



# The Pioneer

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**'India has set target of Rs 3L cr in defence production by 2029'**

**INDIA WILL**

FOCUS ON POLICY AGILITY, LONG-TERM VISION: FM

Pooja Hegde talks about her potential collaboration with **ALLU ARJUN**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

The Pioneer

Who said Kavitha is not a rowdy? Kavitha did the liquor business in Delhi because she is a rowdy. 70 per cent of the leaders of the BRS party are rowdies. KTR should be ashamed of asking Revanth Reddy to tender resignation to CM position. Why should he resign for doing welfare and development? Congress party has full respect at Courts unlike BRS which forgot the fact that several times Courts scolded them.

- Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC Chief

**DON'T MISS...**

**'SC relief brings hope over Kolleru issue'**

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to grant a three-month extension to hear the concerns of residents from the Kolleru region, calling it a positive step towards a permanent resolution of the issue. In a statement, the MP clarified that under the leadership of the NDA Governments at both the Centre and in the State, and through the collective efforts of himself and the MLAs of Kaikaluru, Denduluru, and Unguturu — Dr Kamineni Srinivas, Chintamani Prabhakar, and Patsamatta Dharmaraju...

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**'Judiciary cannot direct Prez'**

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday questioned the judiciary setting a timeline for the president to take decisions and act as a 'super Parliament', saying the Supreme Court cannot fire a "nuclear missile" at democratic forces. Dhankhar's strong words to the judiciary came during his speech to Rajya Sabha interns, days after the Supreme Court sought to fix a timeline for the president to grant assent to the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor. "So, we have judges who will..."

-PAGE: 5

**Adani Ports to acquire Australian terminal**

Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd, India's biggest private port operator, announced on Thursday a USD 2.4 billion non-cash acquisition of a coal export terminal in Australia from a group company to strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region. The Board of APSEZ approved the acquisition of Abbot Point Port Holdings Pte Ltd (APPH), Singapore, from Carmichael Rail and Port Singapore Holdings Pte Ltd, Singapore (CRPSHPL), the company said in a statement. CRPSHPL is a...

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**BCCI removes asst coach Nayar**

The Indian cricket team's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar has been sacked just eight months into the assignment amid speculation of a rift with a high-profile member of the support staff even though Test debacles against New Zealand and Australia are being cited as the reason for his ouster. If board sources are to be believed, Nayar has already been intimidated of the BCCI's decision to part ways with him. "While India's recent Test debacles (against New Zealand and Australia) has led to the churning but there..."

-SPORTS

## Ensure 24x7 water supply: CS

**3,438 HABITATIONS IDENTIFIED AS VULNERABLE DURING SUMMER IN AP**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand has instructed all district collectors to implement proactive and effective measures to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply across Andhra Pradesh during the ongoing summer.

Chairing a video conference from the State Secretariat on Thursday, the Chief Secretary reviewed the summer action plan, along with the 'Swarnandhra' and 'Swachh Andhra' initiatives, stressing the importance of timely execution. He stated that 3,438 habitations across 332 mandals have been identified as vulnerable to drinking water scarcity. A summer action plan, with an estimated outlay of Rs 67.31 crore, is being rolled out to address the issue. He directed officials to remain alert to the rising temperatures and hot winds expected in the coming weeks.

Measures outlined by the CS include supplying water through tankers to drought-prone areas, leasing private water sources where necessary, repairing temporary supply systems, filling tanks, and restoring hand pumps.

He also called for the creation of special monitoring cells at state and district levels to address public grievances through the Public Grievance Redressal System (PGRS), Drought Monitoring Cell,

media, and the 1902 toll-free helpline.

## Gram panchayats in AP key to 'Viksit Bharat' vision: Pawan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan on Thursday said over 13,000 gram panchayats in the State will play a major role in realising the Centre's 'Viksit Bharat' vision, aimed at making India a developed nation by 2047.

In a post on X, Pawan Kalyan said AP has made comprehensive recommendations for strengthening governance & economic self-reliance, highlighting concerns to the 16th Finance Commission on Wednesday.

"Our 13,371 Gram Panchayats shall play a very instrumental role in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of Viksit Bharat. Andhra Pradesh is committed to making our villages self-reliant and prosperous," Kalyan said in the post.

The Deputy CM further said the Gram Panchayats are paving the way for Swarna Andhra Pradesh.

"From digital panchayats to pot-hole-free rural roads, from gram sabhas to gokulams, from creating sustainable infrastructure in remote areas to generating wealth from waste, we are transforming our villages as engines of growth," he said on X.

He reaffirmed Andhra Pradesh's commitment to strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions through economic reforms, governance transparency, and self-reliant village models under the leadership of CM Chandrababu Naidu.



- Steps include water supply through tankers, leasing private sources, repairing systems, and restoring hand pumps.
- Special monitoring cells to address grievances via PGRS, media, and toll-free number 1902.
- In urban areas, officials told to fill summer storage tanks, block canals and repair water systems.
- Chief Secretary emphasises borewell flushing, prevention of leakages, and generator readiness to handle power cuts.
- Establishment of cold storage centres with donor support and controlling pollution to prevent diseases suggested.
- The CS proposes monthly Swachh Andhra Day and e-waste management involving SHGs.

In urban areas, he directed that summer storage tanks be filled and canals blocked in coordination with the Water Resources Department. Borewell flushing and deepening, repair of power bores and hand pumps, and prevention of pipeline leakages were also stressed. Generators must be kept ready to manage power cuts.

He also emphasised raising public awareness on water conservation and instructed urban local bodies to establish complaint cells for quick response. He proposed setting up cold storage centres with support from donors and organisations and stressed pollution control to prevent waterborne diseases.

On reviewing 'Swarnandhra' and 'Swachh Andhra' programmes, he urged monthly observance of Swachh Andhra Day to promote cleanliness in government offices

and surroundings. He also stressed proper e-waste management, involving self-help groups and the public in weekly collection drives, and assured technical support from the Pollution Control Board.

The meeting was attended by Principal Secretary GAD Mukesh Kumar Meena, APIIC MD and Director of Industries Abhishek Kishore, Swachh Andhra Corporation MD Anil Kumar Reddy, and various district collectors and officials.

## Guv extends Good Friday greetings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer extended his greetings to the Christian community on the occasion of Good Friday.

In his message, the Governor stated, "Good Friday is observed by Christian brethren across the world in memory of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is a pivotal event in Christianity, symbolising Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice for the forgiveness of humanity's sins and the promise of salvation."

He further said that Jesus Christ showed immense love for all of humanity, and the occasion signifies a message of hope and salvation.

## AP sub-categorises SCs into 3 groups

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh on Thursday issued an ordinance on sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes (SC) classifying them into three groups in government jobs and education in the state.

"The Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Castes (Sub-classification) Ordinance, 2025 will be published in the Andhra Pradesh Gazette in English, Telugu and Urdu Languages as Andhra Pradesh Ordinance No. 2 of 2025," a Law Department Order said. The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, on April 15, approved an ordinance proposal to sub-categorise SCs into three groups

As many as 12 castes, such as Chandala, Paki, Relli, Dome and other castes, are in Group-I, with one per cent reservation. With a reservation of 6.5 per cent, Group-II includes the castes of Chamar, Madiga, Sindhola, Matangi and others, while Group-III with 7.5 per cent includes Mala and its sub-castes, along with Adhi Andhra, Panchama and others.

with varying percentages of reservations in the total 15 per cent.

Aimed at uplifting SCs, 59 castes have been divided into three groups. As many as 12 castes, such as Chandala, Paki, Relli, Dome and other castes, are in Group-I, with

one per cent reservation, the state government had earlier said.

As many as 12 castes, such as Chandala, Paki, Relli, Dome and other castes, are in Group-I, with one per cent reservation.

Continued on Page 2

## Police foil Bhumana's visit to TTD Gosala

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

High drama unfolded at the residence of former MLA and ex-TTD chairman Bhumana Karunakar Reddy on Thursday, after police prevented him from proceeding to a goshal for an open debate. In protest, Bhumana, along with MP Gurumurthy and former deputy chief minister Narayana Swamy, staged a sit-in by lying down on the road.

TDP MLAs had earlier challenged Bhumana on social media platform 'X' to a public debate at the goshal, following his allegations that several cows had died there. Anticipating his move, police deployed heavy security outside his



residence from early morning, citing law and order concerns.

Police officials informed Bhumana that no permission had

been granted for rallies or public debates, and requested him to refrain from proceeding.

Continued on Page 2

## Rs 30 cr sanctioned for honorariums to pastors in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Bringing cheer to the Christian community, the coalition government in the State has sanctioned Rs 30 crore towards honorariums for 8,427 pastors. Each pastor will receive Rs 5,000 per month for seven months—from May to November 2024—amounting to Rs 35,000 per person.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu approved the release, fulfilling a promise made by Nara Lokesh during his Yuvagalam Padayatra, where he assured pastors of government support.

Continued on Page 2

## Finance panel chief maps India's high income dream

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission of India and first Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, Prof Arvind Panagariya, has stated that for India to transition from a middle-income to a high-income economy, its gross national income (GNI) per capita would need to rise nearly eightfold from the current USD 2,540 (as of 2023). At present, India falls under the lower-middle-income category. To achieve this ambitious target, the country would require a sustained average annual growth rate of 7.8 per cent over the next 24 years.

IIT Tirupati hosted a lecture on Thursday by Prof Panagariya on the theme "India in the Global Economy: The Next Decade." In his keynote address, Prof Panagariya discussed the feasibility

of this goal by citing India's growth performance over the past two decades, during which the GDP expanded at 8-9 per cent, despite challenges such as the Global Financial Crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and domestic financial disruptions.

He emphasised that India had demonstrated resilience and strong growth potential during this period. Prof Panagariya identified three key factors to support India's transition to a high-income economy: the scope for catch-up growth, following the trajectories of China and South Korea; the importance of innovation, backed by skills and technology adoption; and the demographic advantage of a large, young working-age population, which can contribute to higher savings, scalable service delivery, and improved productivity.

Although reforms are slower in a democratic set-up, India has made notable progress in critical areas such as infrastructure. Landmark projects like the Atal Setu and the new Parliament



building were cited as examples of India's growing capacity for large-scale execution. He also stressed the need to expand private enterprise and boost employment in high-productivity sectors, particularly manufacturing.

Addressing concerns about underemployment, Prof Panagariya highlighted the need to shift workers from low-productivity micro-enterprises to more efficient firms. He called for urgent reforms in land and labour policies to facilitate enterprise growth and enable better absorption of the workforce by the private sector.

Responding to questions from the audience, Prof Panagariya acknowledged the lag in manufacturing growth, attributing it in part to restrictive labour laws. He underlined the importance of scaling up medium-sized enterprises and promoting industry-led skill development to enhance workforce productivity.

Prof K.N. Satyanarayana, Director of IIT Tirupati, also spoke on the occasion.

## WEF names Rammohan in Young Global Leaders list

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu has been selected for the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Young Global Leaders 2025 list. He is one of seven Indians recognised this year for their leadership in areas like public policy, technology, law, and human rights.

Naidu, the youngest minister in the Modi 2.0 Cabinet, called the recognition a reflection of the growing global presence of Indian youth in leadership roles. "It's not just a personal achievement but a call to serve with integrity and innovation," he said.

Elected to Parliament at 26, Naidu became a key figure in the Telugu Desam Party. In 2024, he was made Civil Aviation Minister and has since



pushed reforms under the UDAN scheme, improved regional connectivity, and promoted digital innovation.

His inclusion in the WEF network places him alongside past Indian leaders like Jyotiraditya Scindia, continuing TDP's engagement with global platforms.

## AP Chambers seeks Finance panel's support for State's growth

Industry body urges higher tax devolution, support for backward districts, and infrastructure development

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation (AP Chambers) has urged the Sixteenth Finance Commission to provide stronger fiscal support to accelerate the State's economic development. During an interactive session in Tirupati on Thursday, AP Chambers President Potluri Bhaskara Rao submitted a detailed memorandum to Commission Chairman Dr

Arvind Panagariya. The Chambers called for an increase in the States' share of central tax devolution to 50 per cent, particularly for economically weaker and industrially backward states like Andhra Pradesh. They also pressed for continued tax exemptions such as CGST and additional infrastructure grants for the seven backward districts identified under the AP Reorganisation Act.

To bolster industrial development, AP Chambers recommended allocating a portion of

the tax devolution towards establishing MSME Parks in all assembly constituencies, with liberal funding support. Highlighting the State's agrar-based economy, they sought financial assistance to set up national research institutes such as CFTRI and NIFTEM to aid value addition in agri-industries.

The Chambers reiterated the demand for forming dedicated crop boards for mango, banana, and palm oil, while underscoring Andhra Pradesh's potential as a 'Gateway to

South East Asia'. They advocated investments in ports, industrial corridors, logistics hubs, and integrated transport networks.

Further, the Chambers proposed a rural employment scheme modelled on MNREGA to support the labour needs of rural Micro and Small Enterprises.

They also called for extending the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme to small and medium enterprises and earmarking funds from tax devolution to support it.

## Cracker unit blast toll rises to nine

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The death toll in the recent fireworks explosion at Kailasapatnam village in Kotavuratla mandal rose to nine after J. Nagaraju, who was undergoing treatment at the CSR Block of King George Hospital (KGH), succumbed to his injuries on Wednesday. He had been on ventilator support for the past two days due to severe burns.

Another victim, currently receiving treatment at Medi Cover Hospital in MVP Colony, remains in a critical condition.

Authorities continue to monitor the injured, while investigations into the cause of the blast are ongoing.

## AIIMS Mangalagiri launches advanced patient care services

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AIIMS Mangalagiri, the first All India Institute of Medical Sciences established in South India, has taken a major step forward in healthcare delivery by launching a series of advanced patient care services, strengthening its vision of becoming a leader in multidisciplinary medical care.

On 12 April 2025, the Department of Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery (CTVS) successfully commenced its first-ever open cardiac surgery programme, under the mentorship of AIIMS New Delhi. Four complex open-heart surgeries were performed, including treatment for congenital heart defects and valvular heart conditions.

Among the patients were two women, aged 34 and 44, with congenital defects between the upper chambers of the heart. Their conditions were successfully corrected through open-heart procedures, significantly alleviating their symptoms. Another patient, a 46-year-old woman, underwent successful correction of a congenital defect along with repair of anomalous pulmonary veins. A 50-year-old woman, diagnosed with rheumatic heart disease and infective endocarditis, underwent mitral valve replacement with a prosthetic valve. She is currently recovering well.

In another milestone, AIIMS Mangalagiri performed its first robotic-assisted total



knee replacement on 11 April 2025. The surgery was conducted on a 63-year-old woman with severe bilateral osteoarthritis. She had previously undergone conventional knee replacement on her right knee at AIIMS. The robotic-assisted procedure offers greater precision, minimal invasiveness, shorter recovery time, and improved implant durability. The patient is recuperating well and is undergoing physiotherapy for optimal rehabilitation.

On 7 April 2025, Executive Director and CEO Prof Dr Ahanthem Santa Singh inaugurated the newly established state-of-the-art Intensive Coronary Care Unit (ICCU) at

AIIMS Mangalagiri. The ICCU is equipped with advanced cardiac monitoring systems, ventilatory support, and emergency resuscitation infrastructure, enabling round-the-clock critical care for cardiac patients from Andhra Pradesh and surrounding regions.

These developments underscore AIIMS Mangalagiri's commitment to delivering cutting-edge healthcare, supported by technological innovation and academic guidance.

The institute expressed its gratitude to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for its continued support in achieving these medical milestones.



## Manohar seeks bankers' support for welfare initiatives

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Nadendla Manohar has urged bankers to extend their cooperation towards the government's development and welfare initiatives, particularly in supporting farmers and ensuring the timely distribution of ration supplies.

Speaking at a review meeting with bankers held at Civil Supplies Bhavan in Kanuru, Vijayawada, the Minister emphasised the crucial role that banks play in facilitating welfare schemes. He noted that many citizens eagerly await their monthly ration and stressed that it is essential for the banking sector to support the government in delivering these essentials effectively.

Minister Manohar criticised the previous government for leaving unpaid dues amounting to Rs 1,674 crore to farmers. In contrast, he stated that the current coalition government

had cleared dues totalling nearly Rs 24,000 crore in just nine months. As part of its reforms, the government has introduced a new technology-based procurement system that allows farmers to sell paddy via WhatsApp. So far, over 17,000 farmers have utilised this platform.

During the Kharif season alone, the government procured 3.8 million metric tonnes of paddy from six lakh farmers. Impressively, payments were credited to the farmers' accounts within 24 hours, leading to widespread satisfaction.

The Minister also highlighted the government's strong stance against ration mafia and irregularities in the distribution system. He announced the rollout of new ration cards using advanced technology and the installation of AI-powered cameras in all warehouse godowns across the state to enhance transparency.

## TTD COW DEATHS ROW

### Bhumana slams govt, reiterates stand

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Former TTD Chairman Bhumana Karunakar Reddy on Thursday accused the coalition government of backing out of a challenge out of fear and reiterated that he stands by his version regarding the large-scale deaths of cows at a Gosala.

Addressing the media here, Bhumana said a heavy police presence had surrounded his residence since morning and prevented him and other YSRCP leaders from visiting the Gosala. "We informed the authorities that five of our party members — including MP Gurumoorthy, former ministers Narayanaswamy and RK Raja, and our MLC — would visit the Gosala to accept the challenge thrown by the ruling coalition. But we were not allowed," he said.

Protesting the police action, the YSRCP leaders staged a sit-in. "The Superintendent of Police said he would allow only me after the ruling party delegation left. Chandragiri and Srikalahasti MLAs phoned me, saying they were waiting. But when I told them about the police presence,



they denied any such restriction. Still, the police did not relent," Bhumana said. He insisted he stood by his earlier statement and pointed out that even the TTD's own version admitted that 170 cows had died since June 2024, after the coalition took office, although he claimed the actual figure was higher. "The TTD is trying to create the impression that we did not accept their challenge. But I am ready to go to the Gosala with five members and prove our version," he said.

Bhumana noted that there

were contradictory statements from TDP leaders and TTD officials but maintained that he stood by his challenge to exhume the carcasses of the cows.

He recalled that it was during the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government that a vigilance inquiry had been ordered. "Former E.O. Jawahar Reddy is a veterinary doctor. We brought 550 cows from various parts of the country to enrich the Gosala," he said.

He alleged that the present government had not respected the sanctity of the shrine, had discontinued several initiatives taken by the previous government out of vengeance, and was levelling false and baseless allegations against him and the YSRCP leadership. "There have been several unsavoury incidents atop the hill — ranging from liquor to food issues and assaults," he added. "Even after eleven months in office, the government has not been able to prove a single allegation," he said.

"I still stand by my statement and am ready to go to the Gosala with four others to prove our version at any time," Bhumana asserted.

## Seediri: Massive corruption in Amaravati capital project

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP Doctors' Wing president and former minister Seediri Appalaraju has accused the coalition government, led by N. Chandrababu Naidu, of unprecedented corruption and financial mismanagement in the Amaravati capital project.

Addressing the media here, Appalaraju alleged large-scale misappropriation under the guise of Amaravati's construction, terming it a grave injustice to both the farmers of the region and the entire state.

He claimed that the government had resorted to rampant corruption by arbitrarily inflating project costs to benefit themselves, finalising tenders at exaggerated estimates, and awarding contracts to favoured companies.



Appalaraju said such levels of corruption were unparalleled in the country and questioned whether such blatant looting had ever occurred globally.

Citing specific instances, he pointed out that the estimated cost of the state secretariat had increased from Rs 2,700 crore to Rs 4,700 crore, while the overall cost of constructing Amaravati had shot up from Rs 44,000 crore to Rs 77,000 crore — a 75 per cent rise. He questioned whether such drastic escalations had ever been

witnessed elsewhere, describing it as an outrageous act of plunder. He further alleged that to facilitate this, the government scrapped the judicial preview and reverse tendering processes, allowing advance mobilisation payments, which he termed as pre-emptive corruption.

Appalaraju also accused the government of abandoning development works initiated by the YSRCP in other regions. He said sectors like education, healthcare, and agriculture had been neglected while the government pursued commissions, pushing the public into distress.

As the people suffer, he alleged that ruling party leaders are indulging in extravagance. He called upon intellectuals, youth, and the public to question these injustices and hold the government accountable.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The startup ecosystem and innovation landscape in the State are set to receive a major fillip with the launch of the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub (RTIH), said NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha on Thursday. He stated that the hub would be a game-changer for the industrial sector and a catalyst for entrepreneurial growth across the State.

Dr Lakshminsha chaired a review meeting on the Tata Innovation Hub - Spoke model at the Collectorate, which was attended by State Information Technology, Electronics and Communications (ITE&C) Special Officer Deepti Rao and representatives from various coordination departments.

Addressing the gathering, Collector Dr Lakshminsha said the State government, under



the visionary leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, is committed to setting up the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub in Amaravati, incorporating national and international best practices in the startup and innovation ecosystem. In addition, regional spoke centres would be established in Visakhapatnam, Rajamahendravaram, Vijayawada, Tirupati, and Anantapur to extend the hub's benefits across the state, he

said. He elaborated that each regional centre would be managed through a dedicated board comprising a promoter (president), co-promoters, two independent experts, and two representatives from the government, academia, and industry associations.

These boards would oversee key operations such as investment, financing, incubation, partner coordination, marketing, and communications, he added.

Furthermore, he said to ensure the swift launch of activities at the Vijayawada Regional Spoke Centre, the district administration is identifying temporary infrastructure while plans for a permanent facility are underway. A district-level innovation task force, led by the Joint Collector, will coordinate efforts on the ground, he explained. The Collector emphasised that educational institutions, industry associations, and other stakeholders would play a crucial role in realising the vision of "One Family-One Entrepreneur" and Swarnandhra @ 2047.

The meeting was attended by VIT-AP representative Dr Amit Charan, SRM University's Udayan Bakshi, Mohan Spintex's V Ramesh, APIC JM K Babji, District Industries Officer B Sambaiah, DRDA PD

ANV Nanchara Rao, VMC Additional Commissioner Dr D Chandrasekhar, and other officials.

Meanwhile, Collector Dr Lakshminsha informed the Chief Secretary of the State, K Vijayanand, that his district administration is taking strong measures to address drinking water issues throughout the district. He participated in a video conference from his office at the collectorate in Vijayawada, which was conducted by the Chief Secretary from the secretariat on Thursday.

During the conference, Collector Lakshminsha outlined the steps the district administration is taking to resolve drinking water challenges. He also mentioned plans to prevent sand scarcity in the district during the upcoming rainy season.

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
 Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha  
 Tithi: Panchami: Apr 17 03:23 PM to Apr 18 05:07 PM  
 Shashthi: Apr 18 05:07 PM to Apr 19 06:22 PM  
 Nakshatram: Jyeshtha: Apr 17 05:55 AM to Apr 18 08:21 AM  
 Moola: Apr 18 08:21 AM to Apr 19 10:21 AM  
 Rahukalam: 10:42 AM to 12:15 PM  
 Yamagandam: 3:22 PM to 4:55 PM  
 Varjyam: 08:37 AM to 10:21 AM  
 Gulika: 7:35 AM to 9:08 AM  
 Amritakalam: 03:30 AM to 05:14 AM  
 Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:50 AM to 12:40 PM

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
 Forecast: Sunny  
 Temp: 37°C  
 Humidity: 67%  
 Sunrise: 5:50 AM  
 Sunset: 6:23 PM  
 Updated: April 17, 2025 5:00 PM

## AP sub-categorises...

Continued from Page 1

With a reservation of 6.5 per cent, Group - II includes the castes of Chamar, Madiga, Sindhola, Matangi and others, while Group - III with 7.5 per cent includes Mala and its sub-castes, along with Adhi Andhra, Panchama and others. "With this ordinance, all Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh will receive equal justice in education and employment," an official release had earlier said. The Supreme Court last year, in a judgment, allowed states to make sub-classification of SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for granting quotas inside the reserved categories.

## Police foil Bhumana's...

Continued from Page 1

However, the former TTD chairman accused TDP leaders of backing out of their challenge and using the police to block him. "The same TDP leaders who dared me to a debate are now running scared," Bhumana alleged, speaking to the media. "They asked the police to stop me from reaching the gosala." Meanwhile, TDP MLA Palla Nageswar Rao arrived at the gosala, and a heavy police presence led by Additional SP Ravi Manoharachari was seen at the site to maintain order.

## ED seeks confiscation of Rs 661-crore assets in National Herald chargesheet

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a recently-filed chargesheet in the Associated Journals Limited-Young Indian-National Herald money-laundering case, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has sought confiscation of assets worth Rs 661 crore that it has attached during the course of the investigation, according to official sources.

The federal probe agency has also appended the statements of Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the prosecution complaint (chargesheet) that it had recorded in 2022 during their questioning and it is understood that they have denied any wrongdoing, saying the takeover of Associated Journals Limited (AJL) by

Young Indian (YI) was not for commercial purposes, the sources said.

The chargesheet names 78-year-old former Congress president and Rajya Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi as the accused number one and her son, Rahul Gandhi (54), as the accused number two, besides five others.

It was filed by the ED before a competent court here that tries criminal cases against lawmakers on April 9. The court has fixed April 25 as the next date of hearing in the case, when it may take or reject cognisance of the chargesheet.

The sources said the agency has sought punishment against the accused for the offence of money laundering under the provisions of the Prevention of

Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and prayed for the confiscation of assets worth Rs 661 crore that it had attached in November 2023.

These confiscated assets, post the successful trial, will go to the government exchequer by way of auction or any other such process, they added.

It is understood that both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi have denied any wrongdoing in the affairs of AJL and YI, saying while they were part of the meetings held to help the former debt-laden company (AJL), these affairs were mostly taken care of by late Congress leader Motilal Vora, who served as the chairman of AJL between 2001 and 2002, apart from other office-bearers.

## IG conducts vehicle checks

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru range IGP GVG Ashok Kumar personally conducted checks of vehicles at the old bus stand area.

The IGP, accompanied by SP K Pratap Shiva Kishore, took part in the checking of vehicles, and later he monitored the checking of vehicles.

Police officials said that to



prevent transportation and selling ganja and maintaining the law and order efficiently. The IGP himself took part in the checking of vehicles.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**PANCHAYATI RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT**  
**E-PROCURE TENDER NOTICE**  
 IFB No.1/APRRP/PRED/2025-26 Date: 17-04-2025  
 The Project Director, APRRP & Chief Engineer, PR inviting online percentage tenders from eligible bidders for Construction of Road work packages through <http://eprocure.gov.in>. The IFB No.1 (percentage tendering process) are expected to be available from 23.04.2025 (tentative). Further details can be had from <https://ipred.ap.gov.in>.  
 Sd/- Project Director, APRRP & Chief Engineer (PR), Vijayawada  
 OFFICE No: 164202, JAGTI/1/2025-26 Dt: 17/04/2025

## Rs 800 cr for Krishna dist to build substations: Gottipati

Minister inaugurates substation, completed spending Rs 4.36 cr, in Vuyyuru

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar has reaffirmed the Andhra Pradesh government's commitment to strengthening the power infrastructure by announcing an investment of Rs. 800 crore for the establishment of electricity substations across Krishna district. He said this strategic move aims to boost the State's power distribution network and address the rising energy needs in both urban and rural areas.



The Minister, accompanied by Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashoury and Penamaluru MLA Bode Prasad, inaugurated a 33/11 KV outdoor electricity substation at the AP TIDCO Housing Colony in Vuyyuru on Thursday. The project was completed with an investment of Rs. 4.36 crore.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Ravi Kumar highlighted that the ongoing Machilipatnam Port develop-

ment demands uninterrupted power supply to support upcoming industrial and logistical operations. He also stated that industrialists have urged the government to establish substations within the APIIC Industrial Corridors to ensure reliable power for industrial growth.

He further added that under

the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, the State has initiated the construction of a 400 KV Gessolin Electricity Sub-Station, using advanced technology worth Rs. 6,000 crore. Spread across eight acres, this project is expected to be a game-changer in enhancing grid stability and connectivity.

"Our State has great potential for Renewable Energy, especially in Rayalaseema and parts of Prakasam district," the Minister said, underlining the State's thrust

on clean energy. In another announcement, he revealed that the government is ready to sanction 20 lakh solar connections under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, targeting 10,000 to 12,000 connections per Assembly constituency. On the infrastructure front, the Minister announced that Rs. 800 crore has already been spent in the first phase of road development, with an additional Rs. 600 crore sanctioned for the second phase. He also assured that the government is committed to completing the unfinished TIDCO housing projects across the State.

No power tariff hike under TDP rule  
Responding to public concerns, Ravi Kumar clarified that the TDP government has not increased power tariffs. He attributed the current Fuel and Power Purchase Cost Adjustment (FPPCA) charges to decisions taken by the previous YSRCP government.

## KRU plans PG centre in city

VC RAMJI MEETS NTR DISTRICT COLLECTOR DR LAKSHMISHA

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna University Vice-Chancellor Prof K Ramji met NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha at the Collectorate in Vijayawada on Thursday to discuss ongoing and proposed development initiatives at the university.

During the meeting, Prof Ramji outlined the university's vision for academic expansion and highlighted the proposal to establish a Postgraduate (PG) Centre in Vijayawada. The initiative is aimed at improving access to higher education for students in and around the city. He noted that the new centre would help ease the burden on students who currently have to travel to the university's main campus in Machilipatnam.

In a related development, Krishna University Director of Admissions Dr A Susheela announced the establishment of a PG CET Help Line Centre at Nalanda Degree College in Vijayawada. The centre will assist students with queries



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Dr Susheela further said that the Help Line Centre would also serve to create awareness about the various postgraduate courses

offered by the university's affiliated colleges, making the admissions process more accessible and student-friendly.

## Ensure safety of workers in Amaravati: CRDA chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In light of the large-scale construction and development activities underway in the capital region, Guntur District Special Officer and CRDA Commissioner K. Kannababu has instructed officials from the relevant departments to work in coordination. On Thursday, CRDA Commissioner Kannababu, District Collector S. Nagalakshmi, Joint Collector A. Bhargav Teja, and Municipal Commissioner Puli Srinivasu convened a coordination committee meeting with officials overseeing construction within the CRDA limits.

The District Medical Officer informed the Commissioner that the Primary Health Centre (PHC) in the capital has been upgraded to a 30-bed hospital, and that necessary medical care will be provided to workers. As many labourers bring their families to the construction sites, the ICDS Project Director and District Education Officer were instructed to facilitate the admission of their children into nearby schools and 'Anganwadi' centres.

Officials from the Labour Department were directed to ensure contractor appointments in the construction sector are made in accordance with government regulations, while Fire Department personnel were asked to ensure that building works comply with fire safety norms.

Guntur District Collector S. Nagalakshmi emphasised the need for strict safety measures at construction sites. She advised police personnel to maintain law and order, especially as a large number of workers are arriving from outside the capital.

## 1 student killed, 7 hurt as car collides with lorry

PNS ■ ELURU

One engineering student was killed and seven others were injured when the car in which they were travelling collided with a lorry at Taduvai village in Jangareddygudem mandal on Thursday.

According to the police, the students were in their first year of B.Tech at Seshi Engineering College in Tadepalligudem.

The accident occurred while they were on their way to Bhadrachalam to celebrate the birthday of one of their friends.

The car reportedly collided with a lorry that was coming from Aswaraopet towards Jangareddygudem, resulting in the instant death of Komati Swamy (20).

The injured students were shifted to the Area Hospital in Jangareddygudem for treatment.

## Botsa slams coalition over governance, farmers' woes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has strongly criticised the ruling coalition for its alleged failure to address the concerns of various sections of society, including farmers, industrialists, students, and women.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, YSRCP Legislative Council leader Botsa Satyanarayana accused the government of lacking sincerity in governance and merely making tall claims. "While it speaks of creating a favourable environment for investors, its actions are driving away industrialists," he remarked.

He alleged that ruling party leaders across the state are harassing industrialists and contractors for commissions, citing instances in Kadapa, Krishnapatnam, Anantapur and Etcherla. "Even reputed



"While it speaks of creating a favourable environment for investors, its actions are driving away industrialists."

firms like the Jindal Group, which proposed major investments, are being discouraged due to such practices," he said. Satyanarayana further said that farmers and tenant farmers are bearing the brunt of government apathy. "There is no procurement of produce like paddy, chilli or tobacco, and farmers are being denied Minimum Support Price (MSP)," he stated.

He also criticised the financial management of the coalition,

alleging that the government has borrowed Rs. 1.48 lakh crore in just ten months, with no accountability. "Every section of society is disillusioned—be it farmers, students, women, or the unemployed. Promises remain unfulfilled," he said. On the Tirupati issue, he questioned the heavy police presence and said the government should respond transparently to the queries raised by the YSRCP instead of resorting to intimidation.



## Panic as bus catches fire in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Panic gripped commuters as a private travel bus parked along the roadside caught fire near the Krishna Lanka area on the National Highway in Vijayawada on Thursday. Fortunately, no casualties were reported in the incident.

According to eyewitnesses, flames suddenly erupted from the vehicle, causing alarm among the public. Passersby ran in panic, while

some alerted the authorities. A fire tender was immediately rushed to the spot, and firefighters swiftly brought the blaze under control.

The bus sustained partial damage, and preliminary reports suggest that a short-circuit may have triggered the fire. Officials are investigating the exact cause, and further details are awaited. The incident caused a brief traffic disruption on the highway, which was later cleared by local authorities.

## CM should fight for special category status: CPM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has strongly objected to the recent statement by Dr Arvind Panagariya, Chairperson of the 16th Finance Commission, that the issue of Special Category Status (SCS) for Andhra Pradesh is now closed. CPM State Secretary V Srinivasa Rao reminded that it was the Prime Minister himself who had promised special status to Andhra Pradesh, a commitment the people have awaited for the past decade.

Rao criticised the Centre for reneging on its promise and accused it of betraying the people's aspirations. He rejected the Commission

The Centre for reneging on its promise and accused it of betraying the people's aspirations.

Chairperson's remarks as unacceptable, particularly in light of the 14th Finance Commission's earlier clarification that the matter was beyond its purview. The current Commission's stance, he said, was equally unjustified.

He also faulted the state government for failing to mention either the demand for special status or the bifurca-

tion-related assurances in its memorandum to the 16th Finance Commission. Rao argued that instead of chasing foreign investments that often exploit local resources, the government should prioritise securing special status, which would in turn attract genuine investments.

The CPM leader urged Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to exert pressure on the Central government to honour its commitments regarding SCS and bifurcation promises. He further criticised the BJP's proposal to retain the state's share in central taxes at 41 per cent, calling it detrimental to Andhra Pradesh's development.

## Govt focused on edn and jobs for weaker section students: Dola

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Reiterating the State government's commitment to uplift marginalised communities through education and employment, Minister for Social Welfare Dola Sree Bala Veeranjaneeya Swamy on Thursday said significant strides have been made within 10 months of the current administration assuming office.

Accompanied by MLC Vepada Chiranjeevi Rao, the Minister visited the free DSC (District Selection Committee) Training Centre at Dwarakanagar and the SC Hostel at Madhurawada in Visakhapatnam. During the visit, he interacted with the students and faculty, reviewed the quality of instruction, and took stock of the infrastructure and facilities available.

"The government has initiated the construction of new SC Hostels and Gurukul Schools to ensure access to quality education," the Minister said, adding that renovation and upgradation of amenities



Minister Veeranjaneeya Swamy distributes free study materials to DSC exam aspirants

in existing hostels are also being planned.

At the DSC Training Centre, Veeranjaneeya Swamy distributed free course material to candidates and enquired about their challenges and requirements. He lauded the efforts of the faculty and encouraged students to make the most of the opportunities being extended

to them. Currently, over 3,400 economically disadvantaged students are receiving free coaching for the DSC exams across the State. Additionally, the number of NEET coaching centres within Gurukul Schools has been ramped up from three to ten.

Assuring that the long-pending backlog posts for SC/STs would be filled short-

ly, the Minister emphasised the government's holistic approach towards social empowerment. He also announced that from the next academic year, residents of Social Welfare Hostels and students in Gurukul institutions would be served improved meals, including higher-grade rice, as part of efforts to enhance living standards.

## MP felicitates Narra Vasu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Parliament member Kesineni Sivanath, popularly known as Chinni, felicitated Narra Vasu, the newly appointed Chairman of the Vijayawada (Gollapudi) Agricultural Market Committee (AMC), at his office located at NTR Bhavan in Gurunanak Colony on Thursday.

Soon after the official announcement of his appointment, Narra Vasu made a courtesy visit to the MP's office to express his gratitude for the support and confidence shown in him. On the occasion, MP Kesineni Chinni extended his best wishes to the new chairman and encouraged him to work earnestly towards the uplift of farmers and the development of agricultural infrastructure in the region. Narra Vasu thanked the MP for entrusting him with the responsibility and pledged to work with dedication for the welfare of the farming community.

## VRO caught taking bribe

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Beri Srinivasa Rao, Village Revenue Officer of Boddalavalasa village in Denkada mandal, was arrested for accepting a bribe of Rs 13,000. The accused allegedly demanded this amount from Pathiwada Trinath Rao, a resident of Akulapet village, in exchange for facilitating the land mutation process for his family.



The issue surfaced following the death of Trinath Rao's father on December 31, 2024. In line with inheritance procedures, Trinath Rao sought to transfer 28 cents of agricultural land into his mother's name. However, the Revenue Officer allegedly insisted on a bribe to process the request.

Refusing to comply with the demand, Trinath Rao report-

ed the matter to the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB). Acting swiftly, ACB officials set up a trap and arrested the officer while he was accepting the bribe money at Nilati Cheruvu, Vizianagaram.

## AMTZ hosts National Wheelchair Basketball Camp

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) is hosting a 14-day national training camp for women wheelchair basketball players, marking a significant stride in India's para-sports development.

Organised by the Wheelchair Basketball Federation of India (WBFI), the camp has brought together 21 athletes from across the country to train in an international-standard, fully accessible facility.

The initiative aims to prepare the national team for the upcoming Asia-Oceania Zone Games and the Asian Para Games, key qualifiers for the 2028 Paralympics. For many athletes, this is their first



opportunity to train together in a professional environment, with round-the-clock support, modern infrastruc-

ture, and expert coaching. "This camp is a game-changer," said team coach Captain Louis George

Meprath, highlighting the unprecedented level of team synergy being developed. AMTZ, traditionally known

for its medical innovation, is now expanding its vision to include a dedicated Para Sports Academy.

"This is just the beginning," said Dr. Jitendar Sharma, MD and Founder CEO of AMTZ. "We are building a pipeline of para-athletic talent with global aspirations." This is the second of eight national camps scheduled for 2025 under the AMTZ-WBFI collaboration. The players, hailing from diverse and often under-resourced regions, have shared stories of resilience and transformation, underscoring the life-changing impact of such inclusive, high-performance opportunities.

The camp builds on the momentum of a successful national wheelchair basketball championship held at AMTZ earlier this year, positioning the facility as a growing hub for para-sports excellence in India.

## Finance panel lauds Tirupati's solid waste mgmt efforts

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Members of the 16th Finance Commission visited the Integrated Solid Waste Management Plant at Tukivakam near Tirupati on Thursday and commended the officials for its effective and sustainable operations.

The delegation comprised Ritwik Pande, Annie George Mathew, K.K. Mishra, Abhay Menon, Aditya Pant, and Amita. Their visit is part of a four-day tour of Andhra Pradesh to assess development initiatives across districts.

Principal Secretary for Municipal Administration and Urban Development, Suresh Kumar, along with Tirupati District Collector Dr Venkateswar S and Municipal Commissioner D. Harihar Maurya, briefed the Commission on various components of the facility. These included wet and dry waste management, composting, biogas, and the construction waste recycling units. Officials highlighted how



the plant converts waste into usable resources. Dry waste collected from across the city is processed and sold to cement factories, while wet waste is turned into compost and distributed to farmers and gardeners. Organic waste from markets and hotels is converted into biogas. On a daily basis, the city

generates approximately 150 tonnes of wet waste and 75 tonnes of dry waste, along with 25 tonnes of construction debris. All of this is treated and channelled towards industrial reuse, officials said. The Commission was accompanied by Srikalahasti RDO Bhanu Prakash Reddy, Additional Commissioner

Charant Tej Reddy, and Superintendent Engineer Shyam Sundar. Earlier in the day, the members, led by Finance Commission Chairman Arvind Panagariya, were welcomed at Renigunta Airport by State Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav and Collector Dr Venkateswar.

## Houses built on encroached land razed

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

A demolition drive was carried out in Bondada village, Kalla mandal, on Thursday, resulting in the destruction of houses built on government land along the main road.

The authorities employed a JCB to demolish the homes, but residents, supported by CPM mandal secretary Gorla Ramakrishna, successfully halted the demolition efforts. Tensions escalated between locals and the police, with confrontations continuing from 9 am to 12:30 pm. Several individuals, including CPM leader Ramakrishna and some women, were arrested and taken to the Kalla police station.

CPM leaders accused the authorities of demolishing the homes of 28 families, despite calls for the government to grant them house pattas. The CPM leader condemned the police's treatment of the women involved during the incident.

The affected families had built their homes on 79 cents of land, which belongs to the Irrigation Department. As the land is classified as 'poramboku', the CPM demanded that the government provide the residents with legal ownership rights (pattas).



## Steps taken to address potable water crisis, Collector tells CS

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRUY

Chief Secretary K Vijayanand conducted a video conference with district officials to review key issues, including the supply of drinking water during summer, sand stocking, and the delivery of civic services to the public.

During the review, the Chief Secretary assessed the implementation of the free sand policy, preparations for sand stocking ahead of the monsoon, the PM Solar Power initiative, land-related matters, the MSME survey, industrial park development,

the Swarnandhra Swachh Andhra programme, and the water shortage affecting both municipal and rural areas.

East Godavari District Collector P. Prasanthi informed the Chief Secretary that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the supply of drinking water during the summer wherever required. She stated that villages facing acute drinking water scarcity had been identified, and officials had been directed to supply water to these areas. In light of complaints from the public regarding delays in

resolving grievances, the Collector said counselling sessions were being held for officials to improve accountability. "Public feedback will be gathered through IVRS on the services provided, and the responses will be shared with the officials concerned," she added.

Collector Prasanthi further informed the Chief Secretary that 18 lakh metric tonnes of sand would be made available to the public, and sandbanks were being created to ensure free availability during the rainy season.

## YSRCP hails SC's interim orders on Waqf Act

PNS ■ KURNUL

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has welcomed the Supreme Court's interim orders on the Waqf Board Amendment Act, 2025, describing them as a significant step towards justice for the Muslim community.

Addressing the media on Thursday, former MLA M.A. Hafeez Khan expressed confidence in the judiciary, noting that the Chief Justice of India had echoed the concerns raised by the YSRCP regarding the controversial legislation.

The Supreme Court, acting

on a petition filed by the YSRCP, questioned the inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf Boards and observed that the Act could potentially infringe upon fundamental rights. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta sought seven days to respond. In the meantime, the Court directed that there be no de-notification of Waqf properties and ordered a status quo on all related assets and appointments until the next hearing on 5 May 2025.

Calling the order a "major relief," Khan said it strengthened the party's belief in a

favourable outcome. He criticised TDP leader N. Chandrababu Naidu and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for aligning with the BJP-led NDA, accusing them of betraying minority interests.

Khan warned that the Muslim community was closely watching the TDP's actions and demanded that Naidu withdraw from the NDA if he truly supported minority welfare. Reiterating the YSRCP's commitment to securing a repeal of the amended Act, he said, "The Court's questions reflect our stance. Justice will prevail."

## 5-yr-old with neurogenic bladder treated

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A five-year-old girl has been successfully treated from a neurogenic bladder at Ankura Hospital, Vijayawada.

A careful clinical evaluation revealed that a crucial detail-urine was seen leaking from her vaginal area. This observation pointed towards a rare condition: an ectopic ureter.

Subsequent imaging tests, including an ultrasound and MRI urogram, confirmed the presence of a duplex kidney system on the left side, meaning the kidney had two separate drainage systems.

## Women's safety awareness drive launched

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha called for urgent action to educate the younger generation on issues of safety, emotional maturity, and legal awareness during the launch of the state-wide women's safety awareness campaign at the VMRDA Children's Arena on Thursday.

Addressing a large gathering, Anitha expressed alarm over the increasing number of youths becoming embroiled in legal troubles due to rash and impulsive decisions. "Young individuals are often misled under the guise of love, leading them to make life-altering mistakes in moments of anger," she stated, urging students to develop restraint and



long-term thinking. She underscored that self-discipline plays a pivotal role in ensuring a successful future. The event, which drew a diverse crowd including students, police officers, and academic leaders, was attended by prominent figures

such as Visakhapatnam Commissioner of Police Shankha Bratha Bagchi and Andhra University Vice-Chancellor Prof. Rajasekhar.

Anitha pointed to troubling statistics, revealing that 20 per cent of those accused under the

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act are minors, with 80 per cent being under the age of 23. She called for enhanced awareness and potential legal reforms to address the issue more effectively.

The Minister also raised concerns about the growing problem of substance abuse, particularly marijuana use among youth, and stressed the need for greater protective measures to shield the younger generation from such harmful influences.

During her speech, Anitha also praised Andhra University's merit-based selection of Prof. Rajasekhar as Vice-Chancellor, commending the institution as a beacon of academic excellence.

## Officials instructed to address drinking water shortage

PNS ■ ELURU

Zilla Parishad Chairperson Ghanta Padmashri has directed officials to take necessary measures to effectively address the drinking water shortage being experienced in several villages across the district.

The Zilla Parishad general body meeting, chaired by Padmashri, was held here on Thursday. Addressing the gathering, she noted that certain villages were facing an acute scarcity of drinking water and urged officials to act swiftly to resolve the issue.

She instructed the concerned departments to ensure irrigation tanks are filled by 22



April. The Irrigation Department has also decided to continue the release of water to irrigation canals until 22 March. In addition, she ordered that borewells be dug

and old ones repaired. Padmashri further directed ZPTCs, MPPs and other public representatives to be informed about ongoing development activities and the

implementation of welfare schemes in their respective mandals, as per established protocol. She warned that action would be taken against officials who fail to follow pro-

cedure. Her remarks came after several ZPTC members complained that officials were not informing them about government programmes or inviting them to official events and project inaugurations in the mandals.

MLC Vanka Ravindranath, Tanuku MLA Aarimilli Radhakrishna, Government Whip and MLA Bolisetty Srinivas, and Polavaram MLA Chirri Balaraju also addressed the meeting. Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy, ZP CEO K. Bhimeswara Rao, West Godavari Joint Collector T. Rahul Kumar Reddy, and East Godavari Joint Collector S. Chinna Ramudu were present.

## No plans to privatise Kancha Gachibowli lands: Mahesh

'Kavitha did illicit liquor biz in Delhi as she is a rowdy'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TG Government has no plans to privatise Kanche Gachibowli lands, TTPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud said. He threw a challenge at BRS Working President KT Rama Rao to come for a debate on HCU lands and the lands sold by the BRS Government in the presence of the media.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, Mahesh said that KTR and BRS MLA T. Harish Rao are trying to sidetrack the Supreme

Court verdict regarding Kanche Gachibowli lands.

He said the government will 'provide' five lakh jobs by allowing companies to function from HCU lands. However, the leaders of the BRS and the BJP are trying to 'block' the development schemes of the Congress Government, he added.

He said that the BRS government had sold thousands of acres around Hyderabad during its 10-year rule and made it clear that the Congress has full respect for courts, unlike the BRS and added that the BRS is

hiding the fact that courts have criticised the BRS government several times.

"KTR should be ashamed of asking Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to resign. Should Revanth quit for implementing social welfare and development projects?" Mahesh said.

Responding to BRS MLC Kavitha's comment that she is a rowdy type, Mahesh said, "Who said Kavitha isn't a rowdy? Kavitha did illicit liquor business in Delhi as she is a rowdy. Around 70 per cent of BRS leaders are rowdies."



## KRU VC hails students of Nalanda College

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna University Vice-Chancellor Prof K Ramji has stressed that students should grow to a level where they can create job opportunities rather than just seeking jobs. Speaking at the Success Meet-2025 of Nalanda Degree College, held in Vijayawada on Thursday, he lauded the students who secured jobs in various corporate companies through campus placement drives.

He spoke about the competitive nature of the job market and commended the students

for excelling in corporate campus recruitment drives. Prof Ramji also praised Nalanda Degree College for its reputation within Krishna University's jurisdiction, comparing it to the globally renowned Nalanda and Takshashila universities.

NTR District Youth Services Department Chief Executive Officer U Srinivasa Rao acknowledged the college's efforts in adapting to changes in the education sector by introducing new courses that cater to industry needs. He appreciated the institution for not only providing quality

education, but also ensuring job opportunities for students.

College Principal M Anuradha announced that 374 students from the 2024-25 academic year secured placements in various corporate companies, with annual salary packages ranging from ₹3 lakh to ₹11 lakh. She reiterated the college's commitment to ensuring students receive job offers by the time they complete their degrees. To support this, the college has established a dedicated Campus Placement Cell to provide skill development training aligned with employment opportunities.

## Narayana reviews works in VMC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister P Narayana conducted a detailed review of the ongoing and proposed development works under the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC). The review meeting, held at the CRDA headquarters in Vijayawada, focused on monsoon preparedness, traffic infrastructure, park development and livelihood support initiatives.

With the monsoon season approaching, the Minister directed the officials to complete desilting and repair works of all stormwater drains to prevent waterlogging. He stressed the need for proactive measures to ensure roads remain water-free during the rains.

Highlighting the importance of better road connectivity, the Minister instructed authorities to strengthen access roads from the city to Gannavaram Airport. As a new flyover from Mahanadu Junction to Enikepadu is set to begin construction soon, he directed the selection of alternative routes and immediate laying of

new roads to ease traffic congestion.

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath informed that several roads have already been identified for diversion and the Minister ordered swift repair work on those stretches. He also stressed the need for prioritising greenery along the airport corridor.

The Minister reviewed park development proposals presented by local MLAs and urged officials to prioritise projects based on available funds. He also discussed income-generating initiatives for women self-help groups under MEPMA and asked the VMC Commissioner to consult with the MEPMA MD for necessary decisions.

The meeting was attended by MLAs Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, Gadde Rammohan Rao, Bode Prasad, NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminisha, VMC Commissioner Dhyanchandra, Town Planning Director Vidyullatha, Chief Engineer of Public Health Department Mariyanna and officials from the National Highways Authority of India.

## SC relief brings hope for lasting solution to Kolleru issue: Putta

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to grant a three-month extension to hear the concerns of residents from the Kolleru region, calling it a positive step towards a permanent resolution of the issue.

In a statement, the MP clarified that under the leadership of the NDA Governments at both the Centre and in the State, and through the collective efforts of himself and the MLAs of Kaikaluru, Denduluru, and Unguturu — Dr Kamineni Srinivas, Chintamaneni Prabhakar, and Patsamatla Dharmaraju — as well as TDP district president Ganni Veeranjanyulu, the matter has finally seen progress.

He said that following the Supreme Court's directive to demarcate the boundaries of the Kolleru region, which caused fear and anxiety among the locals, he and the MLAs personally explained the situation to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan



The Supreme Court's directive to demarcate the boundaries of the Kolleru region, which caused fear and anxiety among the locals, he and the MLAs personally explained the situation to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan.

to allow three more months to hear the arguments of Kolleru residents has brought significant relief, he added.

The MP also mentioned that a comprehensive report would be prepared by the District Collector and submitted to the Supreme Court on behalf of the State Government. He reiterated that the NDA Governments are determined to provide a lasting solution to the Kolleru issue.

ACROSS THE STATES



**Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to resume soon**

India on Thursday said there is a possibility of resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon and a public notice could be issued over it. India and China have been looking at resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra as part of efforts to improve ties after the two countries completed disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang under the framework of a pact sealed in October last year. "We will soon issue a public notice on the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and there is a possibility of resumption of the Yatra soon," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "The Yatra will happen this year and we are making preparations. More information will be put out for the public soon," he added. The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra has not taken place since 2020.



**Delhi records maximum temperature of 40.6°C**

The national capital on Thursday recorded a maximum temperature of 40.6 degrees Celsius, which is 3.8 notches above the seasonal average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. The mercury reached 40.2 degrees Celsius earlier on April 7. The minimum temperature was recorded at 25.7 degrees Celsius, 4.1 degrees above normal, the IMD said. Humidity levels fluctuated between 47 per cent and 32 per cent during the day. Thursday's minimum temperature was the second highest of the season so far. It was 25.9 degrees Celsius earlier on April 10. The weather department has predicted strong surface winds on Friday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to be around 39 degrees Celsius and 25 degrees Celsius, respectively. The air quality at 4 pm was in the 'poor' category, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) reading of 204. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe', according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).



**Scindia reviews progress of projects in Manipur**

Development of North Eastern Region Minister Jyotiraditya M Scindia on Thursday reviewed the progress of various projects being implemented in Manipur. Scindia, along with Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, chaired a meeting at the Raj Bhavan in Imphal, a statement said. At the meeting, officers made a comprehensive presentation of the status of various projects currently underway in the state, it said. Scindia noted several areas that require focused attention for the development of the state. Among them were handicrafts and handloom, sports, tourism, international trade, agriculture, particularly palm oil farming, logistics, and the development of national highways, it added. He also directed officers present in the meeting to accelerate the pace of key infrastructure projects such as universities, Manipur IT-SEZ, the mental hospital, and the maternity and child hospital, said the statement issued by the Raj Bhavan. Later, Scindia chaired a meeting of the High-Level Task Force on Sports for the North Eastern Region. It was virtually attended by Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, Nagaland's Deputy CM Y Patton, and representatives of Meghalaya and Manipur.

**HARYANA LAND DEAL CASE ED records Vadra's statement on day three of questioning**

The Enforcement Directorate recorded the statement of Robert Vadra, the businessman brother-in-law of Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, for about six hours on the third consecutive day on Thursday in a 2008 Haryana land deal-linked money laundering case. By the end of Thursday's session, he was questioned for about 16 hours in total. Vadra 16 has termed the ED action a "political witch hunt" against him and his family.



He reached the ED office in central Delhi shortly after 11 am on Thursday, accompanied by his wife Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, an MP from Kerala's Wayanad. Robert Vadra left the agency office around 6:15 pm.

**Judiciary cannot direct Prez, act as 'super Parliament'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday questioned the judiciary setting a timeline for the president to take decisions and act as a "super Parliament", saying the Supreme Court cannot fire a "nuclear missile" at democratic forces. Dhankhar's strong words to the judiciary came during his speech to Rajya Sabha interns, days after the Supreme Court sought to fix a timeline for the president to grant assent to the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor.



"What is happening in the country? We have to be extremely sensitive. It is not a question of someone filing a review or not. We never bargained for democracy for this day. President being called upon to decide in a time-bound manner and if not, becomes law."

"So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament and absolutely have no accountability because the law of the land does not apply to them," Dhankhar said.

The vice president also described Article 142, which grants plenary powers to the Supreme Court, as a "nuclear missile against democratic forces available to the judiciary 24x7". "Article 142 has become a nuclear missile against democratic forces (and) available to

(the judiciary 24x7," he said. Article 142 of the Constitution gives the Supreme Court the power to issue orders that ensure "complete justice" in any matter before it.

This power is also known as the Supreme Court's "plenary power".

"There is a directive to the president by a recent judgment. Where are we heading?"

"What is happening in the country? We have to be extremely sensitive. It is not a question of someone filing a review or not. We never bargained for democracy for this

day. President being called upon to decide in a time-bound manner, and if not, becomes law," Dhankhar said.

The vice president said his worries were at a "very highest level" and he had never thought in "my life" that he would have the occasion to see it.

He reminded the audience that the president of India is in a very elevated position.

"(The) president takes an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. Others, including ministers, the vice president, parliamentarians and judges take an oath to abide by

the Constitution," Dhankhar said.

"We cannot have a situation where you direct the president of India and on what basis? The only right you have under the Constitution is to interpret the Constitution under Article 145(3). There it has to be five judges or more..." he said.

Stressing the principle of separation of powers, he underlined that when the government is elected by the people, the government is accountable to Parliament and to the people in the elections.

**CRPF 'backbone' of mission to rid country of Naxalism: Shah**

PNS ■ NEEMUCH (MP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said Naxalism, which is confined to just four districts in India, will be eliminated by March 31 next year, and the CRPF is the "backbone" of this mission. He was addressing the Central Reserve Police Force's (CRPF) 86th Raising Day function in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district.

"The Naxalites who dreamt of spreading red terror from Pashupatinath to Tirupati are today confined to just four districts. The biggest contribution in this is of CRPF. The menace (of Naxalism) will end in the country by March 31, 2026, as stated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," Shah said. The Central Armed Police



Forces (CAPF) and the CRPF, especially its CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country, he said.

The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is a specialised unit of the CRPF, known for its proficiency in guerrilla and jungle war-

fare, particularly in combating the Naxal menace.

"The CRPF has set up over 400 forward operating bases in Naxal (affected) areas. Because of this, violence in these regions has come down by more than 70 per cent and we are now close to ending it," Shah said.

**Mamata protecting 'rioters' with eye on polls: BJP**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday slammed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over her meeting with Muslim clerics in the state, and accused her of giving protection to "rioters" to appease the minority community with an eye on next year's state polls.

Addressing a meeting with Muslim clerics in Kolkata on Wednesday, Banerjee termed the recent communal violence in Murshidabad district "pre-planned", accusing the Border Security Force, central agencies and the BJP.

**'Absence of motive can't result in acquittal': SC**

**Upholds man's life term for son's murder**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the absence of motive cannot be the sole ground for acquittal and upheld the life imprisonment of a man convicted for killing his son in 2012. A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and K Vinod Chandran rejected as

"puerile" the fervent argument of the man about the impossibility of a father killing his only son.

The top court said another compelling argument of the appellant was about the absence of a motive to kill his son. "Just as a strong motive does not by itself result in a conviction, the absence of motive on that sole ground cannot result in an acquittal," the bench held.

The verdict came on the appeal of the man challenging the Delhi High Court's August 2022 judgement, which confirmed the man's conviction and sentencing of life imprisonment by the trial court.

While referring to the top court's judgements, the bench observed if the case was built solely upon circumstantial evidence, absence of a motive would be a factor weighing in favour of the accused.

**Modi invited for V-Day celebrations, waiting for response: Kremlin**

PNS ■ MOSCOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited for the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow on May 9, but there has been no response from New Delhi, a top Kremlin aide said Thursday.

On May 9, Russia celebrates victory in WWII over Nazi Germany and this year has invited leaders of select friendly nations to attend the 80th anniversary event. The leaders include Chinese President Xi Jinping, who has accepted the invitation.

"The Prime Minister has been invited for 9 May, but so far we have not received any response," Kremlin's foreign aide Yuri Ushakov was quoted as saying by Russian State TV.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of the Russia-Qatar summit in the Kremlin, Ushakov said that this year it



was "our turn to visit India for the regular summit" and discussions are ongoing for President Vladimir Putin's visit.

In October 2000, President Putin visited New Delhi for the first time and signed the Strategic Partnership Declaration with the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Over the past quarter century, this partnership has evolved into a "special and privileged" partnership between New Delhi and Moscow.

**Modi govt bent on 'oppressing' MGNREGA workers: Kharage**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage on Thursday alleged that the "anti-poor" Modi government is bent on "oppressing" MGNREGA workers and reiterated the party's demands that their minimum wage per day be fixed at Rs 400 and that they be provided at least 150 days of work in a year.

Kharage shared on X a media report which claimed that the government is unlikely to raise the daily floor wage under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) substantially, on top of the usual annual hike, despite recommendations by two panels.

**'Retaliation in guise of reform': Cong on Waqf Amendment Act**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday said the Waqf Amendment Act is not just "legally flawed" but "morally vacuous" and that it "attacks" the very soul of the Constitution.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress leader Abhishek Singhvi said the law attacks the rights of minorities in the name of reform and the party will not allow this to happen as the framers of the Constitution had not envisioned this.

Singhvi along with Congress' minorities department head Imran Pratapgarhi welcomed the Thursday's development in the Supreme



Court over the new law and thanked the top court for granting time to hear the important matter.

"I want to say this is not reform. It is retaliation in the guise of reform. Retaliation meticulously scripted, strategically timed, and constitutionally questionable. The Waqf Amendment Act is not an exercise in efficiency as it pretends to be."

**Dalits, women 'completely unsafe' under BJP rule: Rahul**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday lashed out at the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh over the alleged rape of an 11-year-old Dalit girl and demanded strict action against the culprit. In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said such crimes were "happening continuously" in the state due to the BJP's anti-Dalit and anti-women mindset.

The deaf-and-mute girl went missing on Tuesday and was found in a field the next morning. She was bleeding from her private parts, and there were bite marks on her body.

**Eating almonds daily can help control blood sugar in Indians: Study**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Consuming almonds daily can help control blood sugar levels in specific populations, such as "Asian Indians", according to a research article.

Analysing previously published research on almonds and cardiometabolic health, an international team of researchers and physicians said that almonds can help improve metabolic health by reducing 'bad' cholesterol and increasing beneficial gut bacteria.

Findings, published as a consensus article in the journal Current Developments in Nutrition, reinforce almonds' role as a heart-healthy, weight-supporting, and gut-friendly food, the team said.

The findings also reveal how almonds can potentially

benefit specific populations, such as Asian Indians, where rising rates of cardiometabolic diseases are a concern, study author Dr Anoop Misra, chairman of Fortis Centre for Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol, told PTI.

Dr Misra is also the head of National Diabetes Obesity and Cholesterol Foundation, New Delhi.

Consuming almonds was found to lower LDL, or 'bad' cholesterol by five units, and diastolic blood pressure in small but significant amounts of 0.17-1.3 mmHg.

For Asian Indians with pre-diabetes, eating almonds daily can help reduce fasting blood glucose and HbA1C, the researchers said.

"The most current meta-analyses on almond consumption and various health-relat-

ed endpoints suggest that almond consumption does not result in weight gain and results in small reductions in LDL cholesterol and diastolic blood pressure, as well as improved glycemic responses in certain populations (i.e. Asian Indians)," the study said.

Dr Misra said, "These benefits aid weight loss efforts by helping stabilise energy levels and reduce appetite fluctua-



tions. When paired with balanced nutrition and physical activity, almonds can be a health-promoting part of a weight loss plan."

In the article, the authors also wrote that "there was some evidence that almond consumption of (more than) 50 grams per day may have led to small reductions in body weight in some study participants." They said the result debunks the myth that almonds can contribute to weight gain.

Dr Misra said, "Almonds can support weight loss efforts due to their nutrient composition -- protein, fibre, and healthy fat content -- which helps people feel satisfied for longer periods and may reduce overall calorie intake."

Further, almonds have been shown to benefit one's gut by

promoting the growth of healthy gut bacteria and increasing the production of short-chain fatty acids.

"These changes support better metabolic health and can contribute to reductions in excess body fat," the author said.

Rich in proteins, fibre and heart-healthy unsaturated fats, almonds can play a crucial role in one's balanced diet, by bringing together essential nutrients, such as magnesium, potassium, and vitamin E.

"While almonds can be easily included in snacks and salads, the best time to consume them -- with breakfast, afternoon snack, post-workout or on-the-go -- depends on one's routine and goals," Dr Misra said in response to a PTI's question about how to get the most out of almonds.

Editor's TAKE

## Preserving the past for the future's sake

World Heritage Day is all about protecting the identity, values and creativity of humanity

Every year on April 18, countries around the globe come together to celebrate World Heritage Day, also known as the International Day for Monuments and Sites. This important occasion, established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982 and later approved by UNESCO, serves as a reminder of the value of our cultural heritage — and the responsibility we all share to protect it.

Heritage — both tangible and intangible — is the collective memory of civilisations. It tells stories of who we are, where we came from, and how our societies evolved. While time, climate, and natural weathering have always been enemies of ancient structures and traditions, a more immediate and insidious threat today comes from political ideologies and regimes. Around the world, we have witnessed deliberate destruction of heritage as acts of dominance, revisionism, or retaliation. In trying to erase the past, these regimes destroy not just structures, but identity itself.

One of the most tragic and symbolic examples was the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001. Carved in the 6th century, these towering statues were not just monuments of religious and artistic significance — they were irreplaceable pages of Afghan history. Their demolition was a stark message: the regime rejected not only the statues, but the entire cultural lineage they represented.

In Russia, we have seen another kind of heritage demolition. After the fall of the Soviet Union, statues of Lenin and other Communist-era icons were removed or destroyed by the new regime. While many saw this as necessary to move forward from a dark period, these relics were also historic markers — powerful reminders of an era that, like it or not, shaped the modern state. Similar stories play out in other regions. In post-colonial Africa and Latin America, monuments to colonisers have been toppled by newly empowered governments or protest movements. These acts are often cathartic for communities, but they also risk oversimplifying history by erasing it altogether.

India, a country with millennia of layered history, offers a complex example. On one hand, India has shown tremendous commitment to preserving its ancient temples, forts, and cities. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) manages thousands of monuments, and sites like the Taj Mahal, Hampi, and Khajuraho receive not just national, but global attention and protection. On the other hand, certain political narratives have led to the neglect, distortion, or even destruction of heritage. Mughal-era structures and other Islamic sites have sometimes been portrayed as symbols of foreign oppression rather than integral parts of India's pluralistic history. Controversies like the Gyanvapi Mosque case or the renaming of historic cities (e.g. Allahabad to Prayagraj) show how heritage is being rewritten to fit modern ideologies. India's heritage, like its culture, is layered and syncretic. To dismantle one layer in favour of another is to misunderstand the very nature of its identity.

When a regime destroys heritage, it isn't just erasing the past — it is destroying a mirror to itself. History cannot be undone. No matter how uncomfortable, the past lives in us. Monuments are not merely stones or statues; they are vessels of memory, cautionary tales, achievements, failures, and everything in between. Their destruction is a loss to humanity, not just a nation. As political tides shift, there is a growing need for governments to adopt a more mature approach to heritage. Recognise its value beyond ideology. Understand that history, in all its complexity, must be preserved, studied, and remembered — not sanitised or destroyed. Ultimately, heritage is not just about the past — it's about continuity. In destroying it, we are only severing ourselves from what could teach us, ground us, and guide us into the future.

## Leaderspeak



Harvard has set an example for other higher-ed institutions — rejecting an unlawful and ham-handed attempt to stifle academic freedom, while taking concrete steps to make sure all students at Harvard can benefit from an environment of intellectual inquiry, rigorous debate and mutual respect. Let's hope other institutions follow suit.

FORMER US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

# Learning to learn and live

Beneath the surface-level diversity lies a profound truth: the core principles that govern human relationships are remarkably consistent. These shared values — truth, respect and fairness — form the bedrock of civil society

The fundamentals of all personal dealings and individual relationships, all over the world, are remarkably similar. Anywhere in the world, truth is upheld as a cardinal principle, and everywhere in the world, a line is considered drawn between proper and improper. It has nothing to do with which religion one follows, what is the colour of one's skin, or what are one's social norms. Similarly, killing is considered wrong, and so is taking something that does not belong to you. The list can be multiplied, and in all cases, there is a universal value system that brooks no distinction on account of language, creed, or anything else.

Put simply, the unifying principles of humanity are many and have withstood the test of time through millennia, and no one has found it worth his time to negate or contradict these principles.

It, therefore, does not follow that there are no differences between one part of the globe or another, or for that matter, all humanity agrees on everything.

There are differences of belief in matters of religion, creed, and values of behaviour. In certain communities, polyandry is accepted. In others, monogamy is considered desirable.

The enforcement of these values is sometimes through written laws enforceable by courts and, in certain cases, by social practices and beliefs, none of which go to a court.

The varieties are many, and the practices often differ sharply. It is this that makes the processes of legislation important, and the norms must be known to hold credence.

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VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

remain tolerant.

This takes one back to the fundamental beliefs of accepting mutual dignity as a human being and recognising that one must not inflict one's values on others.

What can be stated so simply can become comparatively complicated to practise, and these are the roots of much conflict which takes place even in civil states.

Understanding the anatomy of conflict, therefore, requires a need for a concurrent understanding of the practice of the principles of 'live and let live'.

Perhaps this should be made a part of each

child's learning before the child grows into adulthood. The present stage of learning through different stages of school and colleges emphasises knowledge acquisition. There is nothing wrong with that. What is needed, however, is the recognition that one has to let others live to be able to live oneself peacefully and happily.

These are lifestyle learnings and not knowledge learnings. It is, therefore, necessary to keep re-examining the fundamentals of educational systems and values which make coexistence not only desirable but feasible.

Put simply, a recognition of individual identities is useful, but a recognition of the other person's right to that living is also a must. For the physically powerful, adopting a stance of dominance, assertion, and compulsion is easy.

There has to be self-restraint in recognising how this is a must if the other person also needs to have the same spaces for life as one wants for oneself.

The long and short of it is not just the development of the mind, not just the devel-

opment of one's might, but also the development of one's patience, one's understanding, and how necessary it is to respect each other's identity.

A marriage, and a family, are the basic unit of the constitution of a civil society, and it is important to inculcate these values at the core of these institutions.

This can be best done by example and by reflection that the other person has the same right as one wants for oneself.

It is a happy truth that civilisational values have progressively advanced in that direction. That there are notable exceptions is understandable.

Perhaps dealing with it with patience and purpose is the way forward. It takes time but can be done with positive practices in the family and positive values in collective places like schools and elsewhere. The direction is non-negotiable, and the attempt is worth its effort.

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

## Why we must learn to laugh at ourselves again

### SECOND Opinion

BY ASHA IYER KUMAR

Once upon a time, we laughed without offence or guilt. We laughed at power, at politics, at bureaucracy, and most of all, at ourselves. It was a laughter steeped not in mockery but in a shared understanding of the absurdities of life. Remember R. K. Laxman's Common Man?

The bespectacled, bewildered figure who stood silently witnessing the nation's daily dramas was our collective conscience drawn in ink. His was the lens through which middle-class India smiled at its foibles. No one was spared, and yet no one was wounded. His cartoons, which ran for decades under the banner You Said It, didn't merely capture the socio-political temperature — they made us laugh through the chaos, without cynicism, without rage, and it inspired us to gauge ourselves on the scale of changing times. How far we've come — and not for the better! Just the other day, The Times of India reported that Western Railway in Mumbai asked for the removal of a hoarding that humorously depicted Mumbai's famously crowded local trains.

Everyone who knows the city even remotely will vouch that the depiction wasn't far from reality. But even reality now seems too irreverent to tolerate. Our thresholds have shrunk. Satire is suspect. Irony is an offence. And humour — a great salve to wounded hearts — has become a minefield. It is as though

we have forgotten how to laugh without hurting, or how to be the subject of a joke without taking it personally. The public frame has grown brittle. Everything is either an insult or an agenda. Our collective skin has thinned, and with it, our ability to process humour as a mirror rather than a missile. We have become sensitive to our peril, for laughter now is no more a medicine but an action to be indulged in stealth. We now laugh at our own risk, for not all out there are amused. But let us pause here. What does it mean to laugh at oneself? And why is it so crucial to the health of a society, and to the sanity of the individual? To laugh at oneself is acknowledging one's imperfections without shame or embarrassment. It is to accept the human comedy in which we are all actors, fumbling, contradicting, faltering and having great falls like Humpty-Dumpty.

It is an act of humility. And humility, unlike humiliation, does not diminish. It enlarges us. It softens the ego, smoothens the sharp edges of pride, and allows us to be more forgiving — towards others, yes, but especially towards ourselves. We are not meant to take ourselves too seriously. The capacity to see one's absurdity, to smile at it, and even to share it with others, is a mark of inner strength.

In that laughter is a quiet wisdom — the wisdom to know that life is far too unpredictable to be lived in perpetual indignation. And as creatures, we are too tiny and insignificant in the canvas of the cosmos. Philosophers from every tradition have hinted at this. In Zen, the enlightened monk is often depicted laughing. In ancient Greece, Socrates was known for his irony, and his capacity to deflate pomposity through

humour. Closer home, the Bhakti poets gently mocked dogma and orthodoxy. Their irreverence was rooted in love, not spite. They knew that humour could illuminate truth in ways solemnity never could, and it was taken in its true spirit. But today, we confuse being offended with being right. And so, we silence the comedian, the cartoonist, the satirist, and slowly, we silence ourselves. We build fortresses around our fragility and call it righteousness. We seek apology where we should seek perspective.

This is not a defence for vulgarity or cruelty masquerading as humour, which too has become abundant in these indiscreet times. We know the difference between crassness and coolness. And we must always be vigilant against humour that punches down, that mocks the marginalised, that cloaks prejudice in punchlines or masks depravity in insensitivity. The answer to bad humour is not humourlessness. It is better humour. Finer irony. Truer satire. And most of all, a thicker skin. As a society, we need to grow up. We need to rediscover the art of laughing together and at ourselves.

The Common Man did not need to speak because the society around him understood the language of the silent chuckle. That silent chuckle is now endangered. Let us then re-learn the ability to look at ourselves with a smile, not a scowl. Let us not fear humour; let us fear the day when we lose our humour. When people can no longer laugh at themselves, they are no longer free.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### A bold step towards social justice

Madam — The Telangana Government's decision to divide Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three categories is a commendable move towards social justice. It's important to note that the Supreme Court, in its August 2024 verdict, permitted such classification. There are undeniable disparities within the SC community. While some groups have benefited from government schemes, others remain marginalised. By dividing SCs into three groups — each comprising various sub-castes — the Government aims to ensure that the most disadvantaged are not left behind. Other states should take inspiration from Telangana's initiative.

However, while categorisation is a step forward, much remains to be done for the overall development of the SC community. Education must be made accessible to all members of the community, as it is the most effective tool for empowerment. Additionally, self-employment opportunities and skill development programmes must be introduced to boost economic independence.

After all, inclusive human resource development is essential for national progress. To truly uplift the SC community, this categorisation must be followed by sustained policy action. Holistic measures in education, employment, and skill training are vital. Only through inclusive development can we bridge internal disparities and ensure that every section of society participates equally in the nation's progress.

VENUG S | KOLLAM

### India's market resilience shines

Madam — Indian equities soared as markets reopened after an extended weekend, with the NSE Nifty 50 Index rallying by up to 2.4 per cent on Tuesday in Mumbai, surpassing its 2 April closing level. According to Bloomberg, this rebound positions India as the first major global market to recover from losses triggered by reciprocal tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump earlier this month. Investors continue to place confidence in India's large, domestic-driven economy, which appears better equipped to weather a potential global slowdown than markets more exposed to US tariffs.

Amid the escalating US — China trade war, India has emerged as a viable alternative manufacturing hub. Unlike Beijing's combative stance, India has maintained a conciliatory approach and is actively working towards a provisional trade agreement with Washington.

This recovery is indeed a positive sign for India's economic resilience. India's steady performance amidst global volatility reflects the strength of its domestic consumption, robust financial systems, and prudent policy measures.

As geopolitical tensions and protectionist policies unsettle other economies, India's focus on self-reliance, infrastructure development, and investor-friendly reforms offers a competitive edge. This rebound is not just a short-term surge — it signals long-term confidence in India's growth trajectory.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

### A defining moment for Congress

Madam — Referring to the headline 'National Herald Case: ED Chargesheet Sonia, Rahul' (16 April), the Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet marks a serious escalation in the money laundering case involving the Gandhi family and the Congress party.

The allegations of financial irregularities in the Young Indian case are grave. Rather than presenting legal rebuttals, the Congress appears to be adopting a political counter-narrative, blaming the Government.

Moreover, Rahul Gandhi has yet to clarify his citizenship status amid ongoing allegations by Subramanian Swamy. The ED's chargesheet details ₹988 crore in alleged misappropriation, with market valuations of assets pegged at approximately ₹5,000 crore.

This is one of the most significant financial scandals to implicate a political family at the national level. The Congress must focus on proving its innocence in court rather than politicising the issue. It is essential that the judiciary ensures speedy justice, especially when such a high-profile case is involved. The seriousness of the charges demands transparency, accountability, and a fair legal process.

As public trust in institutions is at stake, both the Congress party and the Gandhi family must prioritise legal clarity over political rhetoric. Swift and impartial judicial proceedings will not only uphold the rule of law but also strengthen democratic credibility.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

### ILAYARAJA'S LEGAL FIGHT FOR CREATIVE RIGHTS IN FILM MUSIC

Veteran music composer Ilayaraja has taken legal action against the makers of Ajith's recent film Good Bad Ugly for using three of his iconic songs without prior consent. The songs in question — Illamai Idho Idho from Sakalakala Vallavan, En Jodi Manja Kuruvi from Vikram (1986), and Oththa Roova from Nattupura Pattu — were used without permission.

Ilayaraja has demanded a formal apology and ₹5 crore in compensation from the production house. This case highlights Ilayaraja's unwavering commitment to protecting his creative legacy and reinforces the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. In the past, he has repeatedly defended his works against unauthorised usage. Gone are the days when filmmakers collaborated extensively with composers to create original music. Today's trend of remixing and reusing old songs might offer short-term appeal but erodes originality and often

leads to copyright violations. It is high time that filmmakers prioritised creativity over gimmicks and ensured legal compliance in music usage.

This incident underscores the growing menace of piracy and blatant copyright violations in the Indian film industry. Using a creator's work without consent not only disrespects their artistry but also sets a dangerous precedent — one that undermines intellectual property rights. Ilayaraja's legal stand is a reminder that creativity must be protected, not exploited.

In an era where originality is often overshadowed by remixes and recreations, strict enforcement of copyright laws is crucial. The industry must foster a culture that values artistic integrity, ensures rightful compensation, and deters infringement — to safeguard the future of creative expression in India. The government must take strict action against any violations.

M PRADYU | KANNUR

# River ecosystems in the shadow of sand mining

As illegal mining alters the riverbeds and drains life from these once-thriving arteries, the need for sustainable management becomes urgent. To preserve rivers as living, life-giving entities, we must shift from exploitation to stewardship, write BKP SINHA and AJAY JHA

FIRST Column

Rivers are more than just flowing water — they are living archives of the Earth's memory, coded in sediment, speed, erosion, and the contours of their valleys.

Each river carries within it a unique story of origin, shaped by the terrain it traverses and the climates it endures.

Their courses mark the pulse of the land, shifting over centuries, yet always finding a path forward. In their constant motion, rivers mirror the rhythms of nature — cyclical, adaptive, and ever-evolving.

The flow of a river is driven by the force of gravity, which is counteracted by the resistance of the terrain it flows through.

The characteristics of the surrounding environment, such as the landscape's shape, soil type, vegetation, and factors like climate, land use, and geological play a significant role in determining the river's flow rate, the course it follows, and the sediments it carries. As rivers flow through diverse landscapes, they expose the layers beneath the surface, providing a glimpse into the Earth's geological history.

The sediments they carry — from fine silt to large boulders — reveal rock types, erosion patterns, and the entities that give shape to the terrain they have crossed. As rivers leave steep slopes for gentler terrain, their speed drops, reducing erosion.

They begin depositing transported sediments, with coarser materials giving way to finer silt, clay, and sand. The river may meander, forming curves and oxbow lakes, while sediment builds up along banks and floodplains, creating a more stable course and aquatic ecosystems.

Continuous erosion and deposition, however, cause these river channels to change course, often leading to braided river patterns with multiple interconnected streams.

Naturally developed embankments do help contain the river during high flows, prevent erosion of floodplains, and check disruption of ecosystems including any significant alterations to the river's path. The floods, however, deposit fertile silt on floodplains, enriching soil for agriculture like in the Indo-Gangetic plain. Again, as they approach larger water bodies, intricate deltas are formed, creating biodiverse ecosystems as exemplified in the vast Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta.

As the rivers flow, they provide a variety of resources and life-supporting services. Securing their ecological health is essential for the survival of humanity. River sand, apparently a relatively innocuous item made available by rivers, is in great demand, especially for construction activity. The extraction of river sand is regulated by the Government.

With increasing focus on construction in recent times, however, almost all the states in the country are facing an acute problem of illegal mining of river sand. Major lengths of the rivers being in non-forest areas, the newspapers abounded with journalistic accounts regarding assaults by illegal sand miners on the revenue department's enforcement agency. Indicating, however, that the sand mafia is entering forest areas too in the current construction season, there are reports of several assaults on foresters too.



Sand is abundantly available in deserts, but the sand particles created by wind erosion are rounded and hence are less suitable for construction. Construction-grade sand should be angular and with a certain mineral composition.

The proportion of fine particles (e.g. sand) and coarse particles (e.g. gravel), along with the cost of mining and transport, lead the extraction agencies to select the favourable spots. Indiscriminate sand mining, whether in the active channel or floodplain terraces, however, impacts the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of the riverscape apart from the human populations.

There are strong reasons for regulating river sand extraction. Depending on the type of mining, the riverbed's morphology changes, the groundwater table of the surrounding area is lowered, the stability of the riverbank is affected, and the flow regime of the river and the dynamic equilibrium of erosion and sedimentation gets permanently affected. They make way for disasters to happen.

As regards the chemical impact, the sand excavation and transport machinery severely degrade water and air quality through fuel/oil spills and exhaust

fumes. Extraction of river sand removes sediment-bound nutrients from the mining site which are then deposited on downstream sandbars. While these nutrient-rich deposits support green floodplains as seen along India's Periyar River, the process signifies a loss of nutrients from the river system but a reduced nutrient flow from land to marine environments.

Continuous removal of a sand layer of the riverbed can lead to the destruction of the habitat of microorganisms maintaining the river's biological health and endanger ecosystem services. Increased turbidity due to sand mining in active channels can block sunlight, hinder photosynthesis, and exterminate aquatic life like diatoms, macroinvertebrates, benthic algae, and fish eggs.

The shallow and braided flow impedes fish migration between flows and pools, disrupting the entire food web. Studies show that rampant sand mining has threatened species like the Ganges River dolphin and Chambal River's gharial. Further, unregulated sand mining results in the loss of aquatic flora and also riverine vegetation due to lowered water table, damaging the 'Shaded Riverine Aquatic Habitat' (SRA), which provides shade, bank stabilisation, and

nutrients to numerous organisms.

Again, the disturbed ecosystem creates conditions favourable for the proliferation of invasive species, such as the water hyacinth, in many Indian riverscapes. The repercussions of ecological instability are cumulative and far-reaching.

Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent. Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent.

The lowering of groundwater tables due to sand extraction is reported in the Achankovil and Manimala river basins in Kerala, where wells have dried up and agricultural productivity dropped as irrigation structures became ineffective. The decline in fisheries productivity has been reported in the Ganges River and other basins, impacting local livelihoods directly.

Meeting the ever-increasing demand for sand while adhering to sustainable sand mining practices in the interest of the river's survival is a formidable challenge today. With the Government's will to ensure the conservation and sustenance of our river systems as the non-negotiable premise, a range of responsible approaches must be adopted.

They should include creation of inventory of the available sustainable resources based on scientific study, carefully selected locations for extraction, pre- and post-mining baseline surveys, controlled extraction volumes, phased mining with concurrent or subsequent reclamation of mined areas through measures like refilling and revegetation, no extraction during seasons of aqua fauna's high biological activity, and third-party monitoring and evaluation as well as social audit of mining activities involving villagers and using GPS and drone surveillance as in Kerala.

Simultaneously, a concerted effort be made to diminish reliance on natural river sand by promoting the recycling of construction and demolition waste and the adoption of alternative materials like manufactured sand (M-sand), which is being promoted in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

While the ideal scenario involves widespread adherence to the above-suggested action points, developing a well-grounded strategy for effective enforcement has no alternative so far as a balanced and environmentally sound approach to sand management and riverscape conservation is concerned. Rivers have long been revered as symbols of life and spirituality.

To truly understand our rivers, we must see them as a part of the ecosystem that sustains humanity, and not just as resources to be exploited.

They deserve to be approached with cultural humility, legal innovation, and ecological wisdom. In the face of climate change and environmental degradation also, rivers stand as an eternal reminder that revival is always possible — if we learn to listen, respect, and align ourselves in harmony with nature.

(The writers are former Principal Chief Conservators of Forests, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Views are their own)

WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH AND LIVELIHOODS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND THE COLLAPSE OF INFRASTRUCTURES BECOMES IMMINENT. WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

# India's startup surge: A new innovation powerhouse

In less than ten years, India has transformed from a budding startup landscape into the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, behind only the United States and the United Kingdom, write VINAY PATHAK and SANDEEP JOSHI

In just a decade, India's startup ecosystem has emerged as a powerful driver of innovation, employment, and national competitiveness. From a nascent startup scene, India has exploded into one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly expanding startup ecosystems.

The numbers tell a dramatic story, where from approximately 500 Government-recognised startups in 2016, the count surged to over 1.59 lakh by 15 January 2025.

This is not just development, but represents a fundamental change in India's economic structure, making the country the world's third-largest startup hub, after the United States and the United Kingdom. The presence of over 100 unicorns depicts the scale and value being created within this vibrant ecosystem.

India's startup boom, from 2014 to early 2025, is not just a result of entrepreneurial spirit but the outcome of a powerful convergence — the drive of Indian entrepreneurs coupled with proactive government policies designed to nurture a thriving ecosystem.

This remarkable growth highlights the synergy between intentional policy and organic innovation, unleashing hidden potential across the nation. It demonstrates how focused efforts have transformed ideas into successful businesses, paving the way for India's emergence as a global startup hub.

The exponential growth trajectory of India's startup ecosystem coincides directly with the rollout of key government programmes and visionary leadership that removed roadblocks and actively fostered innovation. Launched in 2016, these initiatives provided a structured framework that catalysed the entrepreneurial surge. Pivotal to this transformation was the launch of the Startup India initiative in January 2016.

Envisioned as a flagship programme, its core objective was to cultivate a startup culture, build a robust and inclusive ecosystem, and fundamentally transform India into a country of "job creators instead of job seekers."

India's visionary leadership has transformed the nation from job-seekers to job providers, reflecting its entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to building a self-



reliant, job-generating economy. It wasn't just a slogan; it was backed by a comprehensive Action Plan focusing on Simplification, Funding, and Incubation. This framework offered tax exemptions, simplified compliance, and financial support to help early-stage ventures overcome funding and regulatory challenges.

Simultaneously, the Government launched the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) in 2016, which fostered a culture of innovation through initiatives like the Atal Tinkering Labs and Atal Incubation Centres. These programmes not only nurtured young talent but also created a robust infrastructure that supported startups across diverse sectors, including technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. AIM's focus on nurturing creativity and research has played a crucial role in strengthening the ecosystem and preparing it for the future.

In 2024, the Indian Government made a transformative decision by abolishing the angel tax in the Union Budget. Introduced in 2012, this tax had acted as

THE EXPONENTIAL GROWTH TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM COINCIDES DIRECTLY WITH THE ROLLOUT OF KEY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP THAT REMOVED ROADBLOCKS AND ACTIVELY FOSTERED INNOVATION

a significant obstacle for investors, discouraging investment by imposing levies on capital raised above fair market value, often hindering critical funding at vital stages. This step has cleared the way for a more investor-friendly environment, fostering growth and opportunity for startups across the nation.

The removal of this tax has been celebrated as a major step towards creating a more investor-friendly environment, helping startups access the funding they need to scale and succeed. The decision to abolish the angel tax, alongside other reforms, showcases the Government's commitment to providing a conducive atmosphere for entrepreneurship to thrive. The growth of India's startup ecosystem has been far from centralised. While traditional tech hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurugram remain significant, a noticeable shift has occurred as entrepreneurs from smaller cities and towns have begun to make their mark.

This democratisation of innovation has been facilitated by the Government's push

for a more inclusive startup ecosystem that is accessible to a broader pool of talent.

Sectors like fintech, healthtech, and agritech have emerged as hotspots for innovation, with over 1,300 active tech startups added in 2022 alone. The Government has played a vital role in fostering growth within these sectors, encouraging investment and providing specialised support to startups that address critical societal needs.

For instance, fintech startups have revolutionised access to financial services, healthtech ventures have improved healthcare delivery, and agritech innovations have brought efficiency to the agriculture sector. Despite facing challenges like funding slowdowns and hiring freezes, the ecosystem demonstrated resilience. In 2023, India added over 1,000 startups, including 400 in emerging areas, underscoring the sector's adaptability.

The journey of our nation from ancient to modern India is a saga of remarkable achievements and milestones. It begins with the wisdom of great saints, progresses through the profound teachings of Swami

Vivekananda and the Upanishads, and extends to the strides of modern innovation like the upagrah (satellite) and the evolution from the traditional Kumbh Mela to the Startup Kumbh Mela. Each chapter of this journey stands as a powerful testament to our nation's relentless hard work, groundbreaking innovation, and unwavering self-reliance.

India is now rapidly emerging as a global leader in fostering sustainable, innovative, and thriving startups. As reported by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) on 16 January 2025, the country commemorates nine years of Startup India, a game-changing initiative launched in 2016. National Startup Day marks a key milestone in India's entrepreneurial journey.

Startup India, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has become a cornerstone of national innovation and growth. It has championed the entrepreneurial spirit across the country, empowering thousands to explore creativity and innovation. As a result, India has become the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world.

India's startup story is a testament to the indomitable entrepreneurial spirit of New India. Since 2016, our vision has been to drive innovation, provide financial support, and nurture budding businesses. In just under a decade, ideas have evolved into industry giants, and dreams have become tangible realities.

Today, India stands tall, not only as a hub for technology but as a beacon of progress across diverse sectors. Our achievements in areas like vaccination further reflect our scientific prowess and societal resilience.

Inspired by the principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and Na Phaleshu Kadachana (focus on action, not results), India continues to grow with values at its core. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push for "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi" (growth and heritage, hand in hand) defines today's India — which is modern and aspirational, yet deeply rooted in its rich traditions and culture. India's story is not just one of economic expansion, but a journey of purpose, passion, and progress.

(Vinay Pathak is Assistant Professor at IIT Sonapat and Sandeep Joshi is a senior technology journalist. Views are their own)

IN BRIEF



Gold rises Rs 70 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 98,170/10g

Gold prices rose by Rs 70 to hit yet another record high of Rs 98,170 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid firm global demand, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Wednesday, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity soared by Rs 1,650 to hit an all-time high of Rs 98,100 per 10 grams. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased by Rs 70 to touch a fresh peak of Rs 97,720 per 10 grams against Wednesday's closing level of Rs 97,650 per 10 grams. "Gold prices soared to record highs, fuelled by a weaker dollar, escalating trade war tensions, and growing concerns over global economic growth following US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements," Chintan Mehta, Chief Executive Officer at Abans Financial Services, said. He said gold prices continue to surge as global uncertainty persists, with the US-China trade war disrupting supply chains and stoking fears of inflation and recession.



India's tea exports touch 254.67 million kg

India's tea exports reached 254.67 million kg during the January to December 2024 period, moving the country up to the third position globally in the export of the beverage, a statement by the Tea Board of India said. The total value realisation from tea exports in 2024 stood at Rs 7,111.43 crore, reflecting a notable increase from the previous year. In terms of regional contribution, North India led the way with exports of 154.81 million kg, accounting for a value realisation of Rs 4,833.12 crore. South India exported 99.86 million kg, with earnings of Rs 2,278.31 crore. North India's share was 60.79 per cent in quantity terms and 66.96 per cent in value terms, while South India contributed 39.21 per cent by volume and 32.04 per cent by value, the statement said. The Tea Board, which functions under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry, facilitates cultivation, manufacturing and marketing of tea across the country.



Infosys to acquire MRE Consulting for USD 36 mn

Infosys on Thursday announced a definitive agreement to acquire technology and business consulting firm MRE Consulting for USD 36 million (about Rs 307.4 crore) in an all-cash deal. The IT firm will acquire the consultancy company through its wholly owned subsidiary Infosys Nova Holdings LLC. The acquisition is expected to close during the first quarter (April-June) of FY26. The cost of acquisition will be "upto USD 36 million, including upfront and earnouts, excluding management incentives, and retention bonus," according to a regulatory filing. The acquisition brings newer capabilities for Infosys in trading and risk management, especially in the energy sector, a company statement said. "Headquartered in Houston, Texas, MRE Consulting will bring a team of over 200 professionals with industry knowledge, consulting and deep technology experience in Energy/Commodity Trading and Risk Management (E/CTRM) platforms and ecosystems," the filing said.

Indian official team likely to visit US next week for trade talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian official team is likely to visit Washington next week to iron out differences on certain issues before formally launching negotiations for the proposed India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA), an official said. The visit, which comes within weeks of a high-level US team visiting India, indicates that the talks for the BTA are gaining momentum.

India's chief negotiator, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal is expected to lead the team for the first in-person talks between the two countries. The visit follows senior official-level talks held between the two countries last month here. Brendan Lynch, the Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, was in India from March 25 to 29 for crucial trade discussions with Indian officials.

"The Indian team may visit Washington by mid of next week. This is not the formal first round of talks between the two countries. They would like to iron out differences on certain issues before launching the formal negotiations for the BTA," the official said. The two sides are keen to



utilise the 90-day tariff pause, announced by US President Donald Trump on April 9, to push the talks.

Earlier, an official source had said that an interim trade agreement between India and the US could be finalised in the 90-day tariff pause announced by the Trump administration if it is a win-win for both sides.

The two countries have already finalised and signed the terms of reference (ToRs) to start negotiations for the pact. The ToRs define the purpose, scope, and framework of the negotiations for such agreements. They also outline the specific areas to be covered.

On April 15, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal had stated that India will try to close the negotiations as quickly as possible with the

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.

Virtual talks are on from this week. In a trade pact, two countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

While the US is looking at duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles particularly), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, and agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts, and alfalfa hay; India may look at duty cuts for labour-intensive sectors like apparels, textiles, gems and jewellery, leather, plastics, chemicals, oil seeds, shrimp, and horticulture products.

From 2021-22 to 2024-25, the US was India's largest trading partner.

The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in bilateral trade.

In a trade pact, two countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments

US. He also stated that India has decided to follow the trade liberalisation path with the US through this agreement.

India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a bilateral trade agreement

India will focus on policy agility, long-term vision: FM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India will focus on policy agility and long-term vision to navigate the global challenges amid ongoing trade recalibrations worldwide.

The intensification of tariff wars and the rise of protectionist policies have the potential to disrupt global supply chains, increase production costs and create uncertainty in investment decisions across borders, she said while speaking at an event to mark stock bourse BSE's 150th anniversary.

"India is confident...we will navigate these global disruptions with policy agility and long-term vision."

"The recalibration efforts on trade are very challenging...it is worrisome, but also very challenging," she said.

The world is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, she said, pointing out that India stands firm in this environment with its strong macroeconomic fundamentals.

The country offers investors policy stability, growth, prudent macroeconomic policies and democratic institutions, she noted.

"The most effective path" for building economic resilience is to foster domestic efficiencies and competitiveness, Sitharaman said.

The government's focus remains firmly on building a



robust domestic foundation through infrastructure development, inclusive growth and deeper regional cooperation, she added.

Acknowledging that the financial markets have been impacted as a result of the trade recalibration, she said India's financial markets have shown remarkable resilience despite recent global uncertainties.

RBI issues master direction of deposits, accounts

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Thursday said banks can open/close rupee accounts (non-interest bearing) in the name of their overseas branches or correspondents without prior reference to the central bank.

However, the opening of rupee accounts in the name of branches of Pakistani banks operating outside Pakistan requires specific approval of the Reserve Bank, said the Master Direction - Deposits and Accounts issued by the apex bank. It further said credit to the account of a non-resident bank is a permitted method of payment to non-residents and is, therefore, subject to the regulations applicable to transfers in foreign currency. The debit to the account of a non-resident bank is in effect an inward remittance in foreign currency, it added. On funding of accounts of non-resident banks, the RBI said banks may freely purchase foreign currency from their overseas correspondents/branches at ongoing market rates to lay down funds in their accounts for meeting their

Sugar output down 18 pc to 25.49 mn tons



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's sugar production has reached 25.49 million tonnes so far in the ongoing 2024-25 season, down 18 per cent from a year ago, sugar mills body ISMA said on Thursday.

The production fall is attributed to a decline in output in the country's top three sugar producing states of Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

According to the data released by the Indian Sugar Bio-Energy and Manufacturers Association (ISMA), production in Maharashtra, India's largest sugar producer, fell to 8.07 million tonnes till April 15

of the current season (October-September), from 10.94 million tonnes a year ago.

Output in Uttar Pradesh, the country's second top producer, fell to 9.11 million tonnes, from 10.18 million tonnes, while in Karnataka it declined to 4.04 million tonnes, from 5.06 million tonnes in the said period.

Out of 534 mills that operated, the crushing operation was on in 38 mills, while the rest were closed.

ISMA said around 3.5 million tonnes of sugar is expected to be diverted towards ethanol production this year, against last year's diversion of 2.15 million tonnes.

Markets surge for 4th day; Sensex reclaims 78k-level

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 2 per cent on Thursday, registering their fourth day of rally as investors turned buoyant after foreign investors returned to domestic equities amid expectations of a breakthrough in US-Japan trade negotiations over reciprocal tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to reclaim the 78,000 level. It finally settled at 78,553.20. During the day, it soared 1,572.48 points or 2.04 per cent to 78,616.77.

As many as 2,427 stocks advanced while 1,522 declined and 157 remained unchanged on the BSE. The NSE Nifty surged 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

In four days, the BSE benchmark jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per cent.

"Benchmark indices posted sharp gains on Thursday to end the week on a high note, posting four consecutive sessions of gains. Broader Mid



and Small caps also closed higher.

"Markets opened lower on weak global cues after sharp overnight losses in US indices. After initial jitters, markets quickly bounced back to steadily climb higher throughout the day as the focus shifted to domestic factors and ongoing earnings. Banks continued to drive the benchmarks higher with private lenders leading the gains ahead of the earnings announcements," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Reliance

Industries were among the biggest gainers.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra and Maruti were the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.56 per cent and smallcap index went up by 0.52 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. Bankex jumped 2.56 per cent, telecommunication (2.22 per cent), financial services (2 per cent), services (1.47 per cent), teck (1.19 per cent), energy (1.13 per cent), auto (1.01 per cent) and healthcare (0.91 per cent).

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Fitch affirms ratings of ICICI, Axis Bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Thursday affirmed ratings of private sector lenders Axis Bank and ICICI Bank, with a stable outlook.

The Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) of both banks has been affirmed at 'BB+'. A 'BB' IDR indicates an elevated vulnerability to default risk.

Axis Bank's viability rating has been retained at 'BB', while ICICI Bank's has been upgraded to 'BB+'. A 'BB' viability rating denotes moderate prospects for ongoing viability.

Fitch said India's strong



medium-term growth potential, and its large, diversified economy are reflected in Fitch's operating environment (OE) score.

Fitch projects GDP growth

of over 6 per cent in the financial year ending March 2025 (FY25) and FY26, driven by domestic demand, government capex and improving capacity utilisation.

"The growth will support Indian banks' ability to sustain profitable business in the medium term, if risks are effectively managed," Fitch said while affirming Axis Bank's rating.

With regard to ICICI Bank, Fitch said it expects a moderate increase in ICICI's loan/deposit ratio as the bank aims to balance loan and deposit growth.

"We have revised ICICI's asset quality score to 'BB', from 'BB+', and the outlook to stable, from positive. This follows an improved impaired loans ratio, which we expect to be sustained at around current levels," Fitch said.

Rupee sheds US tariff impact; ends 27 paise higher at 85.37 against US dollar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee strengthened for the fourth consecutive session and closed 27 paise higher at 85.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, hitting the April 3 closing level, on the back of foreign fund inflows in domestic equities and broad weakness in the greenback.

The unit has pared all its losses since April 2, when US President Donald Trump announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs on multiple countries. On April 2, the rupee was quoted at 85.52 against the US dollar.

According to forex traders, a positive trend in domestic equities following a reprieve from the US tariffs boosted overall investor sentiment even though some recovery in crude prices weighed down on the Indian currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.48 and moved

between the high of 85.31 and the low of 85.62 against the greenback during intraday. The unit ended the session at 85.37 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 27 paise from its previous closing level.

The rupee closed Wednesday's session with a gain of 16 paise at 85.64 against the dollar.

In the preceding four sessions, the Indian currency has added 131 paise, or over 1.5 per cent, since its April 9 closing mark of 86.68 against the greenback.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on surge in the domestic equities and FII inflows.

However, importer buying of dollars and recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp gains, he said, adding "Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims and housing data from the US."



USD 2.4 BN NON-CASH DEAL

Adani Ports to acquire Australian terminal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and SEZ Ltd, India's biggest private port operator, announced on Thursday a USD 2.4 billion non-cash acquisition of a coal export terminal in Australia from a group company to strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Board of APSEZ "approved the acquisition of Abbot Point Port Holdings Pte Ltd (APPH), Singapore, from Carmichael Rail and Port

Singapore Holdings Pte Ltd, Singapore (CRPSHPL)", the company said in a statement.

CRPSHPL is a related party. APPH owns the entities which own and operate the North Queensland Export Terminal, a dedicated export terminal with a current nameplate capacity of 50 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). The terminal is located at the Port of Abbot Point, approximately 25 km north of Bowen in North Queensland on Australia's east coast.



APSEZ had originally, in 2011, acquired the North Queensland Export Terminal (NQXT) at Abbot Point for USD 2 billion. Two years later, in 2013, the Adani family purchased the asset from APSEZ for the same amount, along with the capital invested, enabling the company to concentrate on expanding its domestic operations.

Now, with a strengthened balance sheet and a dominant position in India, APSEZ is re-acquiring the terminal as part

of its global growth strategy.

"The transaction will be completed on a non-cash basis. APSEZ will issue 14.38 crore new equity shares to CRPSHPL in exchange for the acquisition of 100 per cent interest in APPH. This is based on an enterprise value of NQXT of Australian Dollar 3.975 billion (about USD 2.4 billion)," the statement said.

The acquisition is valued at almost similar levels to the transfer done in 2013. This valuation is despite capital invest-

ments, growth and inflation of the past 12 years and at slightly discounted multiples to the recent deals in the region.

"As part of the transaction, APSEZ will also assume other non-core assets and liabilities on APPH's balance sheet, which APSEZ will realise within a few months of the acquisition (zero net impact on the transaction valuation). APSEZ's leverage will remain at similar levels post the transaction," the statement said without giving details of the liabilities.



### SUNNY DEOL IS BACK WITH MORE POWER & NEW MISSION IN JAAT 2

After the thunderous success of Jaat, the makers are all set to take the action franchise to new heights with its much-awaited sequel, Jaat 2. Action superstar Sunny Deol reprises his powerful role, this time on a brand-new mission that promises to raise the stakes and adrenaline even higher. Directed by Gopichand Malineni, Jaat struck a chord with audiences for its gripping storyline, stellar performances, and explosive action sequences. With a cast led by Sunny Deol, Randeep Hooda, Vineet Kumar Singh, Saiyami Kher, and Regina Cassandra, the film

delivered a cinematic punch that left fans wanting more. And now, the wait is officially over. The makers have announced Jaat 2 with Sunny Deol returning to the forefront of the franchise. The film is being jointly produced by Naveen Yerneni, Ravi Shankar, and TG Vishwa Prasad under the prestigious banners of Mythri Movie Makers and People Media Factory—a powerhouse collaboration that promises to take the franchise to an even more thrilling level. While the plot of Jaat 2 is being kept tightly under wraps, sources close to the production hint at a story that's bigger, bolder, and

bloodier. "The legacy roars back," the producers teased in a statement, promising audiences a spectacle packed with high-octane action and intense drama. Sunny Deol, known for his larger-than-life screen presence, is reportedly diving into the role with renewed energy, as his character faces fresh enemies and daunting challenges in the sequel. With Jaat 2, the team is not just crafting another movie—they're building an entire cinematic universe. Fans can expect deeper character arcs, expanded storylines, and action sequences that push the limits of what the first film delivered.



### Ali Fazal and Sonali Bendre dive into Delhi's dark past in upcoming crime drama

Actors Ali Fazal and Sonali Bendre have started shooting for an upcoming web series directed by the amazingly acclaimed Paatal Lok director Prosit Roy in Delhi. The show is supposedly based on the infamous Ranga-Billa murder case, one of the most shocking and high-profile crimes in Delhi's history, that shaped the capital's history and identity. The case, which dates back to 1978, involved the brutal kidnapping and murder of siblings Geeta and Sanjay Chopra. The two children were abducted by Kullej Singh, known as Ranga, and Jasbir Singh, known as Billa, who initially intended to steal a car but later changed plans after finding the children inside. The case shook the entire nation and led to widespread public outrage. It also played a significant role in the development of stricter laws related to kidnapping and child safety. The upcoming series aims to capture the details of the crime and its impact on the people of Delhi at the time and takes an investigative look into the case that followed the murders. The makers have not officially confirmed the storyline but sources suggest it closely follows these very real-life incidents. A source close to the production shared, "The team has been researching the case in detail for months now. The show which has commenced shooting in the capital will focus on the events as they unfolded following the murder case. It's being treated with sensitivity and aims to show how deeply the case affected Delhi. The shoot is currently on in various parts of the city." This marks one of the first times the Ranga-Billa case is being adapted for a scripted series, with Ali Fazal and Sonali Bendre taking on lead roles.



### Bhumi Pednekar & Ishaan Khatter's Royal romance premieres May 9 on Netflix

Actors Ishaan Khatter, Bhumi Pednekar, and Zeenat Aman's upcoming series The Royals will premiere on May 9 on the streaming giant Netflix.

Directed by Priyanka Ghose and Nupur Asthana, written by Neha Veena Sharma, and produced under the banner of Prithvi Nandy Communications, The Royals also stars Sakshi Tanwar, Nora Fatehi, Dino Morea, Milind Soman, Chunky Panday, Vihaan Samat, Kavya Trehan, Sumukhi Suresh, Udit Arora, Lisa Mishra, and Luke Kenny.

It will have Bhumi playing an ambitious and feisty CEO of Work Potato, Sophia Shekhar, and Aviraaj Singh, a dashing party prince played by Ishaan. Creators Rangita Prithvi Nandy and Ishaan Khatter shared, "With The Royals, we've

mounted a romance that whips together the old-world charm of palaces and Indian royalty with glass-walled boardrooms and modern reality—where

love is anything but easy."

The creators shared that the series is about two people from completely different worlds, each fighting their own battles, constantly at odds, yet irresistibly drawn to each other in ways they never expected.

"As they clash, challenge, storm, and rage against each other to prove their worth, they must also discover whether their love can survive the chaos that's them. Expect drama, humor, and a whole lot of fire!"

Netflix shared the poster of the series, which showed a romantic scene between Bhumi and Ishaan, standing closely and intimately in a warm, softly lit setting. They are holding each other tenderly, with their foreheads and noses almost touching, creating a sense of deep emotional connection.

The caption read: "A ziddi rajkumar meets a girlboss aamkumari Royal mess, ya shahi love story? Watch The Royals, out 9 May, only on Netflix."



### VARUN, POOJA, MRUNAL TO BEGIN 2-MONTH UK SHOOT FOR HAI JAWANI TOH ISHQ HONA HAI

Bollywood stars Varun Dhawan, Mrunal Thakur, and Pooja Hegde will head to the UK for a two-month shoot for their upcoming film 'Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai'.

A source shared: "Varun Dhawan, Mrunal Thakur, Pooja Hegde will leave in May for two months to UK for the shoot of their film... It's a long schedule for their comedy 'Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai'." The title "Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai" has been taken from the song "Ishq Sonai Hai" from the Salman Khan and Karisma Kapoor-starrer "Biwi No.1", which was released in 1999. Both the films are helmed by David Dhawan.

On March 22, Varun and Pooja had shared glimpses from their shoot schedule in Rishikesh.

In a collaborative post on Instagram, Varun and Pooja shared several pictures. A video showed the two actors performing Ganga aarti, another picture showed them watering a plant and a picture had Varun speaking on the mic.

"A great beginning to our schedule in Rishikesh... Blessed #HaiJawaniTohIshqHonaHai," they wrote as the caption.

While not much has been revealed about the story of the drama, "Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai" is believed to be inspired

by the charm of classic 90s rom-coms. The project has been produced by Ramesh Taurani. Aside from Varun and Pooja, the cast of the drama is also likely to include Mrunal Thakur, Kubbra Sait, Manish Paul, Rohit Saraf, Rajeev Khandelwal, Nitish Nirmal, and Sreeleela. Varun started shooting for "Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai" in July last year.

Varun will soon be seen in "Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari" along with Janhvi Kapoor. Additionally, he also has Anurag Singh's "Border 2" in the lineup. The war drama, inspired by the 1999 Kargil War, also stars Sunny Deol, Diljit Dosanjh, and Ahan Shetty. "Border 2" is slated to hit theatres on January 23, 2026.

Meanwhile, Pooja has "Retro." The romantic action film written and directed by Karthik Subbaraj. It also stars Suriya. Talking about Mrunal, she is waiting for the release of her upcoming action entertainer "Dacoit", where she has been paired opposite "Major" actor Advi Sesh.

### Nawazuddin Siddiqui battles crime and corruption in Costao

ZEE5 has dropped the intense trailer for its upcoming original film Costao, a gripping tale of courage, justice, and personal sacrifice. Starring Nawazuddin Siddiqui in a never-seen-before avatar, the film is set to premiere on May 1 and promises an electrifying ride through the underbelly of 1990s Goa. Produced by Bhanushali Studios Limited in association with Bombay Fables Motion Pictures, Costao is helmed by debutant director Sejal Shah and also stars Priya Bapat, Kishore Kumar G, Gagan Dev Riar, and Hussain Dalal. At the heart of this raw and intense narrative is Costao Fernandes (Siddiqui), a fearless customs officer who takes on a smuggling empire rooted in corruption and terror. But as he defies the criminal underworld, he also finds himself at odds with the very system he swore to protect. The trailer paints a powerful portrait of a lone warrior—

hunted, betrayed, and battling not just criminals but an entire ecosystem built to silence dissent. In one hard-hitting line, Costao declares: "Humare society mein sabko chahiye ki officer honest ho aur brave ho... lekin ghar mein nai." The line encapsulates the hypocrisy of a world that applauds honesty—until it comes too close to home. Costao dives deep into the emotional and moral toll of fighting a rigged system. With edge-of-your-seat action and emotionally charged moments, the film examines how far one man can go when everything is on the line—his job, his family, and his life. Sharing his thoughts on the film, Nawazuddin Siddiqui said, "Costao is not just a story about a customs officer—it's about what it truly costs to take a stand. His courage, despite facing betrayal from all sides, is what makes this role so powerful."

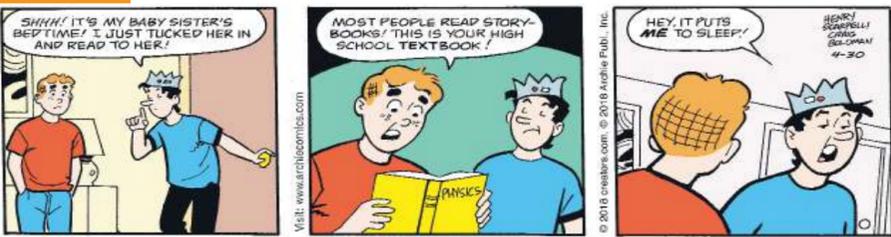


ZEE5's spokesperson called Costao a vital addition to their slate of impactful cinema: "We are proud to back stories like Costao that challenge norms and

amplify unheard voices. It's gripping, real, and reflects the kind of storytelling that resonates deeply." Producer Vinod Bhanushali echoed the sentiment: "After Sirf Ek Banda Kaafi Hai, we wanted another story with a strong heartbeat—and Costao delivers that and more. Nawazuddin's performance is magnetic, and the narrative constantly surprises you." Debutant director Sejal Shah described the journey as both "challenging and rewarding," adding, "Costao represents the conflict between duty and destruction. Bringing this character to life with Nawazuddin was a privilege." Written by Bhavesh Mandalia and Meghna Srivastava, and produced by Vinod Bhanushali, Kamlesh Bhanushali, Bhavesh Mandalia, Sejal Shah, Shyam Sunder, and Faizuddin Siddiqui, Costao is poised to be a standout crime drama on the OTT landscape.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



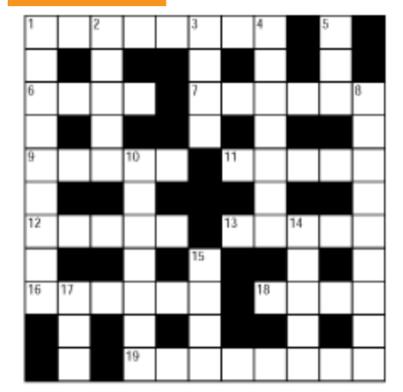
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

- Easiest to do
- Soldiers belong to this building
- Spread this on toast
- A month
- World's largest ocean
- This is held in a courtroom
- A house for a pet rabbit
- A unit of length
- Money made by selling something for more than it cost
- An arm or leg
- Round in shape

**DOWN**

- A vehicle for travelling to another planet
- A word for mother

**SOLUTION**

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

### SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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: ★★☆☆☆

## ‘WRITING BEFORE DIRECTING HELPS YOU KNOW YOUR CHARACTER INSIDE OUT’

TEJAL SINHA  
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

**O**morshongi, the dark romantic comedy from debutant writer-director Dibya Chatterjee, dares to blend grief with the supernatural and the absurd. Set against the backdrop of a grieving novelist haunted—literally and emotionally—by the ghost of his dead girlfriend, the film offers a refreshingly unique take on love, loss, and the art of moving on. In an exclusive conversation, Chatterjee opens up about writing and directing the film, his creative inspirations, and what makes *Omorshongi* stand out in the landscape of Indian cinema.

As both writer and director of *Omorshongi*, Chatterjee found a rare synergy in bringing his vision to life. “I think as a director, it’s more comfortable when you know the story inside out,” he says. “You understand the spectrum of the script. When you write something and then direct it, you are already aware of every character’s motivations. It’s direct—from the source to the screen.”

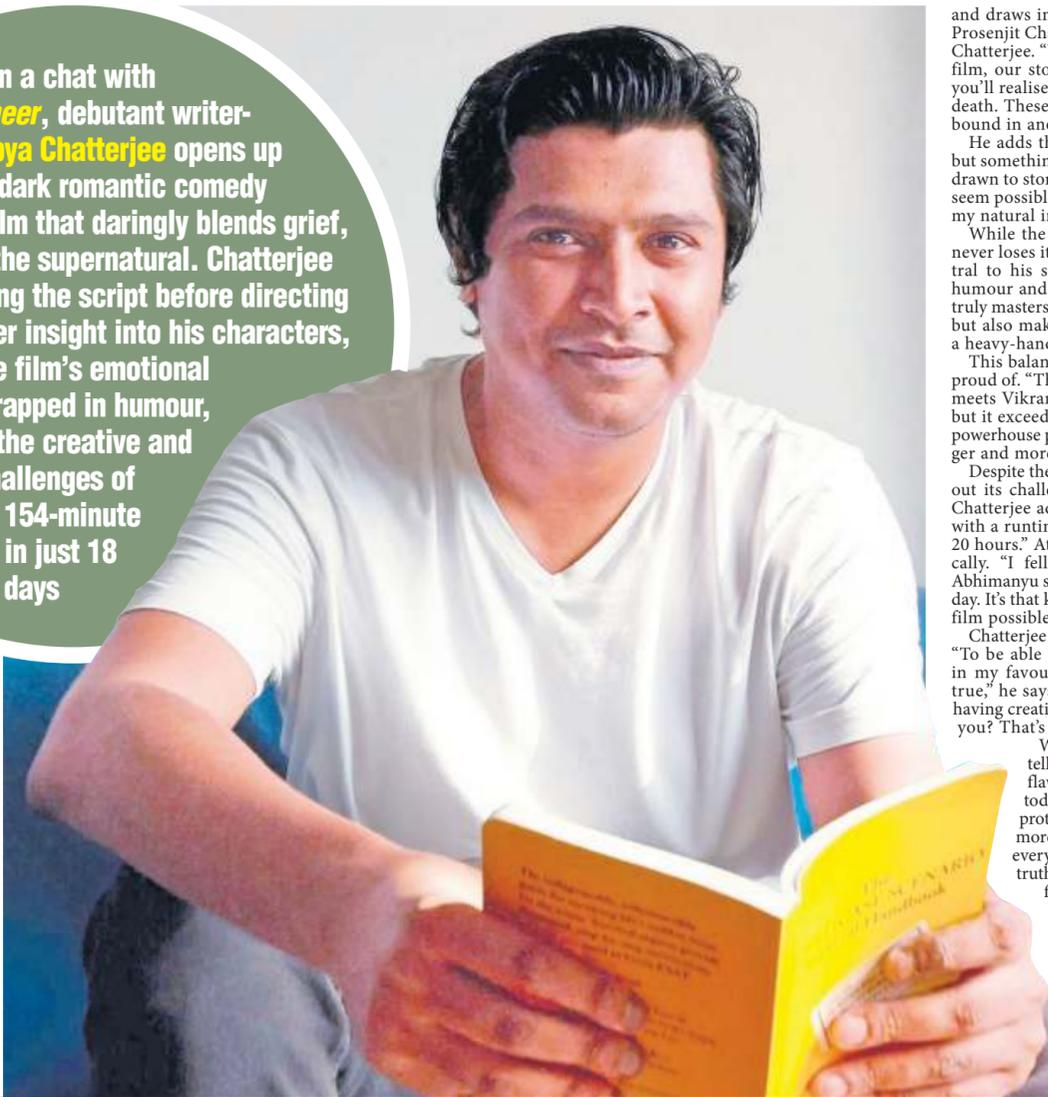
This deep understanding helped him shape a film that’s both poignant and playful. “The script was already a well-defined love story when it came to me. What I brought in were the supernatural and dark comedy elements,” he shares. “My voice is naturally tuned to satirical, absurd, and dark comedy. So, adapting the romantic premise into something more tragicomic was easier for me.”

The story follows Anurag, a novelist struggling with the loss of his girlfriend Joyee—until she reappears as a ghost. But don’t expect jump scares. “Joyee’s ghost is not here to scare anyone. In fact, she’s more scared than anyone else,” Chatterjee laughs. “She’s timid, shy, easily threatened—just like she was when alive. That brings a new layer to her character. It’s not your typical ghost; she mirrors Anurag’s inner trauma.”

The ghost, according to Chatterjee, becomes a metaphor for unresolved grief. “Joyee’s character is the manifestation of the trauma that lives deep inside Anurag. She is his mirror—his other self—helping him cope with the loss, reflecting his own reluctance to move on.”

The film’s title, *Omorshongi*, translates to “eternal flame”

In a chat with *The Pioneer*, debutant writer-director **Dibya Chatterjee** opens up about his dark romantic comedy *Omorshongi*, a film that daringly blends grief, absurdity, and the supernatural. Chatterjee shares how writing the script before directing gave him a deeper insight into his characters, discusses the film’s emotional undercurrents wrapped in humour, and reflects on the creative and physical challenges of shooting a 154-minute feature in just 18 days



and draws inspiration from an iconic Bengali film starring Prosenjit Chatterjee. “It’s colloquial in Bengali culture,” says Chatterjee. “While we borrow inspiration from the previous film, our story is different. Once you watch *Omorshongi*, you’ll realise the title reflects a love that transcends life and death. These lovers aren’t just bound in this world—they’re bound in another world too.”

He adds that the supernatural isn’t just a stylistic choice but something that’s always fascinated him. “I’ve always been drawn to stories that feel absurd or surreal—things that don’t seem possible on the surface,” he explains. “That’s just where my natural inclination lies.”

While the premise is inherently emotional, *Omorshongi* never loses its comic tone. Chatterjee sees this blend as central to his storytelling. “Drawing a fine balance between humour and heavy emotions is tricky. I wonder if one ever truly masters it,” he reflects. “The idea is to say serious things, but also make people chuckle. That way, it doesn’t feel like a heavy-handed message—it stays fun, yet meaningful.”

This balance is best exemplified in a scene he’s especially proud of. “There’s a scene where Joyee returns as a ghost and meets Vikram. I was nervous about how it would turn out, but it exceeded my expectations,” he shares. “Thanks to the powerhouse performances of the actors, the scene became bigger and more impactful than I envisioned.”

Despite the creative high, making *Omorshongi* wasn’t without its challenges. “The biggest hurdle was the schedule,” Chatterjee admits. “We shot the entire film in just 18 days, with a runtime of 154 minutes. Some days we worked 18 to 20 hours.” At one point, the stress took a toll on him physically. “I fell sick and almost gave up. My DOP friend Abhimanyu stepped in and directed the remaining scenes that day. It’s that kind of collaboration and support that made this film possible.”

Chatterjee describes his debut as nothing short of a dream. “To be able to make the film exactly how I envisioned it, in my favourite genre—dark comedy—it’s a dream come true,” he says. “Of course, filmmaking is collaborative, but having creative autonomy while doing something that excites you? That’s the goal.”

When it comes to the kinds of stories he wants to tell, Chatterjee is drawn to characters who are flawed, vulnerable, and sometimes unsuccessful. “In today’s world of hustle culture, I think it’s okay if the protagonist doesn’t win in the end. That makes them more human,” he explains. “I like telling stories about everyday people, their struggles, and their emotional truths.” Tragic comedies and dark comedies remain his favourite genres, but he’s also keen to explore new spaces. “I’d love to do something on the subculture of spies, but with my own take on it,” he says. Chatterjee is currently developing a new film titled *Likha*, co-written with Anirban Das Gupta and Sourav Ghosh. “It’s a situational comedy about a writer couple and the events that unfold in their lives,” he reveals. “We’re still in the drafting stage and are now looking for a producer to finance the project.”

## Reclaiming control over urinary incontinence

Living with urinary incontinence isn’t just about unexpected leaks—it’s about the quiet erosion of confidence and embarrassment that follows. After many years of helping patients through this journey, I’ve witnessed how this condition silently steals away life’s simple pleasures: laughing without worry or enjoying social activities without anxiety.

### YOUR CORE’S HIDDEN HERO

At the heart of recovery lies your pelvic floor—a critical component of your core muscle system that works in harmony with your deep abdominal, lower back, and diaphragm muscles to stabilize your spine and support your organs. When this essential core element weakens due to obesity, childbirth, aging, or surgery, your body’s natural control system fails.

### THE EMOTIONAL BURDEN

The emotional toll can be devastating, with many patients withdrawing from activities they once loved due to self-consciousness and fear.



### SHATTERING THE SILENT STIGMA

Urinary incontinence remains one of healthcare’s last taboos—a condition discussed in whispers, if at all. As physiotherapists, we create safe spaces where this silence is broken and shame dissolves into understanding. By confronting this taboo directly, patients find relief not just physically, but emotionally.

### THE RECOVERY PATHWAY

Through specialized pelvic floor exercises that integrate into everyday movements, patients strengthen not just muscles but rebuild confidence. These tailored regimens enhance the entire core system, restoring control and stability.

### TECHNOLOGY AS YOUR ALLY

Modern physiotherapy at Aster RV Hospital offers innovative approaches through muscle stimulation and biofeedback EMG technology. Our game-based therapy transforms rehabilitation by visualizing muscle activity in real-time, making invisible progress visible and motivating.

### RECLAIMING YOUR FREEDOM

With each strengthening session, patients reclaim more than muscle function—they reclaim their independence and dignity. Don’t let incontinence define your story. Reach out to a physiotherapist who understands not just your condition, but your courage in breaking the silence.

(The author, Dr Palak Dengla, is the Chief Physiotherapist, at Aster RV Hospital.)

## When less skincare is enough!

PNS|HYDERABAD

As skincare continues to move beyond surface-level beauty narratives, the conversation increasingly centers on long-term skin health, ingredient literacy, and mindful consumption. Amid this evolving landscape, some homegrown brands are opting for a more restrained approach—one that focuses on practicality over perfection. Skinvest Care, founded by Divya Malpani, is one such label attempting to reframe skincare as a form of maintenance rather than makeover, especially for Indian consumers often caught between traditional remedies and modern cosmetic marketing.

The name itself reflects this ethos. “Skinvest stands for ‘invest in your skin,’” says Divya Malpani, Founder and CEO of Skinvest. “We see skincare not just as self-care, but as a long-term investment. Your skin is the body’s largest organ—it deserves to be treated with care and gratitude.”

For Malpani, this guiding principle influences both their communication and product development. The brand underscores that effective skincare should not be about quick fixes but about supporting the skin’s health over time.

Despite the rising popularity of skincare, the perception of it being a cosmetic luxury persists. Skinvest has responded to this through what it describes as a community-centric approach. “We’ve created content series like Skininvestate, where we break down skincare myths, ingredient science, and long-term care practices,” says Malpani.

One area they focus on is prevention. According to her, foundational ingredients such as SPF, retinol, and barrier-supportive actives are more beneficial when used consistently rather than reactively. “Skincare is like nutrition or fitness—it works over time. We try to communicate that through edu-

cational tools, polls, and expert-driven discussions,” she explains.

Rather than aligning with elaborate beauty routines or multi-step regimens, Skinvest seems to prioritize minimalism. “We design our products to deliver results without the need for 10 different serums,” Malpani says. “It’s about fewer steps, but with purposeful, effective formulations.”

This pragmatic approach is extended to the product line as well. One example, she mentions, is their CEO Serum—a multi-functional product developed to address multiple concerns including hydration, pigmentation, and skin repair. “It’s a way to simplify routines with-

out compromising outcomes,” she adds. Skinvest also cites its emphasis on Indian skin concerns as a distinguishing factor. Issues such as pollution-related damage, humidity-driven breakouts, and pigmentation are often specific to regional climates and lifestyles, and the brand claims to keep that context in mind.

“Our formulations blend Indian botanicals like turmeric, ashwagandha, and licorice root with research-backed actives like niacinamide, peptides, and retinoids,” Malpani notes. “It’s an attempt to bridge traditional ingredients with modern dermatology.”

Each formulation, she says, goes through several stages of quality testing—from stability and

safety checks to clinical evaluations. “We don’t just focus on the ingredients—we ensure how they interact, how stable they are, and whether they perform consistently over time.”

In an industry driven by fleeting fads, Skinvest’s approach to innovation seems deliberate rather than reactive. “We don’t jump on every trend that pops up on social media,” says Malpani. “Instead, we gather feedback through surveys, social polls, and consumer testing to find out what people actually need.”

Their innovation pipeline, according to her, is as focused on packaging and user experience as it is on ingredients. “We aim to introduce relevance—not novelty for the sake of it.”

The conversation around skincare has also shifted to include sustainability, and Skinvest claims to be adjusting accordingly. The brand states that all its products are vegan, cruelty-free, and aligned with clean beauty standards. Packaging, Malpani adds, uses recycled plastic, with a broader shift toward sustainable materials underway.

“We also try to inform users about what conscious skincare really means—beyond labels,” she says. “It’s about sourcing, formulation safety, and long-term environmental impact.”

For all its scientific language and formulation details, the brand returns frequently to the idea of realism. One belief Malpani actively pushes back against is the notion that extensive routines guarantee results.

“There’s a myth that perfect skin requires a 10 or 12-step regimen,” she says. “But piling on products can lead to irritation and do more harm than good. We advocate for functional skincare—fewer, smarter steps.”

She’s also quick to challenge what she calls the ‘filtered skin fantasy.’ “Social media often sells this idea of flawless, glassy skin, but healthy skin still has pores, texture, and the occasional breakout,” she says. “Skincare alone doesn’t determine your skin’s appearance—factors like sleep, hydration, and nutrition matter just as much.”



# BCCI removes assistant coach Nayar; support staff all set for overhaul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian cricket team's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar has been sacked just eight months into the assignment amid speculation of a rift with a high-profile member of the support staff even though Test debacles against New Zealand and Australia are being cited as the reason for his ouster.

If board sources are to be believed, Nayar has already been intimidated of the BCCI's decision to part ways with him.

"While India's recent Test debacles (against New Zealand and Australia) has led to the churning but there is also a feeling in the BCCI that Nayar became a scapegoat in the turf war between an important member of the support staff and a senior star player," a BCCI source told media. Fielding coach T Dilip, and Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai are also on their way out after completing more than three years in their respective positions.

The new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the BCCI has capped the support staff's tenure at three years.

It is learnt that India's first ever Strength and Conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux is likely to return for a second stint. The South African is widely credited for ushering in a new fitness culture in the then Sourav Ganguly-led Indian team during



the 2003 World Cup. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, when contacted by media, chose to sidestep the query.

"Certain things are being finalised. You will receive a press note from BCCI in some days," Saikia said when asked about the development.

The 41-year-old Nayar, a former all-

rounder who played three ODIs but was largely a domestic stalwart with 103 first-class games, didn't respond to a text message sent by media. His presence deemed "counter-productive"

It is learnt that Nayar's removal was on the cards after Sitanshu Kotak was added to the Indian team's support staff as an

additional batting coach. "...Just after the tour of Australia, there was a review meeting conducted by the BCCI. The top officials of the board, including secretary Devajit Saikia and vice-president Rajeev Shukla, were present along with important members associated with the Indian team, and the national selectors," the BCCI source said.

"On the sidelines of the meeting, a powerful member of the support staff expressed his apprehensions about Nayar's presence and said how him being in the dressing room is proving to be counter-productive.

"While the BCCI didn't act immediately but they brought in Kotak, the former Saurashtra run-accumulator. It was a way of side-lining Nayar during the Champions Trophy," the source added.

It is understood that Nayar was not the first-choice assistant for head coach Gautam Gambhir when the appointments were finalised.

He was appointed to act as a bridge between Gambhir and skipper Rohit Sharma, with whom he has shared a close friendship owing to their time together as Mumbai teammates.

Nayar and Dilip have been the Indian skipper's "most trusted lieutenants" and it is not known whether Rohit was kept in the loop by the BCCI mandarins about these decisions.

# Axar backs McGurk, says Australia- is game-changer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals skipper Axar Patel conceded that his team has struggled with shaky starts with Jake Fraser-McGurk yet to fire this season but backed the Australian to be a game-changer once he finds his rhythm.

The 23-year-old opener, who lit up the tournament in his maiden season last year with his power-hitting, has looked a shadow of himself in this edition.

His ongoing struggles at the top continued in DC's dramatic Super Over win against Rajasthan Royals, as he perished inside the Powerplay for the fifth time this season.

"I have a different opinion. If you don't get a start, we are still doing well. So you have that cushion that you can go from the same team," Axar told reporters on Wednesday. "So I was thinking, the box isn't getting ticked but at the same time we are winning and he is such a player, that the day he gets going he will hand you the match."

I back myself: Axar on captaincy As the IPL reaches its halfway stage, the jovial all-rounder has emerged as the tournament's most successful captain, steering his side to five wins in six games.

"I was captaining for state cricket. I know what to do and what not to do. And when you get a chance to run the team as you want and play the way you want to play then why not," said Axar.

Axar, who has led his state side Gujarat in 23 matches across formats, said he isn't one to lean heavily on analytics or prescribed captaincy templates.

"I am doing what I think is right and not following a template. I am backing myself. I am not captaining for the first time. There is planning, which is for my awareness that what's going on, how the other team is playing. Obviously, sometimes it works.

"But as a captain, I see who is in form, how their day is going, what they can do and what they can't. I choose according to the situation. I am not completely data driven," he added.

Against RR, Axar's impact wasn't just with strategy. After a string of low-key

outings, he finally delivered a telling performance with both bat and ball. His 14-ball 34 provided Delhi with the much-needed boost.

"I thought I was batting well for the last one-and-a-half years. But when I came to this tournament, I wasn't able to create an impact. I don't know if it was a soft dismissal or something. I was getting out in an over-aggressive manner. But when I went today, I was clear. I knew who I wanted to target."



With the ball, he plucked his first wicket of the season by bamboozling Riyan Parag. Asked about his underwhelming returns, Axar reiterated that a finger injury sustained during the Champions Trophy has held him back. "I sustained a cut on my finger during the Champions Trophy. The skin is yet to come. Every time I bowl, the skin comes off. So I was saving myself. I couldn't bowl at my speed. So I felt I was bowling well but was not able to get the impact I want."

## Du Plessis play the next match

DC vice-captain Faf Du Plessis has missed the team's last two games, against Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals, due to an unspecified injury. "I had been told that he wouldn't be able to play three matches — that's the time he needs to recover — and two matches are done. Maybe he will play the Gujarat game. But the physio has to confirm how his rehab has been going," Axar said.

# Rohit to be face of T20 Mumbai League; India players to feature

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India's Test and ODI captain Rohit Sharma is set to be the ambassador of T20 Mumbai League with the MCA expressing hope that the city's other stars such as Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav will make themselves available for the event that was halted owing to the COVID-19 pandemic after two editions.

The league was held in 2018 and 2019 before the pandemic led to its suspension. Rohit has retired from T20 Internationals but continues to play in the IPL.

Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Ajinkya Rahane, Shivam Dube, Tushar Deshpande and Prithvi Shaw are some of the popular Mumbai players. Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal moved to Goa a few days ago.

Most of them are busy with their IPL commitments right now. The MCA (Mumbai Cricket Association) event will not start before the IPL's conclusion on May 25.

"We have not made it mandatory for them to play but we strongly expect them to play in the T20 Mumbai League. Their participation will only help Mumbai cricket grow, and benefit the players and the league," an MCA

official told media. Rohit will be present at an event to announce the league here on Friday. It is also learnt that the MCA is contemplating a pay of ₹15 lakh each for the "icon players" in the competition.

The MCA has received more than 2,800 entries for the event. The tournament will comprise eight teams with two new sides to be announced soon.

The other six teams are North Mumbai Panthers, ARCS Andheri, Triumph Knights Mumbai North East, Namu Bandra Blasters, Eagle Thane Strikers and Aakash Tigers Mumbai Western Suburbs.

# Feeling sense of seniority after coming to PBKS: Arshdeep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

India seamer Arshdeep Singh says he has been feeling a sense of "seniority" since the beginning of his tenure at Punjab Kings thanks to the responsibility entrusted upon him by the IPL franchise that has also helped him in his professional growth.

The 26-year-old left-arm pacer was in his teens when he joined Punjab Kings (formerly Kings XI Punjab) and has been an integral part of the side since then, leading the pace attack on most occasions.

He has been remarkably consistent with the ball having taken 84 wickets for PBKS in seven seasons with a highest of 19 scalps last year. PBKS are currently placed fourth on the points table with the gangly pacer having taken eight wickets so far in this edition of IPL.

"Ever since I came to Punjab Kings, barring the first year, I started feeling seniority in my role. I have been associated with this team for the last seven years and after spending my first year with the team, I started feeling that I have been given a huge responsibility," said the pacer during the 'Kandid with Kings' episode.

Arshdeep said the responsibility thrust upon him has "helped me grow as a player and person" both in the Indian side and at his franchise.

He said that he understood quite early that mistakes, however small, could hamper the prospects of the team and he had to be on his toes at all times on the field.

"The elevation in my role and growth came pretty early and hence, I knew that I could not mess up at crucial stages because at those times, not working as per the plan can put the team in serious trouble. Hence, I became serious and started feeling like a senior way too early." Like any other player, Arshdeep too gets trolled for a bad day in office and the India seamer said rather than getting flustered, he has started to enjoy the memes and messages.

"I have had ups and downs in my career. I have seen the highest point as well as the lowest point in a very short span. But I feel very entertained by these trolls. I laugh at their creativity and memes.

"Earlier, I used to save these memes and messages so I could use those later but now I feel they don't make any sense. However, I still enjoy looking at people's creativity," the pacer says.

PBKS will next face Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday.

# Golfer Scottie Scheffler rested, ready to defend title at Hilton Head

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hilton Head Island

Scottie Scheffler was the star attraction of a parade just two days after the Masters. This one was all about a red plaid jacket from Harbour Town, not a green jacket from Augusta National.

The tradition of the RBC Heritage is for the defending champion to lead a half-mile parade that ends near the 18th green at Harbour Town, where he hits a ceremonial tee shot into the Calibogue Sound as a cannon is simultaneously fired.

"I had some ear plugs. It's always nice when a cannon is going off," Scheffler said. "It was definitely a unique experience. I was glad just to be able to make contact with the ball and not embarrass myself out there." And at least he was well-rested for Tuesday's opening ceremony.

Scheffler is in a different spot in so many ways compared with a year ago, when he was coming off a victory in the Masters. He flew home to Dallas for a brief celebration, then got back on a plane to coastal South Carolina for a \$20 million signature event. He won that, too.

Scheffler couldn't always hit it where he was aiming this year in the Masters. He still tied for fourth and was proud of putting up a fight. It was tiring, yes, but without the adrenaline rush of winning and all that

comes with it. Instead of a big party, a flight home to Dallas and then back to Hilton Head Island, Scheffler enjoyed a peaceful three-hour drive and some relaxation that this tournament offers.

Even with a \$20 million purse, this can feel like one big exhale.

Masters champion Rory McIlroy is not playing, and that's by design. He had mentioned earlier this year Harbour Town was not among his favorites — the course is more about position off the tee and small greens than blasting away — and he didn't enter the tournament at last Friday's deadline. It's the kind of course on which Scheffler thrives. Even while running on fumes after his Masters victory a year ago, he still had enough left in the tank to put on a tee-to-green clinic, building a lead with a 63 on Saturday and finishing off the win Monday morning because of rain.

"This golf course is much more about control and putting your ball in the right spots and staying out of the trouble," Scheffler said. "The fairways here are much smaller than Augusta and a flatter golf course overall. A bit of a different test, but definitely still a good test." That depends on how well he's playing, and Scheffler feels he's close.

Everything is forward in his world, though there was a concession that he has been trying to catch up form having missed



a month away from golf — the work in the gym, and practice on the course — from his decision to make ravioli on Christmas Day. He punctured his right hand with a wine glass and required minor surgery.

Scheffler is still trying to put together a complete game — driving well one week when irons are suspect, good irons and pedestrian driving the next.

"I was playing a bit of catch-up," he said. "I feel like I'm improving each week. Body's starting to feel better. Swing's starting to feel better. I feel like I'm working towards having another good season. I haven't had my best start this year, but I've had some good finishes." He flirted with contention at Torrey Pines. He was in contention until the very end in the Houston Open. And

even in the Masters, he was a birdie or two away — with some help from McIlroy — from having a chance.

Scheffler recalls being in the 18th fairway, two shots behind Justin Rose and McIlroy, thinking of nothing but holing out for eagle. Rose was in the group ahead of him and made a 20-foot birdie putt, leaving Scheffler three behind. He recalls telling caddy Ted Scott, "I guess I'm going to aim at the middle of the green now." Scott concurred, Scheffler made par and he was on his way to Harbour Town.

His final act was twice helping McIlroy into the Masters green jacket — first in Butler Cabin, then during the trophy presentation on the 18th green.

"It was cool to be able to see Rory get the job done," Scheffler said. "Definitely from the outside it looked a lot more like relief than anything. Rory has accomplished everything in the game of golf, and that was really the last thing for him to accomplish. The guy has won FedEx Cup, The Players, all four majors. Maybe the only other thing would be the Olympics is what he would want to win.

"It was really cool for me to be there in that moment," he said. "He's a good friend of mine. To be able to congratulate him and just see the joy on him and his family was really cool."

# Courtois questions Real Madrid's attack after loss to Arsenal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Thibaut Courtois watched from the other end of the pitch as Real Madrid's forwards took turns crashing against the Arsenal defense.

Courtois had done his part by stopping a penalty. But Kylian Mbappé's best shot sailed high and wide. Rodrygo's dribbles got him nowhere, and Vinicius needed a defensive blunder to take Madrid's sole goal of a 5-1 aggregate defeat in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"Sometimes you have to be self-critical and have a good look at everything," the Belgian goalkeeper said after the 2-1 home loss to Arsenal midweek.

"Maybe we need to make more team moves and not so many individual ones, because if they double-mark Vini or Mbappé you can break it once, but not three, four or five times," Courtois said. "We can't always rely on one of our four attacking players dribbling past three defenders and scoring a great goal, we have to attack and defend better as a team."

Exiting from the competition it has won five times in the last decade was not what Madrid expected when it added Mbappé to a squad that was coming off a record 15th European Cup and Spanish league title last season.

The France captain has scored a glut of goals in his first season with Madrid but failed to come up big in the biggest games, including two lopsided losses to Barcelona. Jeers were heard for Mbappé when he limped off the field on Wednesday with a hurt right ankle.



The hard truth is that the team has played worse with him on board. Madrid has had injuries in defense and it lost mid-

fielder Toni Kroos to retirement but its attack has failed to click, with Mbappé having to adapt to a central striker role as

Vinicius' production dropped. Courtois even called into question the range of attacking options for a squad that

also counted on Endrick and Brahim Diaz as sparks off the bench. The goalie said Madrid was missing the tall, big striker who could win balls in the box like Joselu Mato, who scored critical goals in last season's Champions League.

"It was difficult to find openings and we had little success. We were also unlucky with balls into the box. This year we don't have a Joselu who can win those duels," Courtois said. "Now we have to analyze what we can do better because we still have the (Spanish) league, the final of the Copa del Rey and the Club World Cup, and we want to get everything right."

Athletic Bilbao up next in La Liga There will be little let up for Madrid with a strong Athletic Bilbao arriving on Sunday aiming to dig into the wound left by Arsenal.

Madrid must try to overhaul a four-point deficit to Barcelona in La Liga as it tries to salvage the season by defending its domestic title.

Madrid could be facing a seven-point gap with Barcelona by kickoff, if the front-runner beats Celta Vigo at home on Saturday. Madrid will also face Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final next week, but coach Carlo Ancelotti will likely also need his team to retain the league crown to keep his job.

The Italian manager admitted his future was in doubt after his team was outplayed by Arsenal, while also attempting to dampen speculation.

"I'm only thinking about preparing for the next game to stay in the fight for the league title and try to win the Copa del Rey," he said.

# ODELA 2: TAMANNAAH'S RETURN CAN'T SAVE THIS VIOLENT & WEAK SUPERNATURAL DRAMA

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The film *Odele Railway Station* was directly released on a private OTT platform in 2022. Ashok Teja directed the film, while another director, Sampath Nandi, provided the story. The film was just an hour and a half long but found success on OTT. Hebah Patel played the main lead, and Vasishtha Simha had an important role. After three years, Sampath Nandi roped in Tamannaah Bhatia for the sequel, *Odele 2*. Ashok Teja returns as the director, but Sampath Nandi once again provides the story, screenplay, dialogues, and direction supervision. Hebah Patel and Vasishtha Simha continue in the second part as well. Ajaneesh Loknath of *Kantara* fame composed the music for this sequel. Released on Thursday, the film mainly banks on Tamannaah's popularity as she returns to Telugu cinema after a two-year gap.

## STORY

Tirupathi (Vasishtha Simha), who tormented the villagers of *Odele*, is killed by his wife. The elderly villagers decide not to burn his body but instead bury it in a Samadhi Sika, believing this form of burial will cause his soul to suffer as revenge. However, Tirupathi's evil soul (atma) escapes and begins tormenting the villagers again, particularly targeting young women. Initially, the villagers don't believe that Tirupathi's atma is behind the killings and

blame others. But when a police inspector is killed at Tirupathi's Samadhi, they begin to believe the soul is indeed haunting them.

Not knowing what else to do, they approach Radha, Tirupathi's wife. She advises them to seek help from her sister Bhairavi (Tamannaah), who has turned into a Naga Sadhu and also embodies Siva Sakthi. The villagers meet her and request her to fight against Tirupathi's evil spirit. How Siva Sakthi confronts and ultimately defeats Tirupathi's atma forms the crux of the story.

## ANALYSIS

*Odele 2* picks up where *Odele Railway Station* left off. Sampath Nandi, though credited for the story, doesn't bring anything new to the table. The central concept—of a man who turns into a devil after death and lusts after young women—feels overdone. The plot seems heavily inspired by the film *Arundhati*, and it's clear Sampath Nandi has taken cues from that storyline. Unfortunately, the visuals overpower the narrative, and the film leans more on mindless violence than meaningful storytelling.

The first half offers little in terms of engagement, as director Ashok Teja attempts to establish how Tirupathi's atma escapes and starts tormenting the villagers. The scenes are mundane and uninspired. Tamannaah appears just before the interval and continues into the second half. Although her entry scene is meant to be impactful, neither Ashok Teja nor Sampath Nandi manage to craft compelling



REVIEW

sequences between Siva Sakthi (Tamannaah) and the evil atma (Vasishtha).

The first half is entirely dull, and while there's some curiosity about how Tamannaah's character will be portrayed in the second half, all she ends up doing is walking around chanting "Om Namah Shivaya." In supernatural stories, believability is crucial, but scenes like a police officer sitting at Tirupathi's Samadhi simply don't work. The climax sequence drags on unnecessarily and becomes boring. The excessive bloodshed and gore are unwarranted.

Even in the first half, scenes showing Tirupathi's spirit possessing a man and raping two women are lengthy and badly executed. They are uncomfortable to watch and unnecessarily prolonged. Flying heads and overflowing blood are also major negatives.

## PERFORMANCE

Tamannaah is the only saving grace in this film. She embraces a de-glamorised role as a Naga Sadhu and performs sincerely. However, her character isn't written with strength or consistency—especially in the last 30 minutes. She is initially presented as powerful, but this momentum fizzles out by the end. Vasishtha Simha appears less impactful in the climax and comes across as loud. Murali Sharma plays a routine role with nothing noteworthy. Hebah Patel makes a cameo, and her character is wrapped up quickly. Srikanth Iyengar as Pantulu and other supporting actors portraying villagers do their part.

## TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Ajaneesh Loknath's music is just aver-

age and at times unnecessarily loud. Soundar Rajan's cinematography is decent, with a few drone shots standing out. The graphics are well executed. However, the dialogues are mediocre and fail to make an impression.

## VERDICT

*Odele 2* is a disappointment and falls well short of expectations. Sampath Nandi, who managed to deliver with *Odele Railway Station*, fails to provide a fresh or engaging storyline here. Instead, he seems to have reshaped *Arundhati* with minor tweaks. The popular phrase "Vodala Bommali" from *Arundhati* appears to inspire Vasishtha's character as well. Due to excessive blood, disturbing scenes, and a lack of engaging content, this film is not suitable for children or family audiences.

**Cast:** Tamannaah Bhatia, Vasishtha Simha, Murali Sharma, Hebah Patel, Srikanth Iyengar, Gagan Vihari, Sharath Lohitashwa, Naga Mahesh and others  
**Cinematographer:** Soundar Rajan S  
**Music Director:** B Ajaneesh Loknath  
**Producer:** D Madhu  
**Director:** Ashok Teja  
**Story, Screenplay, Dialogues and Direction Supervision:** Sampath Nandi  
**Rating:** 1.5/5

## Pooja Hegde talks about her potential collaboration with Allu Arjun

Pooja Hegde is gearing up for the release of her upcoming film 'Retro'. This film makes for a striking addition to her illustrious body of work, which boasts several mega-hits with Allu Arjun. With films like *Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo*, *DJ Duvvudha Jagannadham*, and others, Pooja and Allu Arjun have become one of the most celebrated on-screen duos. Audiences have showered immense love and praise to them, and are eagerly waiting to watch them collaborate on their next project.

In a latest interview, Pooja Hegde expressed admiration over her chemistry

with Allu Arjun, and talked about their potential next collaboration. "If there's a good story, good characters, and if it fits right, then we'll do it," shared Pooja Hegde.

Be it Pooja and Arjun's on-screen chemistry, their infectious tracks, or their addictive hook-steps in *Butta Bomma*, and *Ramuloo Ramulaa*, the duo has enjoyed the attention of the audience in each film, leaving them wanting more.

While Allu Arjun was last seen in 'Pushpa 2: The Rule', Pooja Hegde will be seen in the upcoming Tamil language romantic action film 'Retro'. The actress will be seen sharing the screen space with

Suriya. Directed by Karthik Subbaraj, 'Retro' is scheduled to hit the screens on May 1. Apart from this, Pooja Hegde is also gearing up for her Bollywood film 'Hai Jawani Toh Ishq Hona Hai', wherein she is starring alongside Varun Dhawan. Directed by David Dhawan, the film is poised to carry a lighthearted narrative with romantic elements, and is slated to release soon.

## Avika Gor back with a soulful romance in Ugly Story

Avika Gor continues to appear in Telugu films consistently. Her last film *Shanmukha*, where she starred opposite Aadi Saikumar, didn't perform well at the box office. However, the actress has landed another project, now starring opposite Nandu in *Ugly Story*.

The makers recently released a romantic track titled *Hey Priyatama*, a soulful melody that instantly connects with the listeners. Composed by Shraavan Bharadwaj, the song carries a refreshing musical feel. Singer Kaala Bhairava lends a distinct depth with his unique vocal texture and expressive style, elevating the song to another level. The lyrics, penned by Bhaskarabhatla,

are simple yet deeply emotional, perfectly capturing the essence of love. Centered around the word 'Priyatama', the lyrics are sure to resonate with today's youth and those in love. The song stands out as a heartwarming romantic melody, ideal for lovers and youth alike. It's a track that audiences will want to play on repeat and immerse themselves in its emotional vibe. Apart from the lead pair, the film features a talented ensemble cast including Sivaji Raja, Raviteja Mahadasyam, and Prajna Nayan. JS Subhashini and Konda Lakshman are jointly producing the film, while Pranav Swaroop serves as the writer and director.



## Abhinaya begins new chapter with businessman Karthik

Actress Abhinaya tied the knot with her longtime friend Karthik, a Telugu businessman also known as Sunny Varma. The wedding took place on Wednesday evening at a convention center in Hyderabad, performed according to Hindu rituals.

Karthik and Abhinaya have been in a relationship for a long time. They got engaged on March 9, and have now taken the next step by getting married.

Abhinaya is known for her performances in films such as *Sambho Siva Sambho*, *Seethamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu*, *Raju Gari Gadhi 2*, and *The Family Star*.

Abhinaya shared her wedding pictures on Instagram with the caption, "Knotted forever." She has been in the news over the past few months, especially after she posted about her engagement, which put an end to the ongoing marriage speculations. Now, she has finally tied the knot with her longtime beau.

## Sivaji's stellar return with Court sparks new opportunities



Sivaji is now the talk of Telugu cinema. Once a lead actor in many films, he took a break of nearly ten years in search of a strong role. That opportunity came with *Court*, where he played Mangapathi—a role that earned him immense appreciation. The film turned out to be a super success and brought Sivaji back into the spotlight.

This one film has completely transformed his career. Determined to make a strong comeback, Sivaji has now become a sought-after actor. He's playing a key role in the upcoming film *Dandora* and is also in talks for Akhil Akkineni's film *Lenin*.

Apart from these, Sivaji is in discussions for Naga Chaitanya's upcoming project and is also working on a film under Dil Raju's production. With this newfound demand, Sivaji is now one of the most sought-after character artists. Even Sai Dharam Tej's team is considering him for a special role in their next. This is a crucial phase for Sivaji, as he's receiving numerous offers and must choose wisely. While Telugu filmmakers often cast Hindi actors for key roles, Sivaji's resurgence might encourage a shift towards casting regional talent more frequently.

## Uday Raj steps into the spotlight with Madhuram

After appearing in character roles in several films, Uday Raj is now making his debut as a lead actor with the film *Madhuram*. Directed by Rajesh Chikile and produced by M. Bangarajulu, the film is set to hit screens on April 18.

"I've had a deep admiration for Megastar Chiranjeevi since childhood, and he is the inspiration for me to enter the film industry," said Uday Raj. During the shoot of *Acharya*, Uday got a chance to interact with Chiranjeevi, which was a dream come true for him.

"I've spent 12 years in the industry, working as an assistant in various departments and appearing in many films as a background artist. I finally got the opportunity to play the lead in *Madhuram*," he added.

Uday and director Rajesh Chikile have been friends for a long time. "When he narrated this story to me, I was genuinely excited. The film is set in a 90s backdrop and beautifully portrays the innocent love between a tenth-grade girl and a ninth-grade boy. I play three versions—a small child, a school student, and a middle-aged man. I had to undergo a physical

transformation for each look," said Uday. For one character, he put on weight, and to get lean again, he survived on just water for a few days. "We did good research about the lifestyle of school kids in the '90s to keep things authentic," he said. Vaishnavi Singh plays the female lead, and Uday praised her performance in the film. "We shot entirely in real locations to maintain authenticity and emotional depth," he said. "I'm open to playing any role, not just leads. I'm ready to take on even the smallest character roles if it means being part of good cinema," said Uday Raj.

