



The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1864

RNI No.APENG/2018/76468

*LATE CITY VOL. 7 ISSUE 1611 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

PUBLISHED FROM: VIJAYAWADA DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

I am not like KCR — he's calm and composed. I'm a rowdy type. If you harass our cadre, we'll see you out properly. We've got the names of those who are threatening our people. We're writing them all down in our pink book. The officers and leaders behind this will not be spared. Those days are over. Don't expect mercy

- K Kavitha, BRS MLC



P4

Waqf Act not anti-Muslim; WB CM 'inciting violence':

Rijju



INDIA BETTER PLACED TO DEAL WITH TRUMP TARIFFS: ITC CHAIRMAN

8

'I felt like this role would completely change the course of my CAREER'



P12

DON'T MISS...

CMRF cheques for 60 beneficiaries

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar on Tuesday distributed Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) cheques to 60 beneficiaries, providing a total financial assistance of Rs 58.47 lakh. Among them, six individuals received Rs 10 lakh each under the Letter of Credit (LOC) scheme. The cheques were handed over at the MP's office located in Santhi Nagar. Speaking on the occasion, the MP said that the CMRF aims to support the poor, especially those facing serious medical emergencies. While six beneficiaries received...

-PAGE: 4

Stalin steps up attack on Centre

Making a strong pitch for empowering states, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday alleged that their rights were gradually being snatched by the Centre, and announced the constitution of a panel under on state autonomy that will be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge. The establishment of the high-level panel, marking half-a-century of DMK government's 'historic' state autonomy resolution moved in the Tamil Nadu Assembly by then Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, was aimed at re-asserting...

-PAGE: 5

India to go for trade ties with US

India has decided to follow the trade liberalisation path with the US, and both countries are negotiating a bilateral trade agreement (BTA) for which in-person talks are expected to begin next month, senior government officials said on Tuesday. India and the US are starting negotiations in virtual mode from this week. They have also finalised and signed the terms of reference (ToRs) for the pact. India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a bilateral trade agreement (BTA) since March...

-PAGE: 8

DC eye comeback against RR in IPL

Jolted by a dramatic loss at home after a dream start to the season, Delhi Capitals (DC) will look to put the setback behind them when they take on a faltering Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the IPL here on Wednesday. Riding high on a four-match winning streak, the Axar Patel-led Capitals looked like a well-oiled machine before a stunning batting meltdown against Mumbai Indians (MI) halted their momentum here on Sunday. What was meant to be a triumphant return to base ended in despair as the loss saw them...

-SPORTS

AMARAVATI DEVELOPMENT



Govt yet to decide on Phase 2 land pooling

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister Ponguru Narayana has clarified that no decision has been taken yet on the second phase of land acquisition for the capital city of Amaravati.

Speaking to the media after inspecting gravel quarries at Ananthavaram, the minister said that while several major infrastructure projects are being planned, including an international airport, the government still prefers land pooling over traditional acquisition.

Minister Narayana said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu aims to develop a mega city connecting Mangalagiri, Tadepalli, Guntur, and Vijayawada.

Continued on Page 2

PM Modi to relaunch capital works on May 2

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Amaravati on May 2 to launch the Amaravati Capital Works Restart Programme. The CM interacted with the ministers after the completion of the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday. He emphasised the need for collaboration among leaders of the three political parties involved in the reconstruction efforts. He directed officials to resolve revenue issues quickly and to ensure that police are not unnecessarily involved in such disputes.

Cabinet nod for Rs 4.62L cr projects

AP MINOR MINERAL POLICY 2025 GETS APPROVAL

DRAFT ORDINANCE CLEARED FOR SUB-CATEGORISATION OF SCS INTO 3 GROUPS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major push for industrial growth and job creation, the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, led by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Tuesday approved important proposals from the State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB), which held its meeting on April 10.

The Cabinet approved several investment plans, including land allotment, basic infrastructure, and subsidy guidelines, to support industries. So far, SIPB has cleared investments worth Rs 4.62 lakh crore, which could create over 4.23 lakh jobs.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Ministers Nimmala Ramanaidu (Water Resources), Dr Dola Sribala Veeranjanya Swamy (Social Welfare), Vangalapati Anitha (Home), and Kandula Durgesh (Tourism) said that contractors from seven districts, including Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Guntur, will get more time to pay seigniorage charges without penalties for the non-working period during their contract time. The Cabinet also approved the AP Minor Mineral Policy 2025. This policy aims to boost mining, attract more investments, resolve old issues, and improve operations in the sector.

In a significant decision, the Cabinet approved a draft ordinance from the Social Welfare Department



- Contractors from seven districts given an extension to pay seigniorage charges without penalties.
- The Cabinet ratified APMDC's creditworthiness and convert it into a public limited company.
- TCS allotted 21.6 acres at IT Hill-3 for a Rs 1,370 crore campus creating 12,000 jobs.
- Projects approved include steel and metal units and a data centre across Vizianagaram, Sri City and Visakhapatnam.
- Clearance given for construction of new Assembly and High Court buildings worth over Rs 1,400 crore.
- TKV agricultural feeder upgrades and two power projects for Orissa Power Consortium Ltd were approved.
- Land allotted for a hospital, temple and industrial parks in Guntur, Eluru and SPSR Nellore districts.
- Polavaram project works handed over to Navayuga Engineering Company Ltd for completion.

to divide Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three groups based on backwardness, population, and social indicators. Group-I (12 castes) will get 1% reservation, Group-II (18 castes) 6.5%, and Group-III (29 castes) 7.5%. The reservations will be implemented using a 200-point roster across all 26 districts. The Cabinet also confirmed GOs

49, 50 and 51 issued by the Industries and Commerce Department to improve financial strength. It approved issuing Rs 9,000 crore worth of bonds, converting APMDC into a public limited company, and appointing four shareholder officers. Changes will also be made to the company's legal documents. To support the IT sector, the

Cabinet cleared the allotment of 21.6 acres at IT Hill-3 for TCS to build a Rs 1,370 crore campus, which is expected to create 12,000 jobs. Other approved SIPB projects include the expansion of Maha Maya Industries' steel plant in Vizianagaram, a metal unit at Sri City, Tirupati, and a data centre in Visakhapatnam.

Continued on Page 2



Vigilance sleuths detain Youtuber for flying drone

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD vigilance personnel identified a YouTuber named Anshuman Tareja from Rajasthan who had flown a drone at the Harinama Sankirtana Mandapam, Tirumala on Tuesday evening. He was immediately detained and the drone was seized and handed over to the Tirumala police. The police have registered a case and the investigation is underway.

Naidu vows support for Central Tribal Univ: P3



TG: Krishna delta needs met through Godavari diversion

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II (KWDT-II), chaired by Justice Brijesh Kumar, resumed hearings on Monday in New Delhi, with Telangana presenting its arguments on Andhra Pradesh's access to additional water, particularly from the Godavari River.

Representing Telangana, senior counsel CS Vaidyanathan argued that the water needs of the Krishna Delta System (KDS) could be sufficiently met through diversions from the Godavari, especially the 80 TMCs allocated under the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (GWDT) Award via Polavaram and Pattiseema Lift Irrigation Schemes.

He asserted that United Andhra Pradesh had itself confirmed to the Central Water Commission and the Union Ministry of Water Resources that KDS requirement stood at only 151.2 TMCs. The Tribunal noted that earli-

er projections had placed the delta's requirement at over 215 TMCs, but the allocation by tribunals was limited to 151.2 TMCs, potentially justifying the need for Godavari diversions. Telangana, however, maintained that even Andhra Pradesh's own statement of case before the Tribunal pegged the KDS requirement at 152.2 TMCs, and once 80 TMCs is diverted from Godavari, only 72 TMCs from Krishna would be necessary.

Continued on Page 2

SC to hear pleas against Waqf Act today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court would likely hear on Wednesday a batch of petitions, including the one of AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, against the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan, so far, listed 10 petitions on the issue. In addition to Owaisi's plea, the court listed for hearing the petitions filed by AAP leader Amanatullah Khan, Association for the Protection of Civil Rights, Arshad Madani, Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema, Anjum Kadari, Taiyyab Khan Salmani, Mohammad Shafi, Mohammed Fazlurrahim and RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha.

Several fresh pleas, which are yet to be listed, were filed in the top court subsequently including the ones filed by TMC MP Mahua M o i t r a , Samajwadi Party MP from Sambhal, Ziaur-Rahman Barq.

2

NATIONAL HERALD CASE ED chargesheets Sonia, Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has filed a chargesheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others on charges of money laundering in the National Herald case.

Special judge Vishal Gogne examined the chargesheet, which was filed on April 9, on the point of cognisance and posted the matter for further proceedings on April 25.

The chargesheet also names Congress leader Sam Pitroda and Suman Dubey as accused persons. "The present prosecution complaint shall next be taken up for consideration on the aspect of cognisance before this court on April 25, 2025 when the special counsel for the ED and IO shall also ensure the production of the case diaries for perusal by the court," the judge said.

Nothing but political vendetta: Congress

The Congress on Tuesday described the ED's chargesheet against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case as vendetta politics and claimed seizing of assets in the case was a "state-sponsored crime masquerading as the rule of law".



The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a chargesheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others on charges of money laundering in the case. "Filing chargesheets against Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and some others is nothing but politics of vendetta and intimidation by the prime minister and the home minister gone completely berserk," Congress general secretary in-charge communications

Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X. "Seizing the assets of the National Herald is a state-sponsored crime masquerading as the rule of law," the Congress leader said. He asserted the Congress and its leadership would not be silenced and the truth shall prevail. Special judge Vishal Gogne examined the chargesheet, which was filed on April 9, on the point of cognisance and posted the matter for further proceedings on April 25.

HELPING HANDS FOR FARMERS

AP, UN join forces to tackle climate woes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major step towards tackling the growing threat of climate change, the Andhra Pradesh Government has joined hands with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to launch a five-year climate adaptation initiative aimed at protecting vulnerable smallholder farmers, especially women.

The project, named Adaptation for Resilience (ADAPT4R), is part of a regional effort involving India and Sri Lanka. It will be implemented in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu, focusing on building climate resilience, food security, and alternative livelihoods through local solutions.



In Andhra Pradesh, the YSR Kadapa district has been selected for the rollout. The State's Agriculture Department and the WFP will jointly implement the project, with Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RYSS) serving as the nodal agency.

Continued on Page 2

Lokesh felicitates rankers from govt jr colleges

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, RTGS and IT, Nara Lokesh, on Tuesday felicitated 52 students from government junior colleges who secured top ranks in state-level examinations. The event, titled Shining Stars-2025, was held at the Minister's residence in Undavalli.

Minister Lokesh presented gold medals and laptops to the students in recognition of their outstanding academic performance.

Speaking on the occasion, Lokesh said, "My heartfelt congratulations to the students and their parents. I am here to celebrate your success. Poverty should never become a barrier to education. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has directed that government schools and colleges should be on par with private institutions."



Referring to past issues, he said the YSRC government had scrapped the mid-day meal scheme in junior colleges. "A girl from Payakapuram told me her grandmother, who is raising her after losing her parents, is finding it easier now after the revival of the Dokka Seethamma

mid-day meal scheme," he added. "You are all winners," Lokesh told the students. "You have broken the myth that government college students cannot score high marks. Today, you are brand ambassadors. Healthy competition among students is good."

He also shared a bit of his own academic journey. "In Class 9, I used to play and sing. But in Class 10, I was bullied. I then worked very hard during my intermediate years. Later, I pursued an MBA at Stanford and worked at the World Bank. After becoming a Minister, we introduced

several reforms in intermediate education."

Lokesh said the Chief Minister had entrusted him with the education portfolio with a clear goal — to allow students to choose careers of their interest, and not push everyone towards IT. "Many students have requested that uniforms be provided in intermediate colleges. We will consider your suggestions seriously," he added.

He also stressed the importance of responsibility. "We should support our families, keep our surroundings clean, and question what is wrong. We must uphold both fundamental rights and responsibilities. The country needs job creators, not just job seekers."

I am proud of each one of you — you have upheld the dignity of government education. Hats off to you!" the Minister said.

Is the basic structure doctrine a shield or a barrier?

Constitutional protection is not merely the authority of courts – it is a reflection of people's rights. Of late, however, the "Basic Structure Doctrine" seems to be emerging as a silent obstacle to the evolution of social justice and equitable representation. In a democratic federation, instead of enabling proportional inclusion, it appears to be safeguarding the interests of certain historically privileged classes.

Established in the landmark Kesavananda Bharati case in 1973, the basic structure doctrine was initially intended to act as a bulwark for constitutional integrity. Over time, however, it has begun to function more as a limitation on legislative independence, especially in matters concerning the advancement of socially backward classes. It

risks redirecting constitutional intent from empowerment to restriction. The pertinent question is – should the doctrine only act as a guardian of institutional power balance, or should it also incorporate the heartbeat of the Constitution – equitable representation and distributive justice?

The Indian Constitution never envisioned equality as a mere statistic. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) explicitly empower the state to make special provisions for the progress of socially and educationally backward classes.

In the Nagaraj (2006) judgment, the Supreme Court insisted on quantifiable data to prove 'inadequacy of representation.' Yet, in Indra Sawhney,

The Indian Constitution never envisioned equality as a formula or representation as a mere statistic. Articles 15(4) and 16(4) explicitly empower the state to make special provisions for the progress of socially and educationally backward classes.

the same court observed that 'social justice is the very foundation of all rights.' These views may not be contradictory, but they highlight a gap in judicial empathy for ground realities.

IR Coelho Judgment – Basic Structure Must Not Override Social Justice

In the IR Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu (2007) case, the Supreme Court ruled that laws

placed in the Ninth Schedule are subject to basic structure review. However, it also clarified that:

"Equality of opportunity, inclusive representation, and social justice are themselves integral parts of the basic structure."

Therefore, the doctrine should not be used to strike down laws that aim to enhance representation, but to uphold them.



DR VAKULABHARANAM KRISHNA MOHAN RAO
Former Chairman – Telangana BC Commission

Articles 31-B, 31-C – Constitutional Safeguards for Social Legislation

Article 31-B shields laws in the Ninth Schedule from judicial review, especially those connected to reservations and

land reforms.

- Article 31-C allows laws made to implement Articles 39(b) and 39(c) to override fundamental rights under Articles 14 and 19.

These provisions were never meant to bypass rights, but to realise socio-economic balance as envisioned in the Constitution.

Why 42% representation for BCs in Telangana is justified

Backward Classes constitute over 50% of Telangana's population. But their representation in education, employment, and local governance remains dismal. Even after conducting surveys and establishing the empirical need, attempts to provide 42% reservations face legal scepticism.

In Vikas Kishanrao Gawali (2021), the Supreme Court held that 'even where inade-

quacy is proven, undue delay in implementing reservations violates the Constitution. This precedent demands timely action, not hesitation.

Without Social Justice, Constitutional Protection is Incomplete

Constitutional protection is not textual rigidity – it is the assurance of dignity to those historically denied voice and power. This includes:

- Social justice
- Collective participation
- Equitable distribution of economic and political power

These values must be embedded within the Basic Structure itself.

Conclusion: A path to stability lies through justice

The Basic Structure doctrine was envisioned as a principle of institutional balance. But if it is increasingly used to block the rights of margin-

alised communities, it loses democratic credibility.

Constitutional morality demands that social justice be seen not as an exception, but as an essential expression of India's constitutional soul. Without representation and participation of the marginalised, the Basic Structure is like an empty bottle – shaped but devoid of ethical essence.

In the present legal scenario, a democratically accountable government must proceed with caution – but with commitment. If the government truly upholds the principle of social justice, it must overcome legal hurdles through credible data, expert-backed reports, and due constitutional process. Fulfilling the promise of equality requires not just intent, but informed and constitutionally-guided action.

Cabinet approves AP Minor Mineral Policy 2025

Dip in mining's share in GSDP from 3.53% in 2018-19 to 2.71% in 2023-24

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Cabinet, led by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, has approved the Andhra Pradesh Minor Mineral Policy 2025 – a strategic initiative aimed at revitalising the State's mining sector and strengthening micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The decision comes in the wake of a decline in mining's contribution to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), which fell from 3.53% in 2018-19 to 2.71% in 2023-24.

A key feature of the new policy is the resolution of over 6,000 pending lease applications that had been rendered inoperative under the auction-only model introduced in 2022. These applications will now be processed on a first-come, first-served basis, with a one-year window for issuing Letters of Intent (LoIs). Applications remain-



ing unresolved within this period will be shifted to the auction process. To ensure balanced access and promote genuine participation, the policy reinstates application-based leases for granite and building materials, while industrial minerals will be allocated through an auction based on a production-linked premium model. This dual approach is intended to meet both industrial and infrastructure requirements.

Lease premiums have been significantly rationalised – reduced

from 10 times to 5 times the dead rent for most minerals, and to 3 times for limestone slabs. Dead rents will be adjusted annually to provide greater financial predictability for leaseholders. Additionally, lease periods have been extended from 20 to 30 years for granite and industrial minerals, and from 15 to 30 years for captive-use road metal leases.

The controversial "Consideration Amount" introduced during the pandemic has been revoked, offering much-needed relief to leaseholders. A transparent, tonnage-based Seigniorage Fee system has been introduced, with no additional levies on competitive minerals such as dolomite and slate.

Secretary (Mines) Praveen Kumar stated that the entire lease lifecycle will now be managed through a digital platform, supported by drone mapping, CCTV

surveillance, weighbridges, and a Mine Surveillance System to curb illegal mining. The policy also emphasises sustainable practices, with provisions for additional dumping land, regulated waste disposal, and scientific closure of abandoned leases. A new Star Rating System will encourage environmental and operational compliance.

He further added that a One-Time Settlement (OTS) scheme will help resolve legacy disputes and reopen closed quarries. Lease transfers within families will be exempt from fees, and task forces will be established to expedite inter-departmental clearances. The Andhra Pradesh Minor Mineral Policy 2025 reflects the government's commitment to responsible, transparent, and inclusive mining, paving the way for renewed growth and investment.

'Mana Mitra' brochure unveiled

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

District Collector Vijaya Krishnan on Tuesday unveiled the promotional brochure for Mana Mitra, India's first WhatsApp-based governance initiative launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. Speaking on the occasion, Krishnan said that the platform aims to simplify citizens' interaction with government departments by providing key services directly through WhatsApp. Residents can now access these services by saving the number 95523 00009 and sending a "Hi" message, thereby avoiding the need to visit government offices in person.

TDP always defends women's rights: Minister Vasamsetti

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a strong message reaffirming the party's commitment to upholding the dignity of women, Labour Minister Vasamsetti Subhash has stated that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has always stood as a defender of women's rights. Responding to the recent suspension of party member Chebrolu Kiran for his objectionable remarks against YS Bharathi, wife of former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Minister said that the action taken reflects the TDP's steadfast respect for women.

"India is a land that has always held women in the highest regard," said Subhash. "By suspending TDP activist Chebrolu Kiran and initiating legal action against him, the



party has made it clear that misconduct towards women will not be tolerated, regardless of who is responsible."

Praising Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Subhash said he embodies integrity, discipline and dedication. "No matter which party a person belongs to, anyone who insults or demeans women will face consequences. These actions send a strong message and will serve as a lesson for many."

The Minister also criticised the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP),

stating that had its leader YS Jagan Mohan Reddy followed similar principles, leaders such as Kodali Nani, Anil Kumar Yadav, Purni Nani, Ambati Rambabu and RK Roja would not have made derogatory and indecent remarks in the past.

"The TDP leadership will never remain silent when women are insulted. Chandrababu Naidu's decision has instilled pride in every party worker," he said. "While TDP leaders stand proud of their leadership's values, even YSRCP members are now embarrassed by their own party's failure to take such action earlier."

The Minister further urged all citizens to act with decency, uphold the dignity of women, and protect their self-respect in every sphere of life.

SC to hear pleas...

Continued from Page 1

The YSRCP-led by former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Communist Party of India (CPI), Tamilaaga Vettri Kazhagam chief and actor-turned-politician Vijay have also moved the top court on the issue. Advocate Hari Shankar Jain and one Mani Munjal have also filed a separate petition challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the law on the ground that they violate fundamental rights of non-Muslims following which the CJI agreed to list it.

The Centre, on April 8, filed a caveat in the apex court and sought a hearing before any order was passed in the matter. A caveat is filed by a party in the high courts and the apex court to ensure that no orders are passed without hearing it.

The Centre recently notified the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which got the assent of President Droupadi Murmu on April 5 after its passage from Parliament following heated debates in both houses.

TCS gets land in Vizag for 99 paise to set up IT centre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for IT and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, has successfully facilitated the allotment of 21.16 acres of land in Visakhapatnam to Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) at a nominal rate of 99 paise.

The State Cabinet, which met at the Secretariat here on Tuesday, approved the allotment for the proposed TCS facility. During his

visit to Tata House in October last year, Lokesh made a strong case for TCS to establish a large development centre in Andhra Pradesh. The company is set to invest Rs 1,370 crore in the facility, which is expected to generate 12,000 jobs.

Through sustained follow-ups and negotiations between the State Government and TCS, Lokesh succeeded in final-

ising the land allotment. The move is being seen as a bold step to demonstrate Andhra Pradesh's commitment to attracting major IT investments.

In a similar precedent, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier facilitated the allotment of land to Tata Motors at 99 paise in Sanand, Gujarat, which marked a turning point for the automotive sector in that state.

Cabinet nod for... TG: Krishna delta...

Continued from Page 1

Infrastructure projects approved include Letters of Acceptance (LOAs) for building the new Assembly (Rs 617.33 crore) and High Court (Rs 786.05 crore). The Cabinet also cleared proposals to upgrade 11KV agricultural feeders and two power projects for Orissa Power Consortium Ltd.

The Cabinet approved land allotments for various purposes: 6.35 acres at Nadimpalem (Guntur district) to ESIC for a 100-bed hospital and staff quarters, and 30 acres at IS Raghavapuram (Eluru district) to Lord Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple. APIIC will receive 87.56 acres in Krishnapatnam and 220.81 acres in Nelaturu (SPSR Nellore district) for industrial parks.

Finally, the Cabinet decided to hand over the remaining Polavaram project works to Navayuga Engineering Company Ltd. It also approved hiring a videographer on an outsourcing basis for the Deputy Chief Minister's office, with a salary of Rs 60,000 per month for the full term.

These approvals show the government's focus on boosting the economy, improving infrastructure, and ensuring social justice.

Telangana argued that after bifurcation, Andhra Pradesh had initiated a major diversion from the Godavari to the Penna basin, first under the Godavari-Penna scheme, later renamed the YSR Palnadu Scheme, and now known as the Polavaram-Banakacharla Link Scheme. The scheme utilizes the Polavaram Right Main Canal (RMC), proposed Vaikuntapuram Barrage upstream of Prakasam Barrage, and Nagarjunasagar Right Main Canal to divert substantial volumes of water.

Vaidyanathan explained that the current infrastructure could divert more than 17,000 cusecs (approximately 1.5 TMCs per day), compared to the 10,000 cusecs proposed in the original Detailed Project Report before the GWDT. Telangana asserted that up to 135 TMCs could be drawn within 90 days using the existing system, with further expansions already planned.

The hearings before KWDT-II will continue for two more days. Telangana's legal team included Advocate General Sudarshan Reddy, senior officials like Adityanath Das, and engineers from the ISWR unit. Andhra Pradesh was represented by senior counsel Umapathy and other legal and engineering officials.

Meanwhile, the hearing on W.P. 772/2021 of Andhra Pradesh and W.P. 666/2021 of Telangana before the Supreme Court, related to the broader Krishna water dispute, could not take place on April 15 and has been postponed to May 7, 2025.

Minister urges outreach of govt welfare schemes to public

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC Welfare S Savitha said that the upliftment of backward classes is a top priority for Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who has allocated unprecedented funds for BC welfare. She urged officials to ensure that government schemes and development programs reach the eligible beneficiaries across the state.

The Minister held a review meeting with chairpersons of various BC corporations at the State Secretariat on Tuesday. During the meeting, she highlighted that the Chief Minister has been working sincerely for



the welfare of BC and EWS communities since assuming office. She noted that ₹39,07 crore was allocated for BCs in the 2024-25 budget and ₹48,000 crore is earmarked for the 2025-26 budget, the highest ever in the state's history.

Minister Savitha directed corporation chairpersons to actively promote government schemes at the grassroots level. Under "Talli Ki Vandanam," ₹15,000 will be given annually for each child in a household. Under "Rythu Bharosa," farm-

ers will receive ₹20,000 and the same amount will be given to fishermen during the fishing ban season. She also said awareness must be created about schemes for weavers and that a BC Protection Act is being introduced. A resolution for 33% BC reservation in legislative bodies has been passed and sent to the Centre.

The Minister assured quick resolution of issues raised by the corporation chairpersons and promised to take unresolved matters to the Chief Minister. She also criticized the previous government for using BC corporations for political appointments.

Govt yet to...

Continued from Page 1

As part of this plan, an international airport is proposed on 5,000 acres, and land pooling on a large scale is being considered. In total, around 30,000 acres would be needed for the airport and related infrastructure such as roads, drainage, and public utilities.

He explained that while traditional acquisition offers compensation of about 2.5 times the registration value, land pooling provides better returns to farmers, including returnable plots and benefits linked to development. He added that local MLAs have expressed concerns about the losses farmers may suffer under regular acquisition, which is why the state prefers

voluntary land pooling. The minister recalled that during the earlier TDP government in 2015, farmers voluntarily pooled 34,000 acres within 58 days, showing their support for the capital city. He said that a similar method could be followed now if farmers agree to cooperate. Criticising the previous government, Narayana blamed political indecision and legal issues—mainly due to their failure to cancel earlier tenders—for the delay in Amaravati's development. "It took eight months to sort out the legal matters," he said, "but now capital works have started again."

He further announced that tenders for 68 projects worth Rs 42,360 crore have been approved and construction is in progress. To meet the con-

struction requirements, the mining department has allotted 851 acres of gravel quarries to the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA), including the Ananthavaram hill, where excavation is currently up to eight metres. Drone surveys will be carried out to assess the full excavation potential.

Minister Narayana confirmed that Amaravati's construction is now moving forward with clear timelines: officials' residential quarters will be ready in one year, trunk roads in 18 months, layout roads in 30 months, and iconic buildings within three years. He also said the government is exploring ways to use vacant lands for infrastructure development.

AP, UN join forces to tackle climate...

Continued from Page 1

Supported by the Adaptation Fund, ADAPT4R targets areas where unpredictable weather and extreme climate events have hurt agriculture and rural incomes. The project follows a national-level agreement signed in August 2024 between the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

and WFP. "This collaboration will shield our smallholder farmers from climate shocks by giving them timely advice and location-specific action plans," said Budhithi Rajsekhar, Ex Officio Special Chief Secretary of the Agriculture & Cooperation Department. "It's about long-term resilience and sustainable farming."

Director, said, "We are proud to work with Andhra Pradesh on this initiative. It's a crucial step in helping farmers, especially women, adopt climate-smart practices to secure their future."

The project also aims to share Andhra Pradesh's experience across the region, boosting access to climate information and strengthening grassroots-level climate response.

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Collector calls for steps to prevent sand shortage

Officials asked to stock 10 lakh MT sand at key supply yards across NTR dist

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has instructed officials to implement comprehensive measures to avert any potential sand shortage in the district. Stressing the need for uninterrupted sand availability to support public and developmental works, he directed that 10 lakh metric tonnes (MTs) of sand be stocked at key supply yards across the district.

Presiding over the District Level Sand Committee meeting at the Pinali Venkaiah Meeting Hall on the Collectorate premises in Vijayawada on Tuesday, Dr Lakshminsha emphasised the importance of transparency and accountability in sand supply under the free sand policy. He urged officials to ensure that the public has easy, fair, and timely access to sand, without delays or irregularities.

With construction activities gaining momentum—especially due to the revival of Amaravati capital works and infrastructure developments in surrounding villages—the Collector highlighted the urgency of maintaining adequate sand reserves in preparation for the upcoming monsoon season. In this regard, he directed that stockyards at Alurupadu, Eтуру, Kanchela, Keesara, and the Ibrahimpatnam Truck Terminal be fully stocked by May 31.

He outlined the daily lorry supply requirements needed to achieve this goal. According to



NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha addressing the District Level Sand Committee meeting at the Collectorate in Vijayawada on Tuesday

the Collector's directions, there is a stock of 50,000 MT of sand at the Alurupadu stockyard, which requires 15 lorries per day for distribution. For the Eтуру stockyard, 10 lorries are needed each day to supply 30,000 MT. At Kanchela, 20 lorries per day are necessary for 70,000 MT, while Keesara requires 80 lorries daily for 3,50,000 MT. Lastly, at the Ibrahimpatnam Truck Terminal, 90 lorries are needed each day to transport 4,00,000 MT, he explained.

He directed tahsildars, as supervising officers, to monitor stockyards daily and submit progress reports. He also suggested appointing addi-

tional technical assistants if required to support coordination and logistics. The Collector announced the identification of seven new sand reaches at Ravirala, Malkapuram, Eтуру, Munnaluru, Saidapuram, Gani Atkur, and Damuluru, and instructed mining authorities to initiate proposals for environmental clearances to enable sand extraction from these locations.

To enhance transparency, Dr. Lakshminsha mandated that regular updates on sand supply and stock levels be made available online, and warned that strict action would be taken against any unauthor-

ised activity at stock points. Citing recent heavy rains in the Jaggayyapeta area that led to sand mounds being deposited in farmlands due to flooding, he instructed Nandigama RDO M. Balakrishna to conduct a field inspection and report on the feasibility of removing the mounds.

Deputy Director of Mines A Srinivasa Rao, Assistant Director K Veeraswamy, Revenue Inspector K Srinivas, Technical Assistant K Khyati, M Baburao, Nandigama RDO K Balakrishna, and tahsildars from Vatsavai, Chanderlapadu, Nandigama, Kanchikacherla, and Ibrahimpatnam attended the meeting.



Kandukuri Awards for 110 artistes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Under the auspices of the Andhra Pradesh State Film, Television and Theatre Development Corporation, Kandukuri Awards will be presented to a total of 110 talented theatre artists and technical professionals across the state at Tummalapalli Venkata Raghavaiah Kalakshetram in Vijayawada. The ceremony will be held to commemorate the 177th birth anniversary of renowned social reformer and literary figure Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, observed as Telugu Theatre Day on April 16.

Three eminent artists will be conferred the Kandukuri Pratishthatmaka Rangasthala Puraskaram (State-level Lifetime Achievement Awards), while 107 individuals from 26 districts will receive the Kandukuri Visishta Puraskaram (District-level Excellence Awards).

Each state-level award will be honored with a cash prize of ₹1 lakh, while district-level awardees will receive ₹10,000 each, along with a memento and citation.

The awardees were selected by a 11-member expert committee headed by noted playwright and screenwriter Dr Burra Sai Madhav, who currently serves as the Chairman of the Andhra Pradesh State Film, Television and Theatre Development Corporation.

CM Naidu releases book

'Mana Chandranna – Abhivrudhi - Sankshema Visionary' is penned by ex-MLC TD Janardhan



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu officially released the book titled "Mana Chandranna – Abhivrudhi - Sankshema Visionary" on Tuesday at the State Secretariat. The book has been authored and compiled by senior TDP leader and former MLC TD Janardhan.

Designed as a pocket-sized publication, the book covers 700 topics highlighting the life, journey and achievements of Chandrababu Naidu. It features visual depictions of his

childhood, education, early leadership roles as a student and his entry into politics.

The book also recounts Naidu's contributions as an MLA and Minister, his first term as Chief Minister and his key role in the formation of central governments. Noteworthy events such as the Alipiri bomb attack, his 'Vastunna Meekosam' padyatra and mass movements he led are also detailed.

A special section of the book elaborates on public policies introduced during his tenure and how they impacted the

united Andhra Pradesh, as well as the influence they had on the national stage.

The publication further highlights Naidu's visionary initiatives in areas such as agricultural development and interlinking of rivers, presenting them as part of a comprehensive blueprint for progress.

The book is aimed at providing readers with a concise yet detailed overview of Chandrababu Naidu's leadership and his emphasis on welfare and development over the decades.

Naidu vows support for Central Tribal Univ

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has assured full support from the state government for the timely completion of the Central Tribal University at Kuntinavalasa village in Mentada mandal, Vizianagaram district.

On Tuesday, Vice-Chancellor Prof T.V. Kattimani and Dean Prof M. Sharath met the Chief Minister at the Secretariat and briefed him on the university's progress. CM Naidu stressed the need to speed up the construction and assured all necessary help from the state.

The Central Government has allocated Rs 800 crore for the project, of which Rs 340 crore has been released. Spread across 561 acres, the campus will include an administrative block, academic buildings, and staff quarters. The Chief Minister urged the university officials to complete the construction within a year.

He directed state officials to speed up basic infrastructure works like drinking water,



power supply, and an approach road. The VC requested urgent completion of the 2-km approach road, to which the CM responded that work would begin immediately.

The university currently has only 18 faculty members against the required 100. CM Naidu said he would write to the Prime Minister seeking an increase in sanctioned posts and also invite him to attend the convocation scheduled for May.

Originally sanctioned in 2018 under the earlier TDP

government, the university has so far functioned from rented buildings. CM Naidu criticised the previous government for neglecting the project and said the present government is committed to making it fully functional.

At present, 600 students are enrolled in various courses. The number is expected to rise after the permanent campus becomes operational. The Chief Minister also stressed the need for job-oriented and industry-relevant courses to prepare students for employment and entrepreneurship.

YSRCP flays arrest of Dalit, BC youth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP spokesperson Anka Reddy Narayanamurthy has strongly condemned the inhumane treatment of Bahujan youth by the Hindupur police on Ambedkar Jayanti.

He stated that BC youth Lokesh and Dalit youth Naveen were illegally arrested for questioning a social media post targeting former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

Acting on directions from senior TDP leaders, the police paraded the youth in handcuffs, barefoot under the scorching sun, in clear violation of legal norms. Narayanamurthy called the act unconstitutional and warned that officers exceeding their authority would face judicial scrutiny. He criticised the State's deteriorating law and order and the rise of Red Book-style governance under the TDP-led alliance.

Reaffirming the YSRCP's commitment to social justice, he said the party would pursue legal action and protect the dignity and rights of Dalits and Bahujans from oppressive State actions.

272 g gold stolen from car at Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A serious security lapse at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, located on Indrakiladri in Vijayawada, has come to light. On Tuesday, 272 grams of gold ornaments were stolen from a car that was parked near Om Turning on Ghat Road.

The One Town Police have registered a case and launched an investigation into the incident.

According to reports, the victims — members of a family from Hyderabad — were en route to a relative's wedding in Amalapuram, located in the Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district, and stopped in Vijayawada to seek



blessings from goddess Kanaka Durga. The family, led by Durga Rao, parked their vehicle at Om Turning before proceeding for darshan. However, upon returning, they were shocked to discover that the gold ornaments they had stored in the car's trunk were missing. Despite

thoroughly searching the vehicle, the ornaments could not be found. The victims promptly approached the One Town Police Station and filed a complaint.

Acting swiftly, the police visited the location and attempted to examine CCTV footage from cameras installed along Ghat Road and near the Durga Temple. Shockingly, they found that the surveillance cameras were not functioning properly, severely hampering their investigation.

This incident has sparked outrage among devotees, who questioned the lax security arrangements at one of the

State's most revered temples. Many expressed concern that thieves are operating with impunity in an area expected to be under tight surveillance, particularly considering the heavy footfall of pilgrims throughout the year.

With this being yet another incident highlighting weak security systems, especially non-functional CCTV cameras, public trust in the temple's safety infrastructure appears to be eroding. Devotees are requesting to review and strengthen surveillance systems, particularly on the Ghat Road and surrounding areas, to prevent further incidents and reassure devo-

DSEO unveils brochure on school achievements

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District School Educational Officer (DSEO) UV Subba Rao, on Tuesday, launched a vibrant, multi-coloured brochure highlighting the success stories, accolades, and achievements of Zilla Parishad High School (ZPHS), Nunna, located in Vijayawada Rural mandal. The brochure reflects the school's excellence in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities, and its commitment to holistic student development.

As part of the 'Badi Bata' initiative aimed at increasing enrolment, the brochure has been specially designed to attract students for the 2025-26 academic year. The launch event took place at the DSEO office on the Vijayawada Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) premises.

Addressing the gathering, DSEO UV Subba Rao praised the efforts of the school's staff and students, noting that ZPHS Nunna had set remarkable benchmarks across various domains. He described the

school as having a "corporate-style" environment and shared that many philanthropists have been coming forward to support it by enhancing its infrastructure.

He further noted that ZPHS Nunna excels not only in academics but also in sports, cultural, and extracurricular activities. Situated on a sprawling seven-acre campus, the school offers a range of facilities for students. Alumni have been contributing significantly by establishing a dining hall, kitchen, science lab, and cycle shed.

National meet begins at Vikas College

Two-day event has received over 177 research papers from AP and Telangana

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr K Venkateswarlu, professor at Namibia University, inaugurated the two-day national conference on Scientific Advancements in Key Technologies and Innovations - 2025 (NCSAKTI) at Vikas College of Engineering and Technology, Nunna, near Vijayawada, on Tuesday. The primary aim of the conference is to offer a dynamic platform for budding engineers and researchers to present their work, exchange ideas, and explore innovative solutions to real-world



Prof Dr Venkateswarlu speaking at the national conference on Scientific Advancement at the Vikas College of Engineering and Technology at Nunna on Tuesday

challenges. The conference witnessed the enthusiastic participation of over 117 students and research scholars from various institutions

across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. A total of 177 research papers were submitted by research scholars and industry experts, reflecting a diverse range

of scientific and technological topics.

In his inaugural address, Prof Venkateswarlu highlighted the pivotal role of technology in driving global development across multiple sectors. He noted that technology has become an integral part of modern life, impacting everything from communication and healthcare to transportation and infrastructure. He also shared insights into cutting-edge innovations in rocket engine design, underscoring advancements that are reshaping the aerospace industry.

SAAP Chairman directs seamless planning for the Beach Festival

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chairman of the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP), Animini Ravi Naidu, has underscored the vital role of sports officials and association representatives in ensuring the successful conduct of the Beach Festival, scheduled to be held from May 15 to 18 at Manginapudi Beach, Machilipatnam. He urged all stakeholders to uphold the spirit of sportsmanship and contribute proactively to the event's seamless organisation.

Chairman Ravi Naidu reviewed the event's preparations with District Sports Development Officers (DSDOs) and representatives of Kabaddi, Canoeing, and

Kayaking Associations during a coordination meeting held at the SAAP conference hall, located on the premises of the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium, Vijayawada, on Tuesday.

Addressing the meeting, he said that Minister for Mines & Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, will personally oversee the festival's arrangements, highlighting the importance the government attaches to the event. Ravi Naidu emphasised that it is a collective responsibility to execute the sports competitions with precision, as directed by SAAP. He urged all participating associations and DSDOs to collaborate closely to uphold and enhance SAAP's reputation

He said this festival is scheduled for May 15 to 18 at Manginapudi Beach under the personal care of Minister Kollu Ravindra



through the effective planning and execution of events.

He added that all sports associations should be immediately informed about the amenities and logistical support

to be provided by SAAP. In addition to smooth organisation, he said that modern sports infrastructure should be arranged to accommodate athletes arriving from across the country. Sports associations reported that 29 men's and 29 women's teams are expected to compete in Kabaddi, while national-level athletes will participate in boat racing, traditional boat competitions, and sea kayaking. In response, the SAAP Chairman assured that the Sports Authority will take full responsibility for providing

necessary facilities to the athletes. He directed that suitable beach areas for setting up sports courts be identified without delay.

Further, Ravi Naidu stressed that sports equipment, technical teams, coaches, referees, and volunteers must be made ready. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of coordinating transport, police services, fire safety, medical camps, and establishing dedicated committees for the welfare of the participants. He also emphasised the need for close supervision of sports court setups, venues, and gallery arrangements to ensure a world-class experience for players and spectators alike.

Ravi Naidu directed that the

Beach Festival should include international-standard sports competitions, making sports an integral highlight of the celebration. With dignitaries including Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan, several ministers, MPs, MLCs, and MLAs expected to attend, he said that all efforts must be made to deliver a vibrant and engaging sporting experience.

He encouraged association managers, coaches, and DSDOs to maximise available resources and ensure athletes deliver their best performances. "Let us create a dynamic sporting atmosphere that inspires players and spectators alike," he concluded.



Ambedkar statue desecrated in Sankhavaram

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The statue of Dr B.R. Ambedkar at Sankhavaram village was desecrated by unidentified miscreants, who garlanded it with footwear on Monday night.

Peddapuram DSP D. Srihari Raju, who visited the site, informed the media that CCTV footage had captured the act and assured that the culprits would be identified and arrested shortly.

The incident triggered protests, with a large number of activists from various organisations staging a dharna to condemn the desecration.

Complete NREGS targets: DC

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector A Thameem Ansariya has instructed officials to step up efforts to meet the set targets under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme.

The Collector conducted a surprise inspection of ongoing NREGA works at P. Naidupalem panchayat in Chimakurthi mandal. During the visit, she directed the DWMA Project Director to inspect the construction of a water tank intended to provide drinking water to livestock and to ensure timely completion while maintaining quality standards.

She interacted with workers engaged at a feeder channel, checking their attendance and inquiring about the availability of basic facilities such as drinking water and shade at the worksite. The Collector instructed officials to provide these essential amenities and take necessary precautions considering the intense summer heat. She also ordered that ORS packets be made available to the workers. Later, she visited a farm pond and reviewed its details.

The Collector also partici-



ated in an enrolment drive and a programme on transition and dropout prevention at the village secretariat in P. Naidupalem. Speaking on the occasion, she said the state government was introducing several reforms in the education sector and emphasised that all school-aged children must be enrolled in schools.

She called for a mandal-level action plan for enrolment, tran-

sition, and dropout reduction, along with public awareness campaigns about the government-provided facilities. Parents must also be involved in this process, she added.

The Collector stressed the need to focus on admitting all five-year-old Anganwadi children into Class 1, promoting students to higher classes, and re-enrolling dropouts. She directed that departments

including Education, Labour, Women and Child Welfare, and Medical and Health work in close coordination.

As part of the 'Poshan Pakhwada' programme, ICDS staff demonstrated the preparation of nutritious food, which was inspected by the Collector. DEO Kiran Kumar and ZP CEO Chiranjeevi accompanied her during the visit.



MP distributes CMRF cheques to 60 beneficiaries in Eluru

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar on Tuesday distributed Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF) cheques to 60 beneficiaries, providing a total financial assistance of Rs 58.47 lakh. Among them, six individuals received Rs 10 lakh each under the Letter of Credit (LOC) scheme.

The cheques were handed over at the MP's office located in Santhi Nagar. Speaking on the occasion, the MP said that the CMRF aims to sup-

port the poor, especially those facing serious medical emergencies. While six beneficiaries received Rs 10 lakh each under the LOC, the remaining 54 were sanctioned Rs 48.47 lakh collectively.

Highlighting the government's commitment to healthcare support, the MP stated that the CMRF continues to provide aid to individuals battling critical health conditions. He emphasised that the process is carried out transparently and enquired

whether any intermediaries had demanded money from the beneficiaries.

The MP noted that financial assistance worth Rs 2 crore has been disbursed in Eluru district so far under the CMRF. He urged the public to avail themselves of the scheme, assuring that support is provided irrespective of political affiliation.

Zilla Parishad Chairperson Ghanta Padmasri and AMC Chairperson Garapati Ramasita were also present at the event.



Ghazal Srinivas to render Gita in all world languages

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Renowned singer and triple Guinness World Records holder Dr Ghazal Srinivas has taken up a unique mission to render the Srimad Bhagavad Gita in all world languages.

Speaking at the launch of the Telugu audio version at the Lions Community Hall in his hometown Palakollu, West Godavari district, on Tuesday, Dr Srinivas said that recordings in 25 languages have already been completed.

Describing the Srimad Bhagavad Gita as a "life textbook" for humanity, he said that the audio recordings are freely available on YouTube and other digital platforms. He

aims to take the timeless teachings of the Gita to every village, every person, and all parts of the world.

A special moment during the event was when Dr Srinivas's father, Kesiraju Narasimha Rao, formally launched the Telugu audio version, which was composed and sung by Dr Srinivas himself. "This is not just a musical project; it is a mission to connect humanity through the eternal message of the Gita," he said.

Former MLA Dr Ch. Satyanarayana, former MLC Angara Ram Mohan, Gummadi Gopala Krishna, and Rasaraju were present at the audio launch ceremony.

Health Minister sanctions private homoeo medical college for Chittoor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move to promote AYUSH systems of medicine, a new private homoeopathy medical college has been sanctioned for Chittoor district. This initiative reflects the NDA governments' focus—both at the Centre and in Andhra Pradesh—on encouraging alternative healthcare systems, including Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Satya Kumar Yadav has approved the establishment of Venkateswara Homeopathy Medical College



and Hospital at Muthirevula village in Puthalapattu mandal, Chittoor district. The institution will be set up by the Srinivasa Education Society, which currently operates a 50-bed hospital.

The college will offer 100 undergraduate seats annually for the 5½-year Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS) course. The Health Minister granted approval after reviewing the available infrastructure, faculty, hospital facilities, and other necessary amenities.

With this addition, the total number of homeopathy colleges in Andhra Pradesh will rise to eight—three government and five private institutions. So far, the state had seven colleges with a combined undergraduate intake of 500 students. Government colleges

at Gudivada, Rajahmundry, and Kadapa admit 120 students in total, while private colleges in Guntakal, Tirupati, Tadepalligudem, and Vizianagaram offer 400 seats collectively.

These institutions also provide essential medical services, with outpatient departments treating around 250 patients daily and inpatient wards serving approximately 15 patients each day. The new college is expected to improve both access to homeopathic education and healthcare services in the underserved areas of the Chittoor district.

CC cams will be installed in Undi segment: RRR



PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Deputy Speaker of Legislative Assembly K Raghurama Krishna Raju has said that CCTV cameras are being installed in Undi Assembly constituency at a cost of Rs 3 crore.

A surveillance camera will be installed for every 100 meters of the entire constituency to enhance security to the people and maintain the law and order situation efficiently, he said, adding that the CCTVs will be installed at a cost of Rs 3 crore. Raghurama Krishna Raju thanked those who came forward to extend donations to install CCTVs.

The Deputy Speaker launched the installation of CCTVs at a programme held in Aavidu on Tuesday. The installation of CCTVs was taken up under the 'P4' programme. Many individuals have handed over their contributions to the deputy Speakers to carry our development works in the constituency at the programme.

Speaking on the occasion, the deputy Speaker clarified that every rupee donated by

donors would be spent transparently under the supervision of the District Collector, adding that he is working to create infrastructure in government schools and for this, modern education would be made available in every school.

Raghurama Krishna Raju noted that the high school would be developed in Akividu with the support of SBI, and a park and yoga center would be set up near the government hospital in Akividu with the support of Canara Bank. He assured that the constituency would be developed in all sectors by organizing more programs in the coming days.

Collector Chadalavada Nagarani said that for the first time CCTVs are being installed in the entire Undi constituency, in all four mandals, as part of increasing security to the people. The installation of CCTVs would help to regulate crimes in the town, she observed.

Eluru Range DIG GVG Ashok Kumar, SP Adnan Nayem Ashimi and Municipal Commissioner Krishna Mohan, and a host of officials were present.

Tribals protest water scarcity with empty containers

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Tribal residents of Ajayapuram village in Cheemalapadu panchayat, Ravikamatham mandal, staged a protest on Tuesday by carrying empty water containers on their heads. The demonstration drew attention to the acute drinking water shortage plaguing nearly 30 families in this remote village.

Despite multiple government assurances and sanctioned funds under central schemes, the water supply problem remains unresolved. Villagers continue to trek over a kilometre daily to collect water from a distant hillock—a hardship that has disrupted daily life and livelihoods for years.



A Rs 5-lakh allocation under the 15th Finance Commission in 2019 saw the installation of a borewell and pipeline network, but the system collapsed following a motor failure, and repairs were not undertaken. In 2023, renewed hope emerged when Rs 15 lakh was sanctioned under the Jal Jeevan Mission to construct an overhead tank and provide piped water to households.

2 teenagers drown in River Godavari, bodies fished out

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRI

Two teenage boys were drowned in the river Godavari at Muddurulanka barrage at Sitampet village. The incident took place on the night of Monday and the bodies were fished on Tuesday.

Police said that the deceased boys Matti Prakash (15) and Gandham Harsha (18) ventured into the river for a bath but they slipped and were drowned. Both the deceased actively participated in the Ambedkar jayanthi programme and later went to the river for a bath and drowned.

The SDRF teams of Kakinada were pressed into service who fished out the bodies from the river. The SDRF team personnel said that there is 100 feet depth at



the place where the incident took place. The police registered a case and shifted to the GGH in Kovvur for post-mortem.

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh rushed to the place and consoled the bereaved family. Minister Durgesh expressed grief over the death of two teenagers at an young age, stating that it was difficult to console their parents, he conveyed his sympathies to them. Steps would be taken to ensure that such tragic incidents do not recur.

Unlike gentlemanly KCR, I'm a rowdy-type, warns Kavitha

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

BRS MLC Kavitha blasted the Congress at a preparatory meeting held in connection with the Silver Jubilee celebrations in Banswada, declaring that she's "not good like KCR" but a "rowdy type" who won't tolerate threats against BRS workers.

Fuming over reports that some Congress leaders were making threatening phone calls to prevent BRS workers from attending the April 27 rally in Warangal, Kavitha said, "We've got the names of those who are threatening our people. We're writing them all down in our pink book. I may not be like KCR, he's calm and composed. I'm a rowdy type. If you harass our cadres, we'll see you out properly. Don't expect mercy."

Her remarks triggered loud cheers from BRS activists as she tore into what she called the "Congress politics of fear."

"Police stations were used to impose false cases on our workers. The officers and leaders behind this will not be spared. Those days are over," she warned.



Kavitha reminded people of the Congress betrayal during the Telangana Movement. "They made us beg for a decade. Telangana didn't come out of sympathy. It came due to KCR's sacrifice. He gave up a Union Minister's post for this state. That grit created Telangana, not favours," she said.

She mocked Congress's unfulfilled guarantees. "They distributed guarantee cards signed by Sonia and Rahul Gandhi in all houses. Now, there's no Rythu Bharosa, no farm loan waiver, no gold for brides, no Rs 2,500 for women. Where are those promises?" she asked.

Kavitha also slammed the Congress for letting down farmers. "There's no Rythu Bima, no paddy procurement, no irrigation. Farmers are struggling, and realtors are ending their lives because of the market collapse. This is what the Congress has done in just a year and a half."

Calling for massive mobilisation for the Warangal rally, Kavitha said, "From every house, at least one person must come. Telangana's image will roar again under the pink flag. And if anyone thinks they can stop us with threats, remember, you are not dealing with the gentle KCR. You're dealing with me."



1.80 kg ganja seized, four peddlers arrested

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The police seized 1.82 KGs of ganja and arrested four drug peddlers at Govindavaripalle village in Tanakallu mandal.

DSP Shivanarayana Swamy told the media in Kadiri rural police station on Tuesday that four peddlers, two of them belonging to Odisha state, brought the ganja from Odisha and were selling it here.

On a tip off, a police team conducted a raid and arrested the four peddlers and seized 1.82 KGs of ganja, 4 mobile phones and Rs 1100 cash.

111 bikes, 3 autos seized during cordon and search operation



PNS ■ KADAPA

The police conducted a cordon and search operation at Indira Nagar colony of Chinkakomma Dinne, Satellite city in Chennuru mandal, Ellatur in Pendlimarri limits, Indiramma colony in Kamalapuram limits.

Several two-wheelers owners did not produce relevant documents of the vehicles forcing the police to seize them.

CIs Ramakrishna, Venkateswarulu, Obulesu, CH Dora, Krishna Reddy, Shankar Naik and other officials were among those who took part in the cordon and search operation.

602 lost/stolen mobile phones worth Rs 1.8 crore seized

PNS ■ KADAPA

The Kadapa police have achieved great feat by recovering 602 lost/stolen mobile phones worth Rs 1.8 crore in the sixth phase of 'Operation Mobile Shield'.

Superintendent of police EG Ashok Kumar said that under the sixth phase of 'Operation Mobile Shield' the police had recovered 602 lost or stolen mobile phones and some of them were handed over to the owners.

The SP said that so far the Kadapa district police have seized 4,670 lost or stolen mobile phones worth Rs 9.2 crore in six phases and most

of them handed over to the owners.

The SP made it clear that the cybercrime police personnel used advanced technology to analyze data to trace the location of the mobile phone. The police also used Digital Forensic, GPS Tracking, IMEI tracing and cyber vigilance tools to recover the stolen or lost mobile phones, the SP revealed.

The Missing Mobile Tracking System and CEIR are yielding good results, he added. Those who lost mobile phones can lodge their complaints on MMTS Whatsapp No. 93929 41541.



ACROSS THE STATES



India to get above-normal rainfall this monsoon

India is expected to get above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season, the India Meteorological Department said on Tuesday, raising hopes for a bountiful harvest for the largely agri-based economy. According to the long-range monsoon forecast, the IMD said large parts of Tamil Nadu and the northeastern region were likely to get below-normal rainfall, while the rain-deficient parts of Marathwada and adjoining Telangana are expected to witness above-normal showers. "India is likely to see above-normal rainfall in the four-month monsoon season (June to September), with cumulative rainfall estimated at 105 per cent (with a model error of 5 per cent) of the long-period average of 87 cm," M Ravichandran, secretary in the Earth Sciences Ministry, told a press conference here. The southwest monsoon lasts from June 1 to September 30. He said that all of the global factors that influence monsoon rainfall over India, two will have a neutral impact, and one will have a positive impact on rainfall this year.



Abducted Pune businessman killed in Bihar

A 55-year-old businessman from Pune was allegedly abducted from outside Patna airport and murdered, police said on Tuesday. After Laxman Shinde's body was found in Jehanabad district, around 50 km from Patna, police detained several suspects from nearby villages for questioning. The preliminary investigation suggests that the crime was linked to a sophisticated cyber-led business entrapment scheme, police said. Shinde, the owner of Centrifugal Casting Bearing located in Khedshivapur in Pune, had travelled to Patna by flight on April 11. However, after sending a message to his daughter around 8:30 PM, in which he mentioned heading to Jharkhand, no further communication was established. Sambhaji Kadam, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone III), Pune, stated that when the family couldn't contact Shinde, they filed a missing person's complaint on April 12 at the Kothrud police station in the city.



Hemant Soren elected as JMM central president

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren was on Tuesday elected as the central president of the ruling JMM, while his father Shibui Soren was made the "founding patron" of the party, a JMM leader said. Shibui Soren had been the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's chief for the past 38 years, while his son Hemant served the party as its executive president since 2015, he said. Senior party leader Nalin Soren proposed the name of Shibui Soren as the founding patron during the JMM's 13th Central Convention, which was seconded by Stephen Marandi. Thereafter, Shibui Soren proposed the name of Hemant Soren as the central president of JMM, which was passed unanimously.

HC upholds life sentence to 2 Chhota Rajan gang members

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday upheld the conviction and life sentence of two members of the Chhota Rajan gang in a 2010 double murder case, stating that the trial court's judgment was "well-reasoned and legally sound".

A court here in August 2022 convicted Mohammed Ali Shaikh and Pranay Rane for murder, criminal conspiracy and offences under the Arms Act while acquitting Rajan and two others for lack of evidence. A division bench of justices Neela Gokhale and Revati Dere on Tuesday dismissed the appeals filed by Shaikh and Rane.

"The evidence on record, when assessed in its entirety,



establishes the guilt of the appellants beyond reasonable doubt," the bench said.

As per the police, represented by special prosecutor Pradeep Gharat, four men opened fire on Asif Khan, an alleged aide of fugitive gangster Dawood Ibrahim, at a spot near the JJ Marg police station in the city on February 13, 2010.

Khan managed to escape, but Shaheel Modak and Asif Qureshi, who were there to meet Khan, sustained bullet injuries and died on the spot.



New York City declares April 14 as Dr B R Ambedkar Day

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Mayor Eric Adams has proclaimed April 14 this year as Dr B R Ambedkar Day in New York City, with its 8.5 million residents celebrating the day, a top official in the mayor's office said.

Deputy Commissioner for the New York City Mayor's Office for International Affairs Dilip Chauhan made the announcement here.

Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Dr Ramdas Athawale, who delivered a keynote address at a special event organised at the UN Headquarters on Monday to commemorate Ambedkar's 134th birth anniversary, was also present on the occasion.

"A historic moment at the UN Headquarters in New York as Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's birth anniversary is officially proclaimed by the NYC Mayor's Office. My heartfelt thanks to Mayor @NYCMayor and Deputy Commissioner Dilip Chauhan for honouring Babasaheb's global legacy of justice and equality," Athawale posted on X along with photos and a video.

Proclamations are issued for only one day, week, or month per year.

The proclamation states that Ambedkar was an Indian economist, political leader, and social reformer who chaired the committee that drafted the Constitution of India.

"Ambedkar - whose message to his followers was 'educate, agitate, organize!' - advocated against the exploitation of farmers and tenants in India, as well as the social institution

of untouchability. After experiencing severe caste discrimination in his youth, he spent the rest of his life fighting for the diversity, equity, and inclusion, which, collectively, have long defined the five boroughs."

Chauhan called for recommitting to the values that Ambedkar lived and died for—liberty, equality, fraternity, and dignity for every human being.

Born on April 14, 1891, Ambedkar - popular among his followers as Babasaheb - was the chairman of the Constituent Assembly's most crucial Drafting Committee that earned him the moniker Architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar had received his PhD in Economics from Columbia University in 1927 and an honorary degree in 1952.

Chauhan said Ambedkar's ideals go beyond borders and time, finding strong connections in the halls of the United Nations and New York—a city built by immigrants, energised by its diversity and united by its shared belief in opportunity and inclusion.

Foundation for Human Horizon President Deelip Mhaske said it is a profound recognition of one of the world's most transformative champions of equality and civil rights that April 14 has been proclaimed as 'Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Day'.

Mhaske expressed gratitude to Adams noting that "this proclamation is more than symbolic—it is a moral declaration that positions New York as a global capital for human rights and justice."

Waqf Act not anti-Muslim; WB CM 'inciting violence': Rijiju

PNS ■ KOCHI

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Tuesday said the amended Waqf Act was not aimed at the Muslim community but was intended to correct "past mistakes", and accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "inciting violence" in her state through her opposition to the implementation of the law.

Rijiju told a press conference here that the government's intention was to ensure that, in India, there is no provision for anyone to "forcibly and unilaterally" take away someone else's land.

The Union Minister of Minority Affairs was in Kerala to meet residents of Munambam village in Ernakulam district-- mostly Christians -- who have strongly supported the BJP-led government at the Centre when it brought in the amendment to the law.



They had alleged that the Waqf Board was unlawfully laying claim to their land and properties, despite having registered deeds and land tax payment receipts.

Rijiju said the Waqf law was amended as certain provisions in it gave "unprecedented power and authority to the Waqf Boards".

"This is not targeted at Muslim community. It is to correct mistakes of the past and provide justice to the people," he said.

Rijiju said that the Waqf Board has the largest properties in the world, but despite that the women and the destitute in the Muslim community were allegedly not benefitting from it.

That, coupled with the plight of the Munambam residents, prompted the Narendra Modi government to bring amendments to the Waqf Act, he said.

Responding to a query about the situation in West Bengal, where violence has erupted in various parts in connection

with the Waqf Act, Rijiju blamed Chief Minister Banerjee for it.

"The CM is visibly inciting violence by asking people to protest and saying that she will not follow the law passed by the Parliament," he said.

He also asked how the West Bengal CM can declare she will not implement the amended Waqf Act passed by the Parliament.

"How? How can she say she will not implement it? She is sitting in a constitutional position and the law is passed by a constitutional body, then how can she say that she will not follow something that is constitutional," he said in response to reporters' queries regarding Banerjee's statement that the Act will not be implemented in West Bengal.

Rijiju, who was flanked by Union Minister of State George Kurien and state BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar, said that following the amendment,

STALIN STEPS UP ATTACK ON CENTRE

Announces high level panel on State autonomy

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Making a strong pitch for empowering states, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Tuesday alleged that their rights were gradually being snatched by the Centre, and announced the constitution of a panel under on state autonomy that will be headed by a retired Supreme Court judge.

The establishment of the high-level panel, marking half-a-century of DMK government's historic state autonomy resolution moved in the Tamil Nadu Assembly by then Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, was aimed at re-asserting the principles of state autonomy in today's context, he said while making a statement in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

The move was meant to protect the 'legitimate rights' of states and to improve relations between the Union and the state governments, he claimed in the Assembly.

He utilised the occasion to flay the present AIADMK leadership, after the party MLAs staged a walkout over a different issue.

Despite their differences with the DMK, AIADMK stalwarts and late Chief



He said B R Ambedkar unequivocally stated that "both the Union and the States are created by the Constitution...the one is not subordinate to the other in its own field and the authority of one is coordinate with that of the other."

"Yet, the steady encroachment of the Union into the rightful domains of the States has disrupted the delicate constitutional balance...a strong Union is not built by weakening States. It is built by empowering them," Stalin emphasised.

Opposition AIADMK slammed the CM over the announcement, asking what was his DMK that shared power with the Congress-led UPA earlier, did all these years. The move was aimed at "diverting" public attention, the principal opposition party charged.

Stepping up the attack on the BJP-led NDA at the Centre, Stalin said the high-level committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Kurian Joseph will examine in detail the relationship between the Union and state governments to ensure state autonomy. It will submit its interim report in January 2026. The final report with recommendations will be submitted in two years.

Bengal must stop attacks on Hindus over Waqf: VHP

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad on Tuesday called upon the state administration to put an immediate stop to attacks on lives and properties of Hindus in pockets of West Bengal over the Waqf Act-related protests, and demanded compensation for the victims.

It also asserted that if such incidents recur elsewhere in the state, the Centre's intervention would become necessary.

Speaking to reporters in Siliguri, the national secretary general (organisation) of VHP, Milind Parande, also criticised Siddiquallah Chowdhury and Firhad Hakim - two TMC ministers of the state - for their reported statements in the wake of the violence, and termed those "provocative and insensitive".

Parande said the fleeing of Bengali Hindus from their homes in Dhulian area of Murshidabad district and taking shelter in adjacent Malda district to escape attack from



"jihadi marauders", is reminiscent of "the exodus of Kashmiri pandits from Jammu and Kashmir in the past".

The West Bengal government should ensure that law and order does not worsen in Siliguri "during any anti-Waqf (Amendment) Act agitation" or in other places in the state, he said.

"Otherwise, the intervention of the central government will become necessary," Parande said.

On West Bengal minister Firhad Hakim's comments that the attacks on Hindus in parts of Murshidabad were "shock-

ing but stray incidents", the VHP leader said "it is a matter of shame" and testimony of the "casual approach" of the Mamata Banerjee government over the plight of Hindus in the district.

"Instead of issuing such statements, the government must ensure that the violence stops, security and compensation are given (to the victims), and attackers and instigators booked for atrocities on Hindus.

These comments show that the administration is not serious in addressing the core issues," Parande said.

Statue of Biju Patnaik set on fire

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A statue of former Odisha chief minister Biju Patnaik was on Tuesday set ablaze at Patnagarh town in Bolangir district, police said.

Apart from BJD, CPI and other Left parties, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi also condemned the incident. "This can only be the handiwork of some lowly person, perhaps suffering from some mental illness," Majhi said, adding that he has directed police to take stern action against persons involved in this incident and expose if there is any conspiracy behind it.

The chief minister said that one person has so far been arrested. He said the state government recognises the contributions of Biju Patnaik and gives due respect to all legendary figures, who made significant contributions to nation building.

Majhi in a statement also mentioned that his government recently held a state-level function in memory of Biju Patnaik on his birth anniversary on March 5.



INSV 'Tarini' flagged off from Cape Town for final journey

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) 'Tarini' carrying two women officers was on Tuesday ceremonially flagged off from Cape Town in South Africa for the final leg of her journey to Goa.

The send-off took place in the presence of the officiating consul general of India in Cape Town, the defence attaché of India to South Africa, members of the Royal Cape Yacht Club (RCYC) governing council, and representatives of the Indian community in Cape Town, a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said.

The vessel was flagged off from Goa on October 2 last year by Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi.

The vessel was ceremonially flagged off from the Royal Cape Yacht Club in Cape Town at 10.30 am local time (1400 hrs IST) for the final leg of her journey to Goa, he said.

"Tarini" is undertaking the global circumnavigation journey under the Navika Sagar Parikrama (NSP) II, an Indian Navy expedition attempting a double-handed circumnavigation of the earth via the three Great Capes.

"The circumnavigation is a significant endeavour aimed at promoting ocean sailing in India, showcasing the strength and resilience of Indian women in uniform, and highlighting India's indigenous shipbuilding capabilities," the

spokesperson said. As part of the ongoing Navika Sagar Parikrama II, the vessel, crewed by Lt Cdr Dilna K and Lt Cdr Roopa A, made a scheduled stopover at Cape Town.

During her port call at Cape Town, the vessel served as a hub for numerous outreach and diplomatic engagements.

It played host to several guests including High Commissioner of India to South Africa Prabhat Kumar; Deputy Speaker of the Western Cape Reagan Allen; former South African cricketer Jonty Rhodes; Kirsten Neuschaefer, winner of the prestigious Golden Globe Race 2022-23 and a noted solo circumnavigator; Ruby Jaspreet, Counsel General of India at Cape Town; and members of the Indian diaspora and other local dignitaries, he said.

In addition to hosting high-profile guests, the crew of INSV 'Tarini' also engaged in a series of interactive events aimed at promoting gender equality, women empowerment, and India's capability in indigenous boat building, the official said.

The vessel is expected to reach Goa by the end of May, marking the successful completion of yet another proud chapter in India's maritime history. The Navika Sagar Parikrama II continues to be a beacon of women empowerment, maritime excellence, and national pride, he said.

CPI(M) demands probe into Murshidabad violence

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The CPI(M) on Tuesday demanded a judicial inquiry into the violence in West Bengal's Murshidabad district by a sitting judge of the Calcutta High Court.

Claiming that the police have been accused of not acting properly to quell the violence in Murshidabad that claimed three lives, CPI(M) West Bengal state secretary Mohammed Salim said that as such an independent probe is required to unravel the truth behind the clashes.

"We demand a judicial inquiry into the incidents of



violence in Murshidabad by a sitting judge of the Calcutta High Court," he said, addressing a press conference at the party's state headquarters here. Salim said that the CPI(M)

is also demanding compensation for those affected by the violence.

The CPI(M) leader also said that he filed a petition on Tuesday before the Supreme

Court challenging the constitutionality of the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

"This is not an issue between two religions, it is about the fundamental rights of the Muslims which are being taken away by way of the new Act passed in the Parliament," he said. Salim also claimed that Haragobinda Das, who was hacked to death along with his son, is a former member of the CPI(M) and that owing to old age he has ceased to continue his membership. The CPI(M) leader claimed that both the BJP and the Trinamool Congress were trying to divide the people on religious lines.

Editor's TAKE

Babasaheb and the battle for justice

The truest tribute to Dr Ambedkar is to see the work he began through to completion

As the nation marked the 135th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar — the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a tireless champion of equality — a deeply unsettling incident unfolded in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh, the place where Dr Ambedkar was born. In Indore district's Sanghi village, a Dalit bridegroom seeking blessings at a local Ram temple was denied entry when members of the Rajput community forcibly locked the temple doors. The situation escalated into a major controversy, and despite the presence of police, the authorities remained unable to defuse the tension or uphold the groom's right to worship. This is exactly what Dr Ambedkar fought for throughout his life — dignity to the people and equal rights for all, clearly still a far cry in many parts of the country including his hometown.

Every year Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Jayanti is celebrated to pay tribute to a towering intellect, a tireless reformer, and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. But the work he started is still unfinished. A lot needs to be done when it comes to social equality, justice, and liberty. This is where Babasaheb's legacy guides us. It continues to inspire millions, especially those fighting for equality, justice, and dignity in modern India.

Dr Ambedkar served as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. Entrusted with the monumental task of crafting the legal backbone of independent India in a caste divided society, he approached it with clarity, wisdom, and an unshakeable commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity. He ensured that the Constitution enshrined fundamental rights for all citizens, irrespective of caste, creed, or gender — a radical and visionary step at the time. One of his most enduring legacies is his insistence on constitutional morality — the idea that institutions must function according to ethical and legal principles, not merely the will of the majority. His emphasis on social democracy as the foundation for political democracy remains deeply relevant today.

Born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow (now officially Dr Ambedkar Nagar), a town in the Indore district in Madhya Pradesh state of India, into a Dalit family, Dr Ambedkar's early life was marred by discrimination and exclusion. Yet, he rose through sheer brilliance and perseverance. He earned multiple doctorates from prestigious institutions, including Columbia University and the London School of Economics, becoming one of the most educated Indian leaders of his time. Despite his global education, Ambedkar never distanced himself from the struggles of the oppressed. He turned his intellect into a weapon against caste oppression, tirelessly working to uplift marginalised communities through education, legal rights, and political representation. Dr Ambedkar's thoughts were rooted in human dignity, rationalism, and social justice. He believed that political independence was meaningless without social equality. He was also a sharp critic of the caste system and Hindu orthodoxy. His decision to embrace Buddhism in 1956, along with millions of his followers, was both a spiritual and political act — a rejection of caste-based discrimination and an embrace of a religion founded on compassion, reason, and equality. He has been posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. However, till India becomes as he wanted it to be — free from injustices and treating all individuals equals his work remains unfinished. Dr Ambedkar was a visionary and saw that the work he started was not easy and would take decades, if not centuries, to complete. As India reflects on his legacy, Dr Ambedkar's words serve as a reminder and a warning: "However good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad." His vision was not just about drafting laws — it was about awakening the moral soul of a nation.

Saluting the Gorkha spirit

From World War trenches to high-altitude patrols, and now well into their centenarian years, these warriors — my comrades, my teachers, my brothers — carry their legacy with the same quiet pride as they once did a khukuri

In my nearly 66 years of trekking and travelling in Nepal, from a Second Lieutenant to a General, in every rank, I have savoured Nepal at its best — from dawn to dusk and at night glow with fireflies. Especially meeting Nepal's greatest gift to mankind, the Gorkha soldier. His name is emblematic of everything tough, brave and never to be messed with — and not for the faint-hearted.

The khukuri, madal, share, Khukuri rum, Gorkha beer and the list goes on; are all synonymous with the soldier. Whether during the two World Wars, Falklands, Borneo, Kashmir, Sylhet, or Jaffna, the Gorkha has left his indomitable imprint. As there is no expiry date for his use, after retiring he has been called out as fighter — contractor in Afghanistan, several places in the Middle East and North Africa, and other places under the radar for even rogue operations. The pedestal the Gorkha occupies in India will soon vanish if the government persists with the demented Agniveer policy, willy-nilly wiping out a strategic asset from the 'colonial' era.

There is a flicker of hope that the absurdity inflicted on the Indian Army — which has damaged deterrence and combat capability — will be removed sooner than later. In my travels and trekking in Nepal since 1959 — worth 60,000 km — I have met Victoria Cross winners, Mahavir Chakra awardees and other gallantry award notables.

But with very difficult conditions in Nepal in the past, their survival rate was low. Now, with development in inaccessible places, health and education improving, and the vintage habits of old soldiers fading, the new Gorkha is living longer. There is no one better than me to make this judgment, as I have seen Nepal transform in slow motion over the years. My Holi travels last month touched Pokhara, Sallyan, Rolpa, Piuthan, Ghorai and Tikapur, where at most places I met old soldiers, some of whom even accompanied me on my climb to Swargadwar, the famous shrine in West Nepal.

I had not met many burros — as pensioners are endearingly called — who were older than me. But last year, while distributing awards to burhos above 80 years, I met 92-year-old Khetiram Pun from our 3-inch mortar platoon.

He was my Guruji when I joined my VC Battalion 2/5 Gorkha Rifles FF in 1957 in Kashmir. But this Holi, occurred the mother of all surprises — attending the 106th birthday party in full Gurung style



of our own Havildar Ramprasad Gurung on 18th March; and one week later, the 99-year-old Havildar, Tejbahadur Thapa. The young Gurung joined the battalion as a 16-year-old in 1939. The Master of Ceremonies at his birthday party introduced Ramprasad with his Army number 5430423, adding that he was from Gandaki Pradesh, Syangjah district, Putlibazar Nagapalika, Oda no 6, Kolma-Pokhrichap, Majhakot ghar. Gurung was from B

Company, 2/5 GR VC Paltan, who retired with 21 years of service in May 1961, fought in World War II mainly in Burma from 1939 to 1945, then was in Japan with the British Occupation Force. Later, in 1961, he served in Kashmir, and before that from 1946 in NEFA, Nagaland and Calcutta.

His only daughter, 59-year-old Jhaman Kumari, was the envy of attention and query. All of Kolma-Pokhrichap appeared to have descended on Pokhara to join the festivities. We represented his beloved battalion and were squeezed into the elaborate Tamu Samaj protocol and allotted a short window to congratulate Gurung. I recalled visiting Kolma

Pokhrichap in 1959, 66 years earlier. The cake-cutting ceremony was unique: the icing on the two cakes was used as a tika to be planted on the forehead. Every well-wisher is trying to put a pinch of cake into Gurung's overloaded mouth. Daughter Jhaman Kumari's yells of 'bhayo bhayo' (stop) — his mouth cannot take any more cake — go unheard. Gurung is unable to speak and not unhappy about it.

He is covered with confetti, icing, khatas (scarves) and gifts. Loud Nepali music signals the start of the feast. They're serving Old Durbar whiskey, Khukuri rum, Gorkha Strong beer and the hill favourite, Kodo ko Rakshi. After the mammoth menu of snacks of every edible two-legged and four-legged, there is dal, bhat and masu, without which no celebration is considered complete. The 106-year-old Gurung would have liked to recall his patrol encounters with the Japanese near Basha Hill in which he was wounded. But he has lost his voice. Fully repaired, Gurung returned to the battalion to survive the fateful Sittang River crossing in 1942.

Gurung's celebrations are covered in local newspapers as well as Annapurna Express and Naya Patrika. My second encounter a week later is with a 13-month-shy of a century-old soldier in Ghorai. His career graph is more colourful and enchanting than the 106-year-old

Gurung's. Havildar Tej Bahadur Thapa was born on 5 May 1926 and joined 2/8 GR, was transferred to 6/8 GR and again moved to 3/8 GR, where he was Signal (communications) Havildar. He too fought in the Burma jungles and at the end of the war, was chosen among 1350 Indian soldiers led by Brig JN Chaudhury, who later became Indian Army Chief, at Victory Parade 1945 in London. After retiring from the Indian Army, Thapa joined Nepal Police by fudging his age by five years. He told me triumphantly: 'I have three dates of birth and get two pensions: one from India, one from Nepal. Next year my Indian pension will double.' His memory is crystal clear and his art of mixing nostalgia with encounters of war, spellbinding.

He walks with a medical stick and has a hazy vision but imbibes with gay abandon. He loves Blue Riband gin, Tuborg beer — which we split — and of course, Old Monk Rum. But he also has local rakshi. He's a perfect specimen from Jumlepani village made famous by late Hony Capt Indrabir Thapa, Sardar Bahadur, OBI, MBE, MC from my VC Paltan. I must be blessed to have met two great old soldiers.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)



ASHOK K MEHTA

Leaderspeak



On behalf of all the countrymen, I bow down to Bharat Ratna Pujya Babasaheb on his birth anniversary. It is due to his inspiration that the country is dedicatedly engaged in realising the dream of social justice today. His principles and ideals will give strength and momentum to the creation of a self-reliant and developed India.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Opinion

BY RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It is one of the reasons why mankind has been unable to solve many national and international problems. Man, who is considered rational, has been using his reasoning in a wrong and perverted way. He has either been rationally explaining the defects of his personality and flaws of his character as his sterling virtues, or he has been using reason wrongly to justify his uncivilised behaviour as necessary for the well-being of his community or the security of his country.

He has been rationalising even his vulgar, barbarous, or animalistic behaviour as biologically 'natural', psychologically justified, and politically beneficial. Like, in the past, until recently, any woman who gave birth to many children was considered 'very fertile' and the father of those children was considered as 'potent', 'manly' or 'masculine' in character. In other words, people adored his libidinousness and her sexual vigour, rather than took notice of the lack of self-restraint or self-control on the part of the man and the woman.

Likewise, one who could slaughter large numbers of people, even for a tyrant ruler or for an aggressive and ambitious nation, was considered a 'brave warrior', a 'courageous soldier' or a 'national hero'. In other words, people praised the quality of one's being a greater butcher, i.e. a killer, and less attention was paid to the quality of forgiveness or compassion.

Moreover, they rationalised aggression as an 'instinct', as an in-built psychological response, or as genetically correct behaviour. It is this kind of rationalisation that has resulted in the present state of the world. Man's faults of character have now acquired global dimensions and are now threatening the very existence of society. Yet his attempt to rationalise his irrational behaviour continues to be. Man's arguments justifying his habits of smoking, drinking alcohol or taking a non-vegetarian diet also are due to his tendency to rationalise the irrational. A matter of more pity is that he does not recognise that he is arguing in favour of irrational and harmful behaviour.

Unless he realises this wrong tendency, no global problem can be solved. As stated earlier, this tendency to rationalise the irrational has led to small and individual defects taking the form of global problems. For example, man's libidinous tendencies, which were earlier justified on biological or psychological grounds, have now resulted in the grave danger caused by over-population, promiscuity, illegitimate children, rapes, abductions and the threat of the spread of AIDS.

The threat caused by overpopulation is not less than the one caused by nuclear weapons. Yet man does not try to have self-restraint, self-control or continence. Instead, he tries to rationalise his irrational and errant behaviour since that suits his perverted instincts, and emotions, and gives him short-lived pleasure even though it is a great strain upon his stamina and moral health.

The same can be said of his tendencies of aggression and greed. His justification of his self-interest and the wrong notion of security has led the world into the morass of grave econom-

ic imbalance and the race for war weapons. Hence there is an urgent need to put man's rational faculty on the right track and, thereby, enable him to put an end to his irrational, irresponsible and injurious behaviour to save mankind from several global upheavals.

There was a time when defects in man's personality or faults in his character were considered as of individual concern. It was thought that society had no cause to bother about an individual's habits, as it was believed that these can, at the most, be of concern to one's family members or a few individuals who directly interact with that man. But now, with our better understanding, we know that defects in man's personality are of concern not only to that individual but to the whole society as well because individual defects add up to global problems. Smoking, for example, is not only injurious to the health of the man who smokes but it is injurious to others also who do not smoke but are exposed to tobacco smoke.

The libidinousness and the aggressiveness of individuals, as already explained, have now led to the problems of high population growth and a huge stockpile of war weapons respectively. The whole society has thus to suffer because of these habits of the individuals. The way to solve these problems now lies in the inner transformation of the individual but this is not possible unless man first gives up the habit of rationalising his irrational behaviour and justifying his bad habits of perverted instincts by employing faulty reasoning.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist. Views are personal)

Human trait: Excusing the inexcusable

Letters to the Editor

Larger than life cut-outs are menacing Congress party revamps itself

Madam — The giant cut-outs of the candidates during the time of election in our country make them appear as larger-than-life characters. This is to create supermen out of democratic leaders and to generate bhakti and awe among us for them. However, such an effort is surely against the concept of democracy. Bhakti for a superman is a roadblock to safeguarding the essence of democracy. B. R. Ambedkar categorically said, "In politics, Bhakti or hero worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship." Hero worship emanates from a slavish mindset, which interestingly wants to enslave others. On the other hand, a person who does not have a slavish mentality will never try to enslave others. Abraham Lincoln once said, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy." "You — master — me — slave" or "Me — master — you — slave" mentality is nothing but two sides of the same coin — and both are equally dangerous for a democracy. Bhakti in politics injects a TINA (There Is No Alternative) factor into our mindset. Ironically, this TINA has a "No" within it which says no to other leaders and no to any democratic change — which is indispensable for the survival of democracy. Thus, bhakti in politics makes democracy slip into a dictatorship, as bhakti and awe are the basic ingredients of manufacturing a dictator. Indeed, bhakti in politics weakens democratic bhakti.

SUJIT DE | KOLKATA

Madam — Apropos the news report "Rahul Gandhi launches pilot to strengthen district units" published on 15 April, here is my response. Congress held its first AICC session in the state of Gujarat since 1961, as it has been out of power in Gujarat for almost three decades now — and it laid down a revival plan, from reviving the organisation to pledging a caste census. Congress's biggest rival — the ruling BJP — is a cadre-based party, and this is where the grand old party lacks the most. We hope that it has realised its biggest weakness. It has to build an effective organisation at the grass-roots level across the country. District committees and district-level leadership is a step in this direction — but how Congress would be able to manage this in the strongly established high-command culture, where Gandhi's way or the highway prevails, will be interesting to watch.

Almost all Congress state units are in disarray, and whether district-level leadership will unite them — or widen the gulf further — will decide Congress's fate in future state elections, including the Gujarat elections to be held in two years' time. The CWC session from the land of Mahatma Gandhi will decide which path Congress will usher into. At the moment, all that Congress needs is a sense of direction and purpose — which it must find to remain relevant in the game.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Now enjoy sleep tourism

Madam — Although tourism and vacation is the most preferred time for any individual who wants to have fun with family and friends — to the surprise of the world, after ecotourism, cultural tourism, and medical tourism, a new variant is paving its way into the current world order: sleep tourism.

The level of tiredness and exhaustion is so high these days that the world needs more sleep for bodily rejuvenation than anything else. To the tiring world, deep sleep is — no doubt — the ultimate panacea which everyone is searching for. Sleep tourism is the need of the hour for the fast-forward, rushing world that is constantly chasing things with an unstoppable approach.

There was a time when tourism was all about exploring, adventure, and recreation. As we all had health soundness, we could better enjoy vacations. But with time, the level of physical, mental, and emotional fatigue has increased — and as a result, man is in search of health soundness, happiness, and mental peace.

Then many new forms of tourism were added — village tourism, medical tourism, and even slum tourism. The latest one to join is, of course, sleep tourism. The idea of sleep tourism is actually welcome in this world like Piccadilly Circus — because, at the end of the day, the art of rest is what

KIRTI | WADHAWAN

THE SC CURBS GOVERNORS' POWERS TO WITHHOLD BILLS INDEFINITELY

The Supreme Court curbed the power of the President to indefinitely delay the enactment of state legislation in a judgement that is bound to have serious repercussions on the Indian polity — especially in helping restore the balance between the Centre and the states in India's federal structure.

And it will be taken as a welcome strike in favour of states' rights that had been casually infringed upon by an authoritarian Centre that has little respect for democratic norms and federal principles.

The Supreme Court judgement settling the dispute between Tamil Nadu Governor R. N. Ravi and the ruling DMK government over the clearing of Bills speaks volumes about the courage demonstrated by the apex Court.

This is yet another bold milestone that is rarely seen these days — when the borderline between the executive and the judiciary often gets blurred, to

the peril of the institution of democracy that rests on the three pillars of the legislature, executive, and judiciary functioning independent of one another. It is in the interest of a healthy Indian democracy that its three pillars — the legislature, executive, and judiciary — run at cross purposes, rather than their interests converge.

After the 8 April judgement, the Tamil Nadu government notified 10 pending Bills as Acts in the government gazette, citing: "There is no 'pocket veto' or 'absolute veto' available to the President in discharge of his functions under Article 21."

The use of the expression 'shall declare' makes it mandatory for the President to make a choice between the two options available under the substantive part of Article 201 — that is, to either grant assent or to withhold assent to a Bill," the bench said.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Please send your letter to the letterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Bridging education and employability

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promises a sweeping transformation of India's education system. Its success hinges not just on vision, but on action, investment, and a unified national commitment to reimagining education for the 21st century

FIRST Column

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark initiative to reshape India's educational landscape, particularly by integrating vocational training into mainstream education. This integration is vital for enhancing skill development and employability, and it complements initiatives such as 'Samagra Shiksha' and the Skill India Mission.

The establishment of PM SHRI Schools embodies the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP), promoting a holistic educational experience nationwide. However, significant challenges stand in the way of realising this ambitious vision.

The Challenges in Implementation

The primary objective of NEP 2020 – to ensure that by 2025, at least 50 per cent of learners receive vocational exposure — faces multiple hurdles. As of 2023, states such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh have lagged significantly in implementation due to financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers. A staggering 75 per cent of technical institutions currently report a lack of alignment between the skills being taught and those sought by industry, highlighting a disconnect that must be addressed.

At the core of these challenges is the lack of a well-designed curriculum that is robust enough to meet the demands of the job market.

Despite a government push, only about 5 per cent of students in vocational education receive practical training in fields relevant to today's job market. Many traditional academic institutions remain resistant to integrating vocational education into their curricula, fearing it may dilute academic rigour.

This results in inadequate exposure for students, many of whom graduate without the skills needed to thrive in a competitive labour market.

Furthermore, there is a notable deficiency in educators trained in emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and automation. Reports indicate that over 80 per cent of institutions lack faculty proficiency in these essential areas, compromising the quality of vocational training offered.

The Path Forward

The path forward requires actionable strategies to ensure that vocational education becomes a core component of the school curriculum. Making vocational education mandatory from Class 9 to Class 12, with students continuing in their chosen fields, is essential.

For instance, a student selecting 'Electrician' as a vocational subject should continue to engage with this subject through Class 10 and beyond, ensuring a deep, practical understanding.

To encourage participation, the government could implement a financial incentive model. Providing a monthly stipend of ₹500 for students from economically weaker sections, along



DINESH SOOD

with vocational training kit, could promote enrollment. An increased stipend of ₹1,000 per month for students who continue in vocational training through their higher classes would further incentivise sustained commitment. Graduating students should receive certification after four years, bolstering their employability both domestically and internationally.

Bridging the Skill Gap

India, with over 260 million students in 1.5 million schools and more than 40 million in higher education, holds one of the largest student populations globally.

Yet, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) stands



INDIA, WITH OVER 260 MILLION STUDENTS IN 1.5 MILLION SCHOOLS AND MORE THAN 40 MILLION IN HIGHER EDUCATION, HOLDS ONE OF THE LARGEST STUDENT POPULATIONS GLOBALLY

at approximately 32 per cent, compelling many to seek employment in the unorganised sector — a domain fraught with exploitation and underpayment.

Vocational education has the potential to effectively address this gap. By focusing on industry-relevant skills, these programs not only enhance employment opportunities but also foster the development of future entrepreneurs.

Countries like Germany and Switzerland exemplify successful dual vocational education systems, blending classroom learning with hands-on industry experience.

India could adopt similar frameworks, ensuring students gain practical exposure, which is increasingly necessary in an evolving job landscape.

Adapting to Emerging Technologies

As technological innovation accelerates, vocational programs must incorporate modern skills relating to AI, IoT, and cloud computing. The Central

Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) initiative to introduce AI and IoT into the curriculum for Classes VI to X is a step in the right direction. With over 20,000 teachers trained in these areas, reaching approximately 350,000 students, substantial progress is evident.

However, a 2022 survey indicated that 31 per cent of teachers are still not proficient with digital tools, while a 2023 report found that 49 per cent feel unprepared to address the impact of AI on education. To tackle these challenges effectively, the public and private sectors must invest in comprehensive teacher training that equips educators for a changing marketplace.

Collaborations with ed-tech companies to bring AI-powered learning tools into classrooms can further support this transition, ensuring that students receive training that is both modern and relevant.

Addressing Regional Disparities Although the Union Education Minister has asserted that states are beginning to implement NEP 2020, the pace of implementation varies greatly.

Reports indicate that Haryana has set an ambitious target to fully implement the National Education Policy (NEP) by 2025, aiming to increase the gross enrollment ratio of girls in higher education from 32 per cent to over 50 per cent by 2030.

However, discrepancies across states — due to funding shortages, trained faculty shortages, and bureaucratic inertia — not only create inconsistencies but also significantly undermine the policy's potential.

To ensure a level playing field, a centralised monitoring mechanism is essential to track progress and enforce uniform implementation across states.

Conclusion NEP 2020 presents a transformative opportunity for integrating vocational education into mainstream schooling, but its success hinges on strategic implementation, sufficient funding, infrastructure development, and robust teacher training.

As India aspires to become a \$10 trillion economy, investing in a comprehensive vocational education system is not just an educational imperative — it's a vital economic strategy.

By addressing the barriers to implementation, India can empower its youth with essential skills, fostering innovation and adaptability that contribute to national growth.

A well-implemented vocational skills education framework represents a win-win for both students and the government, laying the groundwork for a skilled and self-reliant workforce that is pivotal to India's economic future.

(The writer is a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of the Government of India. Views are personal)

How PM Modi's vision revitalised BIMSTEC

Over the years, through initiatives like the 'Neighbourhood First and Act East policies,' the MAHASAGAR vision, and a consistent push for institutional reform and regional connectivity, PM Modi has transformed BIMSTEC into a vibrant platform for cooperation

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997 with the promise of fostering deeper regional collaboration among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.

Yet, for nearly two decades, the organisation remained relatively dormant — its potential untapped, its purpose loosely defined. That changed in 2016 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi injected fresh momentum into the grouping, anchoring it firmly within India's broader regional and global strategic vision.

A Strategic Turn in Goa

The turning point came when PM Modi extended a special invitation to BIMSTEC leaders to attend a Leaders' Retreat in Goa, held on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in 2016. This wasn't just a diplomatic courtesy — it was a strategic pivot. By placing BIMSTEC on the same platform as BRICS, Modi elevated its visibility and importance. His message was clear: India viewed the Bay of Bengal region as central to its regional diplomacy, economic connectivity, and maritime strategy. Since then, Modi's personal involvement and consistent emphasis on BIMSTEC have transformed it from a symbolic forum to an active and evolving regional body. In a move that underscored his commitment, he again invited BIMSTEC leaders to attend his swearing-in ceremony in 2019 — signalling continuity, priority, and seriousness of intent.

Vision-Driven Diplomacy:

What sets PM Modi's leadership apart is his ability to integrate BIMSTEC within a broader web of policies that collectively enhance India's regional and global role. His Neighbourhood First policy, Act East strategy, and the MAHASAGAR initiative are all geared toward strengthening India's ties in its immediate and extended neighbourhood.

At the same time, his Indo-Pacific vision promotes a free, open, and inclusive region, aligning with global efforts to ensure stability and cooperation across maritime domains.

This policy convergence has lent BIMSTEC a new strategic dynamism. The group now finds itself not just an extension of South Asian cooperation, but a crucial bridge connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia, linking economies, people, and futures.

Strengthening the Institutions

While BIMSTEC's Secretariat had existed for some time, a significant leap in its institutional development came in May 2024 with the formal adop-



SHEFALI GUPTA

tion of the BIMSTEC Charter. This milestone endowed the organisation with an international legal identity, clearly defined principles, and an institutional architecture that allows it to function with more coherence and purpose.

Further boosting its multilateral capacity, India appointed Indra Mani Pandey — an experienced diplomat known for his multilateral acumen — as the Secretary-General. India also committed USD 1 million to enhance the Secretariat's institutional and capacity-building efforts.

India's active diplomatic engagement has also seen it hosting the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July 2024, followed by an informal meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2024. These events marked a new phase of energised diplomacy and

engagement, laying the foundation for greater regional integration.

A Holistic Agenda

One of the standout features of BIMSTEC under India's leadership has been the expansion and organisation of its agenda.

The grouping now operates through seven key pillars, each led by a different member nation, allowing for greater ownership and specialised focus.

India leads the all-important Security pillar, while Bangladesh helms Trade, Investment, and Development.

Bhutan focuses on Environment and Climate Change, Myanmar leads on Agriculture and Food Security, Nepal on People-to-People Contacts, Sri Lanka on Science and Technology & Innovation, and Thailand on Connectivity.

This structured approach has allowed BIMSTEC to evolve into a results-oriented body, addressing challenges and harnessing opportunities across the spectrum — from trade and security to climate action and innovation. And the

change is visible in its approach.

India's Pillars of Focus

India's leadership in the Security domain has seen the development of a robust legal framework to tackle terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crimes — issues of shared concern across the region. Efforts are underway to harmonise counter-terror frameworks, intelligence-sharing, and maritime cooperation. On Connectivity, India has placed particular emphasis on developing physical, digital, and energy links. The BIMSTEC Energy Centre, hosted in Bengaluru, coordinates initiatives toward regional grid interconnectivity.

This aligns with PM Modi's bold vision of "One World, One Sun, One Grid", which aims to create a globally interconnected solar energy grid. In the area of Sustainability and Disaster Management, India has positioned itself as a responsible regional partner. It hosts regular disaster management exercises involving member countries and leads the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in Noida, playing a critical

role in forecasting, climate data sharing, and early warning systems.

Given the region's high vulnerability to natural disasters, this collaboration holds immense practical value.

Fostering Regional Identity

Beyond policy and security, PM Modi has consistently championed the softer dimensions of regional cooperation — particularly culture, youth engagement, and environmental consciousness. These elements have been brought to the forefront through a series of vibrant events that promote shared identity and regional pride. Recent highlights include the BIMSTEC Aquatic Championship in Delhi (Feb 2024), the BIMSTEC Business Summit (Aug 2024), and cultural showcases like the BIMSTEC Pavilion at the Surajkund Mela (Feb 2025) and the BIMSTEC cultural troupe's performance at Bali Jatra in Cuttack (Nov 2024). Youth engagement, too, has been given a fresh thrust through the BIMSTEC Youth Summit in Ahmedabad and the BIMSTEC Youth-Led Climate Change Conference in Delhi, both held in February 2025. Another notable milestone was the launch of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network in February 2024, which aims to foster scientific collaboration and ocean sustainability.

From Goa to Bangkok

The vision articulated by PM Modi during the 2016 Goa Retreat continues to shape BIMSTEC's trajectory. The decisions taken during that seminal retreat are coming to fruition, most recently in Bangkok, where two key developments have been unveiled: the adoption of the BIMSTEC Vision 2030 and the Eminent Persons Group Report. These initiatives provide a long-term roadmap and intellectual foundation.

Conclusion

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BIMSTEC has transitioned from a dormant regional forum to a vibrant, forward-looking grouping. India's proactive engagement — rooted in strategic vision and people-centric diplomacy, has redefined the role of BIMSTEC in the 21st century. What began as a diplomatic gesture in Goa has evolved into a robust regional movement.

As BIMSTEC continues to chart its course, India's leadership remains central to its strength, stability, and success, ensuring the Bay of Bengal

(The writer is Founder President, Om Aarohanam Sansthan (Janani Saraksha Yojana) and a BJP functionary. Views are personal)

IN BRIEF



Auto stocks rally as Trump considers pausing tariffs

Auto stocks rallied on Tuesday after US President Donald Trump said that he might temporarily exempt the industry from tariffs that were announced earlier. Shares of Samvardhana Motherhood International jumped 8.17 per cent, Bharat Forge surged 6.86 per cent, Tata Motors rallied 4.50 per cent and MRF soared 4.50 per cent on the BSE. The stock of Hero MotoCorp climbed 4.02 per cent, Eicher Motors (3.45 per cent), TVS Motor (3.06 per cent), Ashok Leyland (3.04 per cent), Bajaj Auto (2.79 per cent), Mahindra & Mahindra (2.42 per cent) and Maruti (2.15 per cent). The BSE auto index surged 3.39 per cent to 47,618.30. "Trump also suggested he might grant exemptions on the 25 per cent levies for automobiles that are already in place, leading to a sharp rally in auto stocks," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,577.63 points or 2.10 per cent to settle at 76,734.89. The NSE Nifty surged 500 points or 2.19 per cent to 23,328.55. "Auto stocks gained on potential tariff relief," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Investments Limited, said.



Capacit bags Rs 220-cr contract from Raymond group firm

Capacit'e Infraprojects Ltd on Tuesday said it has received the Letter of Intent (LOI) from Raymond Ltd's step-down subsidiary TenX Realty for a realty project worth Rs 220 crore. The civil core and shell works for the project in Bandra east include two basements, G-23 floors and non-tower area, Capacit'e Infra said. "We have been entrusted by our client, Raymond Limited's realty division, with repeat orders through TenX Realty Limited," said Rahul Katyal, Managing Director at Capacit'e Infraprojects Ltd. "With a strong track record of project delivery, we're confident in our ability to meet timelines and exceed client expectations. We are expanding our portfolio with quality orders and showcasing our growing expertise in project execution," he added.



IHCL expands footprint with 100 new locations

Indian Hotels Company Ltd (IHCL) on Tuesday said it has expanded its footprint with 100 new locations, comprising 74 signings and 26 openings in FY2025, taking the total portfolio to 380 hotels. "In the last fiscal, we clocked a record 74 signings with over 95 per cent of these signings being capital light and resulted in an industry-leading pipeline of 137 hotels. In alignment with our strategic roadmap 'Accelerate 2030', a significant share of the signings were in Gateway and Ginger brands, reflective of the fast-growing Upscale and Midscale segments in India. "This year, we continued to build scale in each of the brands with Ginger crossing a 100-hotel portfolio and Vivanta reaching the over 50 hotel mark," IHCL Executive Vice President - Real Estate and Development, Suma Venkatesh said in a statement. In line with IHCL's strategy of growing with the Taj brand in key international markets, the company has forayed into the cities of Bahrain and Ras Al Khaimah in the Middle East with over 800 keys, strengthening its footprint in the region, she added.

India better placed to deal with Trump tariffs: ITC Chairman

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is much better placed to deal with disruptions emanating from Trump tariffs as there is a possibility of signing of a trade agreement with the US for which discussions are happening at fast pace, ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri said.

US President Donald Trump imposed reciprocal tariffs on many countries, including India, which he later postponed by three months with the exception of China on whom a 145 per cent tariff has been slapped. However, a 10 per cent additional duty on exports to the US will continue. The reciprocal tariffs have been suspended until July 9.

When asked about the impact of such tariffs on the domestic industry, Puri said it will be difficult to say how it will evolve, but India will be much better placed in this.

"It's difficult to say how it will evolve, but my own sense is that at the end of it, I think India is going to be much better placed, because we do see the possibility of several FTAs (free trade agreements) being inked, which industry has been looking forward to for some time, hopefully during the year, whether it's the EU, UK, and, of course, the US, where there is, I think discussions, dialogue happening at a faster rate," he said.

India and the US have been



India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) since March. Both sides have targeted to conclude the first phase of the pact by fall (September-October) of this year with an aim to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030

engaged in negotiating a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) since March. Both sides have targeted to conclude the first phase of the pact by fall (September-October) of this year with an aim to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030.

In international parlance, trade pacts are described as FTA, CECA (Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement), CEPA (Comprehensive Economic

Partnership Agreement) or BTA. In these pacts, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate import duties on maximum number of goods traded between them.

Puri noted that though India's consumption-driven economy may face some short-term uncertainties, its levers of competitiveness, digitisation and future-ready portfolio has much to offer. "So while short-term uncer-

ainty, unpredictability may be causing some kind of impact on global growth also...a consequent little impact on India will be also there," he said while speaking in a fireside chat - Resilience and Growth in the New World Disorder - at AIMA summit.

On ITC, Puri said it is also a "more domestic-focused industry" and may face some impact due to the US tariffs.

He emphasised the need for agility and empowered teams to navigate rapid changes in the tariff structure.

ITC's strategy to deal with uncertainties includes diversifying its portfolio, investing in sustainable packaging, and leveraging digitalization and innovation. The company emphasises supply-side resilience, climate-proofing infrastructure, and agile, empowered teams.

ITC's human capital development focuses on integrated rural development hubs and vocational training. Sustainability is integrated into corporate strategy with initiatives like Climate Smart Agriculture and green infrastructure.

The company aims to balance economic, social, and environmental goals, he said.

Puri also highlighted how the quick commerce revolution is challenging traditional FMCG players, necessitating new skills and modes of operation.

India to go for trade liberalisation with US

in-person trade talks likely to start next month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has decided to follow the trade liberalisation path with the US, and both countries are negotiating a bilateral trade agreement (BTA) for which in-person talks are expected to begin next month, senior government officials said on Tuesday.

India and the US are starting negotiations in virtual mode from this week. They have also finalised and signed the terms of reference (ToRs) for the pact.

India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a bilateral trade agreement (BTA) since March. Both sides have targeted to conclude the first phase of the pact by the fall (September-October) of this year, with an aim to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from about USD 191 billion currently.

Negotiations of the various track groups for the pact will start virtually within this week.

"We hope to get into physical mode of negotiations may be in the second half of May. So we are on schedule as far as the BTA and its negotiations are concerned," Additional

Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal told reporters here. He is also the chief negotiator of India for this pact.

Speaking on the agreement, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that the agreement, if finalised, will open huge opportunities for both India and US businesses.

"...There are both concerns as well as opportunities for India in terms of the current tariffs (globally). India has already taken a path, where we will be going for trade liberalisation with the US. There is a clear pathway which we have decided at the leaders' level, and then subsequently meetings have been held.

"Negotiations are going on and we have taken a path of trade liberalisation and BTA. So if we follow that path, then I think not only India's trade with the US will grow...that will also open up opportunities for India and for US as well, he said.

Barthwal added that both countries will gain from this BTA and that is the assumption based on which such trade agreements are finalised and negotiated.



Japan's trade negotiator to visit US for tariff talks

PNS ■ TOKYO

Japan's chief trade negotiator will visit the United States this week for talks aimed at convincing US President Donald Trump to remove tariff measures against the East Asian country, officials said Tuesday.

Economic Revitalisation Minister Ryosei Akazawa will be in Washington from Wednesday to Friday for talks with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, according to Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi.

"The visit is to 'build a relationship of trust' between the two sides, with Japan requesting the US side to drop the tariff measures, Hayashi said. "The government will tackle the challenge and work as one so that we can resolve the issue as soon as possible."

Japan is among the first countries to start negotiations with the US.

"I will carefully think what will best serve Japan's national



interest, what will be most effective and do my utmost in the negotiation," Akazawa told reporters Tuesday.

Trump last week abruptly announced a 90-day pause on the latest series of duties, which put Japan's 24 per cent across-the-board on hold, but the 10 per cent baseline tariff and a 25 per cent tariff on cars, auto parts, steel and aluminum exports to the US are kept in place.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba described the situation as "a national crisis."

Ishiba, however, told a parliamentary session Monday that "haste makes waste" and that he was in no rush to con-

clude the negotiations with the US. He also said Japan is not retaliating with tariffs against the United States, saying the measures weren't beneficial.

With concerns rising that US tariffs may deal a serious blow to Japan's economy, Ishiba's government seeks to cooperate and exchange views with other countries that support free trade and multilateralism.

Later Monday, Ishiba held telephone talks with Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong about the impact of US tariffs on the two major Asian economies. Ishiba also held phone talks with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer last week.

Radico Khaitan's Abhishek Khaitan enters Whisky Hall of Fame

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PRNewswire/-- Radico Khaitan Ltd., a titan in the Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) industry and one of the nation's most storied and largest manufacturers, proudly celebrates a

momentous milestone as its visionary Managing Director, Abhishek Khaitan, is inducted into the illustrious World Drinks Awards - Hall of Fame. This distinguished honor marks not only a personal triumph, but also a resounding global recognition of Radico Khaitan's enduring legacy and excellence in the world of spirits.

The induction ceremony took place on April 12, 2025, during the globally renowned Icons of Whisky Awards, held annually as part of the World Drinks Awards. Organised by Whisky Magazine, the platform celebrates the most outstanding individuals and innovations in the global spirits industry. The Hall of Fame

represents the highest individual honour in the whisky world-reserved for trailblazers whose work has made a lasting impact on the industry.

Khaitan's inclusion as the 103rd inductee in the Whisky Hall of Fame marks a proud

milestone not only for Radico Khaitan, but also for India's expanding footprint in the global premium spirits landscape. The honour recognises his visionary leadership, unwavering commitment to innovation, and tireless efforts in building homegrown Indian brands with worldwide appeal.

Under his leadership, Radico Khaitan has transformed and revolutionised into a future-forward, innovation-led spirits company with a diverse portfolio including Rampur Indian Single Malt Whisky, Jaisalmer Indian Craft Gin, Royal Ranthambore Heritage Collection Whisky, Sangam World Malt Whisky and India's most loved Vodka - Magic Moments.



Investors' wealth swells by Rs 18.42 L cr in two days

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Market investors added Rs 18.42 lakh crore to their wealth in two days of sharp rally in equities echoing a rally in global equities after US President Donald Trump relaxed some of the tariffs on electronics products and hinted at duty revision for automobiles.

Rallying for the second straight session on Tuesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,577.63 points or 2.10 per cent to settle at 76,734.89. In two days, the benchmark Sensex has surged 2,887.74 points or 3.91 per cent.



The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms jumped by Rs 18,42,028.91 crore to Rs 4,12,24,362.13 crore (USD 4.81 trillion) in two days. "Buoyancy across global equity markets provided

major support to local benchmarks as recent developments suggest that there could be some solutions to the ongoing tariff war over the next few weeks. However, falling crude oil prices and strong FII fund outflows continue to create a lot of uncertainty among the investors," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3.21 per cent and midcap index rallied 3.02 per cent on Tuesday.

"Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty jumped more than 2 per cent on account of positive global market cues after US President Trump

announced a temporary tariff relief on phones, computers and popular consumer electronics. He also hinted at possible exemptions on tariffs for imported vehicles and auto parts," Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research - Wealth Management at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. Realty zoomed 5.81 per cent, industrials soared 3.76 per cent, capital goods (3.67 per cent), auto (3.39 per cent), consumer discretionary (3.12 per cent), financial services (2.94 per cent) and metal (2.75 per cent).

Manufacturing cluster to be set up near Hisar airport

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To boost industrial development in Haryana, an Industrial Manufacturing Cluster (IMC) will be established near Maharaja Agrasen Airport in Hisar over approximately 3,000 acres.

The estimated cost of the project is around Rs 4,680 crore. This IMC will be developed jointly by the Haryana government and the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC), an official statement said here on Tuesday, giving details about a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini.

Haryana Civil Aviation Minister Vipul Goel was also present at the meeting. In the meeting, the chief minister was apprised by the officials that the Centre, in partnership with state governments, is developing integrated industrial corridors based on multi-modal connectivity to accelerate manufacturing growth and ensure planned urbanisation.

Under the Amritsar-Kolkata Industrial Corridor, industrial townships will be developed in

six cities across seven states, with the IMC in Hisar being the largest project, to be developed over nearly 3,000 acres. The cluster will be developed in two phases.

It was informed that this project is expected to attract investments of around Rs

32,000 crore and generate over 10,000 employment opportunities. The IMC will have all essential and modern infrastructure, including roads, a water treatment plant, and a solid waste management plant (STP). A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between NICDC and the Haryana government will be signed soon for the successful execution of this project.

The chief minister said the IMC will attract investments from Indian and international companies.



Visament: Helping Indians travel without paperwork

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Two young founders, Vipul Jain and Shubham Jain, started Visament in 2022 to solve a big problem. They saw how confusing and slow the visa process was for many Indians. Their goal was simple: make travel paperwork fast and easy.

Vipul, who comes from a tech and business background, noticed how stressful visa applications were. "The process was outdated and hard to follow. I wanted to make it better using technology," he says.

He teamed up with

Shubham, an expert in operations and customer service. Together, they built Visament—a tech-driven service that helps Indians with visas and travel documents.

Visament began in Jaipur, helping NRIs with OCI cards, passport renewals, and e-visas. From the start, the team focused on making the process clear and simple. "We designed everything to be easy, even for someone doing it for the first time," says Shubham.

As the demand grew, Visament expanded to support tourists, students, and business travelers. Today, they offer



visa help for popular places in Europe, Asia, and North America.

One major achievement was building strong ties with foreign embassies. This helped

make the process faster and improved success rates. Now, Visament also offers docu-

ment checks, and custom holiday packages.

People trust Visament because they deliver on three key promises: speed, honesty, and support.

Next, the company plans to expand its services to the UK and USA. They aim to be a one-stop shop for travel paperwork for Indians worldwide.

"Our mission is clear," says Vipul. "We want to remove the stress from travel paperwork so people can enjoy their journey." Visament shows how one idea—done right—can make travel easier for thousands of people, and soon, millions.

Vipul, who comes from a tech and business background, noticed how stressful visa applications were. "The process was outdated and hard to follow. I wanted to make it better using technology," he says



Kesari Chapter 2 team pays tribute to Jallianwala Bagh massacre victims

The cast and crew of Kesari Chapter 2, including Akshay Kumar, R. Madhavan, and Ananya Panday, visited Amritsar to honor the martyrs of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Before their press conference, the team visited the sacred Sri

Darbar Sahib to offer their respects. Later, the cast assembled at the historic Jallianwala Bagh, paying tribute to the victims of the tragic 1919 massacre. The atmosphere at the media event was solemn, reflecting the film's powerful themes of

courage, justice, and sacrifice. Notable attendees included Gurpreet Ghuggi, B Praak, Gurdas Maan, and the grandson of the real-life figure portrayed by Akshay Kumar, adding an emotional and historical depth to the event. Directed by Karan Singh

Tyagi, Kesari Chapter 2 is slated for release on April 18, 2025. The film promises a gripping narrative centered on the events of Jallianwala Bagh, blending powerful performances with a poignant story of resistance and resilience.

Release of Sanjay Dutt's *The Bhootnii* postponed to May

The release of the much-anticipated horror action-comedy *The Bhootnii*, starring Sanjay Dutt, has been postponed. Initially scheduled to premiere next week, the film will now hit theatres on May 1, 2025.

Sources reveal the delay is due to ongoing VFX work. The filmmakers are committed to delivering a visually stunning experience and chose not to rush the final product. With a focus on blending horror, comedy, and high-octane action, the team aims to set new standards in genre filmmaking.

The film has already sparked excitement following the positive response to its trailer. Alongside Dutt, the cast features Mouni Roy, Sunny Singh, Palak Tiwari, and Aasif Khan.

Produced by Deepak Mukut and Sanjay Dutt under the banner of Zee Studios, with Hunar Mukut and Maanayata Dutt as co-producers, *The Bhootnii* will be distributed globally by Zee Studios.



PRIYANKA CHOPRA AND ZAC EFRON TO REUNITE FOR NEW COMEDY



Global star Priyanka Chopra is reuniting with her *Baywatch* co-star Zac Efron for a new untitled comedy film directed by Nicholas Stoller, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. Currently filming an upcoming project with SS Rajamouli and Mahesh Babu in Hyderabad, Chopra is keeping busy—and fans are excited to see her team up with Efron once again.

The comedy is being produced by Amazon MGM Studios, and actor Michael Peña has also joined the main cast. Chopra confirmed the news by sharing a screenshot of *The Hollywood Reporter's* article on her Instagram story. The film, which was previously titled *Judgment Day*, tells the story of a young convict (Efron) who storms an unscripted courtroom TV show, convinced that the judge (Will Ferrell) ruined his life with a past verdict. Rounding out the ensemble cast are Regina Hall, Jimmy Tatro, and Billy Eichner.

Cate Blanchett considers stepping away from acting

Oscar-winning actress Cate Blanchett, celebrated for her performances in films like *The Aviator* and *Blue Jasmine*, has surprised fans by revealing that she's contemplating leaving the acting world. In a candid interview with the UK's *Radio Times Magazine*, Blanchett shared that she often thinks about stepping back from her career to explore new paths in life. During her latest project—an adaptation of Wallace Shawn's thought-provoking play, which features a 90-minute monologue from a woman confronting the harsh truths of global capitalism in a war-torn country—Blanchett hesitated to introduce herself as an actress. Her co-director, John Tiffany, pointed it out, prompting her to say, "I did, didn't I? It's because I'm giving up."

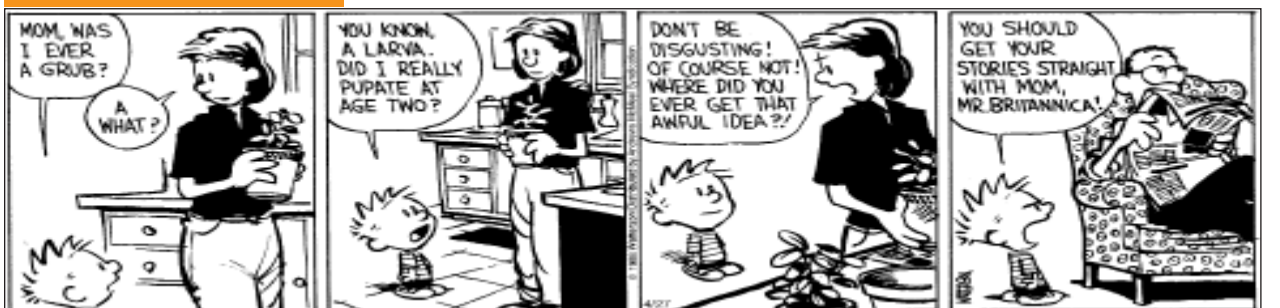
She continued, "My family rolls their eyes every time I say it, but I mean it. I'm serious about giving up acting. There are so many other things I want to do with my life." Despite her comments, Blanchett hasn't slowed down just yet. She's also set to appear in *Alpha Gang*, a quirky alien invasion comedy by the Zellner brothers, alongside a star-studded cast.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



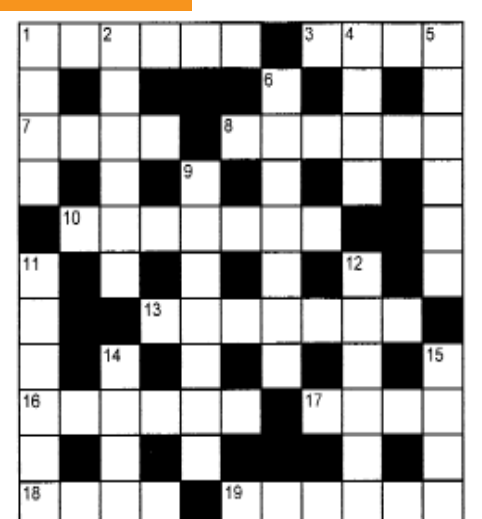
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

ACROSS

- Cleaned with water
- Small town
- A wartime explosive
- One quarter of thirty-six
- Old-aged
- Using a shovel
- Talented, skillful
- Wicked
- Gritty stuff on the beach
- Connected together

DOWN

- Close and open one eye quickly
- Unmarried
- Egg-shaped
- Light wind
- Find these in a cookbook
- Pieces of cut bread
- Not level
- Stitched
- Pleased

SOLUTION



'Hair design has now become an integral part of character delineation in film industry'



TEJAL SINHA
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What do Ranveer Singh's fierce Khilji mane, Saif Ali Khan's mystical Laal Kaptaan beard, and a swanky premium barbershop in Mumbai have in common? One man—Darshan Yewalekar. From a small-town boy studying microbiology to becoming the mastermind behind Bollywood's most iconic hair transformations, Darshan's journey is a story of guts, grind, and glorious style. Whether he's crafting a historically accurate look for a period film or giving a Gen Z star a signature edge, Darshan brings cinematic precision to every snip. And now, with D Barbershop, he's turning everyday grooming into an art form. Darshan's evolution into the world of hair design was not a predetermined path. "This journey has been absolutely incredible, especially because I had not even imagined stepping into Bollywood even in my wildest dreams," he says. With a father who was a bank employee and a mother who ran a beauty parlour, Darshan found early exposure to the world of grooming. After completing his 12th grade, he studied microbiology but ultimately pursued his true passion—hair design. His early career saw him assisting a celebrity hairstylist, eventually leading to bigger opportunities. "I had even started a salon early in my career but it didn't work out, and between 2008 to 2012, I struggled financially and

emotionally," he recalls. His breakthrough came with Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gollyon Ki Rasleela: Ram-Leela. Once he had established himself in the industry, Darshan launched D Barbershop with a vision to introduce "a world-class, premium barbering experience," where grooming would be elevated into a unique, personalized art form. Over the years, the hair design industry has undergone a dramatic transformation, especially with the influence of digital media and celebrity culture. Darshan notes, "In the film industry, the concept of hair design has evolved enormously over the past 10 years and has become an integral part of character delineation." From red carpets to media campaigns, hairstyling has become a key visual component of celebrity personas. "Digital media has completely changed the game," he adds. Clients now walk in with reference images of actors, influencers, or even AI-generated styles, expecting precision. Social media has accelerated trend cycles and increased the demand for innovation. "There's constant pressure to innovate and stay ahead of trends." The shift from on-set styling to entrepreneurship required more than just creative talent. "A prerequisite for any business is a vision and a clear understanding of how you are going to materialise it," says Darshan. Managing a barbershop meant learning the ropes of people management, client servicing, and branding. His time on sets—often dealing

with extreme pressure, last-minute changes, and tight deadlines—prepared him for the demands of running a business. "The ability to adapt and evolve is crucial." Darshan's approach blends artistic integrity with commercial sensibility. "For films, the character's authenticity takes priority, so creativity is driven by the script. In commercial styling, it's more about trends and personal expression," he explains. At D Barbershop, he combines both approaches, ensuring each client walks out with a style that is fashionable yet deeply personal. "We really work hard on not just cutting hair, but crafting a look which is curated for you," he says, adding that their unique method aims to put Indian barbering on the global map. When it comes to biopics, authenticity is key. "A director's brief is very important," Darshan shares. "Sanjay Leela Bhansali always visualises characters very minutely and his inputs laid the foundation of the work I did with Ranveer in Bajirao Mastani and Padmaavat." Period research becomes essential when visual references are scarce. "In '83, Darshan and Ranveer had to embody the legendary cricketer Kapil Dev. "It turned out to be very challenging. We had to accurately create a character mirroring Kapil Dev's distinct persona, his aura and his legacy." Preparing an actor's look for a biopic involves an extensive process. "The director's brief, the world they are visualising, and extensive research of every available image, reference or



video are very important," he says. Look tests, wigs, and constant monitoring on set are all part of the job. Every project presents its own set of challenges. "In Bajirao Mastani, Ranveer had to sport a bald look, while in Padmaavat, he blended his natural hair into prosthetic hair to create Khilji's long mane." Darshan is a firm believer in constant learning. "If you are passionate about your craft, you will continuously seek out new information," he says. He stays updated by studying international cinema and the work of global hair design icons. At D Barbershop, traditional grooming techniques are blended with cutting-edge tools and calming therapies to create a unique experience. Working with established stars like Saif Ali Khan presents a unique set of challenges. "The only challenge is to constantly innovate and go beyond what has been done before," he shares. For the Netflix series Jewel Thief, Darshan created a mix of classic and contemporary looks for Saif. With Ibrahim, it's about crafting an identity independent of his lineage. "He has a very sharp face and a natural style of his own, so we experiment a lot to enhance that uniqueness." Some transformations have left a lasting impact on both the actors and Darshan himself. He recalls Laal Kaptaan with Saif Ali Khan as one of the most immersive experiences. "We did around eight look tests before finalizing his Naga Sadhu look. Even on the night before the shoot, we were still adjusting the beard. That

level of detail made a huge difference—once Saif saw himself in the full look, he completely became the character." Hair design, Darshan believes, plays a critical role in enhancing an actor's performance. "A lot of research and preparation goes into hair design to enhance a character's believability and an actor's performance," he says. The script, era, and director's vision all inform the creative process. For instance, in '83, the script itself offered detailed insights into Kapil Dev's personality, aiding Darshan in creating a look that was both authentic and visually compelling. At D Barbershop, Darshan applies the same precision and innovation seen in his film work. "Every cut is tailored—there's no one-style-fits-all approach. We also keep up with international trends, so whether someone wants a classic cut or something experimental, we can deliver," he says, adding that quality control is non-negotiable. Creating an iconic character look is a collaborative effort. "The look of a character is a collective effort—hairstyling, costumes, and makeup all have to be in sync. The best results come when everyone is on the same page and working towards a common vision," he shares. Looking ahead, Darshan believes personalization is the future. "People want styles that are unique to them, not just copied from a celebrity," he says. In the world of entertainment too, he sees hair design gaining even more prominence—shaping personas not only on screen but off it as well.



Celebrity hair designer Darshan Yewalekar has transformed the looks of iconic film characters and stars like Ranveer Singh and Saif Ali Khan with precision and passion. From humble beginnings to leading large-scale transformations on Bollywood sets, in an exclusive conversation with The Pioneer, he shares insights on working with Sanjay Leela Bhansali, designing for biopics, and building his premium grooming space, while emphasizing that hair is not just style, but storytelling

Rewiring organisational mindsets!

PNS|HYDERABAD

With more than 20 years of experience working with leading companies and governments on four continents Shruiti Swaroop is a true game-changer in the DEI and HR fields - yeah, that's a lot of globetrotting! She founded EMBRACE Consulting in 2019 and has since assisted more than 550 customers worldwide in improving their workplace culture, leadership and productivity. But here's the thing: her goal as a global leader, HR Advisor and entrepreneur is to empower people and promote inclusive communities through projects like her impactful "Find Your Voice" campaign and her collaborations with the International Inclusion Alliance and ERTZ Academy. And it's no surprise that she's earned recognition as a thought leader and award-winning author, with TEDx talks and speaking engagements to her name - she's the real deal! Take a look at this exclusive interview to learn more.

What does it take to rewire organisational mindsets at scale in a world where performance is still frequently valued more highly than people?

It takes a multifaceted, multi-layered strategy to rewire any corporate thinking at scale. Among the things we've observed in that function are that the leadership must have a clear idea of what they hope to accomplish and how. For people to comprehend and support this vision, it must be effectively conveyed and ingrained throughout the organisation. The ideal mindset needs to be actively encouraged and modeled by leaders. Leaders are viewed as role models by the public; if they only articulate the idea without acting on it, the entire plan will fail. It's critical to communicate the changes, their justifications and their advantages in a regular and open manner. We need to be willing to welcome and accept candid conversations.

What have you learned about the applicability—or limitations—of DEI frameworks from international exposure?

The idea of inclusion is universal and consistent across all regions. The difficulties that people encounter are the same regardless of our location. The problems of family and entrepreneurship are often similar or different for the women I have mentored in South Africa, Belgium and Uganda. The fundamental ideas of justice, equity, and equality are still the same, but the cultural setting and opposition to change have changed. For instance, while LGBTQAI is widely accepted in some regions of the world, we encounter opposition from both individuals and even discussions about the notion in the majority of other regions.

What have been the most surprising things you've learned about leadership?

The most significant characteristic that unites leaders from all sectors and regions is their strong emotional intelligence, strategic thinking and ability to look ten years into the future. The majority of executives also give incremental elements that support growth a lot of weight. They are aware that when one remains consistent, seemingly insignificant things can result in significant improvements. Boardroom discussions also center on how the past influences the future, yet in order to advance, we must take measured risks. Boardroom discussions also center on how the past influences the future, yet in order to advance, we must take measured risks.



Another obvious characteristic of effective leaders is their capacity to accept responsibility, empower their groups and persuade key stakeholders to promote change.

Your "Find Your Voice" campaign is both poignant and intensely intimate. How did that phrase come to be and how has your personal voice changed over time to negotiate exclusionary and power structures?

We learn more the more we travel. Having visited more than 40 countries, met women from all over the world and mentored them, I have noticed a commonality: abuse is a widespread issue that is not discussed enough. We talk about domestic abuse because it is obvious, but we don't talk about emotional abuse because it is a part of who we are. The majority of jokes define and reflect our personalities. Every joke, if we listen carefully, reveals a lot about the individual and how they view the world. The Find Your Voice Campaign, in my opinion, was born out of the urgent need to make sure that individuals could express what they were experiencing—the emotions that are not expressed but must be expressed. Standing up for what I believe in and speaking truth to power are two ways that the campaign and what I do have shown up over the years. Has it been simple? Obviously not! Has it been rewarding? Absolutely!

What keeps you up at night and what gives you hope?

Many people are criticising inclusion because, although some recent attempts were sincere, many of them were about people pushing this to the next level of entitlement. It is hoped that, like any change, which swings in extremes like a pendulum, this extreme behaviour will eventually subside and the idea of inclusion will find a balance that is both sustainable and acceptable to everybody.

How do you strike a balance between thought leadership and the equally important task of silent, long-term transformation within organisations?

For me, inclusion is deliberate and non-inclusion bothers me on many levels. I've learned how to use my personal organisational experiences in my talks and use what I've learned to promote long-term change. My own outlook on life, humility and capacity to accept that things will fail a hundred times before they progress have all changed as a result of this. The most important lesson I've learned is that sometimes the most impactful work is done offstage, quietly breaking down barriers, changing processes and fostering

trust. Therefore, it's acceptable to occasionally go unnoticed or unheard, particularly if you're interested in long-term, sustainable change.

Have there been times when your work approach had to change due to your own personal development?

Indeed, every setback, every achievement and every experience I've had throughout the years have subtly shaped and reshaped my own personal development. These have subtly but significantly changed my perspective on the world and how I have presented myself professionally. I have realised how frequently I have been acting in accordance with inherited conventions rather than true ideals as a result of my life experiences, a personal loss and a profound discourse. Naturally, this realisation causes us to speak up in different ways in rooms, posing new queries or questioning presumptions that I had previously held. For instance, losing both of my parents changed the way I saw life and now I talk about spirituality in leadership just as much as I talk about inclusion. It is impossible to separate the two. My personal experiences have also helped me identify my strengths and what I have to offer. One question I pose to everyone I meet is, "What do you have to offer?"

The phrase "psychological safety" is frequently used but hardly understood. What does it mean outside of the textbook?

Fundamentally, psychological safety is about fostering an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks without worrying about embarrassment or repercussions. It is not just about being kind. In a workplace that is genuinely psychologically safe, people are free to express themselves honestly in meetings, even if it is not popular. Mistakes are discussed as teaching opportunities rather than being buried; junior team members politely challenge senior decisions. Feedback travels sideways, upward and downward. Disagreement and laughter may coexist in the same space. It virtually ever occurs in the world we live in. This is mostly due to the fact that people are motivated by their own fears, hopes, expectations and insecurities. The most important thing I have observed leaders failing to recognise is that everyone is accountable for this; when we establish a psychologically safe environment, we establish it everywhere, whether on a personal or professional level.

To have an impact on systemic frameworks, you co-founded the ERTZ Academy and the International Inclusion Alliance. Which procedures or frameworks do you think are essential for any company in the twenty-first century to be genuinely inclusive?

For 21st-century enterprises to be truly inclusive, equity must be ingrained in their processes, culture, and structures, going beyond superficial DEI pledges. To establish a truly inclusive environment, a variety of organisational rules, procedures, systems, awareness and programs that develop the culture from the ground up are needed. In-depth research on the real problems that lead to a non-inclusive workplace and strategies for fostering an inclusive and psychologically safe culture may be found in my book, "Microaggressions at Workplace."

How do you resolve the conflict between promoting representation and making sure the systems they are joining are actually prepared to assist them as a mentor of up-and-coming leaders, particularly women?

Without changing the structures people are entering, advocating for representation may inadvertently expose people to danger, tokenism, or fatigue. A layered, truthful and systems-aware approach—what I refer to as a "Triangle Approach"—is necessary to navigate this environment. Structural change and representation should be co-created concurrently, not sequentially. We must advocate for representation in order to support systemic improvement; we cannot wait for the system to be "perfect." We must provide success-promoting scaffolding before or in tandem with diversifying teams, including mentorship programs, inclusive leadership training, psychological safety and transparent feedback systems that enable marginalised perspectives to be heard and taken into consideration. Engage marginalised communities in transforming the processes, policies, and culture—not as a favour, but as co-creators of equity. The phrase "we're doing this with you" should replace "we're doing this for you." Finally, when we carry out the aforementioned tasks, we must exercise caution to avoid becoming mired in tokenism and the weight of representation. Leaders must be sincere, genuine, and able to live up to their words. They must be ready for the discomfort and be prepared to question customs, power relationships, and routines. Inclusive coaching is one way to accomplish this. All of the aforementioned points are crucial because systems remain unchanged unless the people in charge are prepared to adapt.

LESS-IS-MORE Minimal yet effective skincare essential

Less-is-more is catching fire in the realm of beauty and self-care. In the domain of skincare, more and more women are discovering minimalism as an answer to elaborate 10-step routines and a veritable never-ending array of products. This method is relatively straightforward: choose fewer options, opt for quality, and concentrate on a few key points that target specific needs in the skin without over-saturating it. A minimalist skincare routine includes three significant steps: cleansing, moisturizing, and sun protection. These three steps form the foundation of healthy skin and can be adjusted according to the specific needs of each individual's skin type and concern.

CLEANSING

Cleansing is the backbone of any routine. A gentle cleanser removes dirt, oil, and makeup without stripping the skin of its natural oils. Opt for sulfate-free and pH-balanced formulations to maintain the skin's barrier. Over-cleansing or harsh cleansers can disrupt this barrier, leading to dryness and irritation.

MOISTURISING

Moisturizing is important to keep hydrated and support the skin's natural repair. Oily skin types can use a lightweight, non-comedogenic moisturizer, while dry or sensitive skin types can use more decadent formulas with ceramides or hyaluronic acid. Well-moisturized skin barrier is healthier and better able to fight environmental stressors.

SUN PROTECTION

Sun protection is perhaps the most important and least remembered practice. It protects the skin from harmful UV rays that primarily cause premature ageing and skin cancer, using a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Therefore, sunscreens are no substitute but rather a non-negotiable element in practice.

SERUMS

The beauty of minimalism is that it's adaptable. A minimalist routine does not exclude treatments for specific concerns like acne or hyperpigmentation but encourages selective use of active ingredients such as retinoids, niacinamide, or vitamin C. Introducing them gradually prevents irritation and ensures effectiveness.

Moreover, a minimalist skincare approach is kind to your skin, environment, and wallet. Fewer products mean less packaging waste and a more sustainable lifestyle. Ultimately, the "less-is-more" philosophy is about understanding that healthy, glowing skin is achievable without overcomplicating your routine. You can embrace a streamlined yet effective skincare regimen that respects your skin and the planet by choosing products mindfully and using them consistently.

(The author, Dr. Nirupama Parwanda, is a Dermatologist & Founder of Zolie Skin Clinic.)

IPL: DC eye comeback against RR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Jolted by a dramatic loss at home after a dream start to the season, Delhi Capitals (DC) will look to put the setback behind them when they take on a faltering Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the IPL here on Wednesday.

Riding high on a four-match winning streak, the Axar Patel-led Capitals looked like a well-oiled machine before a stunning batting meltdown against Mumbai Indians (MI) halted their momentum here on Sunday.

What was meant to be a triumphant return to base ended in despair as the loss saw them slip to second on the points table. In contrast, Rajasthan Royals find themselves in a precarious position with just two wins from six matches, languishing at eighth. Their season has been marred by inconsistency.

Impact substitute Karun Nair, fresh off a prolific domestic season, led Delhi's chase against MI with a dazzling 89 in pursuit of 206 in their first game at the Feroz Shah Kotla this season.

At 119/1 in 10 overs, the match looked all but sealed. But what followed was a jaw-dropping collapse, which included three run-outs in the penultimate over. DC were eventually bowled out for 193 in a chase of 205.

Though the Capitals will undoubtedly rue the missed opportunity of collecting two points, they have little time to dwell on the defeat with another crucial clash looming. Once again, the spinners will



hold the key for Delhi. Despite the challenge of the evening dew, wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and 20-year-old Vipraj Nigam will look to weave their magic.

Both these bowlers have been DC's standout performers this season, their spin variations bamboozling opposition batters. However, skipper Axar Patel is yet to leave his mark. As captain, he has led the side admirably but the left-arm spinner has gone wicket-less in 14 overs across six matches, conceding runs at an economy that is a touch lower than 10.

Known for his batting heroics as well, the all-rounder is yet to get going in the tournament.

Young Jake Fraser-McGurk, who set the stage ablaze last season with his power-hitting, has been a shadow of his former self this time around. His high-risk game has completely backfired, yielding a meagre 46 runs, including two ducks.

With Faf du Plessis still side-lined due to injury, Nair looks to have firmly secured his spot in the team.

Delhi's middle-order looks strong this season thanks to the experience of KL Rahul, the firepower of Tristan Stubbs, Ashutosh Sharma, and the promising Nigam. Royals, meanwhile, have been plagued by inconsistency. Their batting unit, which is heavily reliant on Indian

stars, has mis-fired repeatedly.

While Yashasvi Jaiswal notched a fluent fifty in the previous outing in the loss to RCB, his overall form remains patchy. Skipper Sanju Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, while the young guns Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have shown potential without lasting impact.

On the bowling front, Jofra Archer seems to have shaken off the rust after copping the most expensive spell in IPL history.

But the Royals' attack as a whole has been toothless. Apart from Sandeep Sharma, their other bowlers have struggled to control the scoring rate.

Squads

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (C), Faf du Plessis, Karun Nair, Sameer Rizvi, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Ashutosh Sharma, KL Rahul, Abhishek Porel, Donovan Ferreira, Tristan Stubbs, Madhav Tiwari, Tripurana Vijay, Manvanth Kumar, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Darshan Nalkande, Mukesh Kumar, Mohit Sharma, T Natarajan, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav.

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (C), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubham Dube, Nitish Rana, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel (w), Shimron Hetmyer, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Tushar Deshpande, Sandeep Sharma, Fazalqah Farooqi, Kunal Singh Rathore, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya, Kwena Maphaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Ashok Sharma, Vaibhav Suryavanshi.

Use of saliva, second-ball rule in IPL 2025 help bowlers, says Mohit Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals (DC) pacer Mohit Sharma feels the return of saliva to shine the ball and the option of a ball change in the second innings have provided much-needed relief for bowlers in this year's IPL.

Ahead of IPL 2025, the BCCI lifted the long-standing ban on the use of saliva, first imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also introduced the "second ball rule", allowing teams to opt for a used ball after the 10th over in the second innings of evening games to combat the dew factor.

"Yes, it (ball change) is 100 per cent helpful. We saw that in the last game. The ball started getting wet after 12 overs in the first innings and then there was heavy dew in the second innings when 13th or 14th over that Karn bowled and the ball spun," Sharma said on the eve of DC's match against Rajasthan Royals.

He added that while the changed harder ball makes a difference initially, its impact fades after a few overs.

"So, that hard ball definitely creates a slight difference. But with time, when it reaches 15th or 16th over, the condition of the ball becomes the same."

100 per cent saliva has made a difference. You will see that in 70 per cent games, the ball is tailing in, that is only because saliva is heavy, sweat is not

- MOHIT SHARMA, PACER

The 36-year-old veteran also emphasised on the tactical advantage if teams can accurately predict dew.

"If you are 100 per cent sure that the dew is coming, you can plan accordingly but you need to be sure. We have seen in practice matches there was a lot of dew in Vizag but then there was none during the match."

On the use of saliva he said, "100 per cent saliva has made a difference. You will see that in 70 per cent games, the ball is tailing in, that is only because saliva is heavy, sweat is not. So if the ball is heavy it will tail in."

Kuldeep Yadav has been Delhi's stand out bowler and Sharma lauded skipper Axar Patel for using the spinner effectively. "If someone is bowling the best not only for DC but the tournament it is Kuldeep. The way he is bowling is very good for the team. And the way Axar is using him in between wherever we need the wickets, are under pressure or when a partnership is being built is amazing."

Do not care about individual scores, win for team important

Rajasthan Royals batter Nitish Rana said he does not care about the milestones as long as the team is winning.

"On a given day, what you perform is important. 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 is just a milestone for me as a player and a batsman. What is more important is as a team, where do you stand?"

"How do you perform on that individual day? How do you take those two points home? That is the most important thing."

Rajasthan are currently eighth in the points table having managed just two wins in six games.

KL Rahul has been standout wicketkeeper batter in IPL so far, says Mark Boucher

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

KL Rahul has been the standout wicketkeeper-batter in the Indian Premier League (IPL) thus far and is a contender for a spot in the national T20 team, reckons former South Africa and Mumbai Indians' head coach Mark Boucher.

Rahul, who is not part of India's T20 setup, has made 200 runs in four games at a stellar average of 66.66 and strike rate of 163.93 while batting in the middle-order for his new franchise Delhi Capitals.

"If you look at IPL — I am not talking about MS Dhoni here as we are talking about the future — one player who has been sound with his 'keeping and (has) batted really well is KL Rahul," Boucher, a JioStar expert, said in a selection media interaction on Tuesday.

"He has played some fantastic innings. He made a comment the other night I could relate to. He said when he keeps, he picks up a lot of information that he can use in his batting. He would be the standout keep batter in the IPL."

Panjab Kings bundled out for 111 by KKR bowlers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) dished out a clinical bowling show to bundle out hosts Punjab Kings (PBKS) out for a mere 111 — the third lowest total in this season of the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday. PBKS captain Shreyas Iyer's play to bat first after winning the toss at their home ground backfired as all their batters, except openers Priyansh Arya (22) and Prabhsimran Singh (30) struggled on the home pitch.

Only three more batters — Nehal Wadhwa (10), Shashank Singh (18) and Xavier Bartlett (11) — could register double-digit scores. Some PBKS batters were also guilty of reckless batting and poor shot selection.

Harshit Rana (3/25) was the most successful bowler while Varun Chakaravathy (2/21) and Sunil Narine (2/14) chipped in with two apiece. Arya (22 off 12 balls), who hit a sensational hundred to win PBKS' match against Chennai Super Kings, struck two fours off Anrich Nortje in the second over to set the tone of the home side's innings.

Prabhsimran then struck a six and two fours in the next over bowled by Vaibhav Arora, who conceded 20 runs.

Rana was welcomed by Arya with a six but the bowler had the last laugh as the batter holmed out to Ramandeep Singh.

In-form PBKS captain Iyer was dis-

missed first ball with Ramandeep taking a stunning catch. Ramandeep ran a few yards and made a full length head-first dive and grabbed the ball inches above the turf.

Punjab's shoddy batting show continued as Josh Inglis (2) was bowled by Chakaravathy as the home side were three wickets down in the fifth over.

Prabhsimran, however, was not affected by the fall of wickets as he smacked Rana for two consecutive sixes in the sixth over. But he got out two balls later to become Rana's third victim of the day.

Ramandeep also grabbed his third catch of the day, all of them off the bowling of Rana, as the duo made a perfect pair. With 54 for 4 at the end of powerplay, Punjab were clearly in trouble.

Glenn Maxwell and Nehal Wadhwa were kept quiet in the next two overs by the clinical KKR bowlers.

Nortje then returned to take Wadhwa's wicket in the ninth over to leave Punjab in disarray. The home side's slide continued as no batter was willing to stay put for even a few overs. Maxwell (7) fell in the 10th over off Chakaravathy to continue his poor form.

Punjab were in deep trouble at the halfway mark with just 80 on board for six wickets. Veteran KKR spinner Narine played his part to virtually seal Punjab's fate by dismissing both Suryansh Shedge (4) and Marco Jansen (1) in the 11th over. By that time, Punjab were 86 for 8.

India to play four matches in Mirpur, two in Chattogram: BCB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

India will play four games at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur and the remaining two in Chattogram during their white-ball away series against Bangladesh in August, the BCB announced on Tuesday.

India will play three ODIs and as many T20s in Bangladesh. This will also be India's first T20 bilateral series in Bangladesh and first exclusive white-ball tour since 2014.

The first two ODIs and the last two T20s will be played in Mirpur while the third ODI and first T20 will be held in Chattogram.

India are set to arrive in Dhaka on

August 13. They will play the first two ODIs on August 17 and 20, before heading to Chattogram to play the third ODI and first T20 on August 23 and 26. They will return to Dhaka to play the last two T20s on August 29 and 31.

The tour will also help in preparation for the Asia Cup T20. While India are the hosts of the tournament, it is still not clear if the event will be entirely held in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or UAE as Pakistan will not travel to India as per the understanding between the two countries.

"This series promises to be one of the most exciting and most anticipated events in our home calendar," BCB's chief executive Nizam Uddin Chowdhury was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

Pant had some plans in mind: Bishnoi backs LSG captain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Lucknow Super Giants leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi is not quite sure why he did not get to bowl at the death against CSK despite a fine spell but backed his captain Rishabh Pant's decision, saying as a skipper "he had some plans in mind."

Pant had opted for pace over spin at the death when MS Dhoni joined Shivam Dube (43) in the middle with CSK needing 56 off the last 30 balls.

The decision backfired as Dhoni blasted 26 off 11 balls as CSK achieved the victory target of 167 with three balls to spare.

"I didn't really talk (to Pant) about it. I came to the wicket twice, but maybe he had some plans in mind. He probably wanted to execute something else..." Bishnoi said during the post-match press conference.

"A captain can see better and from behind the stumps, he can understand the situation better. So according to me, he took the decision that he felt was better."

"No, nothing like that (talk about the fourth over). It was clear in his mind (what he had to do). In a tense situation, it is better for a captain to think from his point of view so he took what was the better decision," he added.

Bishnoi send down nine dot balls in his three overs, dismissing Rahul Tripathi and Ravindra Jadeja in the ninth and 13th overs respectively. Dhoni teaches you how to play the game: CSK bowling coach

A five-time IPL winner, Dhoni took over the captaincy role again after regular skipper Rituraj Gaikwad was ruled out due to an injury. Highlighting his influence in the team, CSK bowling coach Eric

Simmons said, "His influence has been behind the time, even when he was not captain. His relationship with Rutu is very important. His relationship with Fleming and all the players is very important."

In a tense situation, it is better for a captain to think from his point of view so he (Pant) took what was the better decision

- RAVI BISHNOI, PACER

"It is not that he teaches typical technical issues about the game, but it is the calmness that you see out there—that is how he teaches you to play the game."

"He teaches an understanding of cricket, which is a very important aspect of the game. So that influence, that calmness that he brings, has always been there, but

tonight we saw it once again."

Dhoni was named the Player of the Match for his contribution on the field and also scored 26 off 11 balls to take CSK home against LSG. "The fact that he is captain or not captain — he is the same person. It did not change when he was not, in terms of his actual influence on the team. He's obviously a very important part of our setup," Simmons said.

"It is a pity that Rituraj is not there to play and be our captain and our leader, but MS has always been like that. It does not feel like a massive change because he's always been there to give advice, give thoughts, give inputs. "And as I said, he is always a calming influence and gives a great level of understanding about how cricket should be played. His wisdom is tremendous."

Prepare better pitches: Dhoni urges Chepauk's curators

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Mahendra Singh Dhoni has urged the curators at the Chepauk to prepare better surfaces which can give his batters the confidence to play their shots like they did here as he does not want Chennai Super Kings to play timid cricket. Dhoni's 11-ball 26 was instrumental in CSK's win over Lucknow Super Giants after the five-time champions snapped their four-match losing streak, which also included three defeats at home. Chasing a target of 167, CSK won with three balls to spare with a markedly better batting performance.

CSK have been invincible at 'Fortress Chepauk' over the years but the 'Yellow Brigade' is yet to open its account at home this season.

"One of the reasons could be that the Chennai wicket is slightly on the slower side. When we have played away from home, the batting unit has done slightly better," Dhoni, who won his first player of the match award in six years, said in the post-match presentation on Tuesday.

"Maybe we need to play on wickets that are slightly better so that it'll give the batters confidence to play their shots. You don't want to play timid cricket," the 'Captain Cool' said.

Dhoni admitted that his batters need to fulfil their roles and responsibilities bet-



ter. "As a batting unit, we can do better. Roles and responsibilities - that's what we talk about. If you get off to a good start, and you're someone who can play through the innings, then why not. I think he batted really well today."

He also agreed that CSK's Powerplay performance has been an issue in the past five games.

"If you see the powerplay, whether it was the combination or the conditions, we were struggling with the ball. And then we weren't able to get the start we want-

ed as a batting unit. Also the fall of wickets. We keep losing wickets at the wrong time to some extent."

In fact, R Ashwin often bowled in Powerplays with not much success during this edition. "We were putting too much pressure on Ash. He was bowling two overs in the first six (overs). We made changes and this looks like a better attack. As a bowling unit we've done well."

Former India U-19 World Cup winner Shaik Rasheed made his debut for Chennai Super Kings scoring 27 off 19

balls with six boundaries. Rasheed has been around for past two seasons but got his debut only this year and the legendary former India captain seemed happy with what he saw.

"He has been with us for quite a few years (Shaik Rasheed). This year he has been batting really well in the nets against both pacers and spinners. It's just the start. He has the capability to dominate with authentic shots," the skipper said.

Dhoni felt that in a tournament like IPL, losing a few games on the bounce can make comebacks a bit tough.

"It's good to win a game. When you play a tournament like this, you want to win games. Unfortunately the (earlier) matches didn't go our way for whatever reasons. There can be lots of reasons."

"It gives confidence to the whole team and helps us improve in areas we want to improve. We all knew that when it doesn't come your way in cricket, God makes it very tough, and it was a tough game."

He also said in lighter vein that he didn't know why the adjudicators zeroed in on him to win the Player of The Match award.

"Even today I was like - 'why are they giving me the award?'" Noor (Ahmed) bowled really well."

The left-arm spinner bowled 13 balls in his four overs, stifling rival captain Rishabh Pant.

Rohit's form is disrupting MI's plans, admits Anjum Chopra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Rohit Sharma's poor run of form hasn't allowed Mumbai Indians to set the tone in the IPL so far, believes former Indian women's captain Anjum Chopra. The former MI captain has been reduced to an impact sub for the Hardik Pandya-led side with a string of low scores, 0, 8, 13, 17 and 18, that cut a sorry figure in the IPL.

MI fashioned a 12-run win in their recent game against the Delhi Capitals on Sunday and are saddled in the seventh position in the ten-team points table with four losses and two wins.

"You can be out of form. It is not a crime to be out of form. The only idea is that it is not helping, it is not setting the start that Mumbai Indians were looking for or are looking for right at the top," Anjum told PTI Videos in an exclusive interaction on Tuesday. Anjum suggested that if Rohit's fabled position at the top is unable to give them the returns they seek then demoting him down the order could do the trick.

"So, I mean, they have options, they can always look at pushing Rohit Sharma down the order or not utilising all those options are always there. But it is not that Rohit Sharma is out of form, it is just that sometimes you don't start the tournament on

that good a note or that high a note and it can affect you as a batter or as a player as well."

"So, it is part and parcel. It is like we are, we are watching a tournament as and when it's an IPL or a World Cup. But tell me in a World Cup, would you want your best batter to be in form in a World Cup or not? And a lot of energy goes into delivering that kind of performance."

"Some people recover from that and step into the next tournament quicker than most or others. It's not that others can't get into it. He hasn't got that kind of a start but then we know what kind of a player he is or what kind of a match winner is," said Anjum. It is not all doom and gloom for young opener Shafali Verma, whom Anjum advised not to lose heart after being overlooked once again.

"If she is rested or dropped from an Indian team, there is always an opportunity to make a comeback. I mean, it's happened with any and everyone. It's not that the heavens have fallen or the tides have changed. Every player goes through it."

"So, for a player of her age and if she starts thinking and people around her start thinking that it's curtains for her, I think it's a wrong thought. A 20, 21-year-old player can always look at the bright side that it is just the start of my career."

'I FELT LIKE THIS ROLE WOULD COMPLETELY CHANGE THE COURSE OF MY CAREER'



In a candid chat with *The Pioneer*, actress Apsara Rani opens up about her transformative role as Bhargavi Reddy in the Telugu political drama *Racharikam*, now streaming on Lionsgate Play. From shedding her glamorous image to embracing the raw intensity of a 90s-era political leader, Apsara shares how the emotionally charged story resonated with her personal experiences

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In *Racharikam*, Apsara Rani steps into one of her most layered and intense roles yet—playing Bhargavi Reddy, a strong-willed woman navigating the volatile political terrain of 1980s Rachakonda. The film, which premiered in theatres on January 31 and is now streaming on Lionsgate Play, marks a significant shift in Apsara's acting journey—showcasing her in a rustic, performance-oriented avatar that has surprised even her close ones. For Apsara, *Racharikam* offered more than just a powerful script—it was a long-awaited opportunity to break out of glam-centric roles and take on a character with depth. "Honestly, I was looking for a powerful role as an actor, which I feel I wasn't able to get before. I kept rejecting a lot of films because I realized something was always missing. But when this came to me, I felt like it would completely change the course of my career," she says. "I feel very grateful—by God's grace, I got the role at such an early stage of my journey." Bhargavi Reddy's character is a blend of political intensity, emotional vulnerability, and inner conflict—elements Apsara found deeply resonant with her own life. "Personal experiences helped me understand her. Every woman at some point feels a little unwanted or unimportant, especially when it comes to decision-making in families," she shares. "I could relate to that. I come from a very traditional background, and growing up I did face restrictions—being told not to go out alone, or not to do certain things. Bhargavi has faced similar barriers, and that emotional grounding helped me

portray her truthfully." The emotional complexity of the role challenged Apsara to push her boundaries. "I played a more mature character than my real age, so it was definitely challenging," she says. "But I had a young, passionate team with me—everyone was so dedicated. That energy helped me immensely." Since *Racharikam* is set in the backdrop of the late 1980s and 90s, Apsara had to make a conscious effort to unlearn modern mannerisms and embody the physicality and grace of a traditional Andhra woman. "We worked extensively on the look—the hairstyle, costumes, body language, even the way I sat or ate," she reveals. "I stopped gymming for a while. I didn't want to look like a modern, gym-toned actor playing a rural politician. That would've killed the authenticity." Her transformation wasn't just physical—it was mental and emotional, and one scene in particular left a lasting impact. "There's this moment when Bhargavi meets her lover, Shiva, after seven years of him being in jail. She hugs him with the same innocence from their college days, but he pulls back, seeing her as someone else's wife now," Apsara recounts. "That moment broke me. I cried on set and continued crying in my caravan. That feeling of how time changes people and love—it was overwhelming." The film was helmed by debutant directors Ishwar and Suresh Lankalapalli, and it was their passion that sealed Apsara's decision to come on board. "Ishwar gave me the narration in a language I was comfortable with. The moment I heard it, I knew I had to do this film. I didn't care if it was an experimental film or if they were new directors," she says. "Their belief in the story was so strong, and my intuition just

said yes. Every cell in my brain screamed, 'Go for it!'" Now that *Racharikam* is streaming, viewers across the country are seeing a different side of Apsara—one that her close circle had been rooting for all along. "My friends and family were shocked when they saw the trailer. I looked absolutely unrecognizable," she laughs. "They've seen me dance and do glam roles, but this time, they saw me perform. Even my conservative relatives were proud. They finally saw me do something substantial." The actress believes the film will resonate widely. "It has all the elements people love—South masala, action, songs, a gripping storyline. It's folk, raw, rustic, and very Rayalaseema. Films like this aren't made often anymore," she says. "Even North Indians will enjoy it. It has that strong 90s flavour and a solid emotional arc." Having portrayed a fierce political figure, Apsara is now gravitating towards roles that continue to push the envelope. "I've always wanted to play a politician—and I got to do it so early in my career," she smiles. "Next, I'm playing a cop in *Blood Roses*. And one day, I really want to play a thief! Or maybe do a simple college love story." For her, the thrill lies in doing something new every time. "I get bored easily, so I want each role to challenge me. I like pressure—it brings out the best in me." While her path has firmly led her into the world of cinema, Apsara reflects on her alternate career paths with a touch of humour and honesty. "I studied computer science engineering, but I would've made a very bad engineer," she admits. "Maybe I'd be a yoga teacher, or a dancer, or even an interior designer—something creative for sure. But every time I'm in front of the camera, I feel like this is exactly where I belong."

Acting is easy, but producing is the real challenge: Sumaya Reddy

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Sumaya Reddy wears many hats in *Dear Uma*—she's not only the female lead but also the producer and the writer of the story. Originally from Anantapur and holding a degree in Aviation from Hyderabad, Sumaya first came up with the film's concept during the COVID-19 pandemic. "I wrote a script during the lockdown and shared it with director Sai Rajesh Mahadev. He liked it, and that's how the film began," she recalls. Sumaya initially wanted an all-Telugu cast, but scheduling conflicts made that difficult. "I reached out to several actors, but none were available. That's when I cast Prudhvi Ambat as the male lead," she explains. *Dear Uma* delves into the workings of corporate hospitals and the ways some patients are misled. "The story is inspired by real incidents, but we've added fictional elements to build the narrative," she adds. Interestingly, Sumaya didn't plan to act in her own production. "I didn't take on the lead role just to be on screen. I truly believed in the story and wanted it to be told. My experience in theatre helped me bring the character to life." When asked which is harder—acting or producing—Sumaya doesn't hesitate. "Producing is far more difficult. Acting feels easy in comparison," she admits. The film's budget has exceeded initial expectations. "Because the shoot was delayed, and we brought in talented technicians and actors, costs went up," she says. Family and friends often advise her to invest in real estate instead. "They say I'd get guaranteed returns there. But with films, I'm constantly moving around, meeting people, and taking risks." Despite the challenges, Sumaya is undeterred. "Even though producing is tough, I won't back away. I want to make more films." Sumaya acknowledges that she had no industry connections starting out. "Getting people to attend our pre-release event was difficult. I had to personally request many of them. It's not easy," she admits. Still, her faith in her content keeps her going. "Look at the film 'Court'. It did well without big names. That kind of success inspires me." Before entering films, Sumaya worked as a model. "I've always had a passion for cinema, and that's what

SUMAYA REDDY, THE FEMALE LEAD AND PRODUCER OF THE UPCOMING FILM *DEAR UMA*, OPENS UP ABOUT HER JOURNEY—FROM WRITING THE STORY DURING THE PANDEMIC TO NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES OF PRODUCING HER DEBUT FILM



brought me here." A few days ago, she shared an emotional video online, which drew public attention. When asked about it, she says, "Regardless of political parties—TDP, YSRCP, or Pawan Kalyan's camp—no one should drag women into political controversies. It's not right." Talking about *'Dear Uma'*, Sumaya describes it as a feel-good film that families can watch together. "The last half-hour is particularly emotional. Since the lead character is a doctor, we titled it *'Dear Uma'* instead of *Dr. Uma*, to give it a more personal touch." She also highlights the need for more Telugu representation in cinema. "Just like in government jobs, there should be reservation in films too. At least 70% of the cast should be Telugu actors," she says passionately. When asked whether *Dear Uma* is similar to Chiranjeevi's *'Tagore'*, which also touched on corruption in corporate hospitals, Sumaya clarifies: "In *'Tagore'*, it was a small subplot. In *Dear Uma*, we explore the issue in depth." She reflects on how the pandemic revealed the darker side of the healthcare industry. "So many people were admitted to hospitals and spent lakhs, even when they didn't need to. Many recovered at home. We bring that reality to light in the film." Sumaya also touches on rising costs in education and healthcare. "People are spending 90% of their income on these two sectors. Only 10% is left for their actual living. And with GST on top of everything, it's overwhelming. The government should prioritize free education and healthcare over freebie schemes. That's the real solution."

Ilayaraja slaps ₹5 crore legal notice on *Good Bad Ugly* makers

Legendary music composer Ilayaraja has taken legal action against the producers of *Good Bad Ugly*, a recent film starring Tamil superstar Ajith. The movie, backed by Mythri Movie Makers, released last week and has underperformed in Telugu states, although it is reportedly doing better in Tamil Nadu. Ilayaraja has sent a legal notice to the producers, demanding Rs 5 crore in compensation for the unauthorised use of three of his songs. He claims the tracks were used without his prior



consent. In addition to monetary compensation, the composer has also requested a formal written apology within a

week. While some reports suggest that the production house had obtained a No Objection Certificate (NOC)

from the music label, Ilayaraja insists that such permissions are invalid without his personal approval, as he is the original composer. This isn't the first time Ilayaraja has taken legal action over his music. He previously issued notices for the Malayalam film *Manjummel Boys* and even sent a similar notice to his longtime friend and legendary singer SP Balasubramanyam for performing his songs without permission. All eyes are now on how Mythri Movie Makers will respond.

Siddu and Pradeep Machiraju latest films crash at the box office

Siddu Jonnalagadda's much-anticipated film *Jack* has turned out to be a major disappointment at the box office. Coming off the massive success of *Tillu Square*, expectations were high for *Jack*, especially given its larger budget. However, the film opened to poor reviews and failed to impress audiences or critics. Directed by Bommarillu Bhaskar, *Jack* was expected to carry the emotional depth and charm of his previous films. But the final product felt disconnected from Bhaskar's signature style, and word-of-mouth quickly turned negative. Despite releasing around a holiday weekend, including Ambedkar Jayanti, the film failed to generate momentum, resulting in heavy losses for buyers and the production team. Meanwhile, popular TV

host Pradeep Machiraju's second film as a lead actor, *Akkada Ammayi Ikkada Abbai*, also flopped at the box office. The film received minimal attention from audiences and was unable to create any buzz, marking another setback in Pradeep's transition to films.



Shambhala making video hints at visual spectacle

The team behind Aadi Saikumar's upcoming film *Shambhala* has released a behind-the-scenes making video, generating buzz for what looks to be his most ambitious project to date. The film is being made on a massive Rs 12 crore budget and is directed by Ugandhar Muni, with Rajasekhar Annabhimoju and Mahidhar Reddy producing. The making video showcases rich visuals, a mystical storyline, and high-intensity action sequences. The film is set across three differ-

ent timelines — the 1980s, 1,000 years ago, and 10,000 years in the past — blending mythology, history, and supernatural themes into a time-traveling epic. Aadi plays a geo-scientist unraveling an ancient mystery. Featuring Archana Iyer, Swasika, Ravi Varma, and others in key roles, *Shambhala* is nearing completion. A teaser launch is expected soon. With its grand visuals and intriguing concept, the makers believe the film could be a game-changer in Aadi's career.

