Vishnu has praised the free conduct of Upanayana ceremonies as a commendable initiative. A grand collective Upanayana event for Brahmin boys was held on Sunday at the Rotary Vignana Mandiram, organised by the Andhra Pradesh Brahmin Seva Sangham. The ceremony, marked by the chanting of Vedic mantras and guidance from spiritual scholars, was attended by Malladi Vishnu and Sri Sri Kamalananda Bharati, the head of the Bhuvaneshwari Peetham in Vijayawada, who blessed the participants.

# Financial empowerment of women key to social progress: Savitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BC Welfare Minister S Savitha has emphasised that the financial empowerment of women is essential for the overall development of society. She stated that the government is committed to fostering women entrepreneurs, ensuring that every household has at least one woman engaged in business. Speaking at an International Women's Day event organised by the State BC Welfare Association, Minister Savitha acknowledged the contributions of former Chief Minister NT Rama Rao and current Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu towards women's empowerment. She noted that



NTR was instrumental in establishing a women's university in the state and promoting equal property rights for women.

Under Naidu's leadership, the government has introduced several initiatives to support women's economic and social progress. These include 33.33%

reservations for women in education and employment and policies encouraging their participation in politics. The establishment of DWCRAs groups has further enabled financial independence among women. The minister also announced free online coach-

ing for women preparing for the upcoming mega DSC (District Selection Committee) exam, aimed at helping homemakers secure teaching positions. She highlighted the development of the Shakti app for women's safety, underscoring the government's commitment to their security. Minister Savitha called for an end to gender bias and urged society to provide equal opportunities for girls in education and other fields. She stressed the need for public support in promoting the welfare and advancement of girls. The event was attended by BC Welfare Association state president Keshava Shankar Rao and other dignitaries.

## YSRCP to hold 'Yuvatha Poru' protest on March 12

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has announced plans to organise a 'Yuvatha Poru' protest on March 12 to highlight the alleged failures of the coalition government. YSRCP State Coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, in a video conference with regional coordinators and district presidents, called for large-scale participation to address issues affecting students, unemployed youth, and the public.

Sajjala criticised the government for failing to release Rs 3,900 crore in fee reimbursement dues, allocating only Rs 2,600 crore in the budget. He claimed this move was aimed at restricting beneficiaries, leading to the expulsion of students from colleges. He asserted that the scheme, introduced by YS Rajasekhara Reddy and expanded by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to cover 93% of students, was being dismantled by the Chandrababu-led coalition, similar to the 2014-19 period.

He also accused the government of renegeing on its promise



to provide 20 lakh jobs or a Rs 3,000 monthly unemployment allowance, requiring Rs 7,200 crore annually, but with no allocation in the budget. Additionally, he alleged a plan to privatise 17 government medical colleges initiated under the YSRCP regime, with five already operational.

Sajjala urged party leaders to organise grand celebrations for YSRCP's formation day on March 12, with flag-hoisting in villages to demonstrate public support. He directed constituency in-charges to form mandal-level committees and called for peaceful protests, including dharnas at district collectorates and submission of grievance memoranda.

# APATA pushes for AP airport upgrades to boost exports

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh Air Travellers Association (APATA) has issued a strong appeal to the state government to prioritise the upgrade of airport infrastructure, specifically demanding the development of advanced warehousing facilities to bolster the export of high-value perishable goods, seafood, textiles, and pharmaceuticals.

In a letter addressed to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, prominent APATA members O. Naresh Kumar, Dr. K. Kumar Raja, and D.S. Varma outlined critical infrastructure deficiencies following a post-budget meeting with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Visakhapatnam.

While acknowledging Andhra Pradesh's impressive economic strides, fuelled by significant investments and



increased agricultural output from projects like Polavaram, the association stressed a key barrier to further growth: the lack of temperature-controlled air cargo warehouses. This deficiency forces local producers to rely on airports in neighbouring states, adding significantly to their shipping costs and putting them at a competitive disadvantage.

"The absence of specialized storage is severely limiting our ability to export," explained O. Naresh Kumar, speaking for

APATA. "Our businesses are missing out on key opportunities because of these logistical hurdles." To address this, APATA is calling on the state government to accelerate the creation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for major airports, including those in Vijayawada, Rajahmundry, Tirupati, and the upcoming Bhogapuram Airport. These reports are crucial for securing vital funding from federal ministries to finance the needed infrastructure enhancements.

## Pawan's move over...

Continued from Page 1

However, this approach could come at a steep cost, as it risks alienating dedicated party members who have long advocated for greater representation of grassroots leaders. With the TDP conceding JSP's choice for the MLC seat, speculation is mounting over the broader implications of this move. Is JSP prioritizing familial ties over experienced party workers? The way the party leadership manages the resulting unrest will be crucial in determining its unity and long-term strength.

Political strategist Anil Reddy weighed in on the controversy, remarking, "Pawan Kalyan's leadership style has always been unconventional. Opting for Nagababu over Varma may be a strategic move to maintain cohesion at the top, but it also risks disenfranchising party loyalists who were expecting a more inclusive selection process." Reports indicate that Pawan Kalyan had previously assured Varma of a key role, raising questions about whether this decision is part of a broader strategy or a shift in JSP's internal priorities. The party's next steps will be crucial in addressing concerns and preventing further discontent from spreading among its rank and file.

As Andhra Pradesh's political landscape continues to shift, this decision could have significant repercussions. If mishandled, it may deepen internal rifts and weaken JSP's grassroots momentum. However, if Pawan Kalyan successfully reassures his supporters and offers Varma a meaningful political role, he may be able to turn the situation in his favor, reinforcing his leadership and stabilizing party cohesion. Ultimately, this nomination marks a pivotal moment for JSP. Whether it strengthens the party's position or leads to internal discord will depend on how Pawan Kalyan navigates the growing concerns within his ranks. His ability to strike a balance between loyalty, strategy, and inclusivity will shape the future trajectory of the party.

## Dry weather likely in AP in next 7 days

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Dry weather is likely to prevail in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next seven days, the Meteorological Centre said on Sunday.

A daily weather report here said that the maximum temperatures are likely to be above normal by 2-3 degree Celsius in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next five days.

Dry weather prevailed in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours. The highest maximum temperature of 39.4 degrees Celsius was recorded at Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday, the report added.



Continued from Page 1

KL Rahul with his 34 not out, there was no dramatic twist to the tale, leading the side past the finish line after India lost well-settled batters.

Pacer Nathan Smith, who replaced injured Matt Henry in the line-up, felt the heat as the 37-year-old Rohit hammered him for two sixes and as many fours in the beginning of the chase.

At the other end Shubman Gill (31), who helped Rohit to raise 105 runs for the opening wicket, was more subdued and the lone spark in his innings was a maximum off spinner Rachin Ravindra.

But a stunning catch by Glenn Phillips off left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner ended his stay, and opened a creek for the Kiwis.

Virat Kohli came to the middle accompanied by loud cheers but his stay lasted just two balls, an effort to turn Michael Bracewell off his pads saw the master batter getting trapped plumb in front.

By now, Rohit had decided

to knuckle down after racing 49 in the Power Play segment. In the next 16 overs the Mumbai man added only 27 runs more to his score, as he tried to play a rather forgotten role of innings builder.

His belief in his own defence too seemed to have come back as he smothered Santner and Bracewell quite effectively.

It ended when his charge against Ravindra resulted in a stumping by Tom Latham. India were 130 runs away from a win at that juncture.

India were 122 for three then and needed some consolidation. Shreyas Iyer (48) and Axar Patel (29) gave them precisely that during a 61 runs stand for the fourth wicket.

They carried India closer to the shore but Shreyas, who was dropped on 44 by Kyle Jamieson off Phillips, fell four runs later to Santner and Axar too perished to Bracewell.

But those dismissals only created artificial excitement as a focused KL Rahul (34 not out) helmed India's march home.

But the Indian spinners also

can rightfully claim a good chunk of credit for this victory.

Kuldeep (2/40) and Varun Chakravarthy (2/45) were excellent alongside Axar and Ravindra Jadeja as the quartet conceded only 144 runs in the 38 overs bowled between them.

However, the start made by New Zealand did not justify the total that they eventually managed.

They raced to 69 for 1 in 10 overs despite losing Will Young to Chakravarthy, who came in the sixth over. But the introduction of Kuldeep 11th over changed the complexion of the game.

With his first ball, Kuldeep consumed Ravindra, who failed to read a wonderfully concealed googly that disturbed his stumps.

It also ended a good 57-run opening stand, in which Ravindra, who punished Hardik Pandya for a six and two fours in row, was dropped on 28 by Mohammed Shami off his own bowling.

In the very next over, Kane Williamson's forward prod off

the left-arm wrist spinner eventuated in a return catch as the Kiwis slipped to 75 for three in 12.2 overs.

The four-pronged Indian spin attack assumed control of the proceedings from that point, and New Zealand could not find a boundary for the next 81 balls.

Kuldeep and Varun found an appreciable turn off the deck. Axar and Jadeja, however, relied more on quickness to cramp Kiwis batters for space, and both the methods were equally effective on the day.

Chakravarthy also mixed his endless ensemble of tricks and accounted for Phillips to end a promising 57-run alliance for the fifth wicket. However, Mitchell, who cleverly manipulated the field for singles and twos, brought up his fifty in 91 balls.

His twin boundaries off Shami in the 46th over indicated a late charge.

He also stitched a useful 46-run partnership with Bracewell, who played some hefty shots, for the sixth wicket before falling to Shami.

Continued from Page 1

The Election Commission had rejected the Trinamool Congress claim that the voter lists were manipulated to allow voters from other states to exercise their franchise in West Bengal.

The poll body also made it clear that while the EPIC numbers of some voters "may be identical", other details such as demographic information, Assembly constituency and polling booth are different.

Trinamool Congress leaders are meeting the Election Commission on Monday and have also rallied other opposition parties, including the Congress, DMK, Shiv Sena-UBT, to raise the issue in both Houses of Parliament during the second part of the Budget session.

For the government, the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill is a priority. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said at the India Today Conclave last week that the government is keen on the early passage of the Waqf Amendment Bill as it will solve many issues of the Muslim community. A Joint Committee of Parliament submitted its report on the bill in the Lok Sabha amid vociferous protests by the opposition. Issues such as the fresh violence in Manipur, the threat of reciprocal tariffs by US President Donald Trump, the political furore over the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies are also expected to find an echo in Parliament. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said the opposition INDIA bloc leaders will hold "extensive consultation" to jointly oppose the Waqf bill. Ramesh also said the Congress will also keep raising the issue of irregularities in the election process, alleging that elections are "no longer free and fair" and are being "masterminded and orchestrated".

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**

Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha

Tithi: Ekadashi: Mar 09 07:45 AM to Mar 10 07:44 AM

Dwadashi: Mar 10 07:45 AM to Mar 11 08:14 AM

Nakshatram: Pushya: Mar 09 11:55 PM to Mar 11 12:51 AM

Ashlesha: Mar 11 12:51 AM to Mar 12 02:15 AM

Rahukalam: 8:00 AM to 9:29 AM

Yamagandam: 10:57 AM to 12:26 PM

Varjyam: 02:24 PM to 04:05 PM

Gulika: 01:55 PM to 03:24 PM

Amritkalam: 06:12 PM to 07:52 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:02 PM to 12:49 PM

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 34°

Humidity: 56%

Sunrise: 6:18 AM

Sunset: 6:16 PM

Updated: March 9, 2025 5:00 PM



**Automatic Signalling System installed at key junctions**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Automatic Signalling System has been established in Vijayawada at significant intersections in accordance with the directives of NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu. The Traffic Department has informed residents that when the red light is activated at these junctions, drivers are required to halt at the designated white line before continuing.

In a press release issued on Sunday, the traffic authorities of the NTR District Police Commissionerate cautioned that non-compliance with traffic signals will result in the Automatic Signalling System recording the vehicle's information.

Any violations will be communicated to command control, which will lead to the issuance of an online challan, the press release said.

Furthermore, the authorities indicated that these signals will also monitor additional violations of the Motor Vehicle Act, such as not wearing helmets or seat belts, carrying excessive passengers on two-wheelers, using mobile phones while driving, traveling against traffic, and operating overloaded vehicles.

**Praja Arogya Vedika opposes PPP model for medical colleges**

**Writes to Chief Minister urging immediate reconsideration of the decision**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Praja Arogya Vedika has voiced its strong and profound opposition to the government's recent decision to implement a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) framework for medical colleges in the State. The organisation firmly believes that the primary responsibility of the government is to protect and promote the health of its citizens. Transferring healthcare, particularly medical education, to private entities through a PPP model raises significant concerns regarding accessibility, affordability, and the fundamental right to health for the residents of the State.

In this context, Praja Arogya Vedika president Dr MV Ramanaiah and general secretary T Kameswara Rao wrote a letter to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, urging an immediate reconsideration of the PPP model for medical colleges. They issued a press release indicating that they had submitted a formal representation to the government,



advocating for a reassessment of the PPP proposal. They stressed that healthcare should remain under government oversight to ensure equitable access and to prevent the commercialisation of vital services.

Moreover, they expressed serious concern regarding the decision to transition 10 out of 17 previously government-run medical colleges to the PPP model, as well as the establishment of new colleges under this framework. They highlighted that this move represents a significant departure

from the government's earlier position. Notably, the government had previously opposed the introduction of self-financing seats and had committed during the last elections to abolish all related Government Orders (GOs), they said. They recalled that this commitment was well-received by the public, and the current decision stands in stark contradiction to those promises.

They stated that despite the assurances given and the clear sentiments of the populace, the government has declared its

intention to advance with the PPP model. They said that this action is viewed as a violation of public trust and a direct challenge to the foundational principles upon which the government was elected. They commented that the privatisation of medical education would result in higher costs, rendering it inaccessible to students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, which would ultimately affect the availability of affordable healthcare professionals.

Furthermore, they contended that the PPP model poses a risk of prioritising corporate profits over public health, potentially leading to a deterioration in the quality and accessibility of healthcare services.

They demanded that the State government promptly revoke its decision to implement the PPP model for medical colleges. In addition, they urged the government to reaffirm its commitment to opposing self-financing seats and to honour the promises made during the election campaign.

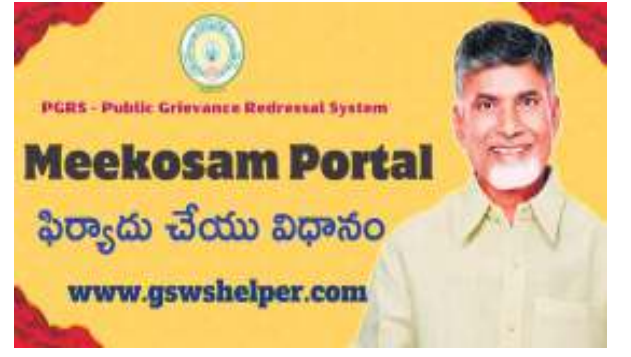
**PGRS to resume from today**

Conducted every Monday, the programme was postponed due to election code

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS), known as Meekosam, is scheduled to take place on Monday in the NTR and Krishna districts, including the Vijayawada and Machilipatnam municipal corporations. District collectors, municipal commissioners, revenue divisional officers (RDOs), and mandal parishad development officers (MPDOs) will be available to receive petitions from the public in order to effectively address and resolve their grievances.

The PGRS, which is typically conducted every Monday, was postponed for approximately 40 days due to the Krishna-Guntur Graduate Constituency MLC election and the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in the former Krishna district from January 30 to March 3.



Now that the Election Commission of India (ECI) has revoked the MCC, the collectors of NTR and Krishna districts have decided to resume the PGRS on March 10.

Following this, NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha, Krishna Collector DK Balaji, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra, and Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation Commissioner Bapi Raju announced the

upcoming Meekosam event on Monday. They encouraged the public to bring their petitions for prompt attention and resolution.

The PGRS programmes will be held at the district collectorates in Vijayawada and Machilipatnam, as well as at the municipal corporation offices. Following these meetings, the Meekosam will also be organised at the RDO, Municipal and MPDO offices. In this context, the two district administrations are fully pre-

**'Govt, industry must share responsibility for worker safety'**

**Stresses necessity of stringent safety measures in industrial zones**

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

The Minister for Labour, Factories, Boilers & Insurance Medical, Vasamsetti Subhash, underscored the shared responsibility of the government and industry in ensuring worker safety at the 54th National Safety Week celebrations in Anakapalli on Sunday. Addressing an audience of workers, industry representatives, and officials, he stressed the necessity of stringent safety measures in industrial zones.

The event, organised by the district administration, began with a safety awareness rally from NTR Stadium to Pentakota Convention Centre. Minister Subhash, alongside District Collector Vijaya Krishnan, inaugurated the programme at the convention hall.

Addressing a gathering of workers, industry representatives, and officials, the Minister highlighted Anakapalli's industrial prominence, housing 884 industries, including 205 hazardous ones, collectively employing around 1,28,000 workers. Indirect employment further amplifies this work-



force, necessitating robust safety protocols. He reiterated that worker well-being is crucial for achieving 'Vikasit Bharat 2047' and Swarnandhra Pradesh's development goals. Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu has established a committee led by Vasudha Mishra to devise industrial accident prevention strategies, with recommendations expected within a month.

Minister Subhash held industry management accountable for fostering a safe work environment. He advocated for daily safety pledges, regular training, and awareness initiatives, urging industries to equip workers with essential protective gear.

He called for collaboration between management, employees, and government agencies to prevent workplace accidents.

District SP Tuhin Sinha reaffirmed the importance of worker training and mock drills in mitigating occupational risks. Yelamanchili MLA Sundarapu Vijay Kumar echoed similar views, emphasising cooperation between management and workers while encouraging employee participation in insurance schemes.

To instil a culture of safety from a young age, student competitions were held, and Minister Subhash awarded certificates and mementos to winners, promoting awareness among future generations. Senior officials, including Factory Department Director Chandra Shekhar Murthy, Joint Chief Inspector J. Siva Shankar Reddy, and District Industries Centre GM Nagaraja Rao attended the programme.

Representatives from NDRF, SDRF, Navy, Fire Services, HPCL, NTPC, and major industries were also present.



**Janardhan Reddy receives public grievances**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Roads & Buildings, Investments and Infrastructure BC Janardhan Reddy has directed officials to expedite the resolution of public grievances. The Minister personally received various petitions from citizens at his camp office in Banaganapalle on Sunday.

The grievance redressal event was flocked by a diverse group of people, including party workers and supporters from across the district. During the event, the Minister assured that the issues raised by the public

would be brought to the notice of the relevant officials for prompt resolution. He mentioned that, for legally valid issues, he was able to communicate directly with officials via phone to facilitate immediate solutions. The Minister's positive response to the grievances brought noticeable happiness among the affected individuals.

Several leaders and officials took the opportunity to congratulate the Minister with bouquets and traditional shawls, acknowledging his efforts in addressing public concerns.

**Collector calls for seamless execution of P-4 survey**

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

District Collector A. Shyam Prasad has instructed officials to ensure a seamless execution of the P-4 survey (Public, Private, People Partnership), which aims to cover 2.65 lakh households in the district. The survey, which commenced on March 8, is part of the government's initiative to combat poverty and enhance the economic and social well-being of households through active collaboration between the government, private sector, and the public.

During a teleconference with the authorities concerned, Collector Prasad emphasised the importance of meticulous planning and instructed officials to conduct the survey systematically on a daily basis. He also suggested scheduling the survey during morning and evening hours when villagers are available, to maximise participation.

In addition to the survey, the Collector instructed officials to take proactive measures to prevent drinking water shortages in both urban and rural areas until the end of June.

This includes field-level inspections of water pipelines and boreholes, digging new boreholes, and executing necessary repairs in areas expe-



**SRM, Carnegie Mellon University join hands for AI research**

**Five-year collaboration aims to enhance knowledge and innovation across various AI disciplines**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP (SRM-AP) has launched a five-year partnership with Carnegie Mellon University's School of Computer Science (CMU SCS), a global leader in artificial intelligence (AI) research and education. This collaboration aims to enhance knowledge and innovation across various AI disciplines, including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, and AI ethics.

The partnership seeks to establish an ecosystem that fosters groundbreaking research and talent development. "Together, we will shape the future of AI and empower the next generation of researchers and industry leaders," said Prof. Martial Hebert, Dean of CMU SCS.

Dr P Sathyanarayanan, Pro-Chancellor of SRM University-AP, noted that the collaboration will facilitate the establishment of advanced AI labs at SRM-AP, serving as incubators for novel research and promoting academic rigor and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Manoj K Arora emphasised the commitment to nurturing future AI leaders, stating that the partnership will provide students with research internship opportunities at CMU's School of Computer Science.

Key initiatives include direct engagement between faculty from both institutions, opportunities for faculty and scholars to audit CMU's cutting-edge courses, and summer research internships for SRM-AP students.

**Minister Anitha pledges support for nurses**

**Highlights women's ability to manage both professional and personal responsibilities**

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

International Women's Day was observed with immense enthusiasm at Andhra Medical College, under the aegis of the Andhra Pradesh Government Nurses Association. The event underscored the indispensable role of women in society, with a special tribute to nurses for their unwavering dedication and resilience in the healthcare sector.

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha graced the occasion as the chief guest, accompanied by MLA Vamsi Krishna Srinivas and NTR Vaidya Seva Chairman Seethamraju Sudhakar. A symbolic cake-cutting ceremony, led by Minister Anitha alongside the nursing staff, served as a heartfelt acknowledgment of their tireless service.

In her address, Anitha lauded the increasing influence of women across diverse domains, highlighting their ability to seamlessly manage both professional and personal responsibilities.



"Women have always been a pillar of strength and an inspiration," she remarked, emphasising the nurturing care exhibited by nurses in their profession. She further underscored the significance of women's empowerment, noting its impact on increased representation and meaningful contributions to society.

Reiterating the government's unwavering commitment to women's welfare, the Minister assured a safe and supportive environment for all women. She encouraged

them to pursue their ambitions with confidence, urging them to harness their potential without hesitation.

Addressing the concerns of the nursing community, the Minister pledged to present their grievances to the Chief Minister. She also advocated for bolstering security in hospitals, proposing the installation of CCTV cameras in every ward at King George Hospital (KGH). Additionally, she promoted the Shakti app as an essential tool for women's safety and empowerment.

**85 pc women experience PMS: Expert**

**Severe PMS can lead to social withdrawal and is classified as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr Madhu Bindhu, a consultant gynaecologist at Manipal Hospital Vijayawada, sheds light on Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), a condition affecting a significant number of women from adolescence to menopause. Characterised by distressing physical, behavioural and psychological symptoms, PMS occurs during the luteal phase, just before menstruation and typically resolves by the end of the menstrual cycle.

It is estimated that 85 per cent of women experience some form of PMS, with around five per cent suffering from severe cases that can disrupt personal and professional lives. Severe PMS can lead to social withdrawal and is classified as Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). The exact cause of PMS remains largely unknown, though genetic and cultural factors may play a role. Notably, about 40 per cent of those affected experience a significant decline in beta-endorphins.

Physical symptoms of PMS are breast tenderness, bloating, headaches, weight gain, and abdominal pain, while psychological symptoms are fatigue, irritability, anxiety, low mood, and decreased concentration.

Diagnosis involves a gynaecological assessment based on the presence of symptoms for at least five days before menstruation, with symptom resolution following the end of the cycle. Conditions such as depression, anxiety, and chronic fatigue syndrome must also be considered in differential diagnoses.

Management strategies for PMS are multifaceted, focusing on lifestyle changes. Dr Bindhu recommends regular exercise, a balanced diet rich in complex carbohydrates and calcium, and adequate sleep. It is also advised to reduce fat, salt, and sugar intake and avoid caffeine and alcohol.

As awareness of PMS grows, understanding its symptoms and management can significantly improve the quality of life for many women.

**Poster released for YSRCP's 'Youth Poru'**

**NDA Govt accused of betraying students by failing to reimburse their fees**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deveneni Avinash, president of the YSRCP in NTR district, has announced that 'Yuvatha Poru', designed to support students, will be held in Vijayawada on March 12, coinciding with its foundation day. The event will be conducted under the guidance of party president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. As part of the initiative, the party plans to organise rallies across the district and present a memorandum to the district collector and other officials.

In connection with this initiative, Avinash released a poster at the party office in Vijayawada on Sunday, in the presence of Municipal Corporation Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi, Deputy Mayor Bellam Durga, and other party officials.

While speaking to the media, Avinash stated that his party is organising the 'Feesu Poru' and 'Yuvatha Poru' to assist students. He accused the TDP-led NDA government of betraying students by failing to reimburse their fees, which has led to significant financial hardships for students in the



State. Furthermore, he noted that during the tenure of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the YSRCP implemented various schemes aimed at facilitating higher education for students. He criticised the NDA government for undermining the future of students, asserting that it came to power based on false promises. He added that the State government has deceived not only students but also young people by failing to deliver on job creation commitments.

In addition, Avinash urged the State government to reinstate the schemes introduced by Jagan to enhance public services. He explained that in celebration of the YSRCP foundation day, a host of programmes will be organised in all villages and towns, including Vijayawada. Former MLA Nallagatla Swamy Das announced that following the directive of Jagan, his party will hold the 'Feesu Poru' event on March 12. He accused the government of attempting to privatise medical colleges for corporate interests. Furthermore, he urged the NDA government to amend its errors. He highlighted the shortcomings in the execution of the Super Six schemes and claimed that the government has discontinued the Vidya Deevana, Vasathi Deevana, and Talliki Vandanam programmes.





## Minister Dola unveils statue of VM Ranga

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjaneeya Swamy unveiled a statue of former MLA Vangaveeti Mohan Ranga Rao at Tangutur mandal on Sunday. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister appreciated the villagers for installing the statue and recalled VM Ranga's services to the poor. He noted that Ranga extended support not only to the underprivileged but also to workers and labourers, actively addressing their concerns.

The Minister remarked that the Kapu Corporation was established during the erstwhile TDP regime to provide financial support to the Kapu community. However, he criticised the previous Jagan Reddy-led government for neglecting the corporation by not allocating funds. Despite financial constraints, the coalition government is implementing all welfare schemes while prioritising development, he asserted. The Minister also clarified that the party high command would decide on nominations for district posts.

## AI centre to be set up in Vizag

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Union Minister Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma has stated that Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has agreed to establish an Artificial Intelligence (AI) centre in Visakhapatnam at the request of IT Minister Nara Lokesh.

Union Minister Srinivasa Varma, along with Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu, performed 'bhoomi pooja' and unveiled a plaque for the construction of additional classrooms and other facilities at Dasari Narayana Rao Mahila College in Palakollu on Sunday. The project, estimated at Rs 1.40 crore, aims to enhance educational infrastructure.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister praised IT Minister Nara Lokesh for bringing transformative changes in the education sector and introducing digital services to provide documents via WhatsApp.

He asserted that industrialists who had left the State during the five-year YSRCP regime were now returning to Andhra Pradesh to set up industries. He also claimed that those who



had migrated to other States for livelihoods were coming back as employment opportunities were improving.

Criticising the previous YSRCP government, he alleged that it failed to complete any major projects and mismanaged government departments. He accused the previous regime of diverting Central funds instead of using them for development.

He said that the current coalition government was ensuring that every rupee received from the Centre was being spent on development, and several pending projects

had been resumed. He expressed confidence that the State would witness rapid progress in the coming years.

Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu stated that the Naidu-led government had prioritised education and healthcare, allocating necessary funds. He praised film director and former Union Minister Dasari Narayana Rao for establishing a women's college in Palakollu.

He criticised the previous YSRCP government for not conducting even a single DSC to fill teacher vacancies or releasing a job calendar. He noted that the coalition govern-

ment had announced the DSC, with examinations to be held soon, and was committed to filling 16,500 vacant teacher posts by the end of the academic year.

He further mentioned that 700 DSC aspirants in Palakollu constituency were receiving free training and study materials.

MLC Borra Gopimurthy also addressed the gathering. College principal Dr P Sobharani, vice-principal C Ravishankar, and BJP district president A Sridevi were among those present at the event.

## Renowned classical musician Garimella passes away

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Renowned classical musician, vocalist, and composer, Garimella Balakrishna Prasad passed away here on Sunday.

He was 76 and he died of massive cardiac arrest in his house on Sunday. Garimella Balakrishna Prasad was the court scholar of the famous hill shrine Tirumala Venkateswara temple.

He is regarded as a pioneer in composing and rendering Annamacharya Sankeertanalu in various Indian musical genres like classical, semi-classical, light and folk styles. He composed tunes for the lyrics of nearly 1400 songs composed by various poets. Of these nearly 1000 of them were Annamacharya Sankeertanas.

To mention a few most popular sankeertanalu set to tune by Prasad were 'Vinaro Bhagyamu Vishnukatha, Jagadapu Chanavula, Vachenu Alamelumanga, Tiruveedhula Merasi, Choodaramma Satulala, Jayalakshmi Varalakshmi, Aadimoolame maaku angaraksha, Mangabudhi Hamumantha, Antayu neeve, Yemani pogadudume, Annimantramulu and Pidikita Thalambala

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock and grief over the sudden demise of Garimella Balakrishna Prasad. He conveyed his sympathies to the bereaved families. IT Minister Nara Lokesh and TTD Board chairman BR Naidu also condoled his demise.

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, expressed profound shock and grief over the demise of renowned classical musician, vocalist, and composer, Garimella Balakrishna Prasad. YS Jagan conveyed his deep condolences to the family members of the late Garimella Balakrishna Prasad prayed for the departed soul to attain eternal peace.

Recalling the invaluable contributions of Garimella Balakrishna Prasad, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy highlighted his distinguished service as a court scholar of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD).



## Minister opens Govt Polytechnic in Repalle

PNS ■ REPALLE

Minister for Revenue, Registration and Stamps Anagani Sathya Prasad on Saturday inaugurated the newly constructed Government Polytechnic College building in Repalle, built at a cost of Rs 8 crore.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Sathya Prasad emphasised the importance of government colleges in providing education to students in remote areas. He assured that all necessary infrastructure would be made available for the polytechnic college and stated that CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funds would be utilised if required for further development.

He lauded the efforts of Education Minister Nara Lokesh in strengthening the education sector from the grassroots level. The government, he said, is ensuring one teacher per



The Minister lauded the efforts of Education Minister Nara Lokesh in strengthening the education sector from the grassroots level. The government, he said, is ensuring one teacher per class and has introduced a midday meal scheme for intermediate students. Parent-teacher meetings are being organised to improve coordination, and students are being provided with free books, uniforms, shoes, and bags to support their education.

class and has introduced a mid-day meal scheme for intermediate students. Parent-teacher meetings are being organised to improve coordination, and students are being provided with free books, uniforms, shoes, and bags to support their education. Encouraging polytechnic stu-

dents to set career goals, he assured them of the government's commitment to education despite budgetary constraints. He noted that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu is prioritising funding for the sector to enhance learning opportunities for students.

## Wedding bells ring for orphan girl

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

The event, organised under the leadership of District Collector Pamela Sathpathy, with assistance from the district machinery, was a grand spectacle. It was a traditional wedding ceremony held at the Kalabharathi Auditorium in Karimnagar. The elders who officiated the wedding were District Collector Pamela Sathpathy and Manakondur MLA Kavyampalli Satyanarayana.

This wedding had a special significance. The wedding ceremony was held for an orphan girl who had grown up in the Balasadan.

The Women and Child Welfare Department organised the event.

On Sunday, the wedding was held at Kalabharathi Auditorium in Karimnagar under the leadership of District Collector Pamela Sathpathy. The girl, who had lost her par-

ents, was looked after by the officials, who took on the role of her parents, ensuring she lacked for nothing. The Collector, MLA Satyanarayana, and other officials stood as the girl's guardians. It gave a message of assurance to orphans, showing them they are not alone.

The girl, Pooja (Monika), was admitted to Karimnagar's Balasadan in 2017 after losing her parents. The authorities took care of her education and well-being there. After completing her intermediate studies, she pursued an MPHW course and was doing an internship when she met Sai Teja, a resident of Manthani in Peddipalli district, and their relationship eventually turned into love. When the girl informed the authorities, they spoke to the young man, and he expressed his intention to marry her. With the approval of the family, the officials arranged the marriage.



## Police conduct cordon and search op, seize bikes

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The police conducted a cordon and search operation at Arunathivada under One Town police limits in Gudur on Sunday.

CI Sekhar Babu said that a police team led by him carried out the operation following the directions of Superintendent of Police Harshavardhan Raju. The team cordoned off the colony and searched all 130 houses.

During the operation, the police seized 13 motorcycles as the owners failed to produce valid documents. Some residents were counselled, and officials warned of stringent action against those involved in criminal activities or drug peddling. DSP Geeta Kumar supervised the operation.



## TTD Board chairman releases wall posters on Vontimitta Brahmotsavam

PNS ■ KADAPA

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) Trust Board Chairman BR Naidu flanked by JEO Veerabrahmam released wall posters, pamphlets related to Vontimitta Brahmotsavam near here on Sunday.

This event took place at the temple premises. Later on the Chairman along with TTD and district officials also inspected Kalyana Vedika, other ongoing arrangements for the annual fete which is set to commence from April 6 onwards. The chairman called on the

devotees to take part in the annual festival and beget the divine blessings.

Meanwhile the construction of the ancient temple of Sri Kodanda Ramalayana was believed to have commenced in the 14th century and lasted upto 17th century with various developments.

Named after two thieves turned ardent devotees Ontadu and Mittadu, the construction of the temple was commenced by Sri Bhukkarau in 1356AD of Vijayanagara dynasty as per available inscriptions.

TTD officials were also present.

## Some forces blocking 42% quota for BCs: Revanth

Says BJP leaders fear an increase in quota for BCs will anger Modi  
Govt to name Asifabad Medical College after Konda Laxman Bapuji

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP leaders fear that any increase in reservations for BCs will trouble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said.

"So after the TG Assembly adopted a resolution on caste census, the BRS and the BJP are criticising it as Modi is drawing flak for not accepting the demand for a caste census across the country," the CM said.

The CM said that data collected during KCR's rule said that upper castes constituted 21 per cent of the population, while the caste census disclosed it was only 15.28 per cent. The CM said the opposition has hatched a conspiracy to 'suppress' the rights of weaker sections and 'throttle' their voice.

The CM said that some forces are blocking the government's attempts to provide 42 per cent reservation to BCs initially and called upon BCs to thwart these conspiracies.

The CM was speaking while attending the Akhila Bharatha Padmashali

Mahasabha meeting at the Nampally Exhibition Grounds on Sunday as chief guest. Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageshwara Rao, CM's Advisor Vem Narendar Reddy, Mineral Corporation Chairman Eravatri Anil, Warangal Mayor Gundu Sudharani and Akhila Bharatha Padmashali Association leaders also attended the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, the CM said the state government had fulfilled the promise made by Rahul Gandhi to conduct a caste census and had completed the enumeration of backward communities. Some political leaders said the caste census was full of errors as they didn't like it, he said.

The CM said the Padmashali community is synonymous with self-respect and sacrifice. Konda Laxman Bapuji sacrificed his post for the cause of a Telangana state. Bapuji made his house the venue for the launch of the second phase of the Telangana Movement and that is a testament to the community's commitment.



He said the BRS government had not honoured such a great person when he passed away and the entire community will not forget this disrespect towards Konda Laxman Bapuji.

The CM said that Tiger A. Narendra was another great leader from the community who fought for Telangana. The Congress-led UPA gave a Union Minister post to Narendra. However, who ruined Narendra's political career, he said. "My government's policy is to render justice to the Padmashali fratern-

ity when opportunities are available. The government convinced the Centre and set up the Indian Institute of Handloom Technology. Recognising Konda Laxman Bapuji's services, the institute was also named after the great leader.

The CM said the Asifabad Medical College will be named after Konda Laxman Bapuji. Agriculture Minister Tummala Nageshwara Rao will take the responsibility for completing the official process, the CM said.

He said the government is supporting handloom weavers by giving an order for One crore 30 lakh sarees worth Rs 600 crore to women's Self-Help Groups. "My job is to meet the demands of the community. I have no other thoughts except to serve the public. I will support the community like a family member as you hold me in your heart," the CM said.

The CM said the Padmashali community of Telangana is playing a key role in elections in other states as well. The government is ready to provide a Rs 1 crore fund to construct a Markandeya Bhavan in Solapur to uphold the honour of the Padmashali fraternity, Revanth said.

"My government will support the community financially and politically and also provide them employment. The government is ready to take some active decisions to ensure the welfare of the community. I am assuring you on this platform that I will stand by you as a brother and uphold your honour," the CM said.

## Turmeric fetches highest price of Rs 13,000/ quintal in TG

PNS ■ NIZAMABAD

Turmeric has fetched the highest price of Rs 13,311 per quintal in the Nizamabad market, with farmers receiving an average of Rs 11,300 per quintal. So far this season, at least 5,00,985 quintals of turmeric have been brought to market, and farmers are celebrating the favorable Minimum Support Price (MSP).

Notably, 80 per cent of the turmeric produced in the state is sold at this market. This year, the absence of heavy rains has averted issues like rhizome rot disease in the turmeric crops. The gola variety is currently commanding

a price of Rs 10,000 per quintal, while the market committee has ensured a minimum price of Rs 10,000 per quintal for finger turmeric and Rs 9,900 per quintal for the gola variety.

The market committee is urging farmers to reduce the moisture content of the turmeric to 12 per cent, significantly lower than the current moisture content of 15-20 per cent, to achieve better prices.

In the 2023-24 season, 7,23,470 quintals of turmeric were brought to the market, compared to 7,49,072 quintals the previous year. This year, however, the quantity of turmeric is expected to sur-



pass last year's total. The estimated yield this year is 30 quintals per acre, up from just 25 quintals last year. Officials predict that at least 1.5 lakh quintals more turmeric will be brought to market this year, with an additional 2.25 lakh quintals expected by the end of this month. The officials also estimate 85,000 quintals will arrive in April and another 65,000 quintals in May. Last year, turmeric was cul-

tivated on 35,000 acres across the state, including 19,000 acres in Nizamabad district. This year, the area under turmeric cultivation has increased to 45,000 acres, with 22,000 acres in Nizamabad district alone.

Muppa Gangareddy, Chairman of the Nizamabad Market Committee, stated that the committee is closely monitoring turmeric trading and has set a cutoff price of Rs 10,000 per quintal. They are also encouraging online bidding through e-Nam and advising farmers to ensure that their turmeric's moisture content remains at 12% to avoid lower bids from traders.

## SRSP canal turns into death trap

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The SRSP canal has turned into a death trap. Authorities who have been turning a blind eye to the loss of lives, with no safety measures in place, are the cause of these deadly incidents. Four years ago, in a similar accident, three people lost their lives. The SRSP and the Roads and Buildings Department officials have so far not reacted to the incidents. The tragic accident claimed the lives of a man and his two children when the car in which they were travelling plunged into the SRSP canal on Saturday.

The helpless children aged two and five were unaware of



what was happening, and sat peacefully on the laps of their parents in the car, unaware of the perilous situation they were in. Their father, after experiencing severe chest pain, crashed the car into the canal. Their mother helplessly watched as her two children were swept away in the canal.

It may be recalled that four years ago, a similar incident

happened when a car fell into the canal and three people died. Yet, the authorities do not seem to have thought of taking steps to prevent the recurrence of such tragedies in future.

It may be recalled that Somarapu Praveen (30) and his two children drowned after their car fell into the SRSP canal. Praveen's family was travelling from Warangal to their native village. At the Thigarajupalli area in Sangem mandal, the car accidentally fell into the canal, leading to the drowning of Praveen, his wife, and his children. Villagers managed to rescue his wife using a rope, but Praveen, his son and daughter drowned in the water.



ACROSS THE STATES



Third accused held in tourist rape, murder case in K'taka

Karnataka Minister Shivraj Tangadagi said on Sunday that the third accused in the tourist rape case in Koppal district had been arrested. Two women, including a 27-year-old Israeli tourist, were allegedly gang-raped and assaulted while stargazing near Hampi, police said on Saturday. The incident occurred on March 6. Tangadagi stated that three individuals were involved in the crime. While two were arrested on March 8, the third accused was apprehended on Sunday. "Three people were involved in this horrific crime, which should never have happened. Two were arrested yesterday, and the third was caught today," said Tangadagi, who is also the Koppal district in-charge minister. He added that he has instructed the police to enhance security for tourists to prevent such incidents in the future. According to police, the third accused was arrested in Tamil Nadu, where he had fled after the crime. Earlier, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said, on the night of March 6, two foreign nationals, including an Israeli citizen, along with two others, went out for stargazing on the banks of the Tungbhadra canal.



Rallies in Kolkata seeking justice for RG Kar doctor

Two rallies were held in Kolkata on Sunday, demanding justice for the doctor who was raped and murdered at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital. The rallies, organised by a section of the civil society to mark seven months of the heinous crime, also condemned the injury suffered by a student on the Jadavpur University campus after being allegedly hit by the vehicle of Education Minister Bratya Basu during a protest on March 1. Both the rallies converged at Rabindra Sadan after starting from Hazra Crossing and Esplanade. The participants in the rallies demanded that all those involved in the rape and murder of the post-graduate trainee doctor be brought to book by the CBI, which is investigating the crime on an order of the Calcutta High Court. Former civic volunteer Sanjay Roy has been sentenced to imprisonment till the end of his natural life by the Sealidah sessions court here after finding him guilty of the gruesome rape and murder of the doctor. The central agency is, however, continuing its investigation into the matter. The parents of the victim have claimed that there were others involved in the crime and demanded that all of those who may be directly or indirectly involved be brought to book.



Two-day women advocates' conference held in Delhi

More than 1,200 women advocates across the country participated in a two-day event on International Women's Day. The All India Conference of Women Advocates concluded on Sunday. It was organised by the Akhil Bhartiya Adhivakta Parishad, Delhi Prant, in collaboration with the National Commission for Women (NCW). International Women's Day was celebrated on Saturday. "The conference comprised in-depth discussions on historical contributions of women and the need for their empowerment," a statement said. "It was attended by over 1,200 women advocates from across the country. The theme was '75 Years of Indian Constitution - Role of Women Advocates for Resurgent Bharat' and both the days were divided into two sessions each," it said. The inaugural session of the conference was attended by Union Minister for Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, Delhi High Court judge Swarana Kanta Sharma, and NCW Chairperson Vijaya Kishore Rahatkar. On Saturday, Delhi High Court Judge Mini Pushkarna delivered the keynote speech, the release said.

Future of cooperatives bright under Modi's leadership: Shah

Says over 60 initiatives taken by cooperation ministry so far

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the future of cooperatives is bright under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and more than 60 initiatives have been rolled out by his ministry since its formation.

Addressing the 'Swarnim Shatabdi Samapan Mahotsav' (golden centenary closing ceremony) of the Ahmedabad District Cooperative Bank, Shah called ADC a big bank for small people that has worked to bring prosperity in the lives of lakhs of farmers and cattle rearers for generations.

"Since (Modi set up the Cooperation Ministry), it has taken more than 60 initiatives. We have ensured the registration of 2 lakh primary cooperative societies in 5 years, including the service cooperative societies and primary milk producers cooperative societies, which are the foundations of the cooperative movement," Shah said.



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The future of cooperatives is bright under PM Modi's leadership, he said. There should not be a single panchayat in the country without a primary service cooperative society or primary milk-producing society. By introducing many model by-laws into society constitutions, they have been associated with several new works, he said.

Shah said such a cooperative society can also open an afford-

able medicine shop, and a quota has been given to them for petrol pumps and gas distribution services. They also get priority in the distribution of subsidised grains, said the minister.

"They can also build godowns and undertake water supply projects. Until the cooperative society is strong, the (cooperative) bank cannot be strong. And until the bank is strong, the dairy sector of the

district or state cannot thrive..." he said. Three national cooperative societies, one each for quality seeds, exports and organic farming, have been registered and the mandals (local cooperatives) are now linked with them, he said.

Out of the country's 260 district cooperative banks, ADC Bank is the only one with 100 per cent e-banking facility as per the RBI guidelines, Shah said.

India cannot allow obesity, diabetes to weaken youth: Jitendra

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

At a time when India aspires to be a developed nation by 2047, the country cannot allow the energy of its younger generation to go waste due to diabetes, obesity and others which are spreading in epidemic proportions, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the annual conference of Diabetes in Pregnancy Study Group of India (DIPSI) here, he said Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about the menace of obesity more than once.

"The relevance of today's subject is that type-2 diabetes mellitus in India is spreading like an epidemic, and so also obesity. So, these all metabolic disorders... every third Indian has a fatty liver," said Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology.

Observing that the country has become the fifth-largest economy in the world and aims to become number one,



Singh said more than 70 per cent of the country's population is below the age of 40.

The architects of India 2047 are the generation which is now growing up to reach the prime of its energy and expertise by that year, he said.

If the energy of youth is allowed to get squandered away because of the metabolic disorders, it would not only be a disservice to a medical cause but also to the service of the nation, said Singh, a medical doctor himself.

"Because, it virtually becomes a national responsibility to preserve their energies, preserve India's huge energy pool for a higher purpose," he said.

No realignment with Nitish: Tejashwi

PNS ■ PATNA

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav got miffed on Sunday when he was asked about the possibility of a realignment with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president, who snapped alliance with his party last year to return to the BJP-led NDA. Yadav, the former deputy CM, was addressing a press conference here after a 'dharna' organised by the RJD over alleged 'theft and eating up of reservations by the NDA'.

When he was asked whether there was a possibility of his joining hands with his former boss and the JD(U) chief ahead of

assembly polls, Yadav shot back, "Why would we join hands? Why are you trying to divert attention from the issue at hand?" It was pointed out to him that in a section of the media, there have been speculations that Kumar, who recently turned 74, was wary that the BJP might push for a leadership change after elections and the RJD was ready to exploit the situation with an 'offer' of realignment.

However, the normally affable Yadav replied sternly "there is no offer from anybody. In my party, only RJD president Lalu ji and I are authorised to take any decision on alliances".

Journalist demands discovery from 'box of evidence' be made public

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Journalist and author Chitra Subramaniam has asked the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to make public its discoveries from the "box of evidence" received from Switzerland on Bofors payoffs which, the former officers said, were used in the probe and submitted before the court as evidence in its charge sheet.

In an exclusive interview with PTI, the author of 'Boforsgate: A Journalist's Pursuit of Truth' said, "We

BOFORS CASE



should be told who opened the box, when it was opened, what was in the boxes."

She also wondered if the commission in the deal was 18

per cent, as suggested by the evidence Swedish firm Bofors gave to the Indian government.

"Secondly, why would George Fernandez, who was then the

defence minister, tell me at the end of 1999 that he was told by Brijesh Mishra not to open the box?"

Subramaniam, who has remained firm in her stance on the issue, said, "The CBI is saying what it has to say. I have to say what I have to say."

Former Director General of Rajasthan Police, O P Galhotra, who played an important role in the Bofors case during his tenure with the CBI, said the agency filed a charge sheet based on documents received from Switzerland.

PM Modi changed nation's political culture: Nadda

PNS ■ AGARTALA

BJP national president J P Nadda on Sunday asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has changed the country's political culture by transforming anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency in the electoral landscape.

Nadda, addressing a rally here, also pointed to the increasing vote share in favour of the BJP during the past three Lok Sabha elections.

"Now, Modi has changed the country's political culture by transforming anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency. Pro-incumbency means that people are happy and want Modi to win again and again," he said. "The BJP polled 17 crore



votes (31.30 per cent) in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, while it shot up to 22 crore votes (36.7 per cent) in the 2019 polls. The figure was around 24 crore votes (37 per cent) in the last Lok Sabha polls (2024). People are blessing Modi ji with more votes every time," Nadda said. The BJP chief was addressing a rally at the Swami Vivekananda Ground here to mark the saffron party-led government's second-year anniversary in the northeastern state during its second term.

Alpha Tocol hands over first real fuselage for LAC Mk1A to HAL

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Private firm Alpha Tocol Engineering Services on Sunday handed over the first rear fuselage for Light Combat Aircraft Mk1A to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the Defence Ministry said. The rear fuselage was handed over at the HAL's Aircraft Division in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, according to a Defence Ministry statement.

Speaking on the occasion, Singh termed the handing over as a milestone in the historic journey of India's defence manufacturing.

"The ceremony is a testimony to India's progress towards Aatmanirbharta in defence and the Government's commitment towards enhanced public-private partnership," he said.

Changes in GST must be more comprehensive than mere rate reduction: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that the GST rates will come down further, the Congress on Sunday said any changes in the tax must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction and stressed the need for a radically simplified and less punitive GST 2.0.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said his party had envisaged a GST 2.0 -- a truly "Good and Simple Tax" -- in its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, and it remains committed to that vision. "The ball is now in the Union government's court-- will they take this historic opportunity?" Ramesh asked in a statement.

"The finance minister has declared that GST rates will be reduced soon. The Indian National Congress reiterates that any changes in GST must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction," he said.

Reducing the tax on caramel popcorn, without fundamentally reforming a system that has three rates of tax for popcorn, is just window-dressing, the former Union minister added. The need of the hour is a radically simplified



"The finance minister has declared that GST rates will be reduced soon. The Indian National Congress reiterates that any changes in GST must be more comprehensive than a mere rate reduction."

and less punitive GST 2.0, he said. "The first objective of GST 2.0 must be to simplify the tax slabs. The three-slab tax system for popcorn and the differential tax rates for cream buns and regular buns are only the tip of the iceberg," he said.

As the Narendra Modi government's former chief economic advisor, Arvind Subramanian, has acknowledged, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has up to 100 different rates, including cesses, the Congress leader pointed out.

Determined to remove every barrier in progress of youths: CM Yogi

PNS ■ MEERUT

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday asserted that the government is determined to remove every barrier in the progress of youths.

Participating in a loan-distribution programme organised at the Chaudhary Charan Singh University in Meerut, where Rs 48 crore was distributed among 1,070 youths from



Meerut and Saharanpur divisions, Adityanath said there is tremendous enthusiasm among the youths about the

'CM Yuva Udyami Scheme' launched on January 24.

He stressed this scheme is an important step towards making youths self-reliant and realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Startup India, Standup India'. According to a government statement, more than 2.67 lakh youths applied against the target of 1 lakh applications under the scheme. Out of these, more than 1 lakh applications

were sent to the banks after screening, and 25,000 of those have been approved and loan distribution started.

"For youths, a challenge is not a challenge if the government stands by them, they can prevail any challenge. The youths of Uttar Pradesh have worked to take themselves forward," he said, adding a new Uttar Pradesh is becoming the base of a New India.

Hindu temple vandalised in US with anti-India graffiti

PNS ■ NEW YORK/NEW DELHI

A prominent Hindu temple in the United States was defaced with anti-India graffiti by unknown individuals, prompting a strong condemnation from India and a demand for "stringent action" against those involved in the incident.

Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) said that its Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills city of San Bernardino County faced desecration. Chino Hills borders Los Angeles County.

"In the face of another Mandir desecration, this time in Chino Hills, CA, the

Hindu community stands steadfast against hate. Together with the community in Chino Hills and Southern California, we will never let hate take root," the BAPS Public Affairs posted on X.

"Our common humanity and faith will ensure that peace and compassion prevail," it said, without providing details of the incident.

India on Sunday strongly condemned the incident and called for adequate security to the places of worship in view of the incident.

"We have seen reports regarding the vandalism at a



Hindu temple in Chino Hills, California. We condemn such despicable acts in the

strongest terms," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal in New

Delhi while responding to media queries on the incident. "We call upon the local law enforcement authorities to take stringent action against those responsible for these acts, and also ensure adequate security to places of worship," he said.

The opposition Congress party also condemned the incident, saying such acts of hatred and intolerance were utterly unacceptable.

"The Indian National Congress condemns in the strongest possible terms, the vandalism of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills, California," Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan

Khera said in a post on X. "Such acts of hatred and intolerance are utterly unacceptable and have no place in any civilized society," he said and demanded action against the desecrators.

Patanjali Ayurved's co-founder Ramdev condemned vandalism at the temple and said India should take the initiative in finding a way to curb "religious terrorism".

Hindu American Foundation, a non-profit advocacy group in the US, said the vandalism at the largest Hindu temple in California occurred on Saturday and demanded the FBI and its Director Kash Patel to probe the matter.

Normal life affected in Manipur as agitators enforce shutdown

PNS ■ IMPHAL/CHURACHANDPUR

Normal life was affected in Kuki-dominated areas of Manipur on Sunday as agitators enforced an indefinite shutdown called by Kuki-Zo groups against a "crack-down by security forces".

The situation in Kangpokpi district, where at least one person was killed and 40 others were injured in clashes between Kuki demonstrators and security forces on the previous day, remained tense but calm on Sunday.

In other Kuki-dominated areas in Churachandpur and Tengnoupal districts as well,

protesters burnt tyres and blocked roads with boulders, which the security forces were seen clearing. However, no fresh violence has been reported so far.

Business establishments remained closed and few vehicles were seen plying the roads in Kuki-dominated areas in the state. Agitators were seen asking people to remain indoors. Additional security forces have been deployed in Gamghiphai and other parts of the district along the NH-2 (Imphal-Dimapur Road) and vehicular patrolling was being conducted to ensure law and order, a district official said.



Editor's TAKE

A promise is a promise!

Delhi Government approves ₹2,500 aid for women despite PM Modi's opposition to freebies

Delhi Government, powered by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, has approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana, a scheme aimed at providing financial assistance of ₹2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections. The initiative, a key promise made during the BJP's election campaign in Delhi, is expected to cost the exchequer ₹5,100 crore. The eligibility criteria for the scheme include an annual income cap of Rs 2.5 lakh and an age range of 18 to 60 years. The Delhi Chief Secretary, along with other officials, has finalised these conditions, ensuring that the financial aid reaches the most deserving beneficiaries. However, the announcement understandably will concretise over a period of time as no date for disbursement has been declared yet, despite earlier promises of payments beginning on March 8. Besides, it has also been pointed out that the eligibility criteria were not communicated to voters during the election campaign. In its layout, the Mahila Samridhi Yojana seeks to ward off any criticism of the so-called "freebie culture," which political parties across the spectrum accuse each other of.

Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has often warned of excessive populist schemes could that burden State finances and harm long-term economic stability. He has advocated for welfare measures that promote self-reliance rather than direct cash benefits. It is hoped that the Delhi Government would acknowledge the Prime Minister's warning and ensure that welfare measures are not just a tool to secure electoral victories.

BJP national president JP Nadda himself launched the scheme, congratulating the Chief Minister for allocating the funds for its execution. Ms Rekha Gupta has a tight financial rope to walk on, considering she bemoaned the appalling fact of Delhi's empty coffers when she assumed office. Admittedly, Delhi has already allocated itself subsidies which are worth thousands of crores, a probe into which the Government must initiate post haste. The subsidies given by the Kejriwal Government in the past decade have increased manifold, inquiries into which ought to be the present Government's utmost priority. The highest subsidies have been allocated to the power, water and transport sectors. Delhi's power subsidies rose from ₹292 crore in 2014-15 to a shocking ₹3,600 crore by 2024-25. The free water provided by the Kejriwal Government was another big drain on the exchequer. The past decade has spawned an invincible Water Mafia culture in Kejriwal's erstwhile strongholds which merits an independent action. Water subsidies rose from ₹21 crore in 2014-15 to ₹500 crore projected for 2024-25. Free bus travel for women cost a whopping ₹115 crore in 2019-20. In 2014-15, the total subsidy doled out was ₹1,555 crore. This figure nearly doubled in 2015-16, soaring to ₹3,018 crore. While it remains to be seen how Ms Gupta delivers on her promise to fellow women citizens, what needs to be clearly factored in is the figure of ₹5100 crore and how best to manage the resources for it.

The approval of the Mahila Samridhi Yojana initiative is expected to strengthen the BJP's party's appeal among women voters, a crucial demographic in electoral politics. Therefore, the real success of the scheme will depend on its swift and transparent implementation. With opposition parties already raising concerns over delays and additional conditions, the Delhi Government must ensure that the scheme does not remain a mere electoral promise and delivers tangible benefits to the intended beneficiaries. As the political landscape of Delhi continues to evolve, the implementation of welfare schemes such as this will play a pivotal role in shaping the public's perception of the ruling party. The question remains whether the BJP can balance its ideological opposition to freebies with the electoral necessity of welfare measures. Indeed, the politics is the art of possible.

Judiciary under malicious attack by influential groups

In a democracy, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. However, unless there is a measure of restraint, judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity stand debilitated

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked, "Events crowd in upon us in such quick succession that we are apt to miss their true significance." This is particularly true of the unhealthy drift of recent events in the Supreme Court of India. The customary reverence formerly paid to judges of the Supreme Court is being systematically deflated. Pernicious attacks on the judiciary have become commonplace. Many are made by political parties and politicians. Some politicians who are distinguished members of the Supreme Court Bar, see enormous mileage in pursuing that course. But even beyond politicians, the attacks have been made with impunity by the media, academicians and limbs of the law. The recent spate of malicious attacks on our former most respected Harvard educated Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, particularly after he hung up his gloves on November 10, 2024, has shocked the conscience of all right thinking people who cherish and value democracy, the rule of law and the independence of the Judiciary. All I can say is that that the vicious attack of calumny and vilification set in motion against Chief Justice Chandrachud in the print, visual, broadcast and internet media, and that too without any cogent basis or tangible evidence, by vested political interests and ventilated by unscrupulous lawyer politicians (who ostensibly owe their allegiance to the Supreme Court) is a most ignominious development that deserves to be condemned by one and all in the strongest possible language. It is indeed lamentable that such personal and political attacks, led by politicians, politician lawyers and lawyers, have gone too far, nay crossed the 'Lakshman Rekha'.

They have sometimes been devised to undermine the fundamental independence of judges of the highest judiciary, even to attempt to daunt judges or to sway the outcome of cases and to depreciate their irrefragable impartiality and integrity. The unconquerable power of democracy and the Rule of Law are being sought to be subverted and subjugated in a most sinister and malicious manner.

Behind the façade of the attacks on the judiciary, I see the evil hand of certain political parties (even invisibly supported by foreign forces inimical to India's interests) to dislodge the smooth functioning of the highest court of the land by means foul rather than fair. In a democratic society, some criticism of the judiciary is inevitable. This is especially so at a time when there is a grow-



ing understanding of the inescapable choices which are open to judges. Just as decisions of the other branches of the government attract criticism, important and controversial decisions of the courts will inescapably do the same.

Into this ambience has been impregnated the technology of the modern media of communications. Unless there is a measure of restraint, the judicial institutions will be damaged and judicial integrity debilitated. The following features of the recent attacks on the judiciary have been distinctly intemperate. The personal targeting of identified judges. The attempt to intimidate them or to deflect them from fidelity to their oath of office to decide each case strictly on its merits. The unrelenting character and partisan political aspect of the attacks. A censurable feature of the barrage which cannot pass unnoticed is how a woman judge, who was the first lady judge to have been honoured with a well-deserved elevation straight from the Bar to the Bench, was singled out for a studied attack by a senior lady member of the Bar in April, 2018 before her swearing in. In April, 2018, there was also an unholy attempt to impeach another former Chief Justice of India supported by seven disgruntled opposition parties. Targeting judges, identifiable because of their sex, race or other minority considerations, attacking them by over-simplified and inaccurate generalisations, caters to public prejudice.

Such conduct is unworthy of our country that indefatigably claims to uphold fundamental rights and the rule of law. In the face of the onslaught, and under fire, there are a few strategies available to the judiciary. It would be a reprehensible judicial response



ANOOP BOSE

to cave in to the pressure and to do exactly what the politicians, editorialists or other powerful interests desire. This would be a complete abdication of the judicial system. It, therefore, rests increasingly on the organised legal professionals to defend the judiciary, to correct blatant misinformation and to remind politicians, the media and others of the precious heritage of judicial neutrality and independence which we have enjoyed so proudly. In India, independence and conscientiousness are cherished features of the judiciary. Institutional protection for those features must be sustained.

Political attempts to undermine them should be spurned. Leaders of the legal profession, irrespective of their personal political leanings, should speak up where judges are unjustly assailed by politicians and others for carrying out their independent role. The increasingly adversarial and belligerent nature of our public discourse should not become contagious to the erosion of the balanced relationship of the judiciary with other branches of the government.

Legislators, members of the Executive Government and the judiciary should realise that each branch has its distinct part to play, without which constitutional government would falter and fail. But a genuine desire to protect and preserve the rule of law and the dignity and majesty of the highest court of the world's largest working democracy. In this context, it would not be out of place to men-

tion that our first President Dr Rajendra Prasad, himself an outstanding lawyer, described this "noble edifice" as the 'Temple of Justice' on the occasion of the inauguration of the new Supreme Court building on August 4, 1958 in the august presence of Prime Minister Nehru, Vice President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Chief Justice Sudhi Ranjan Das, his son-in-law Asoke Kumar Sen, the Union Law Minister and my senior and guru, Lok Sabha Speaker Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, and Attorney General Motilal Chimanlal Setalvad.

In conclusion, I am highly emboldened to commend to readers the stern message delivered by Justice Jamsheer Burjor Pardiwala of the Supreme Court at the Second Justice HR Khanna Memorial Symposium on July 3, 2022, "Personal attack on judges for their judgements lead to a dangerous scenario where the judges have to think about what the media thinks, rather than what the law says."

This puts the rule of law on the burner, social and digital media are primarily resorted to expressing personalised opinions more against the judges, rather than a constructive critical appraisal of their judgments. This is what is harming the judicial institution and lowering its dignity. This is where digital and social media need to be regulated throughout the country to preserve the rule of law under our Constitution in India, which cannot be defined as a completely mature or defined democracy, social media is employed frequently to politicise purely legal and constitutional issues."

(The author is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and Tribunals in India. Views expressed are personal)

Whither the women of this country?

SECOND Opinion



PAYAL AGARWAL

Accelerate Accelerate action is a call for urgency, inclusion, and transformative change. It underscores that equality cannot wait and that all sectors of society must work together to hasten progress toward women's rights and empowerment. The responsibility for accelerating this change primarily lies with institutions, particularly the government. Effective policy changes and awareness campaigns that challenge deeply ingrained societal norms are crucial.

While the Government of India has placed women's education and empowerment at the forefront of its agenda — an effort worthy of commendation — the critical question remains: What about their security? According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a total of 4,32,256 cases of crimes against women were registered across India in 2022 — an alarming statistic that translates to nearly 51 FIRs being filed every hour. These cases include rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and dowry-related violence, marking a four per cent increase from the previous year. However, the NCRB also clarified that the rise in registered cases does not necessarily indicate an increase in crime but rather a greater willingness among victims to report incidents.

While urban areas have witnessed increased awareness

and reporting, rural regions still struggle with underreporting due to social stigma and a lack of support systems. A report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed that 151 sitting MPs and MLAs have declared cases related to crimes against women in their election affidavits.

West Bengal has the highest number of lawmakers (25) facing such cases, with 16 sitting MPs and MLAs accused of rape. While the BJP leads in such cases, Congress and other parties are not far behind. These numbers are not just statistics—they represent silent battles fought daily by women at home, on the streets, in workplaces, and even within political corridors.

Protecting the dignity of women is the Government's duty, yet it is deeply ironic that political parties, both at the State and Central levels, sometimes shelter individuals accused of crimes against women for electoral gains. Whether it is Sheikh Shahjahan of TMC or Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of BJP, such instances raise serious concerns about political accountability.

The BJP Government claims significant progress in empowering women, yet the party itself has 134 sitting MPs and MLAs facing charges of crimes against women. Congress follows with 25, with AAP close behind. India ranked 128th out of 177 countries in the 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Index, which assesses women's status based on three dimensions: Inclusion (economic, social, and politi-

cal), Justice (formal and informal discrimination), and Security (individual, community and societal levels). This ranking reinforces the urgent need to accelerate action. In response to growing concerns, the Central Government has extended its flagship

women's security scheme until 2025-26 to curb crimes against women. However, ensuring women's safety requires a multi-pronged approach, including stringent laws, robust security measures, swift justice, timely redressal of complaints, and accessible institutional support for victims.

At its core, the persistence of gender-based violence is deeply rooted in India's complex social fabric, where patriarchal norms, economic disparities and cultural traditions intersect to perpetuate inequality. This systemic injustice not only denies women their right to live with freedom and dignity but also hinders societal progress. Meaningful change requires a shift in mindset—starting at home. As the saying goes, "Gender equality begins at home," and by fostering a culture of respect and equality, we can empower the next generation to build a fairer world. According to the World Economic Forum, at the current pace of progress, achieving full gender parity will take until 2158 — approximately five generations from now. The question we must ask ourselves is: Can we afford to wait that long, or will we take action now to accelerate change?

(The writer is a lecturer in Political science, Jawaharlal Nehru College, Kuanpal, Cuttack; views are personal)

Leaderspeak



I urge the CM of Tamil Nadu to draw inspiration from other states that have taken steps to offer medical and engineering education in their native languages. It is my sincere wish that Tamil Nadu also introduce such courses in Tamil.

AMIT SHAH, MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



Letters to the Editor

Unique ID for voters

Madam — India's democracy is set to create a new milestone in its journey toward becoming more robust and transparent. Under the initiative of the Election Commission, nearly one billion voters in the country will now be assigned a unique identity, making the electoral process more transparent, secure and error-free. This step will not only simplify voting but also eliminate issues like fraudulent voting and duplicate voter names. In today's digital era, it was essential to make voter identification more effective. By adopting a digital system, the Election Commission is ensuring that duplicate names are removed from voter lists and each voter is assigned a distinct identity, thereby strengthening the democratic framework. This initiative will enhance voter credibility, ensuring fair and impartial elections.

Eliminating the problem of duplicate EPIC numbers will provide every voter with a unique identity, preventing any misuse of voting rights. Moreover, this initiative will pave the way for future advancements such as e-registration and digital voting, making the electoral process more transparent and convenient. This historic step will further deepen public trust in democracy. Now, every citizen will be able to exercise their voting rights without any doubts or obstacles. This initiative will serve as a milestone in steering Indian democracy towards the digital era.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Russian strikes on Ukraine

Madam — US President Donald Trump on Friday, March 7, 2025, threatened serious sanctions against Russia for attacking Ukraine. Russia launched a wave of aerial bombings early Friday, hitting Ukraine with 67 missiles and 194 drones, according to Kyiv. Most of them were intercepted, but some did make it through, hitting gas and power facilities. These threats were the first strong warnings for Russia from Trump, who had, during the election campaign 2024, claimed the war would be over on the day he took office and even before.

He had then, as now, also claimed Russia would have never invaded Ukraine if he was still president. The second claim cannot be tested, but the first, his confidence in finishing the war, is being tested, as the war has been on for two months now after the start of his second term. Trump has managed to strong-arm Ukraine into getting ready for a ceasefire and a final settlement. After a heated exchange with President Volodymyr Zelensky at an Oval Office meeting, he announced a pause in all US aid to Ukraine, stopping even the exchange of intelligence. Mollified by a "regret" letter from Ukraine, Trump has said he is ready to work with Zelensky towards peace. Officials of the two sides are to meet next week for talks, including on a US-Ukraine agreement that will grant Washington rights in Ukraine's rich reserves of rare earth minerals.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Unfair criticism of Shami

Madam — The statement from the All India Muslim Jamaat President Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Bareilvi's criticism against the Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami is quite shocking. The cleric stated that fasting during Ramadan is an obligatory duty in Islam, and anyone who deliberately avoids it is committing a sin. The Indian cricketers have been held in high esteem worldwide not just for their passion towards the game but also for their patriotism towards the nation when it comes to delivering their best on the field. I can bring up the incident of the past when Mohammed Siraj lost his father in November 2020 while he was with the team on his tour of Australia. Though he was given the option of returning home, the pacer chose to stay back with the team for the series.

It was such an emotional moment even for the fans when he shared later that he went to his father's graveyard straight after landing in Hyderabad. The traumatic state was fought out by Siraj then because of his commitment towards national duty. The same is the case here with Mohammed Shami, whose commitment towards the game is well known and who is delivering his might in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah in the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy. When the game of cricket unites all religions, it is unfortunate that the cleric, by his remark, has brought out unreasonable division among religions and is unpardonable as per Islam.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

TRUMP IMPOSES RECIPROCAL TARIFF

The United States of America is all set for rolling out the reciprocal taxation policy for the world. And his particular taxing targets are China, Brazil and India, all the major BRICS countries, along with Canada, the EU and Mexico.

Donald Trump claims their tariff rates are unfair for US products. Trump claims that India charges more than 100 per cent tariff rates, whereas South Korea charges four times higher tariffs on the USA. This is a clear indication of the fact that this time Trump 2.0 is actually trying to establish fair trade conditions, at least from the American domestic perspective. His wish to play fair on the tariff ground against those nations that have charged tremendously higher amounts of tariffs on America will become a costly affair for the respective targeted countries. Although Trump achieving this trade fairness is definitely a challenging task. As the nation will feel, it is challenging to adjust themselves to the new reciprocal tariff system.

The opinion of Trump to achieve this trade fairness is welcoming, as every country has the right to bargain, compete and charge

the tariff for protecting their local businesses. But at the same time, the US must not forget that the world is still on the juggernaut of unfair competition, resource and income divide. Still, the developing countries stand nowhere in comparison to the trade figures of the developed nations. In such a trade paradox milieu, the idea of tariff fairness and equity seems a little vague. Trump must pave the way for fair trade opportunities before initiating the idea of tariff fairness and reciprocity.

Trump must understand that no nation can grow unilaterally; we all need each other for our holistic development altogether. Trump must understand that America is a hegemonic state, and it holds its accountability for setting a balanced world order. It just can't do tit for tat with the world, calling it fairness. At the same time, Trump must stop taking help from Elon Musk, a smart capitalist. Since the administration of America is not like the running of a company, where risk-bearing is conditioned for profit only. Sometimes, our loss is the genuine profit of others, and we have to do so to pave the way for an equivalent and just society.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur



# Bangladesh's National Citizen Party: A new dawn or fleeting revolution?

On February 28, 2025, Bangladesh witnessed the birth of the National Citizens Party (NCP), or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali. Emerging from the embers of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM)—the very force that toppled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024, the NCP represents both hope and uncertainty

The National Citizens Party (NCP) or Jatiya Nagorik Party (NJP) in Bengali, was born in Bangladesh on February 28, 2025. It is a progeny of the student leaders who spearheaded the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from power on August 5, 2024, and the National Citizens Committee (NCP) or the Jatiya Nagorik Committee (JNC), that emerged from the same political cradle on September 8, 2024. The country was pregnant with it for almost seven months. A report by Reuters, datelined August 16, 2024, and issued under the heading 'Student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution,' quoted Mahfuz Alam, who then chaired a committee charged with liaising between the interim government, which had assumed office on August 8, and groups like teachers and activists, that the decision to form such a party would be known in about a month. It further quoted Alam, who had been a key leader of the ADSM and is now an adviser to the interim government, as saying, "People are tired of the two political parties (obviously the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party). They trust in (sic) us."

According to the report, Nahid Islam, another of ADSM's important leaders, who resigned as an adviser on February 25 and is now the convener and leader of the NCP, said that the spirit of the students' movement was to build a new Bangladesh where no fascist or autocrat could return. He had added, "To achieve that, we need structural reforms, which will undoubtedly require some time." Nahid further stated that the government was not heeding calls by the Awami League and BNP to hold new elections as early as the fall (of 2024). Another Reuters' report by Ruma Paul, Krishn Kaushik, Deviyot Ghoshal and Krishna N Das, carried under the headline "Insight: Bangladesh student protesters eye new party to cement their revolution" and datelined August 16, 2024, however, cited Alam as having said on Facebook that his statement to Reuters "had come out wrong" and that "We are not thinking about political organisations right now."

The main focus was to maintain the spirit of the mass uprising and to consolidate the government. Others also expressed the same view.

Statements, denials and volte faces—nothing new in politics—often reflect tensions and conflicts kept under wraps. Was Alam under pressure to retract or deny his statement? One does not know. There, however, have been indications of differences among both leaders—called coordinators—and rank-and-file of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD), the moniker given to the organisation emerging out of the ADSM, even in the heady immediate aftermath of the formation of the interim government led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Thus, a report in *The Daily Star*, datelined August 16, 2024, stated that a coordinator and four assistant coordinators of Chittagong University's ADSM had resigned from their posts, alleging that the central coordinators took unilateral decisions and ignored their demands. According to another report in the *Daily Star* datelined January 3, 2025, eight persons were injured in Khulna town in a clash among ADSM supporters.

There have been several reports of internal conflicts and tensions. According to a report in Prothom Alo English, adherents of the ADSM blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for an hour on February 24, 2025, demanding the dissolution of the organisation's new district committee announced earlier in the month. Not surprisingly, though a consensus was subsequently achieved, there have been reports of arguments and tensions over the naming of the NCP's office-bearers and members of the central convening



committee.

Wrangling and power struggles seem programmed into the genes of all political parties. In the case of the NCP, however, factional fissures are accompanied by the presence of incompatible ideologies.

The NJP includes alumni of the Shibir, Jatiotabadi Chhatradal (Bangladesh Nationalist Students Party) affiliated with the BNP, several students' organisations of both leftist and fundamentalist Islamist outfits and those without any political involvement prior to joining the ADSM. They seem to be sticking together because they feel that the future belongs to the new party. What would happen when the latter loses its sheen with time? Signs of trouble are already manifest.

Questions have been asked as to how the enormous amounts of funds needed to mobilise for the gargantuan rally that marked the NCP's formation were found. According to a report in *The Daily Star* datelined March 2, 2025, the Pirojpur district administration had requisitioned several privately owned buses to facilitate local students joining the NJP's inaugural rally on February 28.

It was a partisan act and a grim pointer of this becoming a regular factor if the NJP comes to power. Besides, the declaration of the party's vision for Bangladesh raises questions. It talks of a "cruel fascist" regime—obviously referring to Sheikh Hasina's—ruling for 15 years, destroying state institutions and democracy, and making all-encompassing corruption and money laundering a part of state culture.

A lot of what it says—relief to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, the protection of fundamental rights, preserving ethnic, social, gender, and cultural diversity, and ensuring strong safeguards against poverty, inequality, and abuse of power—is unexceptionable.

One, however, wishes that it said more about the 'Second Republic,' which, and the enactment of a new constitution, are the party's overarching goals. Also, one wonders as to how seriously are pronouncements to



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

be taken, particularly because it says that the party is committed to a culture where justice replaces vengeance. It is liable to make the dead rise up laughing given the interim government's relentless and savage persecution of Awami League leaders and supporters, conducted in blatant disregard of all

juridical fairness. Will the NCP come to power following the next parliamentary elections? It might have enjoyed a sweeping victory if an election had been held immediately after Sheikh Hasina's ouster, when its popularity was at its peak.

Since then, issues like a steep decline in the law-and-order situation, runaway inflation and economic instability have been eroding the public's confidence in the interim government. Given the latter's links with the founders of the new party, they too have started attracting a measure of cynicism, which is bound to be transferred to the NCP.

The latter will also meet growing challenges from parties like the BNP, which had their backs to the wall during Sheikh Hasina's second innings as prime minister but are now flexing their political muscles.

Further, the NCP lacks a nationwide, grassroots-level political infrastructure and a leader with charisma and gravitas. Its leaders' demands for not holding parliamentary elections until the reforms are completed and Sheikh Hasina is on the gallows are obviously ploys to gain time to build up its organisation. Time, however, takes its own toll even on the most resplendent of shrines. It cannot be otherwise with the NCP. Its leaders will do well to remember the saying, "Sic transit gloria mundi," which literally translates as "thus passes the glory of the world" but is generally meant to convey that earthly glory is fleeting.

## Bangladesh: A backgrounder

A 17-member interim government, led by Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus as its chief advisor, took charge in Bangladesh on August 8, following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina. Hasina resigned as prime minister on August 5, following weeks of deadly student-led protests. Her ouster was followed by a chaos in Muslim-majority country of over 170 million people and it reverberated in neighbouring India.

Sheikh Hasina's departure from Dhaka to neighbouring India resulted from months of growing anger in Bangladesh. After the January 2024 general election, perceived as flawed, critics accused Hasina's government of becoming increasingly arrogant and serving its minions.

The turning point came in June 2024, when Bangladesh's High Court re-instated a quota reserving 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans from Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. With government jobs in high demand due to elevated graduate unemployment, students protested the quota, which they also viewed as favouring supporters of Hasina's Awami League party.

The Supreme Court eventually reduced the quota in late July to 5 per cent. The reversal was too little, too late. Violence between the protesters and the police increased, further fuelled by Hasina's refusal to release detained student leaders.

The protesters, viewing Hasina as responsible for the deaths of some 600 people killed in the clashes with the police, began seeking her overthrow.

To control the protests, Hasina announced a curfew, repeatedly shut down internet and jailed over 11,000 protesters. The army eventually withdrew its support after refusing Hasina's order to open fire on civilians to enforce the curfew. On August 5, 2024, with a large number of angry protesters heading to her official residence, Hasina resigned and fled to India.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

# Breaking Free from Cloth Clutter

In today's fast-paced and consumer-driven society, the accumulation of clothing has become a significant issue, leading to what is commonly referred to as cloth clutter. The ease of online shopping, the rise of fast fashion, and the influence of social media have all contributed to an excessive and often unnecessary collection of garments.

Unlike previous generations who have always valued durability and longevity in clothing, today's generation – the Gen Alpha born between 2010 and 2025, is caught in a cycle of overconsumption, leading to cluttered wardrobes, financial waste and severe environmental consequences.

Cloth clutter or fashion hoarding refers to the excessive accumulation of clothing, often resulting in disorganised spaces filled with unused or rarely worn garments. With trends changing rapidly, many individuals feel pressured to keep up with fashion, leading to impulsive purchases contributing to a growing pile of clothes.

Unlike past generations who owned fewer but high-quality garments, today's generation is surrounded by cheap, trendy options that encourage frequent buying. Moreover, the convenience of online shopping, where clothes are just a click away, has made it even easier to accumulate unnecessary clothing. The result is overcrowded closets, confusion in outfit choices, and a constant feeling of having nothing to wear despite an overflowing wardrobe. There is no denying that the fast fashion industry thrives on quick production cycles, offering new styles almost every week at an affordable price.

This rapid turnover has created a sense of urgency among consumers to buy more before trends change, leading to excessive clothing accumulation. Above all, online shopping platforms such as Amazon, Myntra, Meesho and many more offer constant discounts such as buy-one-get-one deals, and fast delivery, making it incredibly tempting to buy clothes even when they are not needed. Subscription-based shopping models and exclusive online sales have also encouraged unnecessary purchases, filling wardrobes with items that may never be worn.

Today, with the increased stress, boredom or emotions imbibed among many individuals, the concept of mindless shopping is being used, leading to impulsive buying decisions. This has resulted in wardrobes filled with clothes that were purchased out of momentary excitement but have no long-term use.

Various studies and research have shown that a cluttered environment negatively affects mental wellbeing, making it harder to focus and feel at ease. Today, the textile industry is one of the largest contributors to pollution.

Overproduction of clothing has led to increased carbon emissions, water consumption and waste. Many discarded clothes end up in landfills, as most fast fashion items are made from synthetic fabrics that take decades to decompose. Constantly buying new clothes without fully utilising existing ones results in unnecessary expenses.

As a result, many individuals end up spending large amounts on fashion while struggling to save money for essential needs. Adopting a minimalist approach to fashion will encourage owning fewer but high-quality, versatile pieces that can be mixed and matched.

This will not only reduce the clutter but also promote mindful consumption. Choosing sustainable brands, buying second-hand clothes, and donating unused garments can significantly reduce the impact of fashion waste.

Supporting ethical fashion brands that prioritise durability over trends can help break the cycle of overconsumption. Donating, selling, or repurposing clothes instead of hoarding them can also free up space and prevent unnecessary purchases.

Asking questions like "Do I need this?" or "Will I wear this at least 20 times?" before making a purchase can help in avoiding impulsive buying. Cloth clutter is a growing problem among today's generation, fuelled by fast fashion, digital influence, social media influencers and impulsive shopping habits.

While the allure of trendy and affordable fashion is strong, it comes at a high cost—both personally and environmentally. By embracing mindful consumption, adopting sustainable fashion choices, and prioritising quality over quantity, individuals can break free from the cycle of cloth clutter, leading to a more organised, stress-free, and eco-conscious lifestyle. There are various reasons for it.

Cloth clutter can arise from various factors, such as: Buying more clothes than needed, holding onto clothes that no longer fit or are out of style and above all reluctance to ward off the old clothes.

It may look innocuous but cluttering can have a negative impact on your well being and mental state. It also has practical issues arising from the problem of plenty.

One can have reduced storage space and difficulty accessing clothing and one can experience the a sense of being overwhelmed and disorganised. It often leads to stress and anxiety which can impact your overall wellbeing. But there is solution to it. To combat cloth clutter, you may start declutter your wardrobe regularly and get rid of the items you no longer wear or need.

Besides, organising your clothing storage, using bins, shelves, and drawers effectively declutters your storage space.

One of the easiest way to declutter is to avoid mindless purchasing and buying only what you need and love. Indeed it is not a big problem or something which cannot be dealt with but it must be acknowledged and taken into stride.

It is a lifestyle problem arising from our inability to be mindful of our actions. And don't forget there are people who need your clothes so why not give it to people who need them and experience the feeling of gratitude

Let your wardrobe smile!

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)



SHAINY SHARMA

# A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility

The strategic partnership and geopolitical compulsions of both India and the United States could significantly contribute to clinching a long-awaited trade deal, laying the foundation for future cooperation. While President Donald Trump has positioned himself ideologically closer to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un—thus isolating European nations—his administration saw the need to counter China's growing influence in the Asia-Pacific, making India a crucial ally.

## US Demands and India's Position

US Commerce Secretary, Howard Lutnick has stressed the necessity of India opening its agriculture market, asserting that this sector could not be "off the table" in trade negotiations. He advocates a broad, macro-level trade pact rather than product-specific agreements, arguing that aligning India's tariff policies with the US would be more beneficial for both nations.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal recently concluded productive trade discussions in Washington with US counterparts, including Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Secretary Lutnick. The talks hold significance as both nations move towards negotiating a bilateral trade deal. During Prime Minister Modi's recent US visit, India and America committed to doubling bilateral trade to \$500 billion by 2030, targeting the completion of the first phase of a trade pact by fall 2025.

In 2023, US-India trade in goods and services reached \$190.08 billion, with India enjoying a \$43.65 billion trade surplus. Trump, echoing Lutnick's optimism, emphasised that a trade deal is within reach, underlining its strategic importance.

## The Indian Diaspora's Growing Influence

Reports suggest that the Indian diaspora in the US has emerged as a significant economic and political force, subtly shaping US-India trade policies. Indian-Americans, one of the most prosperous and educated ethnic groups in the US, have wielded considerable influence in strengthening bilateral ties. In a shift, a notable portion of the Indian diaspora supported Trump in the November elections, affecting the political calculus. As of 2021, the average household income for Indian-Americans was \$123,700—surpassing all other ethnic groups.

Between 1995 and 2005, they founded more technology and engineering companies than immigrants from the UK, China, Taiwan, and Japan combined, contributing significantly to innovation and job creation.

The Indian-American population has grown from 2.3 million in 2005 to approximately 4.4 million by 2023, making them the second-largest immigrant group in the US. Their increasing economic and political clout has played a pivotal role in strengthening US-India relations, including current on-going

trade deal dialogue.

Trump's Foreign Policy and Its Impact on India Trump's foreign policy has been defined by an "America First" approach, often at the cost of traditional alliances. His controversial actions—isolating European allies, supporting Russia in the UN by refusing to name it as an aggressor, and potentially attempting to pull Russia away from China—signal a major shift in global geopolitics.



KS TOMAR

These moves could have far-reaching consequences, impacting not just Europe and Asia but also India's strategic positioning. If Trump successfully distances Russia from China, India stands to benefit. Moscow has historically been a key defense and energy partner for New Delhi. Europe's Strategic Shift under Trump Trump's presidency has been marked by tensions with European allies over defense spending, trade policies, and multilateral agreements like the Paris Climate Accord. His criticism of NATO and demands for Europe to shoulder more security costs have strained US-Europe ties. Trump's questioning of NATO's Article 5 (the

mutual defense clause) could leave Eastern European nations vulnerable. Europe might be forced to increase defense spending and coordination, but a lack of American support would weaken the alliance's deterrence against Moscow.

## Indo-Pacific Security Dynamics

In the Indo-Pacific, key US allies like Japan, South Korea, and Australia rely on Washington to counterbalance China. If Trump reduces support for alliances like AUKUS and Quad, these nations may strengthen security ties with India and European powers like France and the UK. Trump's retreat from alliances could create a vacuum that China might exploit. Beijing has been expanding its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), offering economic and military incentives to countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. If US allies feel abandoned, China might step in, further eroding American influence.

## Trump's Alignment with Russia

On the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, US support for Moscow at the UN exposed a growing rift with European allies. Washington sided with Russia, North Korea, and Belarus in opposing a Europe-backed resolution condemning Moscow. The motion still passed 93-8, with 73 abstentions, including China. Furthering this shift, the US pushed a UN Security Council resolution calling for an end to the war—conspicuously avoid-

ing any reference to Russia's invasion.

Trump's alignment with Moscow signals a potential unravelling of America's transatlantic security commitments. His pivot to Russia, ostensibly to end the war, side-lines Kyiv and Brussels, making lasting peace unlikely, though pressure tactics may yield results. Meanwhile, China sees a strategic advantage in this shift, hoping to mend its strained ties with Europe and Washington as the global order tilts towards an authoritarian axis.

## The Future of India-US Trade Relations

While Trump may attempt to realign US-Russia relations, Russia's deep economic and strategic ties with China make a complete pivot unlikely. However, his policies could still reshape global trade and security dynamics in ways that affect India. A trade deal between India and the US remains a strong possibility, driven by economic and geopolitical imperatives.

The Indian government will need to carefully navigate these complexities to safeguard its trade interests while ensuring strategic autonomy. As the global power balance shifts, India's ability to leverage its relationships with the US, Russia and China will determine its long-term geopolitical and economic standing.

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



IN BRIEF



ONGC's OPaL exits from Dahej SEZ

ONGC PetroAdditions Ltd, a subsidiary of the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), has relinquished its 'only-for-export' unit status as it aims to tap into the booming local petrochemical market to drive a turnaround. In a stock exchange filing, ONGC said OPaL has received the final approval for its exit from the Dahej Special Economic Zone (SEZ). "Accordingly, OPaL shall operate as a Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) unit with effect from March 8, 2025," ONGC said. "Further, this exit from SEZ will improve the competitiveness of OPaL for supplies to be made to the DTA. This essentially means primarily catering to the domestic Indian market instead of focusing on exports, which is the primary purpose of an SEZ unit. It will now not have to pay customs duty on products sold within India, helping improve margins. The move is primarily to gain access to the wider domestic market and potentially benefit from the lower corporate tax regime."



ISMA demands duty protection

The Indian Solar Manufacturers Association (ISMA) has demanded imposition of safeguard duty on import of polysilicon, ingot and wafer to help protect the domestic solar manufacturing industry from dumping and boost local capabilities. Sunlight is converted into electricity through a process called photovoltaics (PV). This involves several key components working together to harness the energy from the sun. At the core are solar cells, which are made from silicon. These are grouped together and mounted on a solar panel or module which captures sunlight and converts it into direct current (DC) electricity. According to ISMA, India is already self-sufficient in module manufacturing, helped by duty protection measures. Also, significant cell capacities are under ramp-up and the country will be self-sufficient by FY27 in cell manufacturing. "Need of the hour is to shift focus towards capital and energy intensive upstream manufacturing which is currently dependent on China with heavy dumping and price manipulation," ISMA said in a presentation to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.



PepsiCo to double India revenue in 5 yrs

PepsiCo aims to double its revenue in India over the next five years, viewing the country as a 'key anchor market' where it is making 'aggressive' investments to expand its capacity, its India & South Asia CEO Jaagru Kotecha said. India will be the 'engine of growth for PepsiCo' in driving its global revenue, as it ranks among the top three markets for the food, snack, and beverage multinational, where the company is experiencing double-digit growth, Kotecha said. PepsiCo has invested in greenfield plants in Uttar Pradesh and Assam, focusing on staying ahead of the demand curve, Kotecha said, adding the company will not be 'investment shy' in India and plans to open two more facilities, including one in the southern region. "We believe India will be the engine of growth for PepsiCo to drive the top line. Yes, it's not as big as North America because it is a lot more evolved category. Our per capita consumption in India is still very low, not only for us on beverage and food, but we would expect one of PepsiCo's fastest growing economies to do that," Kotecha said.

US tariff imposition to hit pharma segment

Auto sector likely to face minimal impact

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Enhanced tariffs on pharma imports in the US can severely impact Indian drug manufacturers as it would lead to higher production costs, making shipments less competitive against products from other countries.

Smaller drug firms operating on thin margins can face severe pressure potentially forcing consolidation or closure. The automobile sector, on the other hand, is expected to have a very minimal impact owing to the US being a small export market.

Terming India as a very high tariff nation, US President Donald Trump has said that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2.

India currently levies around 10 per cent import duty on American drugs, while the US doesn't charge any import duty on Indian drugs.

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co Partner

Arvind Sharma said as of recent history, the US has been a net importer of pharmaceutical products to meet its own domestic demand.

"In the event the US decides to impose substantial tariffs on pharmaceutical imports from India, the impact could send noticeable ripples through the Indian pharma sector and



simultaneously disrupt its own domestic consumption," he noted.

Indian pharmaceutical companies supply a substantial proportion of drugs to US residents, with four out of ten of all prescriptions filled in the US in 2022 being supplied by Indian companies.

As per industry sources, overall, medicines from Indian companies provided USD 219 billion in savings to the US healthcare system in 2022 and a total of USD 1.3 trillion between 2013 and 2022.

India, EU to hold FTA talks amid Trump tariff threats

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) bloc will start the tenth round of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday in Brussels amid Trump tariff threats, according to an official.

The talks are expected to focus on resolving remaining issues so that the agreement can be finalised by the end of this year.

During the recent visit of EU Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security Maros Sefcovic, the two sides have discussed ways to accelerate efforts towards a balanced and mutually beneficial trade pact.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen last month agreed to conclude the ambitious India-EU free trade deal by this year amid fears of the Trump administration's threat of higher tariffs.

"The two sides are scheduled to hold the tenth round of negotiations for the FTA from March 10-14 in Brussels," the official said.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation EU bloc resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years. It stalled in



2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets. The two sides are also negotiating an investment protection agreement and an agreement on Geographical Indications (GIs). According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), key sticking points include agricultural tariffs, especially on dairy and wine import duties, automobile tariffs, and regulatory barriers affecting labour-intensive goods.

India is reluctant to lower auto import duties and is cautious about committing to EU demands on sustainability and labour standards, it said, adding that services trade remains another contested area, with India seeking easi-

er mobility for professionals and data security recognition under the EU's GDPR framework (European Union's General Data Protection Regulation).

"Government procurement, investment protection, and environmental regulations like the Carbon Border Adjust ment Mechanism (CBAM) further complicate talks. Despite these challenges, a successful agreement could significantly enhance bilateral trade, which exceeded USD 190 billion in FY 2024," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

India exported USD 76 billion in goods and USD 30 billion in services to the EU, while the EU exported USD 61.5 billion in goods and USD 23 billion in services to India.

'Regulations biggest hurdles'

The European Union's (EU) aggressive environmental regulations, particularly the carbon tax, deforestation rules, and supply chain due diligence laws are one of the biggest hurdles in the negotiations for a proposed trade pact with India, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

It said that these regulations could impose additional costs on Indian exports. Under the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), Indian exports of steel, aluminum, and cement to the EU could face tariffs of 20-35 per cent, even if an FTA is signed, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in its report.

This raises concerns that while EU goods would enter India duty-free, Indian exports would still face these indirect barriers in Europe, it added. India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) bloc will start the tenth round of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday in Brussels.

FPIs pull out Rs 24,753 cr from equities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors continue to pull back money from the Indian equity market, withdrawing Rs 24,753 crore (about USD 2.8 billion) in the first week of March amid escalating global trade tensions and lacklustre corporate earnings.

This came following an outflow of Rs 34,574 crore from equities in February and Rs 78,027 crore in January.

The total outflow by FPIs has reached Rs 1.37 lakh crore in 2025 so far, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data with the depositories, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 24,753 crore from Indian equities this month (till March 7).

This also marks the 13th consecutive week of net outflows. Since December 13, 2024, FPIs have offloaded equity shares to the tune of USD 17.1 billion.

The sustained selling by overseas investors is chiefly due to a combination of global and domestic factors.

A major catalyst continues



to be the escalation in global trade tensions, which significantly weigh on investor sentiment. Imposition of higher tariffs by the US on countries like Mexico, Canada and China, along with reciprocal tariffs on several countries, including India, has dented market sentiments, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment, said.

On the domestic front, lacklustre corporate earnings added to the negative sentiment as it failed to meet investor expectations, thereby reinforcing FPIs to exercise caution toward Indian equities, he added.

This uncertainty has been compounded by a weaker

rupee, which has also diminished the appeal of Indian assets.

Vaibhav Porwal, co-founder of Dezerv, pointed out that the depreciation of the rupee has eroded returns for FPIs, while India's tax structure, with 12.5 per cent tax on long-term capital gains and 20 per cent on short-term gains, contrasts with alternative markets offering lower or zero tax environments.

Moreover, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, highlighted the growing interest in Chinese stocks, driven by attractive valuations and the Chinese government's recent positive initiatives for large businesses

Want to consolidate trade ties with India: Italy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Italian Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida has called for the consolidation of reciprocal trade relations with India, highlighting the very strong relationship between the two governments.

His remarks came against the backdrop of the two-day 'Vinitaly' trade promotion fair India Roadshow that began on Saturday.

Talking about 'Vinitaly', the Italian Agriculture Minister said it is a platform where "the best Italian wine companies and others represent themselves, meet, discuss" and it allows "deepening of the topics related to the development of this industry from every point of view".

In a video message, the Italian Minister of Agriculture pointed out the "very strong relationship between the two governments" and said, "It must be consolidated through mutual export".

He further said, "We want to renew not only the friendship but also consolidation of reciprocal trade relations".

In his address at the gala dinner ahead of 'Vinitaly', Italian

Ambassador to India Antonio Bartoli spoke about the vibrant trade of black pepper and wine between the Roman empire and India along the Golden Road.

"So, we are not reinventing something... We are trying to revamp this. This link, there is steady growth in the market. I think it is on average 6 per cent every year since 2017, we



already account for 17 per of the market, as in many other sectors. We have to do better. We can do better".

Describing it as "a win-win situation", he said creating a culture of wine means that you also favour the growth of a sector that now is punching below its weight.

Prominent Italian winemakers are participating in the

Haier to invest Rs 1,000 cr in manufacturing

PNS ■ GREATER NOIDA (UP)

Haier Appliances India looks to become a USD 2 billion sales company in the next 3-4 years on the back of a high double-digit growth powered by expansion in product category and channels, according to a top official.

The home appliances maker has earmarked an investment of over Rs 1,000 crore between 2024-2028 to set up new AC Production and Injection Molding Units. It has already ploughed in Rs 2,400 crore in its plants at Pune and Greater Noida so far.

With this new plant, Haier India's capacity would increase to 4 million units per annum from the present 1.5 million units, besides increasing domestic value addition.

"Currently we have a capacity of 1.5 million. However, the way the AC market is growing here, by 2027 we will have a shortage in capacity... The new plant will be 2.5 million units," Haier Appliances India President NS Satish told PTI on Sunday.

Global trends, macro data to drive stock markets

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Global trends, macroeconomic announcements and US tariff developments are expected to drive stock markets in a holiday-shortened week, analysts said.

Market participants will also closely track foreign investor activity, geopolitical tensions, and their impact on the US dollar and crude oil prices, they added.

"The upcoming trading week will be a holiday-shortened one, with market participants closely monitoring global developments in the absence of major domestic

events. Key factors to watch include fresh updates on tariff negotiations, geopolitical tensions, and their impact on the movement of the US dollar and crude oil prices.

"Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) have slowed their selling in cash markets, but any shift in their stance will remain a crucial indicator for market direction," Ajit Mishra, SVP of Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

On the macroeconomic front, the release of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation data will be closely monitored, Mishra said.



Equity markets will remain closed on Friday for Holi.

This week, the CPI data from the US and India are scheduled to be released on March 12.

Last week, the BSE Sensex climbed 1,134.48 points or 1.55 per cent, and the NSE

Nifty rose 427.8 points or 1.93 per cent.

The global sentiment improved following reports of a delay in U.S. tariffs and the possibility of further negotiations, which helped stabilise financial markets. Additionally, a weaker dollar and a decline in crude oil prices further boosted investor confidence, he added.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, the domestic market finally closed in the green after weeks of relentless selling, primarily due to a rebound in Q3FY25 GDP and a recovery in consumption.

LONDON'S NEW 'GROWTH PLAN'

India pegged as No 1 source market

PNS ■ LONDON

The UK's capital city has unveiled an ambitious new 'Growth Plan' to provide an estimated 27 billion pounds extra tax revenue to fund vital public services in London and across the country, with India pegged as its number one source market in terms of foreign direct investment.

The plan, unveiled recently by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan along with growth agency London & Partners, aims to restore productivity growth to an average of 2 per cent

a year in the next decade, which is hoped would make London's economy 107 billion pounds larger by 2035.

India has been on a growth curve for the last three years, overtaking the US as London's single-largest FDI source market in 2022-23 and continuing through 2023-24.

"Foreign direct investment from India has been the fastest growing and has been our number one market for the last two years," said Laura Citron, CEO of London & Partners.

"So, it's Indian tech companies setting up operations in London.



Equally, if we look at it as a student market, post-Brexit, India has really rapidly grown as a student market. It's now the number two source market

for London after China. It's also a fast-growing tourism market for London; India is just a really critical, top market for London," she said.

According to official data for 2023-24, London played host to 38,625 Indian students, reflecting a steep growth curve over the past 10 years with the country's share of all international students in London increasing from under 5 per cent to over 20 per cent.

"It is positive that London's quantity of Indian students has increased in the past decade, with Indian stu-

dents now accounting for over 20 per cent of international students enrolled at a London university," said Mark Hertli, Head of Global Engagement at City St George's University and Chair of the International Network at London Higher, the city's advocate for higher education.

"At City St George's the number of Indian students joining us has doubled over recent years... They become lifelong ambassadors of our capital city and create lasting and powerful bridges between our nations," he said.

IPO activity slows down, no main-bourse listings in last 3 weeks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After heightened activity in 2024, there has been a slowdown in new listings, with no main-bourse IPOs hitting the market in the past three weeks due to a correction in the secondary market.

This slowdown in IPO activity is reflected in the numbers, as only five companies went public in January and four in February, compared to 16 listings in December 2024.

Quality Power Electrical Equipment Ltd was the recent IPO which opened for three-day bidding on February 14. However, the trend of slower activity is evident as at least three companies - Advanced Sys-tek, SFC Environmental Technologies, and Viney Corporation - withdrew IPO plans by pulling their draft papers in January and February.

This shift follows a remarkable 2024 in which 91 maiden public issues collectively raised Rs 1.6 lakh crore, driven by robust retail participation, a resilient economy, and booming private capital expenditure.

Bhavesh Shah, Managing Director and Head of

Investment Banking at Equirus, told PTI that the slowdown is largely a result of the secondary market correction, especially in January and February, which negatively impacted the share prices of several listed companies. As a result, investors have shifted focus to their existing



portfolios rather than exploring new listings.

Shah emphasized that the diminished investor attention on new IPOs has contributed to the slowdown in market activity.

Despite this caution, V. Prashant Rao, Director and Head of ECM Investment Banking at Anand Rathi Advisors, pointed out that the longer-term outlook remains positive, with a strong IPO pipeline.





**B**ollywood star Nora Fatehi, known for her electrifying dance performances, is gearing up for her upcoming film *Be Happy* alongside Abhishek Bachchan. While promoting the film, the actress sat down for an interview with BBC Asian Network, where she candidly addressed the industry's PR-driven tactics, the biases she faces as a performer and how she refuses to engage in unfair marketing gimmicks. During the conversation, Nora opened up about how certain actors allegedly pay PR agencies to com-

**'ACTORS PAY TO USE MY NAME FOR MARKETING'**

pare their dance performances to hers as a publicity strategy. "So when they want to market a song, they think, 'Let's compare it to Nora,'" she revealed. According to her, these agencies create narratives such as "Nora's career is over" or "She can eat 100 Noras for breakfast," attempting to pit performers against each other for attention. However, the actress made it clear that she refuses to engage in such tactics, despite receiving numerous PR packages urging her to do the same. "I won't compare myself to anyone or bring someone else down. If a song is going to work, it should be because people appreciate my talent, not because they're excited to replace someone else—that's just ridiculous," she asserted. Beyond PR politics, Nora also addressed the perception that she comes across as arrogant in the industry. She clarified that her confidence and straightforward nature are often misinterpreted. "My logic is that everyone should be allowed to do songs, and everyone should act. But it should be fair for everybody," she stated. Despite her undeniable impact on Bollywood's dance landscape, Nora revealed that she is often frustrated by wanting to transition into lead roles instead of being confined to dance numbers. "What I don't like is when everybody starts using my name as a marketing tool," she emphasized. Nora further shared that she noticed these marketing patterns while recovering from an ankle injury. Observing the industry from a distance, she saw a mix of classy, well-produced songs and others that she described as "diabolical and highly degenerate." Following the interview, a clip of her statement surfaced on Reddit, sparking speculation about which actors or PR agencies she was referring to. While she did not name anyone directly, her remarks have ignited conversations about the fairness of Bollywood's promotional strategies and the ethics of pitting artists against each other for publicity. As *Be Happy* prepares for its release, Nora Fatehi continues to stand her ground—choosing talent over tactics and refusing to play into industry games.



**LOOKBOOK**

As the sun dipped below Jaipur's horizon, the Pink City transformed into a dazzling spectacle, mirroring the brilliance of the 25th International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards. The Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC) became the epicenter of glamour, where Bollywood's finest gathered under one roof, rekindling old bonds and creating new memories. Kareena Kapoor Khan, Shahid Kapoor, Madhuri Dixit, Karan Johar, Bobby Deol, Kriti Sanon, Vijay Varma, Jaideep Ahlawat, Shreya Ghoshal and Nora Fatehi attended the star-studded evening, exuding elegance and charm. The stage became a playground of nostalgia and celebration, with the biggest highlight being Kareena and Shahid's long-overdue reunion, exchanging smiles and conversations that set social media abuzz. Adding a fresh chapter to IIFA's legacy, the night also marked the debut of the IIFA Digital Awards, recognizing excellence in streaming content. As the cameras flashed and the crowd cheered, the grandeur of Bollywood unfolded in a night to remember.

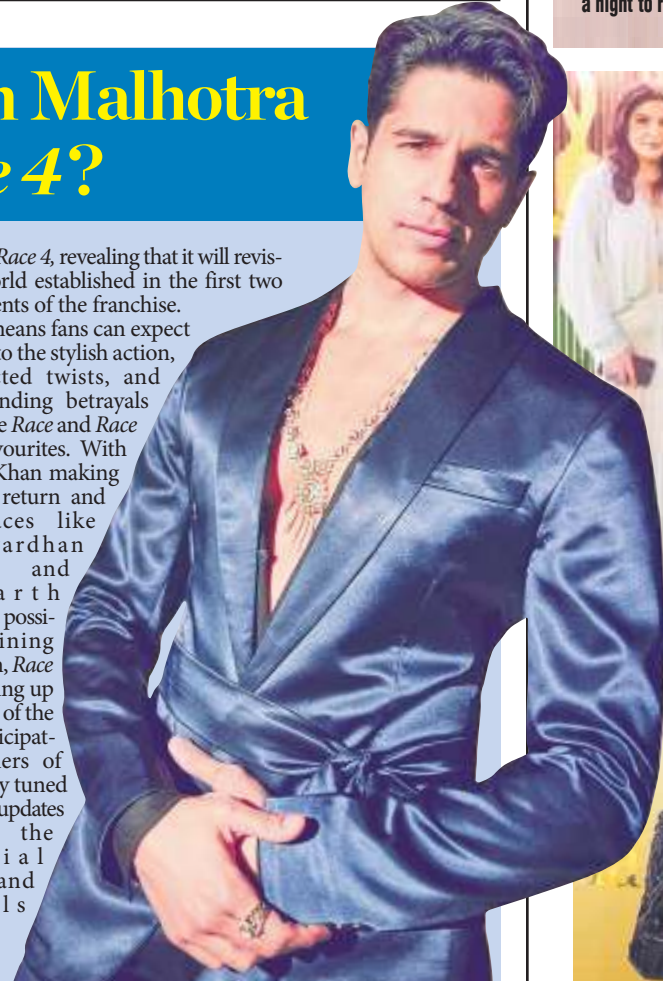


**Harshvardhan Rane, Sidharth Malhotra in the running for Race 4?**

The *Race* franchise is set to make a thrilling return with *Race 4*, bringing back Saif Ali Khan in a major comeback role. While details about the director, filming locations, and complete cast are still under wraps, the buzz around the film is already soaring. According to recent reports, 2025's breakout star Harshvardhan Rane is being considered for a pivotal role in the film, possibly as the antagonist. According to reports, Harshvardhan Rane, who has been riding high on the renewed success of *Sanam Teri Kasam* after its re-release, is currently in discussions to join the *Race* franchise. His rising popularity has opened doors to several high-profile projects, and one of them is reportedly *Race 4*. While his involvement hasn't been officially confirmed, industry insiders suggest that he is a strong contender for the antagonist's role. If the deal is finalised, it would mark a major milestone in his career and add fresh energy to the franchise. Adding to the intrigue, there was earlier speculation that Sidharth Malhotra might also be a part of *Race 4*. In an interview with Bollywood Hungama,

Shiraz Ahmed, the writer behind all previous *Race* films, revealed that the movie is set to begin production in January 2025. While confirming Saif Ali Khan's return and Sidharth Malhotra's potential involvement, Ahmed stated that the rest of the cast would be officially announced soon. Shiraz Ahmed also hinted at the sto-

ryline of *Race 4*, revealing that it will revisit the world established in the first two installments of the franchise. This means fans can expect a return to the stylish action, unexpected twists, and mind-bending betrayals that made *Race* and *Race 2* fan favourites. With Saif Ali Khan making a grand return and new faces like Harshvardhan Rane and Sidharth Malhotra possibly joining the action, *Race 4* is shaping up to be one of the most anticipated thrillers of 2025. Stay tuned for more updates as the official cast and details unfold!

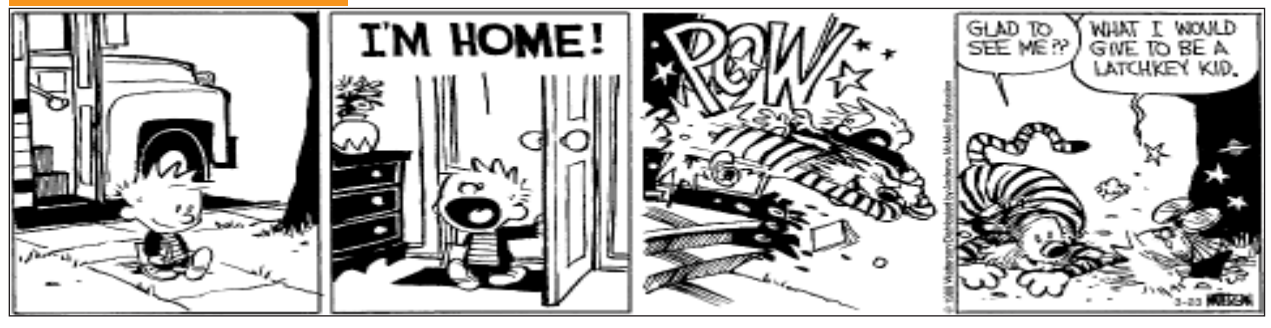


**FUN**

**ARCHIE**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**



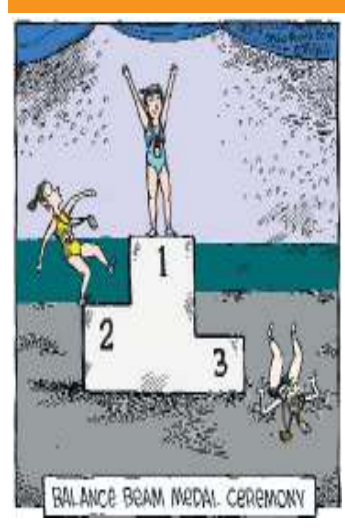
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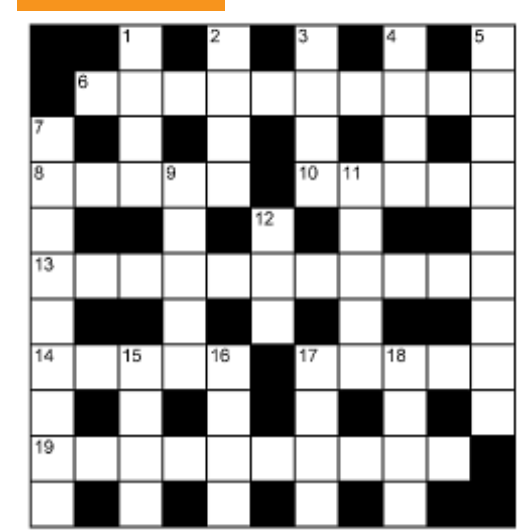
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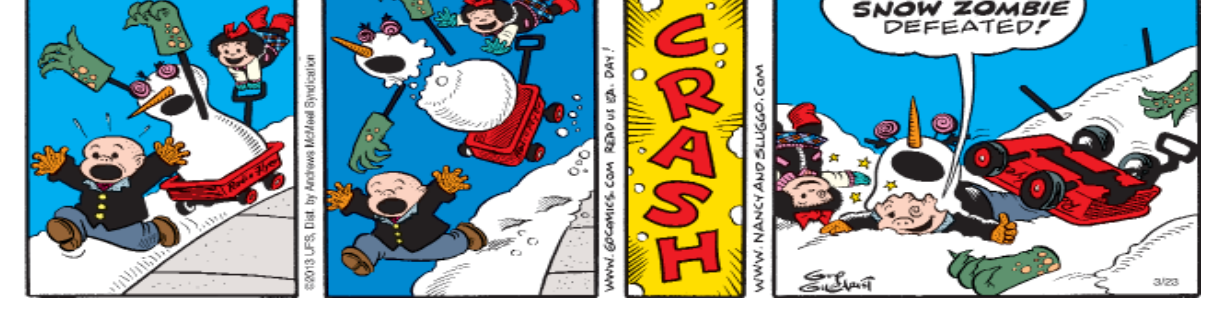
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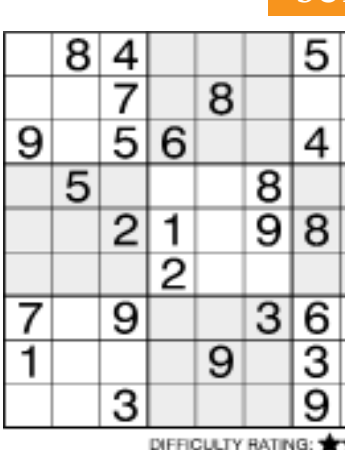
**CROSSWORD**



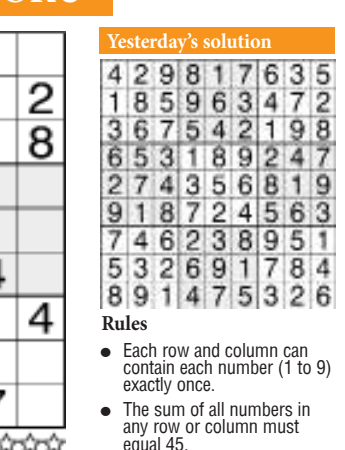
**NANCY**



**SUDOKU**



**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**



**ACROSS**

- 6 Job
- 8 A sung musical drama
- 10 A short part of a play
- 13 Refusing to obey orders
- 14 To cook vegetables or meat in an oven using fat
- 17 Listen to music and news on this
- 19 Somewhere students go
- 11 Porcelain
- 12 Fast aeroplane
- 15 This chemical liquid burns
- 16 Held by ropes
- 17 Take a break
- 18 A fruit from a palm tree

**GINGER MEGGS**



**DOWN**

- 1 Painful throb
- 2 Hawaiian dance
- 3 Overtake
- 4 Pleasant
- 5 A job with a syringe
- 7 Marvellous
- 9 A plant's anchors in the soil

**SOLUTION**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | L | E | E | P | I | S | L | O |
| H | A | I | C | A | A |   |   |   |
| C | O | R | N | H | O | O | K | I |
| T | A | S | H | I | O |   |   |   |
| A | N | G | I | E | N | T |   |   |
| H | O | L | E | S | T |   |   |   |
| E | P | E | A | C | O | K |   |   |
| L | P | L | A | N | T | A |   |   |
| P | A | L | A | C | E |   |   |   |
| R | O | M | E |   |   |   |   |   |
| R | O | M | E |   |   |   |   |   |



# Vijayawada

## 'If a script doesn't let me sleep at night, that's when I say yes to it'

**Vardhan Puri, grandson of the legendary Amrish Puri, is carving his own path in Bollywood with a passion that runs deep in his veins. Despite being born into a family of celebrated artists, he is determined to create a legacy of his own, guided by the invaluable lessons his grandfather instilled in him. In a heartfelt conversation with The Pioneer, Vardhan reflects on his journey so far, from his intense debut in Yeh Saali Aashiqui to embracing the charm of romantic comedies with Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story**

TEJAL SINHA  
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

**C**arrying the weight of a cinematic legacy can be daunting, but for Vardhan Puri, grandson of the legendary Amrish Puri, it is a source of immense pride rather than pressure. With a deep-rooted passion for storytelling and a relentless drive to carve his own niche, Vardhan is steadily building a filmography that reflects both his versatility and commitment to his craft.

In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, he delves into his journey, the experience of working on *Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story* and his aspirations for the future.

For him, acting is not just a profession—it is a calling, a way of life. Reflecting on his early years in the industry, he credits *Yeh Saali Aashiqui* as his first love, a film that pushed him to explore complex characters and prepared him for the challenges ahead.

"That film keeps giving and giving," he says with a smile. "It was my first love, my first child and a movie I'm extremely proud of. Playing two distinct characters in my debut was challenging but also immensely rewarding. It was a great warm-up into what my career would lead to. Doing something so difficult early on served as a preparatory platform for me as an actor." With an inclination toward dramatic and intense roles, he found himself craving a shift in tone. He wanted to explore something lighter, something that would challenge him in an entirely different way.

"Comedy is the most difficult genre to attempt," he states. "As a theatre actor, I was always known for my drama and comedy. So when Kunal Kohli offered me *Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story*, I said yes in a split second. It was such a simple decision. And honestly, doing this film has changed my life." *Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story* is a romantic drama that blends nostalgia with modern emotions, a signature of Kunal Kohli's storytelling. He describes it as a film with the same soul as *Hum Tum*, one that is lighthearted, musically rich, and emotionally grounded.

"It stands out because of its strong emotional core. Kunal sir has such a deep understanding of romance and rom-coms and that trans-

lates beautifully on screen. The film isn't just about romance—it's also extremely funny. That balance is what makes it special."

A crucial aspect of any romantic film is the chemistry between its leads and Vardhan found an incredible co-star in Kaveri Kapur. Their bond evolved naturally, strengthening over time and translating seamlessly onto the screen. "Kaveri and I became inseparable on set. Initially, we were just getting to know each other, but as we started readings—even on Zoom calls—our chemistry kept growing. Kunal sir could see the progression, and once he said, 'Yes, the chemistry is perfect,' we flew to London for the shoot!"

Off-camera, the duo shared countless laughs, keeping the mood light and fun, a reflection of the film's genre.

"If you caught us between takes, you'd see us laughing our lungs out. We just had so much fun, and that energy translated into our performances. We weren't trying to fit into a mold—we wanted our characters to feel real, to feel believable. And I think that approach really worked." Born into a family of celebrated actors, Vardhan is keenly aware of the expectations that come with the Puri name. Yet, rather than

feeling burdened by it, he embraces it with gratitude. "My grandfather, Amrish Puri, is my god. I pray to him. But I don't feel any pressure—I only feel a sense of responsibility. Every artist is unique, and I believe in creating my own path rather than emulating someone else's journey. My grandfather's career was different, my journey is different, and I just want to make him proud in my own way." His grandfather's advice still rings in his ears—discipline, punctuality, and persistence make an actor.

"He always told me, 'Cinema cannot be a part of your life—it has to become your entire life.' He warned me against distractions, against losing focus, and reminded me that my purpose is to entertain and bring happiness to people. That lesson has stayed with me."

The Puri family's contribution to cinema extends far beyond Amrish Puri. Vardhan is deeply aware of the lineage he comes from, tracing back to the legendary K.L. Saigal, his granduncles Chaman Puri and Madan Puri and Om Puri, whom he considers family. "We are a family of entertainers. And that's a privilege, not a pressure. I wake up every day with stars in my eyes, thinking about what story I can tell next, what character I can bring to life."

Having played intense, dramatic roles, Vardhan is eager to explore more lighthearted characters in the future.

"I love doing dramatic roles, but this rom-com was such a breath of fresh air. Now, I really want to do an out-and-out comedy. Filmmakers, please offer me comedies!" he laughs. "I'm already reading some scripts, and hopefully, I'll lock in something soon." Vardhan's aspirations go far beyond just playing specific roles. His vision is to be a storyteller who leaves an impact on audiences, shaping narratives that resonate deeply.

"I want to tell stories that have social relevance without being preachy. I want to play characters that are both challenging and relatable. I want to be the hero, the villain—anything and everything—because we only have one life. I'm hungry to explore unique stories, and I believe the world is my oyster. I'm just raring to go."



## Check-in and doze off!

**W**ith stress and sleep deprivation on the rise and India being the world's second most sleep-deprived nation after Japan, the demand for sleep-focused vacations is growing. According to Skyscanner's Travel Trends 2024 Report, an impressive 85% of Indian travellers are now more mindful of their sleep, with 20% even considering sleep as one of the main activities for their next holiday. The global market for sleep tourism was estimated at \$74.54 billion in 2024.

Once regarded as merely incidental to travel, sleep is now becoming the main event. Sleep tourism—a concept gaining global popularity—has begun to find its footing in India, as travelers increasingly prioritize rest and relaxation over the hustle of conventional sightseeing and packed itineraries.

From tranquil Himalayan retreats to luxurious urban sanctuaries, India is redefining relaxation with its sleep-focused travel. These sleep vacations are not just about catching up on rest—they're a way to disconnect from the chaos of modern life and indulge in the art of slumber. Customised programs, including aromatherapy, yoga nidra sessions and sleep-enhancing cuisine, ensure that guests leave not only well-rested but also rejuvenated, ready to take on the world.

This World Sleep Day, on March 14th, let's make India rethink its travel plans.

### The Westin Resort & Spa, Himalayas

Since opening in early 2023, it has established itself as a leading destination for sleep tourism, surrounded by the tranquil beauty of Uttarakhand's lush foothills. The resort's 141 thoughtfully designed guestrooms, featuring

private balconies with stunning valley views, offer signature comforts such as the Heavenly Bed, ensuring a deeply restorative stay. For added indulgence, the Royal Garden Villa and Garden Suites with Plunge Pools create serene havens for relaxation. At the heart of its wellness offerings, the Heavenly Spa provides expertly curated treatments, combining global wellness practices with Ayurvedic traditions to enhance relaxation. It redefines sleep tourism as a holistic and rejuvenating retreat.

### Courtyard by Marriott, Ahmedabad

Nestled in India's first UNESCO World Heritage City, it offers an immersive sleep tourism experience where luxury meets mindfulness. The thoughtfully designed rooms, inspired by Ahmedabad's heritage, provide a serene haven for restful slumber, blending mid-century sophistication with local artistry. Elevating the sleep experience, Explore Spa's signature rituals—First Taste + First Touch and Last Touch + Last Taste—prepare the mind and body for deep relaxation, leaving guests rejuvenated. Complemented by a Wellness Epicurean Menu, the spa ensures holistic well-being, making it a perfect destination for those seeking restful escapes and a journey into sleep tourism.

### The Westin Goa

Set amidst the vibrant charm of North Goa, it offers an inviting escape where rest and rejuvenation take centre stage. Surrounded by lush green hills and the lively beaches of Anjuna, the hotel balances Goa's energy with a serene retreat inspired by the philosophy of *susegud*. The thoughtfully designed spaces, rooted in biophilic principles, create a soothing environment that fosters deep relaxation. At the Heavenly Spa, therapies like the Abhyanga and Sports Massage ease tension and prepare the body for restorative sleep. Together, the tranquil setting and wellness-focused amenities make it an ideal destination for sleep tourism.



**My grandfather, Amrish Puri, is my god. I pray to him. But I don't feel any pressure—I only feel a sense of responsibility. Every artist is unique, and I believe in creating my own path rather than emulating someone else's journey. My grandfather's career was different, my journey is different, and I just want to make him proud in my own way.**

## 'SONGS LIKE UDAU UDAU UDAU BRING LIFE TO A FILM'

PNS| EXCLUSIVE

**R**enowned playback singer Shaan, often called the 'Golden Voice of India', has mesmerized audiences for decades with his soulful renditions. Known for his romantic melodies of the 2000s, Shaan has won multiple Filmfare and IIFA Awards and remains one of India's most beloved voices. Shaan, the celebrated Golden Voice of India, brings his powerful presence to *Kuch Sapney Apne*, lending his soulful voice to the uplifting anthem *Udaa Udaa Udaa*. With decades of musical mastery, Shaan connects deeply with the film's themes of love, trust and inclusivity. As a champion of social change, he reflects on how music transcends boundaries, fostering acceptance and challenging societal norms. Through his heartfelt rendition, Shaan reminds us

**The Pioneer had an opportunity to quickly chat with the renowned singer Shaan, for his latest song Udaa Udaa from Kuch Sapney Apne as he delves into being part of it.**

that music is not just a melody, but a force capable of transforming minds and shaping a more inclusive world.

Now, he lends his voice to *Udaa Udaa Udaa*, a vibrant and uplifting track from *Kuch Sapney Apne*—a film that delves deep into love, trust and acceptance, not just in queer relationships but in all human connections. In an exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Shaan shares his thoughts on the film's message, the power of music in shaping mindsets, and why he believes inclusivity is more important than ever.

For Shaan, the emotional core of *Kuch Sapney Apne* struck a chord.

He believes the film addresses a subject that, while widely discussed, still carries deep societal challenges. "Social rejection is something we may learn to navigate, but when it comes from our own family—especially our parents—it can make life extremely difficult," he says. "*Kuch Sapney Apne* sensitively explores this issue and I'm truly grateful to be a part of a film that carries such a strong and necessary message."

Shaan's contribution to the film comes in the form of *Udaa Udaa Udaa*, an energetic and uplifting track that complements the film's narrative beautifully. Reflecting on his experience recording the song,

he says, "It was an absolute joy to sing! The song is packed with positivity and high energy, so it felt like a breeze. Songs like these bring so much life to a film." Music has long been a force for change, and Shaan firmly believes in its ability to shift mindsets, especially on social issues such as LGBTQ+ rights.

"Music speaks louder than words," he says with conviction. "It has the power to communicate a message without sounding preachy or overbearing. A song can make you feel, reflect, and embrace perspectives that words alone might not." With *Kuch Sapney Apne*, Shaan is proud to be associated with a project that champions

inclusivity. He strongly believes that 2025 and beyond should be about moving forward with sensitivity and acceptance.

"I have always stood for equal representation and inclusivity," he states. "It's heartening to see more films addressing these important themes. We need to create art that reflects and respects everyone's experiences. I'm honored to contribute to a film that takes a stand for LGBTQ+ rights and social progress." With *Udaa Udaa Udaa*, Shaan once again proves that music can be a beacon of hope, joy and change. As *Kuch Sapney Apne* makes its way to audiences, his voice will carry not just melody, but a powerful message of love and acceptance.





### WPL: Mumbai Indians to face Gujarat Giants



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

With two games left in the league stage, Mumbai Indians will look to make the most of the opportunity and push for a first-place finish on the WPL points table, starting with the clash against in-form Gujarat Giants here on Monday.

UP Warriorz's win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 12 runs knocked the defending champions out from the race to the playoffs on Saturday, confirming the qualification for Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians and Gujarat Giants in the process. But what remains is the final classification of the points table. Harmanpreet Kaur's MI, who return to the Brabourne Stadium here for the final leg of the third WPL — their home ground where they had won the inaugural edition in 2023 — will look for a top-place finish.

The team that tops the points table at the end of the league round will get a direct entry into the final and MI, who play back-to-back matches on Monday and Tuesday, will aim to go past DC who are currently at the first spot with 10 points and a Net Run Rate of 0.396.

The Giants, currently placed second 8 points and NRR of 0.334, can finish at best with 10 points provided they beat Mumbai Indians, which would place them at even keel with DC. In such a scenario, the NRR will determine how teams are placed on the points table.

The teams that finish second and third will meet in the Eliminator on Thursday, with the summit clash slated to be played on Saturday.

But it won't be an easy task to begin with for MI as the Giants have been on a roll recording three heavy wins on the trot to make it to the final three.

Not only have the Giants' batters been firing in unison, their bowlers have also found their rhythm which makes them a team to beat in this knockout round.

A maiden appearance in the WPL playoffs would certainly inspire the Giants, who turned things around after a dismal start that had them losing three of their first four matches.

On the other hand, MI have four wins and two defeats in six outings so far which has helped them to make their third WPL playoffs. Once again, overseas stars Nat Sciver-Brunt (309 runs and 8 wickets, Hayley Matthews (181 runs and 9 wickets) and Amelia Kerr (10 wickets) have been at the forefront of their charge with skipper Harmanpreet (126 runs) in tow.

For the Giants, the trio of skipper Ashleigh Gardner (235 runs, 7 wickets), Beth Mooney (224 runs) and Harleen Deol (200 runs) in the batting line-up have found strong backing from their bowlers.

West Indies' all-rounder Deandra Dottin (132 runs, 9 wickets) has not really put a foot wrong but the revelation has been India's uncapped Kashvee Gautam (9 wickets) this season. Tanuja Kanwer (7 wickets) is not too far behind.



### Paris Saint-Germain wins 4-1 at Rennes in Ligue 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Ousmane Dembélé came off the bench to score twice and help a shaky Paris Saint-Germain win 4-1 at Rennes to stay unbeaten in Ligue 1.

Bradley Barcola got one goal and set up another as PSG moved 16 points ahead of second-placed Marseille, which conceded a stoppage-time goal in a 1-0 home defeat to Lens in the late game on Saturday.

Third-placed Nice can move level on points with Marseille if it beats Lyon at home on Sunday.

PSG coach Luis Enrique rested captain Marquinhos ahead of the return leg at Liverpool in the last 16 of the Champions League next Tuesday. PSG lost the first leg 1-0 despite dominating.

Dembélé was joined on the bench by right back Achraf Hakimi, winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

PSG controlled the first half but made many mistakes after the break as Rennes attacked strongly, before Dembélé wrapped up the win late on.

Barcola put PSG ahead in the 28th minute when he placed the ball through goalkeeper Brice Samba's legs. Ludovic Blas almost equalised moments later and 17-year-old striker Mohamed Meité headed against the crossbar.

Barcola broke down the left again and picked out striker Gonçalo Ramos in the 50th for 2-0. Three minutes later, sloppy defending allowed defender Lilian Brassier to pull one back and it galvanized Rennes, which came close to equalising several times. An awful mistake from PSG defender Lucas Beraldo saw him

pass to Meité, giving him an easy chance from six meters. But the young striker hesitated to shoot with his weaker left foot and his tame shot with his right was blocked.

Dembélé's stoppage-time brace took him this season to 20 league goals for the first time.

Canada striker Jonathan David moved onto 14 league goals — third in the Ligue 1 scoring charts — after scoring in Lille's hard-fought 1-0 win against rock-bottom Montpellier.

The win moved fifth-placed Lille level on 44 points with Monaco, which is ahead on goal difference, in the race for one of the four Champions League spots.

### Marseille loses to Lens

Marseille's Mason Greenwood — second in the scoring charts with 15 goals — was named as a substitute along with Brazilian winger Luis Henrique. Both players came on at the start of the second half at Stade Velodrome.

Luis Henrique's close-range volley was expertly stopped by Lens goalkeeper Mathew Ryan in the 83rd. Moments later, he made a superb one-handed save low to his right to deny forward Neal Maupay. Marseille paid the price when Lens launched a counterattack in the fourth minute of stoppage time and Colombia defender Deiver Machado teed up Neil El Aynaoui for a fine finish as Lens moved up to eighth.

All the players in Saturday's games had "WO=MÁN" written on the back of their jerseys instead of their names as part of the French league's initiative centered around International Women's Day.

### Jeneath Wong becomes first Malaysian to win WAAP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Da Nang

Saanvi Somu was the best Indian golfer at tied 38th while compatriots Guntas Kaur Sandhu and Mannat Brar finished way behind at the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific (WAAP) Championship here on Sunday.

Somu, who made the cut for the second year running, shot her second straight 1-under par 70. With rounds of 72-74-70-70, she totalled 2-over for the week.

The 14-year-old debutant Sandhu, who impressed by becoming the youngest Indian to make the cut at WAAP, had a

tough final round with a 7-over 78 and was 9-over to finish 47th.

Her aggression and some good putting helped her pick up 14 birdies, the most among the Indians, but she was held back by lack of experience of playing in strong windy conditions.

Brar, who made the cut after three unsuccessful attempts, had a very rough day when things just did not go her way. She shot 78 and with cards of 67-76-73-78, she finished at 10-over and in 48th place.

Meanwhile, Jeneath Wong, who moved to Australia when she was ten years old and

now plays at Pepperdine University in college golf in the United States, became the first Malaysian to win the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship.

She turned in a superb finish which included a clutch par putt on the 16th, a perfect tee shot to within six inches on the 17th and a great pitch for an 8-foot birdie on the 18th for a round of 68.

Wong, who now gets to play three Women's Majors and a host of other iconic events, totalled 18-under, and won by one shot over Korea's Soomin Oh (66), who made a great charge with a bogey-free 66, but fell short in the face of a nerveless fin-

ish from Wong.

Wong finished 18th in her only previous experience in 2022, when she also had a hole in one on the second day. In the final round here in Vietnam, she almost had another one on the Par-3 17th, when her tee shot came inside six inches.

Three Koreans finished in top-four as Sumin Hong (68) was sole third while another Korean Yunseo Yang (66) and Australian Jazy Roberts (66) were tied fourth.

The 2026 Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific Championship will be held in Wellington, New Zealand.



### Morikawa birdies final hole for a 1-shot lead at Bay Hill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Orlando

Collin Morikawa made a 12-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole on a baked out Bay Hill course for a 5-under 67, giving him a one-shot lead in the Arnold Palmer Invitational and a chance to win for the first time in 17 months.

Russell Henley on Saturday holed a long bunker shot for birdie on the opening hole, ran off four in a row to start the back nine and had a 67 to finish one shot behind. Corey Connors of Canada missed the 18th fairway, chipped out and made bogey for a 69 and was two back.

Even without much wind and occasional cloud cover, the heat and three days of sun brought a yellow shine to fairways and greens. Birdie putts from a reasonable range rolled out past the hole sometimes 8 feet or more away.

Shane Lowry, the 36-hole leader, got a taste of that at end. His tee shot on the 18th ran so far that only the collar of the rough kept it from rolling into the water. He had a birdie chance just inside 25 feet and watched that roll 7 feet by the hole.

He managed to hole that for a 76, leaving him six shots behind. Rory McIlroy made bogey on three of his last four holes for a 73 to fall seven shots behind.

Scottie Scheffler tried to stay in range, except that birdies were hard to come by. He came up short on the 13th — a front pin and a crispy green — and went into the rocks. He managed to salvage bogey from that but he could only manage a 71 to fall eight shots back.

### Collin Morikawa was at 10-under 206

"You have to hit good shots out there," he said. "It can get you in any direction." The final hour had Morikawa, Henley and Connors trading spots or sharing time

at the top. Morikawa was the only one to avoid a bogey over the final four-hole stretch. He laid up on the par-5 16th and hit lob wedge and let a 6-foot birdie trickle and swirl into the cup.

He barely touched his 12-foot birdie putt on the final hole. Every shot — trying to keep it in the fairway, on the green and putting — required respect. "Some of these pin locations, I feel I'm having to putt very defensively," Henley said.

Jason Day, who opened with a 76, put himself back in the mix with a tournament-low 64 on Friday and a wild round of 69 on Saturday. He was briefly tied for the lead until closing out the front nine with three straight bogeys. He was losing ground until making three straight birdies at the end, including a 20-footer on the 17th.

His measure of how firm it was from waiting his turn to putt. "Any time you put your putter down and you start sliding on your putter, that's when you know the greens are getting pretty slick," Day said. "They're changing colour and you can kind of start to see the change in color."

Michael Kim had two eagles on the back nine for a 67, joining Tony Finau (68) at 5-under 205. Kim is the only player among the top five going into the final round who is not already exempt for the Masters, and a win would take care of that.

Morikawa is a two-time major champion on whose last victory was in October 2023 at the Zozo Championship in Japan. He got back with longtime coach Rick Sessinghaus, and that buttery fade that gives him such great control has been giving him more chances.

Golf Channel reminded him it had been 502 days. "Thank you for putting that in exact days. I hope you have it in hours and minutes," he said.

### Leverkusen loses to Werder Bremen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Berlin

Bundesliga leader Bayern Munich squandered a two-goal lead and lost at home to struggling Bochum 3-2, but Bayer Leverkusen was unable to take advantage.

Leverkusen on Saturday lost 2-0 at home to Werder Bremen, a team that lost its previous five games across all competitions.

The Champions League weighed heavily across the league on a day of upsets.

Borussia Dortmund lost at home to Augsburg 1-0, leading to a chorus of whistles from home fans before the "Black and Yellows" go to Lille for the second leg of their Champions League last 16 tie on Wednesday. The teams drew the first leg 1-1 last Tuesday.

Also, Stuttgart was held to 2-2 by Holstein Kiel, and Wolfsburg drew with St Pauli 1-1.

Freiburg drew with Leipzig 0-0 in the late game, denting their hopes of

Champions League qualification. Both needed a win to keep pace with Mainz, which won Friday to boost its qualification prospects.

### Wirtz injured

Leverkusen's loss — its second blow this week after Wednesday's 3-0 defeat to Bayern in Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie — was compounded by an injury to star player Florian Wirtz early in the second half.

Wirtz, who had only gone on after the break as a substitute, was unable to continue after a foul from Bremen's Mitchell Weiser in the 52nd minute.

Weiser, who was booked, connected with Wirtz's right foot. Both Leverkusen and Bayern had rested players before they meet again for the second leg of their Champions League in Leverkusen on Tuesday.

### Bochum wins in Munich

Bochum is celebrating its first win in Munich since 1991. It was also Bayern's

first defeat at home this season.

Raphaël Guerreiro got Bayern off to a flying start in the 14th minute, but Serge Gnabry missed a penalty shortly afterward when his effort crashed off the left post.

Harry Kane, who'd been rested, usually takes Bayern's penalties. Kane hasn't missed any of his last 30.

Guerreiro made the most of his rare start with his second goal in the 28th, only for Jakov Medic to pull one back three minutes later.

The game tipped in Bochum's favor when Palhinha was sent off in the 43rd for a studs-up challenge on Georgios Masouras' ankle.

Ibrahima Sissoko equalized in the 51st and Matus Bero put the visitors in front in the 71st. It proved to be the winner, but Bochum needed goalkeeper Timo Horn at his best to grab his first away win of the season.

Leverkusen's loss means Bayern still leads by eight points with nine rounds remaining.

### Real Kashmir FC beats Aizawl FC 2-1 in I-League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Srinagar

Real Kashmir FC moved to third spot in the I-League standings with a hard fought 2-1 win over relegation-battling Aizawl FC at the TRC Turf Ground here on Sunday.

Real Kashmir's fifth straight home win, and fourth in the last five overall, took their tally to 32 points in 18 matches, two behind both Churchill Brothers and Inter Kashi.

With just four matches to go, the title race is set to go down to the wire. On the other hand, Aizawl missed the chance to climb out of the relegation zone. The Reds remained in 11th place with 16 points, one behind SC Bengaluru.

Senegalese Karim Samb (31st minute) put the Snow Leopards ahead before Lalrinzuala (58th) equalised for Aizawl with his ninth goal of the season. Brazilian Paulo César (77th), who came on as a substitute, scored the winning goal for the hosts, who also saved a penalty late on to grab all three points.

It was an end-to-end start with both goalkeepers making some routine saves in the early minutes.

Gradually, Real Kashmir began to boss possession and took the game to the visitors. In the 21st minute, Aizawl almost scored an own goal as Samuel Lalmuanpuia, intending to clear an Ocran Idan corner, flicked a header that went just wide of the far post.

The breakthrough for the hosts arrived through a defensive mix-up from Aizawl in the 31st minute. Karim Samb capitalised on it, burst into the box and slotted it past Md Rafique Ali Sardar to score his fifth goal of the season.

Aizawl began the second half better and found the equaliser in the 58th minute despite it coming due to a goalkeeping error. Lalrinzuala cut inside from the left but shot directly at Mohd Arbaz. What should've been a routine save was spilled by the Real Kashmir custodian and Lalrinzuala, the top Indian scorer of the I-League, was on hand to tap it in from two yards out and restore parity.

The contest became more equal after that and both teams came close to scoring again but were let down by poor finishing.

For Real Kashmir, Mohammad Inam crossed for substitute Paulo César, who headed it agonisingly wide from six yards. At the other end, Lalrinzuala cut it back for an unmarked Lalbiakdia inside the box, but he skied his first-time shot.

Eventually, Paulo Cesar did find the net in the 77th minute and it proved to be the match winner.

### Barcelona's Spanish league game postponed after death of team doctor



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Barcelona's home game against Osasuna in the Spanish league was postponed after the death of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia.

Fans were informed of the decision around 15 minutes before the game was scheduled to kick off at 9 pm local time (2000 GMT) in Barcelona at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium on Saturday.

Barcelona said in a statement that it was "deeply saddened to announce the passing of first-team doctor Carles Miñarro Garcia this evening" and

extended its "heartfelt condolences to his family and friends during this difficult time." Barcelona did not immediately provide any details on the cause of death, which local media reports said was due to medical reasons.

"I can't believe it," Barcelona defender Ronald Araújo wrote on X. "Rest in peace, Doc."

The 50-year-old Miñarro Garcia joined the medical staff of Barcelona's first team last season after having previously worked with its futsal team.

Osasuna said it agreed to the request by Barcelona to postpone the match. The Spanish soccer federation confirmed that

the decision was official.

Barcelona club president Joan Laporta said that Miñarro Garcia had died "suddenly" as the team gathered hours before the game. Unconfirmed local media reports said the death occurred at a team hotel.

"The players, staff and coach were all incredibly sad because he was a man loved by everyone," Laporta said.

"We thought it was best to ask for the game to be postponed," Laporta thanked Osasuna and La Liga for their understanding. Barcelona leads the league by one point over Atletico Madrid. The Osasuna game will be rescheduled.

### Winning with nine

Alaves held on to upset fifth-placed Villarreal 1-0 despite having two players sent off and an injury scare to goalkeeper Antonio Sivera.

Sivera was one of the Alaves players sent off — in the 58th minute — when he fouled Ayoze Pérez during a one-on-one situation that ended in a frightening collision. Sivera seemed to lose consciousness momentarily when his body went limp on the turf before he recovered and was able to walk off the field. Alaves also lost Antonio Blanco with a second yellow card during 15 minutes of second-half injury time.

Manu Sánchez scored the game's only goal in the 11th minute for Alaves' first home win since November 1.



## Inspired by Chiranjeevi, director Viswa Karun gears up for *Dilruba*

SURESH KAVIRAYANI  
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Director Viswa Karun is all set to make his directorial debut with *Dilruba*, starring Kiran Abbavaram and Rukshar Dhillon. The film is slated for release on March 14. In a candid conversation, Karun shared insights into his filmmaking journey, how he got his break and what inspired him to enter the world of cinema.

Karun's love for cinema began early. Coming from a family of educators, he grew up surrounded by literature. "Both my grandfathers were teachers and our house was filled with literary books. I developed a habit of reading from a young age," he shared.

Born and raised in Tadepalligudem and Bhimavaram, Karun pursued a degree in B. Pharmacy before deciding to chase his filmmaking dreams. "I always knew I wanted to be a director," he said. His defining moment came when he watched *Mugguru Monagallu*, a film in which Chiranjeevi played triple roles. "As a child, I thought there were three real Chiranjeevis! My grandfather explained that it was just the magic of cinema. That's when I decided—I want to be a filmmaker," he recalled.

Karun had no industry connections when he set out to become a filmmaker. "I roamed around production offices, trying to find opportunities," he admitted. His first break came when his friend Vicky asked him to write scenes for Naladamayanthi. "I wrote 22 scenes and received Rs 2,500 as my first paycheck. Unfortunately, the film never saw the light of day," he said.

Determined to succeed, Karun



**Director Viswa Karun, who is making his debut with *Dilruba*, speaks about his journey, inspiration behind this film and more**

took on various writing and advertising gigs. His persistence paid off when *Ranga Ranga Vaibhavana* director Gireeshaya introduced him to veteran writer Vijayendra Prasad, the mastermind behind *Baahubali* and *RRR*. Karun worked on the script for *Jaguar*, starring Nikhil Kumaraswamy (grandson of former Prime Minister Deve Gowda), under the mentorship of director Mahadev Swamy.

"I spent one and a half years working on *Jaguar*. After that, I felt ready to chart my own path," he said. He then contributed to *Chalo* (starring Naga Shaurya and Rashmika Mandanna) and even worked briefly with Ram Gopal Varma and Dil Raju's production house before landing a stint with producer DVV Danayya. It was during this time that *Dilruba* started taking shape.

Karun's collaboration with Kiran Abbavaram happened by chance. "I met Kiran a few years ago and narrated a story to him. He liked my storytelling style but wasn't con-

vinced by the story itself. He told me to come back with a stronger script," he recalled. Determined, Karun worked on a new concept and reapproached Kiran. "When I narrated *Dilruba*, he loved it. He listened for just 40 minutes before giving his approval," Karun shared.

Despite Kiran's growing success, especially after *Ka*, the actor gave Karun complete creative freedom. "Before shooting began, we discussed everything in detail. Kiran never interfered—he just told me, 'Take your time, but make a great film,'" Karun said.

Discussing the film's theme, Karun explained that *Dilruba* explores emotions rarely addressed in mainstream Indian cinema. "Words like 'sorry' and 'thank you' are common in Western culture, but here, apologizing is often difficult. In *Dilruba*, the protagonist struggles with apologizing for something that isn't his fault, which creates tension in his relationships," he revealed.

Another key element of the story is how the protagonist views his ex-girlfriend. "Many people treat their exes as enemies, but before love, there was friendship. Even after a breakup, that friendship can still exist. Checking in on an ex shouldn't be taboo—that's something we explore in *Dilruba*," Karun said.

He also addressed comparisons to recent films with similar themes, like *Sankranthiki Vasthnam* and *Return of the Dragon*. "Though the core idea might seem familiar, the way we present it on screen is completely fresh. *Dilruba* offers a unique perspective on love and relationships," he assured.

With *Dilruba* set to release on March 14, Karun is ready to introduce his vision to the world. From childhood inspiration to working with industry veterans, his journey reflects passion, perseverance and an unwavering love for storytelling.



### MAHESH BABU DOMINATES THE RE-RELEASE TREND IN TOLLYWOOD

Superstar Mahesh Babu has established himself as the undisputed leader in Tollywood's re-release trend. It all started with *Pokiri*, which became a massive success upon its re-release, inspiring other stars to follow suit. Following *Pokiri*, Mahesh Babu's *Okkadu*, *Businessman* and *Murari* also had successful re-releases, with *Murari* performing like a fresh theatrical release. The trend continues with *Seethamma Vakitlo Sirmalle Chettu*, his blockbuster multi-starrer with Venkatesh, which re-released on March 7 and has been drawing strong box-office numbers. Despite many other star re-releases, Mahesh Babu remains the most successful in this space. While Pawan Kalyan's *Gabbar Singh* managed decent collections, other stars like Ram Charan, Jr. NTR and Allu Arjun haven't seen the same level of impact. With *Seethamma Vakitlo Sirmalle Chettu* still performing well, Mahesh Babu solidifies his position as the reigning superstar of re-releases in Tollywood.

## Despite busy schedule, Nagarjuna remains *Bigg Boss* host

There have been speculations that Nagarjuna might step down as the host of *Bigg Boss Telugu* due to his busy acting schedule. The veteran actor is currently working on multiple projects, including *Kuberaa*, which stars Dhanush and *Coolie*, where Rajinikanth plays the lead. Both films are being made as multilingual releases in Telugu and Tamil.

Given his packed schedule, rumors suggested that Nagarjuna might not return for the reality show. However, a source close

to the show's organisers has confirmed that he will continue as the host.

"We have not approached anyone else to host the show, as Nagarjuna has already agreed to return," said the source.

Nagarjuna has been the face of *Bigg Boss Telugu* since its third season and has successfully hosted five seasons so far. The first season was hosted by Jr. NTR, followed by Nani in the second season. The upcoming ninth season is expected to begin in September 2025, with Nagarjuna once again taking the reins.



## Sreeleela surprises Chiranjeevi on Vishwambhara sets

Megastar Chiranjeevi is currently filming *Vishwambhara* at Annapurna Studios and on Saturday, he received an unexpected but pleasant surprise from actress Sreeleela.

Sreeleela, who was also shooting at the same studios for her upcoming project, learned that Chiranjeevi was on set and decid-

ed to visit him. Since it was International Women's Day, Chiranjeevi made sure she didn't leave empty-handed.

Despite not expecting her visit, Chiranjeevi quickly arranged for a thoughtful gift. He presented Sreeleela with a goddess idol, making the moment even more special. The actress was thrilled by the gesture and later took a self-

ie with the megastar to commemorate the occasion. Sreeleela is set to make her Tamil and Hindi film debuts this year. She is starring in *Parasakthi*, directed by Sudha Kongara, in Tamil and will be seen opposite Kartik Aaryan in a Hindi film directed by Anurag Basu. Meanwhile, Chiranjeevi is wrapping up *Vishwambhara*, which is nearing completion.

## GV Prakash's debut as producer ends in disaster

GV Prakash Kumar, a well-known music composer with over 100 films to his credit, recently made his debut as a producer with *Kingston*, which was released on March 7. The film also marked his 25th appearance as an actor. Prakash had high hopes for this project, calling it one of his most ambitious films.

*Kingston* is a fantasy thriller with a horror backdrop, featuring extensive graphics and a significantly higher budget compared to his previous films. Marketed as a sea-adventure thriller, the makers claimed it was a concept never explored before in Indian cinema.

However, despite the hype, *Kingston* failed to make an impact from day one. The film opened to disastrous box office numbers in both Telugu and Tamil markets. Audiences outright rejected it, and even the weekend collections showed no improvement. Critics also gave the film poor reviews, citing a confusing narrative structure with excessive flashback sequences. With such weak performance, the film is now poised to incur significant losses for its makers.



## Kalyan Ram's next titled *Arjun S/o Vyjayanthi*

After a year without releases, Nandamuri Kalyan Ram is back with an exciting new project. While he made a mark as a producer with *Devara: Part One*, starring his brother Jr. NTR, he is now returning as the lead in *Arjun S/o Vyjayanthi*.

The film, directed by Pradeep Chilukuri, will see legendary actress Vijayashanthi in a pivotal role. The makers recently unveiled the title and first-look poster, confirming that Kalyan Ram plays Vijayashanthi's son in the film.

A major highlight is Vijayashanthi's return as a cop, reprising her iconic character name, Vyjayanthi, from *Kartavyam*—a film that released



nearly 35 years ago. Known for her powerful police roles, she will once again don the uniform, adding nostalgia and intensity to the film.

*Arjun S/o Vyjayanthi* is an action-packed thriller produced by Ashok Vardhan Muppa and Sunil Balusu, with Saiee Manjrekar as the female lead. Bollywood actor Sohail Khan has been cast as the antagonist.

The poster captures the high-octane energy of the film, depicting Kalyan Ram and Vijayashanthi walking amidst fire and metal chains in a factory-like setting. The film is currently in production, and the makers are expected to announce the release date soon.