



The Pioneer

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Will make India self-reliant in defence, says
Rajnath

MEET
MOTHER-DAUGHTER DUO
REDEFINING HEALTHY DESSERTS

Suriya hopes for a comeback
with RETRO

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

Revanth Reddy should be held responsible if West Bengal-like conditions take place in Telangana as AIMIM is protesting against the Waqf Bill with CM's financial support. In Telangana, there are 77,000 acres of Waqf land. Only 20% (16,000 acres) are under dargahs and mosques. The remaining 80% are illegally occupied by people like Owaisi. Do they think Waqf properties are their grandfather's wealth? Not even a square yard is accessible to poor Muslims

- Bandi Sanjay, MoS

P4

DON'T MISS...

Union Min inspects power plant site

Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Pralhad Joshi, inspected the site of the Greenko Integrated Renewable Energy Project here on Friday. Officials briefed him on the progress of the project. Speaking to the media later, the Union Minister assured that the Greenko Renewable Energy Project would be completed within six months and dedicated to the nation. He described the renewable energy initiative, being established at Pinnapuram in Orvakal mandal, as a boon to the region. Recalling the situation a decade ago, the Minister noted that ...

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Shukla set for space travel next month

Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla is set to travel to the International Space Station next month as part of an Axiom-4 mission, four decades after Rakesh Sharma's iconic spaceflight onboard Russia's Soyuz spacecraft, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Friday. Singh made the remarks after reviewing the work of the Department of Space and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) here. "Group Captain Shukla's journey is more than just a flight - it's a signal that India is stepping ...

-PAGE: 5

All eyes on Vance visit to India next week

Ahead of US Vice President JD Vance's visit to India next week, Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday expressed optimism about "positive outcome" from the visit. Vaishnaw cited pragmatic approach and continued engagement on both sides, and asserted that India has emerged as a trusted hub in electronics manufacturing. "There will be very positive outcome is what I can say with a good level of confidence, because we have approached this thing in a very ...

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Shooter Shriyanka 8th in World Cup

Paris Olympics shooter Shriyanka Sadangi finished eighth in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) final on the third day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage here. She became the latest Indian shooter on this double-legged South American sojourn to make the cut for a maiden individual World Cup final, but made the exit after the 10th shot of the standing position round, the 40th of the 45-shot final. Sagen Maddalena of the USA, the silver medalist in the Paris Games ...

-SPORTS

'SWACHH ANDHRA' MISSION
Join hands for cleaner AP: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has appealed to people from all walks of life to actively participate in the Swachh Andhra programme being observed today (Saturday) across Andhra Pradesh. In a message posted on social media platform 'X', the Chief Minister said the initiative is being conducted every third Saturday as part of the Swarnandhra-2047 Sankalpam, with each edition focusing on a specific theme. This month's theme is the collection and safe recycling of e-waste.

Emphasising the importance of sustainable waste management, Naidu said, "A circular economy is achievable when we create wealth from waste. I appeal to state-level officials, district collectors, public representatives, MLAs, ministers, NGOs, corporate organisations, stu-



dents, and youth to voluntarily participate in this initiative." He instructed officials to establish e-waste collection centres across the State in partnership with Self-Help Group (SHG) members, both in rural and urban areas. "These centres should function under the motto 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'," he added.

- Each edition of the monthly cleanliness drive will focus on a specific theme, with this month dedicated to the collection and safe recycling of e-waste.
- Naidu highlights the need for sustainable waste management and calls for voluntary participation from officials, public representatives, NGOs, students, and corporate bodies.
- Officials directed to set up e-waste collection centres in both urban and rural areas, in collaboration with Self-Help Group (SHG) members, under the motto 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'.

Expressing confidence in the success of the campaign, the Chief Minister said collective efforts would strengthen the broader goals of the Swarnandhra Sankalpam. Separately, on the occasion of Good Friday, Naidu extended his greetings to the Christian community. He said, "Good Friday marks the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, who came as a messenger of peace. Even in suffering, Christ preached peace - a path that continues to inspire." He called upon people to reflect on Christ's teachings and his sacrifice, and to work towards building a society rooted in equality and peace.

SC SUB-CATEGORISATION IN AP
Govt issues guidelines

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued official guidelines outlining reservation quotas for various Scheduled Caste (SC) sub-groups, marking a significant step towards implementing SC sub-categorisation.

Following the publication of a gazette notification on Thursday, the government released detailed norms and directives that will come into immediate effect. As per the notification, the state will allocate reservations to different SC sub-castes under three groups, within the overall 15 per cent reservation earmarked for the SC community.

According to the new classification, Group 1, which includes Relli and 12 other sub-castes, will receive 1 per cent reservation. Group 2, comprising Madiga and 17 other sub-castes, will be allotted 6.5 per cent reservation. Group 3, covering Mala and 28 other sub-castes, will be granted 7.5 per cent reservation.

The government also announced

33.3 per cent of the reservations in each group will be reserved for women, ensuring gender equity in the distribution of benefits

the introduction of a 200-point roster system to regulate and monitor reservation allocations across the categories. Notably, 33.3 per cent of the reservations in each group will be reserved for women, ensuring gender equity in the distribution of benefits. The government clarified that if eligible candidates are not available in a particular notification cycle, the vacancies will be carried forward to the next round of recruitment or selection.

These measures are part of the state's effort to ensure more equitable distribution of opportunities among various SC sub-castes, addressing long-standing demands for fair representation in education, employment, and other government services.

Transmission projects worth Rs 1,095 cr commissioned: CS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Chief Secretary and Special Chief Secretary (Energy) K Vijayanand held a high-level virtual review meeting on Friday to assess the progress of APTRANSCO's major infrastructure projects across Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam and Kadapa.

During the review, Vijayanand noted that APTRANSCO had made significant progress in strengthening the State's power transmission system. Eighteen transmission projects, including augmentation of ICT capacity and installation of additional bus reactors for reactive power management—comprising seven of 400kV and eleven of 220kV—have been commissioned at a total cost of Rs 1,095 crore.

He added that 55 transmission projects worth Rs 4,965 crore are currently in various stages of execution. These include works across voltage levels ranging from 400kV



to 132kV, and are expected to be commissioned over the current and next two financial years. Vijayanand said that APTRANSCO had recently awarded contracts for nearly 10 major transmission projects amounting to Rs 3,407 crore. These include key works such as the diversion of 400kV and 220kV lines within the APCRDA region. Tenders are also

Focus on e-waste collection: Narayana



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana has called for a focused implementation of this month's Swachh Andhra - Swachh Diwas programme, with special emphasis on electronic waste management under the theme "E-Check". The initiative will be held on April 19 (Saturday), as part of the state-wide cleanliness drive observed every third Saturday.

In a teleconference with municipal commissioners, Minister

- Existing RRR centres will be converted into e-waste collection points and operated by women from self-help groups under MEPMA.
- The initiative, launched in January, is being held monthly with different themes. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has actively participated in past events
- Citizens will be offered monetary compensation for handing over electronic waste, creating income opportunities and encouraging participation.
- A total of 222 e-waste collection centres will be established across the state, remaining open beyond the Swachh Diwas to support regular disposal.

Narayana directed officials to ensure the effective collection of electronic waste from households and commercial establishments.

Continued on Page 2

Student from Guntur dies in US road mishap

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Telugu student from Rajendranagar in Guntur district, Vangavolu Deepti, tragically died in a road accident in Texas, US. Deepti had recently moved to Denton city to pursue her Master's at the University of North Texas.

On April 12, Deepti and her friend Snigdha from Medikonduru were walking when a speeding car hit them. Deepti sustained a serious head injury, while Snigdha escaped with minor injuries. Deepti was hospitalised but succumbed to her injuries on April 15.

Her father, Hanumantharao, a small-scale trader, was informed by Deepti's friends. He approached Union Minister of State Dr Pemmasani Chandrashekhar's office in Guntur, which extended support. A crowdfunding campaign raised 80,000 US dollars for her treatment.

Dr Pemmasani said efforts are underway to bring Deepti's body back to Guntur by Saturday. Deepti's younger sister, Srilakshmi, an engineering student, tearfully recalled their last phone call on April 10.

WORLD LIVER DAY TODAY

Eat right, live right: Health Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

"Diseases don't come without our invitation," remarked Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav, urging people to rethink their daily choices on the occasion of World Liver Day, observed on April 19.

Emphasising that both communicable and non-communicable diseases are often linked to lifestyle habits, the Minister highlighted the growing burden of liver diseases due to poor diet, sedentary living, and high-risk behaviours. "The liver is central to the body's well-being—it aids digestion, detoxifies the body, and produces chemicals essential for



This year's World Liver Day theme—'Food as Medicine'—focuses on the role of nutrition in maintaining liver health. The Minister warned that unhealthy eating habits, obesity, diabetes, excessive alcohol intake, poor hygiene, unprotected sex, body piercings, and repeated syringe use significantly increase the risk of liver disease

various bodily functions," he said. This year's World Liver Day theme—'Food as Medicine'—focus-

es on the role of nutrition in maintaining liver health.

Continued on Page 2



Govt aims to build homes for every poor family: Kolusu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is committed to ensuring that every poor family in the state has access to a well-equipped home, said Minister for Housing and Information & Public Relations, Kolusu Parthasaradhi. He stated that constructing houses with all basic amenities for the underprivileged remains a top priority of the state government.

On Friday, M Shivaprasad, the newly appointed Managing Director of the State Housing Department, paid a courtesy call on the Minister at his camp office in Vijayawada and extended birthday greetings. During the meeting, the Minister reviewed key developmental initiatives and the progress of ongoing housing projects.

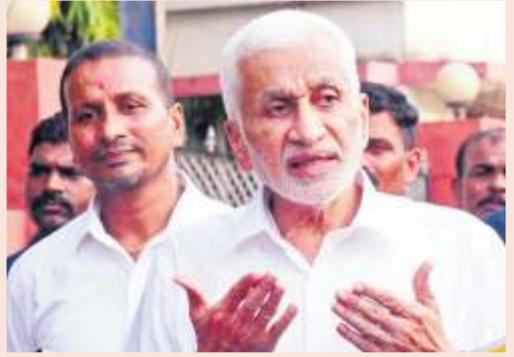
Shivaprasad briefed the Minister on the status of housing construction and said the department is working diligently to meet the construction targets by June, as directed by the Chief Minister. He added that Ajay Jain, Special Chief Secretary of the Housing Department, is closely monitoring progress through daily reviews involving District Collectors and other officials.

Continued on Page 2

SIT PROBE

Vijayasai grilled in Rs 4K-cr liquor scam

The ex-YSRC MP alleges Kasireddy Rajasekhar Reddy - an IT consultant during the YSRC term - is the kingpin



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Rajya Sabha MP V. Vijayasai Reddy appeared before the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Friday in connection with the alleged Rs 4,000-crore liquor scam being probed by the NDA-led Andhra Pradesh government.

Speaking to the media afterwards, Reddy said the SIT questioned him about two meetings - one held at his residence in Hyderabad and another in Vijayawada - where the previous

government's liquor policy was reportedly discussed. He said he answered all questions to the best of his knowledge and denied any direct involvement in liquor sales during the YSRC regime.

Reddy alleged that a select group around former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy was responsible for spreading 'misinformation' and diminishing his political standing. He squarely blamed Kasireddy Rajasekhar Reddy - an IT consultant during the YSRC term - as the alleged kingpin of the scam.

Continued on Page 2

DEADLIEST ATTACK OF TRUMP CAMPAIGN

US strikes on Yemeni oil port kill 74 people

PNS ■ DUBAI

US airstrikes targeting an oil port held by Yemen's Houthi rebels killed 74 people and wounded 171 others, the group said Friday, marking the single-deadliest known attack under President Donald Trump's new campaign targeting the rebels.

Assessing the toll of Trump's campaign, which began March 15, has been incredibly difficult as the US military's Central Command so far has not released any information on the campaign, its specific targets and how many people have been killed.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Houthi rebels strictly control access to areas attacked and don't publish complete information on the strikes, many of



which likely have targeted military and security sites.

But the strike on the Ras Isa port, which sent massive fireballs shooting into the night sky, represented a major escalation for the American

campaign by hitting oil facilities for the first time.

In a statement, Central Command said that "US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and

deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorise the entire region for over 10 years."

"This strike was not intended to harm the people of Yemen, who rightly want to throw off the yoke of Houthi subjugation and live peacefully," it added. It did not acknowledge any casualties from the attack or offer any damage assessment.

Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC and analysed by The Associated Press Friday showed destroyed tanks and vehicles at the port as oil leaks into the Red Sea.

The Iranian-backed Houthi later Friday launched a missile toward Israel that was intercepted, the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and other areas.

Purandeswari launches Wakf reforms awareness drive

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh BJP President Daggubati Purandeswari on Friday launched the Wakf Reforms Public Awareness Campaign at the party's state office in Vijayawada. Addressing the media at the outset of the event, she said the campaign aimed to raise awareness and garner support for legislative reforms and amendments to Wakf laws.

Referring to the ongoing debates surrounding the Supreme Court's recent verdict on the Wakf Act, Purandeswari clarified that the apex court had clearly stated that the government was not repealing the Wakf Act. The court advised that no alterations should be made to recognised Wakf properties. A new Wakf Board was to be constituted in line with the proposed legislation, but there would be no interference in the functioning of the existing Board. She emphasised that the Wakf system is a religious institution, and the Central government has no direct involvement in its religious matters. However, she accused opposition parties of needlessly stirring unrest over the proposed amend-



ments. Purandeswari asserted that the Supreme Court's directions were in alignment with the Central government's position, and there was no contradiction. As part of the campaign, the BJP presented a detailed PowerPoint presentation on Wakf-related concerns. Separately, she strongly refuted allegations that the BJP was targeting Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi by dragging their names into the National Herald case. She clarified that both leaders were already out on bail in the matter and that the FIR was lodged before the BJP came to power at the Centre. Challenging the Congress

party's accusations, she asked, "Why blame the BJP for a case that was filed before it assumed power?" She explained that around 5,000 freedom fighters had invested in Associated Journals Limited (AJL), of whom only 1,057 original shareholders remain. The Congress had extended an interest-free loan of Rs 90 crore to AJL. Subsequently, a company named Young India was formed with a capital of Rs 5 lakh, in which Sonia and Rahul Gandhi hold 76% of the shares. Young India took over both the liabilities and assets of AJL under the pretext of clearing the debts. Purandeswari recalled that it was Subramanian Swamy

who had approached the court in 2012, raising concerns about the opaque manner in which the assets were transferred and the failure to inform remaining shareholders. She reiterated that the BJP had no role in the case, as it was not in power at the time, and now the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a detailed charge sheet based on available evidence. BJP Minority Morcha State President Sheikh Baji, BJP State Media In-charge Paturi Nagabhushanam, Minority Morcha General Secretary Syed Basha, Vice-President Sheikh Khuddu Beg, Sheikh Rafi, K Sambasiva Rao and others were present.



Stranded workers from Srikakulam in Muscat

Rammohan Naidu promises help to stranded workers in Muscat

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu has taken prompt action to address the distress of migrant workers from Srikakulam district, who have been stranded in Muscat due to issues with their employer, NASEEM AL SALAM company.

In response to reports of their plight, the Minister interacted via video call with nine Telugu workers from his office in Srikakulam. The workers, who had travelled to Muscat in search of employment, shared

the hardships they were facing under difficult circumstances. Rammohan Naidu patiently heard their concerns and assured them that the Government of India was actively pursuing a resolution.

"I will speak to the concerned officials and make every effort to ensure your safe and early return," he told them during the virtual interaction. He stressed that their safety and well-being were top priorities and promised that all necessary assistance would be extended.

The Minister also reached out to reassure the families of the affected workers, urging them to remain hopeful. "The government stands firmly with the workers and their families during this difficult time," he said, adding that appropriate support mechanisms would be put in place to facilitate their return.

Rammohan Naidu's swift response has brought some relief to the families in Srikakulam and reflects the Centre's commitment to safeguarding the interests of Indian nationals abroad.

YSRCP demands panel to probe Gosala deaths

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has demanded the formation of a committee to regularly investigate the deaths of cows at the Tirupati Gosala, asserting that it will continue to raise public concerns as a responsible opposition.

Addressing the media on Friday, former MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy stated that over the past nine months, an average of ten cows have been dying each month, which is a serious matter. "Whenever we raise the issue, the government avoids open debate by using the police to restrict the movement of our leaders," he alleged.

He said that party leader Karunakar Reddy had taken up the matter, and it is the bounden duty of the government to verify the facts, rectify any lapses, or clarify the situation. "However, from the Chief Minister to local leaders and officials, there have only been conflicting statements, with no convincing explanation. They are trying to hush up the issue," he said.

Mahesh Reddy emphasised that the matter concerns the sanctity of the holy shrine and has caused distress among devotees across the country. "Even now, it is not too late. The government must release full data and constitute a committee to look into the matter," he said.

Dismissing allegations that the issue is being politicised, he said it was Chandrababu Naidu who had earlier attempted to politicise the TTD, even in the 'laddu' issue. "The apex court had expressed displeasure over such baseless allegations made during his tenure in office," he added.

Irrigation Minister unhappy with tardy progress of Veligonda works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Water Resources, Nimmala Ramanaidu, has expressed strong dissatisfaction over the sluggish pace of work on the Poola Subbaiah Veligonda Project, particularly the delayed lining work in Tunnel-2.

During a review meeting

with irrigation officials, the Minister pointed out that only 72 metres of the planned 432 metres of lining work—originally scheduled for completion by April—had been completed so far.

Stressing the urgency of the situation, Ramanaidu directed officials to expedite both benching and lining works in

Tunnel-2. He emphasised the importance of adhering to the June 2026 deadline set during the tenure of former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Chief Engineer M Venkateswara Rao, the Superintending Engineer, and other senior project officials attended the meeting, where discussions centred on key



obstacles, including the status of a Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) currently stuck inside Tunnel-2.

To resolve the issue, the Minister announced the formation of a special committee to assess the TBM's value and identify the most feasible method for its removal.

Reiterating the govern-

ment's commitment to the project, Ramanaidu said the State Cabinet had sanctioned Rs 106.39 crore for critical works under Package-2 and Package-4 of the Veligonda Project.

Furthermore, approvals have been given for assigning the feeder canal, the Teegaleru Canal head-works, and the head regulator

works of the Eastern Main Canal to the executing agencies.

The Veligonda Project, seen as a lifeline for drought-prone areas in Prakasam, Nellore and Kadapa districts, is intended to provide irrigation and drinking water by diverting surplus water from the Krishna River.

Security lapses at Durga Temple slammed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP-Central Constituency Coordinator and former MLA Malladi Vishnu has strongly criticised the deteriorating administrative and security conditions at the renowned Kanaka Durga temple atop Indrakeeladri hill since the coalition government assumed office.

His comments follow a recent incident in which gold orna-



ments worth Rs 20 lakh were reportedly stolen from a Hyderabad devotee's vehicle. "Unfortunately, devotees coming

to seek blessings from Goddess Kanaka Durga are left without adequate security," said Vishnu.

He alleged frequent surveillance failures and inadequate safety measures despite the temple attracting over 30,000 devotees daily. Vishnu pointed out that Minister Nara Lokesh had recently apologised to devotees for poor amenities and noted that even during a surprise inspection by the Executive

Officer, deficiencies in security and infrastructure were evident.

"From storage facilities to basic amenities, everything on the hill is being exploited by contractors who charge exorbitant prices," he alleged. He also claimed that devotees' repeated complaints remain unresolved and accused the temple's Annaprashad wing of corruption.

24x7 job hub to debut in AP as birthday gift to CM Naidu

Chandranna Udyog Bhavan to revolutionise employment facilitation

PNS ■ RAMACHANDRAPURAM

In a significant stride towards Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's vision of "Employment for All," Minister Vasamsetti Subhash has announced the launch of Chandranna Udyog Bhavan, set to be inaugurated on 20 April at Ramachandrapuram. The initiative is being unveiled as a special tribute to mark the Chief Minister's birthday and is billed as the first-of-its-kind employment hub in Andhra Pradesh.

What makes Chandranna Udyog Bhavan unique is its 24x7, year-round operation, with a promise to connect job seekers to opportunities within just 30 minutes of registration. The centre caters to candidates with qualifications ranging from 10th pass to postgraduates, ensuring wide accessibility and inclusiveness.

Bringing together Human



Bringing together Human Resource departments from various industries, companies and factories under one roof, the Bhavan creates a centralised ecosystem for job generation. HR representatives will remain in constant coordination with the hub, enabling seamless hiring and real-time placements

Resource departments from various industries, companies and factories under one roof, the Bhavan creates a centralised ecosystem for job generation. HR representatives will remain in constant coordination with the hub, enabling seamless hiring and real-time placements.

Describing the initiative as a milestone in the state's employment drive, Minister Vasamsetti

said, "This is not just a building; it's a promise - a step towards fulfilling Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's dream of a job-ready Andhra Pradesh."

The centre will offer tailored guidance, skill-matching, on-the-spot interview scheduling, and serve as a one-stop destination for job counselling, training referrals, CV building, and job fairs - making it a compre-

hensive employment facilitation centre.

With Chandranna Udyog Bhavan, the state government aims to set a benchmark in responsive governance and proactive job creation, ensuring every qualified individual gets a fair shot at employment in line with the Chief Minister's vision for a prosperous, self-reliant Andhra Pradesh.

Transmission ... Vijayasai grilled in Rs 4K-cr...

Continued from Page 1

Vijayanand reiterated APTRANSCO's commitment to building a resilient and scalable transmission network and stressed the importance of timely project execution to support Andhra Pradesh's energy and economic goals.

JMD APTRANSCO Kirthi Chekuri, Director (Grid), AKV Bhaskar, CE (Projects), T. Sudeevan Kumar, SE (Projects-400kv), P Ramachandra Prasad, SE (Projects-220kv), K Bindu, and other APTRANSCO officials participated in the review.

Continued from Page 1

The SIT, which was constituted in November 2024, has reportedly unearthed evidence linking political leaders and private individuals to the scam after recording statements from liquor manufacturers.

The probe has revealed large-scale illegal earnings through the launch of local liquor brands and the handling of cash transactions. TDP leaders have accused several YSRCP

members of colluding with manufacturers to siphon off funds. The SIT had earlier conducted searches at the properties of Rajasekhara Reddy, who has been accused by Vijayasai Reddy of orchestrating the scam.

During the three-hour questioning by the six-member SIT team, Vijayasai Reddy maintained that while he had recommended two companies for loans, he was unaware of any fund diversion. "I told the SIT that I did not know where

the money collected by Kasireddy Rajasekhara Reddy went," he said.

He also lamented his fall in the party ranks, stating, "My number 2 position in the YSRCP fell to 2000." He asserted, "Kasireddy Rajasekhara Reddy knows who the real boss behind the scam is."

In a related development, Kasireddy's father, K. Upendra Reddy, also appeared before the SIT and was questioned separately.

Focus on e-waste ...

Continued from Page 1

He emphasised converting existing RRR (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) centres into dedicated e-waste collection points, to be operated by women from self-help groups under the MEPMA scheme.

Highlighting the vision of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu to make Andhra Pradesh 100% clean, the Minister said the initiative, launched in January, is being conducted monthly with different themes. Notably, the Chief Minister has actively participated in the past three editions held across various districts.

The Minister announced that 222 e-waste collection centres

will be set up across the state and will remain open beyond Swachh Diwas to allow regular disposal. The public will receive monetary compensation for handing over items such as broken mobile phones and televisions, offering a livelihood opportunity for women.

Narayana urged coordination among municipal officials, other department officials, and local MLAs to ensure the programme's success. He will take part in the event at Nellore this Saturday. Principal Secretary Suresh Kumar, Swachh Andhra MD Anil Kumar Reddy, Chairman Pattabhiram, and municipality commissioners took part in the review meeting.

Eat right ...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister warned that unhealthy eating habits, obesity, diabetes, excessive alcohol intake, poor hygiene, unprotected sex, body piercings, and repeated syringe use significantly increase the risk of liver disease. He also pointed to the lack of timely vaccinations as a contributing factor. One major concern is fatty liver disease, now affecting nearly 38 per cent of the population. If unchecked, it can lead to cirrhosis, liver failure, and even death. However, these outcomes are largely preventable through a healthy diet, ideal body weight, and management of related conditions.

"I urge everyone to make mindful lifestyle choices," the Minister said. "Eating right and living right is the best medicine for a healthier liver and a better life."

Govt aims to build ...

Continued from Page 1

Local authorities are also giving special attention to the execution of the housing schemes.

Minister Parthasaradhi expressed satisfaction with the performance of the Housing Department and reiterated the government's resolve to provide quality homes for the poor.

The Minister's birthday was celebrated with much enthusiasm. Upon his arrival at Gannavaram Airport from Hyderabad, he was accorded a hero's welcome by party leaders, officials, workers and citizens from Krishna and West Godavari districts, with traditional drums and festive fanfare.

Birthday wishes poured in from several dignitaries, including Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu (currently on a foreign tour), Education Minister Nara Lokesh, other Cabinet Ministers, MPs, senior bureaucrats such as Chief Secretary K S Jawahar Reddy, Special Chief Secretary Ajay Jain, I&PR Director Himanshu Shukla, and legislators.

Suchitra Ella assumes charge as Advisor for Handlooms dept

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Padma Bhushan awardee and Bharat Biotech Co-founder Suchitra Ella formally assumed charge on Thursday as Honorary Advisor for Handlooms and Handicrafts Development at a ceremony held at APCO Bhavan in Vijayawada.

Appointed by the Andhra Pradesh Government, Ella will serve in this cabinet-rank position for a period of two years. She will provide strategic guidance to strengthen the handloom and handicrafts sectors in the State. Her responsibilities include advising on policy reforms, promoting sustainability, improving market access, and supporting the use of digital platforms and Geographical Indication (GI) recognition for artisan products.

Handlooms and Textiles Commissioner Rekha Rani participated



in the programme and congratulated Suchitra Ella on her new role. She expressed confidence that Ella's leadership and experience in innovation and enterprise would significantly benefit the traditional handloom sector.

Suchitra Ella's appointment is part of a broader initiative by the State Government to bring domain experts into advisory roles to drive focused sectoral development.

Devotion marks Good Friday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Christian communities across the state observed Good Friday with deep reverence, marking the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Known also as Holy Friday and Easter Friday, the day was solemnly commemorated through fasting, prayer, mourning and church services, as believers reflected on the sacrifice of Jesus for the salvation of humanity.

As part of the observance, the Way of the Cross procession was held under the auspices of the renowned St Paul's Cathedral in Patamata. The solemn procession began at 1.30 PM near Nirmala Convent, and was led by Monsignor Rev Father Muvvala Prasad.

The procession traced through Nirmala Convent Road, NTR Circle, Pantakaluva Road and Maris Stella College Indoor Stadium before concluding at the cathedral.

Bishop of Vijayawada Diocese, Telagathoti Joseph Raja Rao, told the gathering that Jesus Christ endured crucifixion for the redemption of sinners, and that the Holy Cross is a symbol of forgiveness,

love and compassion. "Jesus shed His blood and sacrificed His life on the Cross to save humanity," the Bishop said, urging the faithful to reflect on Christ's love and mercy.

Throughout the two-hour-long procession, devotees walked in silence, stopping at each of the Stations of the Cross to offer prayers and meditate on the suffering endured by Jesus on His journey to Calvary.

Monsignor Father Prasad spoke on the spiritual significance of Good Friday and the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice. Good Friday remains one of the most sacred days in the Christian calendar, reminding believers of the immense sacrifice made for humanity's salvation and calling them to live in love, faith, and compassion.

The event also saw participation from Assistant Parish Priests Father Upendra and Father Vinod, sisters from Nirmala High School and Mary Stella College, religious instructor R Mariyanna, and community leaders including Korukonda Ashok Kumar, Bandi Baburao, PR Mohan Rao and M Bermand.

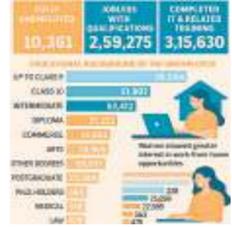


Nearly 6 lakh job seekers in Visakhapatnam district: Survey

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A district-wide household survey has revealed that close to six lakh individuals in Visakhapatnam are currently seeking employment. Conducted by Secretariat staff last month, the survey aimed to assess the scale of unemployment, map educational backgrounds, and explore interest in work-from-home opportunities.

The survey covered 6,31,260 individuals in the age group of 19-50 years. Of them, 10,361 were found to be fully unemployed, while another 2,59,275 were jobless despite holding some form of educational or technical qualifications. Notably, 3,15,630 had completed degrees or vocational training in IT and related sectors, highlighting a significant gap between technical training and employment



availability.

Data from the survey also illustrated the diversity in educational backgrounds among the unemployed. These included 26,094 persons educated up to Class 9, 51,907 with Class 10 qualifications, 53,412 Intermediate pass-outs, and 21,222 diploma holders. The unemployed also included 14,645 commerce graduates, 10,965 from arts, 55,937 from

other degree streams, 22,589 postgraduates, 563 PhD holders, 519 medical graduates, and 479 law graduates.

Urban areas recorded a higher concentration of unemployment compared to rural mandals. In response, the government plans to implement targeted skill development programmes for those without formal degrees and facilitate employment opportunities, including remote work options, particularly in IT and service sectors. The survey also found that women showed greater enthusiasm for upskilling and working from home, indicating a shift in employment trends and preferences. Officials stated that the findings would serve as a basis for designing job-oriented policies to address local needs and bridge existing skill gaps.

Finance panel chief prays at Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The 16th Finance Commission Chairman, Arvind Panagariya offered prayers to Lord Venkateswara during his visit to the Tirumala temple on Friday.

He was accompanied by Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav and other commission members.

The team was welcomed at Mahadwaram by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Additional EO Venkaiah Chowdary with traditional honours and Vedic chants, according to a TTD press release.

"On behalf of the TTD, we extended a warm spiritual welcome to the Chairman and members as per temple traditions," said a TTD official.



After darshan, the delegation received 'Seshavastram' (sacred garment) and 'VedasiRVachanam' (Vedic blessings) at the Ranganayakula Mandapam, followed by 'Theertha Prasadam' (holy water) and a laminated photo of the deity.

As part of its nationwide tour to all states before submitting its recommendations to the Union government, the 16th Finance Commission is on a four-day visit to Andhra Pradesh, where it held detailed discussions with the state government.

'Octopus' cop done to death

PNS ■ NANDYALA

An Octopus constable was brutally murdered at Paccharla village of Sirivella mandal on Friday.

Police said that Faoq was working as a constable attached to the Mangalagiri Octopus.

The unknown miscreants murdered him three days ago and dumped his body behind bushes at the village. An illicit relationship with a woman is suspected to be the reason for the brutal murder of the constable. The police held a woman in connection with the murder of Octopus constable, it is learnt.



New gynec ward mooted at KGH

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Social Welfare Minister and Vizag in-charge Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy has announced that proposals have been forwarded for the construction of a second gynaecology ward at King George Hospital (KGH).

During a visit to the hospital on Friday, the Minister inspected various wards, interacted with patients, and assessed the quality of medical services being provided. Emphasising the alliance government's focus on improving healthcare for the underprivileged, he said that efforts were being made to ensure that patients at KGH receive comprehensive facilities. "Renovation of the Casualty block is currently underway at a cost of Rs 1 crore," he added.



At a subsequent review meeting with hospital officials, the Minister underscored the urgent need to enhance infrastructure, ensure the uninterrupted supply of emergency medicines, and maintain transparent duty rosters. Expressing concern over poor sanitation in

certain areas, he instructed hospital authorities to step up cleanliness measures and fortify security arrangements.

In a move to create a more patient-friendly environment, the Minister directed officials to establish a women's feeding room and child-friendly sani-

tation facilities near the Outpatient Department (OPD).

To improve administrative efficiency, he ordered the immediate issuance of birth certificates and Aadhaar enrolment for all newborns delivered at the hospital. He also issued a stern warning to staff against accepting bribes from economically disadvantaged patients and recommended the installation of CCTV cameras throughout the premises to bolster accountability and security.

Calling upon medical professionals and staff to contribute towards Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's vision of 'Aarogya Andhra Pradesh' (Healthy Andhra Pradesh), the Minister sought collective efforts to elevate the standard of public health services across the State.

MP takes part in Good Friday procession, carries cross

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Good Friday symbolises the supreme sacrifice made by Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind's sins, said Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni). He participated in special prayers held at the RCM Church in Mulapadu village of Ibrahimpatnam mandal on Friday.

Following the prayers, the MP also took part in the procession, during which he carried the cross, symbolising the path Jesus took to his crucifixion. Speaking on the occasion, he recalled how Christ, even while enduring the agony of carrying the cross and being nailed to it, preached peace and forgiveness. He stressed the importance of following the path shown by Christ, one of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, patience and tolerance. He expressed his prayers for a society where



these values are practiced and upheld by all.

The event was also attended by TDP Mulapadu village president Kaki Nagaraju, Ibrahimpatnam mandal party president Ramineni Raja, TDP State executive secretary Jampala Sitaramaiah, district executive secretary Garikapati Shiva, and Andhra Cricket Association treasurer Dandamudi Srinivas, among others.

Custodial deaths: AMC study flags issues in prison healthcare

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A recent study by the Andhra Medical College (AMC) has highlighted critical shortcomings in prison healthcare, identifying chronic respiratory diseases and delayed medical intervention as leading causes of custodial deaths in the Visakhapatnam region.

Conducted by the Department of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, the study examined 20 custodial deaths reported between 2021 and 2024. Of these, 18 were due to natural causes — lung-related ailments like bronchiectasis, bronchopneumonia, and lobar pneumonia accounting for seven cases. The remaining two deaths

were attributed to suicide, notably without any prior psychiatric history, prompting concerns over the mental health assessment protocols in prisons.

All deceased were male, averaging 44 years in age, with the highest fatalities reported in the 31-40 age group. While 13 inmates died during treatment at hospitals, seven passed away in transit, underscoring critical delays in timely medical response.

The research team comprised Dr. Srinivasa Reddy N, Dr. Krishna Sagar SM, Dr. Mohit Kumar Moses T, Dr. Shiyam Sundar Karunanithy, Dr. Ravi Kumar T, Dr. Mamatha K, and Dr. Kattamreddy Ananth Rupesh.



Their findings, published in the Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, stress the need for urgent reforms.

"Most deaths occurred within 24 hours of hospital admission, pointing to delayed initiation of treatment," the report

stated. The researchers advocated for enhanced prison healthcare infrastructure, regular medical check-ups, and faster hospital referrals.

The study also brought attention to the broader public health implications of overcrowded jails — often breeding grounds for infectious diseases. With frequent transfers and short-term incarcerations, the risk of community transmission remains high.

Referencing a UN report, the study noted that 63 per cent of Indian convicts have a history of substance abuse. It further highlighted the psychological impact of incarceration, including high-risk behaviours stemming from sexual deprivation.

TTD Chairman conducts surprise inspections at Kalyanakatta

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Chairman BR Naidu conducted surprise inspections at the main Kalyanakatta and Nandakam Mini Kalyanakatta, where devotees offer their hair to Venkateswara Swamy.

The Chairman observed the process of hair offerings, and interacted with devotees and received their feedback on the conduct of barbers.

He later instructed the officials to regulate pilgrim crowd

distribution by guiding devotees to less crowded Kalyanakattas during peak times to avoid accumulation and long waiting hours.

The Chairman emphasised the need to maintain cleanliness at all times and directed the staff to perform their duties with a spirit of service, ensuring there is no room for complaints.

TTD Board members Shanta Ram, Naresh Kumar and other officials also participated in the inspection.



NTPC Simhadri conducts baseline survey for Girl Empowerment Mission-2025

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Taking a step forward in its commitment to social inclusion, NTPC Simhadri, in collaboration with Tanvi Consultancy Ltd., conducted the baseline survey for its flagship initiative — Girl Empowerment Mission 2025 (GEM-2025) — on Friday. The programme seeks to uplift and empower girl students from 28 government schools in Parwada mandal, through focused educational and personality development interventions.

The day began with student registrations at Samyukta Function Hall, followed by structured assessment sessions held at Bal Bharti Public School (BBPS). A total of 115 girls were assessed, marking the start of their journey towards inclusion in a four-week residential camp tailored to foster academic growth, leadership qualities, and overall confidence.

"This initiative is about more than just education — it's about creating a foundation for a brighter future for these young girls," said Sameer Sharma, Head

of Projects (HoP), NTPC Simhadri. "We are committed to ensuring that every participant receives the guidance and support they need to grow into strong, independent individuals."

As part of its robust Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, NTPC Simhadri also hosted interactive sessions with the participants' parents to share the vision and structure of GEM-2025. These discussions aimed to strengthen trust, ensure transparency, and build community ownership of the initiative. "Engaging with parents is crucial," said a representative from Tanvi Consultancy Ltd. "Their involvement plays a vital role in reinforcing the values and learning outcomes we aim to deliver through GEM-2025."

Preparations for the residential camp are already underway, with arrangements being made for uniforms, footwear, and personal kits. Through initiatives like GEM-2025, NTPC Simhadri continues to champion girl child empowerment.

TCS set to establish major campus on Rushikonda Hill

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In what could be a major boost to the IT ecosystem in Andhra Pradesh, the State government has initiated steps to allot a significant parcel of land to Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in Visakhapatnam. If the project progresses as envisioned, the third of the four Rushikonda hills in Visakhapatnam may soon earn the moniker "TCS Hill", marking the city's growing appeal to tech giants. The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet recently approved the allocation of 21.6 acres of land on Hill No. 3 to TCS at a symbolic cost of just 99 paise. However, details regarding whether this amount pertains to a lease or an outright transfer are yet to be officially disclosed.

The land, currently managed by the Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC), is part of a 32-acre stretch on the hill, which has been earmarked for IT infrastructure development.

TCS is expected to utilise the allotted land to develop a permanent campus, based on a formal proposal submitted by the company. The remaining 9.5 acres may be offered to other technology firms, according to sources.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a senior government official confirmed the development. "Yes, 21.6 acres have been earmarked for TCS on Hill No. 3. Around two lakh sq. ft. of plug-and-play office space is also available on a lease basis, which TCS can use temporarily while it constructs its own facility. Operations in the leased premises may begin within the next three to four months," the official said.

Industry experts point out that while temporary arrangements can enable quick roll-out, constructing a dedicated IT campus is a long-term process. "Building a tech-ready facility takes time—typically two to three years—owing to strict standards and infrastructure requirements," said an infrastructure consultant.

Govt's aim is to make State fire-accident-free: Anitha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of Fire Services Week, the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Response and Fire Services Department conducted a mock drill at Trendset Mall in Vijayawada on Friday. Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha attended the event as the chief guest and praised the exemplary services rendered by fire personnel during emergencies.

Speaking at the event, Minister Anitha stated that the government's aim is to make the State fire-accident-free. "The mock drill was conducted to demonstrate the measures to be taken in the event of unforeseen fire incidents, especially in malls. These programmes are essential to raise awareness among the public about how to respond during fire emergencies," she said.

Minister Anitha highlighted that Fire Services Week is observed nationwide from April 14-20 in remembrance of the tragic Bombay Dock Explosion on April 14, 1944, in



which 66 fire service personnel lost their lives and 87 others were injured. "These events are held in their memory, and to spread awareness about fire safety under the theme of making India fire-safe by 2025," she added.

She praised fire personnel for their unparalleled commitment and bravery, noting their crucial role during the Vijayawada floods, where over 2,000 homes and roads were cleaned using 150 fire engines. "Since the new coalition gov-

ernment took office, ₹250 crore has been allocated for the modernisation of the Fire Department," the Minister said.

Highlighting efforts to improve infrastructure, she revealed that advanced vehicles have been procured, including three specialised fire engines from Japan. Additionally, 190 new fire vehicles have been acquired to strengthen the department's response capabilities. The Minister stressed the use of

modern technology to prevent fire accidents and announced steps to address the shortage of fire personnel. New fire stations will be established in locations that currently lack facilities.

During the drill, a live demonstration on how to control a cylinder fire was showcased.

Women volunteers were guided on how to calmly extinguish a gas fire using a wet cloth, which drew much appreciation from the public. The use of the newly acquired turntable vehicle in high-rise fire simulation, along with various other fire safety methods, was also demonstrated.

MLA Gadde Rammohan Rao also attended the event and applauded the fire personnel for their calm and effective handling of fire emergencies. Fire Services Director Murali Mohan, Additional Directors G Srinivasulu and T Uday Kumar, and Regional Fire Officer E Swamy were among the officials who participated in the event.

Union Minister Joshi inspects renewable energy project site



PNS ■ KURNOOL

Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Pralhad Joshi, inspected the site of the Greenko Integrated Renewable Energy Project here on Friday. Officials briefed him on the progress of the project.

Speaking to the media later, the Union Minister assured that the Greenko Renewable Energy Project would be completed within six months and dedicated to the nation. He described the renewable energy initiative, being established at Pinnapuram in Orvakal mandal, as a boon to the region.

Recalling the situation a decade ago, the Minister noted that over 18,700 villages in the country lacked electricity. However, after the Narendra Modi-led government came to power, electricity was provided to all villages.

Highlighting recent initiatives, Joshi said, "The Modi-led Central Government has launched the 'PM Surya Ghar' scheme to provide solar energy to every household, thereby helping to reduce electricity bills." He also endorsed wind energy as a viable alternative to solar power.

Inter student drowns in water pit

PNS ■ NELLORE

A 17-year-old Intermediate student, Srivalli, accidentally fell into a water pit and drowned at Lakshimpuram village in Varadaiahpalem mandal on Friday.

According to the police, Srivalli had taken a herd of sheep to graze in their agricultural field. A deep pit had been dug in the field under the NREGA scheme. She is believed to have accidentally slipped and fallen into the pit, which was filled with water.

Her parents, who began searching for her when she did not return, later found her body floating in the water. They told the media that as the college had declared holidays, Srivalli had been helping with agricultural work and tending to their sheep.

The police have registered a case and recovered the body from the pit. A pall of gloom descended on the village following the tragic incident.

TDP Satyavedu MLA Koneti Adimulam visited the village and consoled the grieving family. She assured them of all possible support.

Successive govts neglected Rayalaseema, says RSSS

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Rayalaseema Saaguneeti Sadhana Samiti (RSSS) president Bojja Dasaratharami Reddy has alleged that successive governments have neglected the development of the Rayalaseema region. He announced that a massive public meeting would be organised on May 31 to highlight the long-pending issues of the region.

Speaking to the media here on Friday, Bojja Dasaratharami Reddy said the entire Rayalaseema region, along with Nellore and Prakasam districts, continued to remain backward even after the bifurcation of the State, due to the apathetic attitude of successive governments.

"The Rayalaseema Saaguneeti Sadhana Samiti has decided to conduct a massive public meeting at Siddeswaram on May 31 to bring attention to the unresolved issues of the region, including the long-pending irrigation projects and the prevailing backwardness," he said, and appealed to the people to make the meeting a grand success.

He stated that the region continues to face acute drinking water and irrigation water shortages, and alleged that successive governments had



failed to address these problems effectively. He further claimed that the then government had diverted Krishna river water to coastal Andhra districts during 2015-16, resulting in heavy crop losses for farmers in Rayalaseema.

He said foundation stones were laid for the Gundrevula reservoir, Vedavathi lift scheme, and modernisation of the RDS right canal, but the works remain incomplete. The government had also approved the widening of the Handri-Neeva main canal, but the works are progressing at a snail's pace, he added.

Reddy pointed out that even though the government had admitted in the Assembly that crops in three lakh acres would be submerged if the embankment of the Gorakallu reservoir were breached, no measures had been taken to strengthen it.

He criticised the government for failing to complete the

Galeru-Nagari, Handri-Neeva, and Veligonda projects, which should have been completed under the Reorganisation Act of 2014. He lamented that with the current pace and meagre budgetary allocations, the projects would not be completed even after 20 years.

Accusing the Naidu-led government of bias, he said, "Funds are not being released for Rayalaseema projects, while thousands of crores have been sanctioned for the development of Amaravati." He recalled that the previous government had claimed that once the Pattiseema Lift Scheme was completed, Krishna water could be diverted to Rayalaseema. "Then why is water still not being released from the Srisailem project to Rayalaseema?" he questioned.

Bojja Dasaratharami Reddy warned the Naidu-led government against hoodwinking the people of Rayalaseema once again.

Archaeologist: 1518 CE inscription of Sri Krishnadevaraya craves for attention

Inscription originally comprised 55 lines in Telugu, but currently only 19 lines are visible

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A stone inscription dating back to 1518 CE, belonging to the illustrious Vijayanagara Emperor Sri Krishnadevaraya, is facing the threat of being lost to time as it continues to sink into the ground at Durgi, a mandal headquarters in Palnadu district. The condition of the inscription was brought to light by Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, noted archaeologist and CEO of Pleach India Foundation.

The issue came to light after Ch Srinivasacharya, a local sculptor, informed this to Dr Reddy, who subsequently inspected the site on Friday. The inscription, located within the Vankeswara Temple premises, is dated 22nd November, 1518 CE and was issued by Timmapa Nayanam, the door keeper of Emperor Krishnadevaraya. It records the donation of Gundala village, situated in the fields of Durgi and falling under the Nagarjunakonda sima, for the anga, ranga bhogas and Amritapadi (offerings and festivals) of the deities Vireswara and Vankeswara.

Dr Reddy noted that the inscription originally comprised 55 lines in Telugu language and script, but currently only 19 lines are visible, while the remaining 36 lines have become illegible due to the



stone slab gradually sinking into the ground.

Highlighting the historical and cultural importance of the artifact, Dr Sivanagi Reddy has made a heartfelt appeal to the local residents of Durgi, as well as the priests and authorities of the Vankeswara Temple, urging them to preserve the inscription. He recommended that the

slab be carefully excavated, mounted on a pedestal and its content be displayed on signage for the benefit of researchers, historians, and future generations.

This rare inscription, linked to one of South India's greatest emperors, serves as a valuable piece of regional history and deserves immediate conservation efforts to prevent its permanent loss.



Six injured as private bus rams lorry

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

As many as six persons were injured when a private travel bus rammed into a lorry on the Gonipet bridge along the National Highway near Penukonda on Friday.

The private bus was en route to Bengaluru from Hyderabad when the accident occurred. According to reports, the wheat-laden lorry came to a sudden halt, resulting in the bus crashing into its rear.

The injured passengers were initially admitted to the Government Hospital in

Penukonda. However, as their condition turned serious, they were shifted to a private hospital in Bengaluru for further treatment. The front portion of the bus sustained severe damage in the collision.

Passengers told the media that the bus was speeding at the time of the incident and the driver was attempting to overtake the lorry when the mishap occurred.

Police have registered a case and cleared the wreckage to ease traffic on the busy Hyderabad-Bengaluru highway.

Leopard death: Villagers gherao forest officials

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI

Villagers of Ponnetipalem gheraoed forest officials who had visited the area to conduct an inquiry into the death of a leopard, which had become trapped in a fence erected by farmers to protect their crops from wild boars.

Chief Conservator of Forests Chalapathi Rao, along with forest official Selvam and local police, visited Konnetipalem village in Madanapalle mandal to investigate the death of a female leopard. They inspected nearby water bodies and forested areas where leopards are known to roam.

However, as the officials were returning, a large group of villagers blocked their convoy and raised slogans demanding justice. A brief scuffle ensued between the villagers and the police, leading to mild tension.

The villagers alleged that three local farmers—Venkata Ramana Reddy, Reddeppa Reddy, and Gangadhar—were arrested in connection with the leopard's death. They claimed that forest officials were informed at 7 a.m. on Wednesday that a leopard had become stuck in a fence in the village, but they only arrived around 9 a.m. Due to this delay, the leopard, which was struggling to free itself, reportedly died before officials could

take action. The villagers expressed strong objection to the swift arrests of the farmers, arguing that the leopard's death was a result of official negligence rather than any deliberate act. They later staged a dharna in front of the Deputy Conservator of Forests' office in Madanapalle.

It may be noted that the two-year-old leopard became trapped in a fence erected to deter wild boars. Forest officials reportedly failed to rescue the animal in time, and it died after six hours of struggle. A post-mortem examination revealed that the leopard was gravid and carrying two foetuses.



Revant must take responsibility if Bengal-like events take place in TG: Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Revant Reddy government is providing financial support to the public meeting that the Majlis is holding in Hyderabad against the Waqf Board Amendment Bill, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said.

He said that under the pretext of meetings, gatherings and protests, conspiracies are being made to start riots. He expressed concern that a Bengal-like situation might arise in Hyderabad if this continues and warned that immediate steps must be taken to prevent that. Otherwise, the Revant Government will have to bear the consequences, he added.

"Revant Reddy should take responsibility if West Bengal-like conditions occur in Telangana as the AIMIM is protesting against the Waqf Bill with Revant Reddy's financial support," Sanjay said.

Addressing the media at the state BJP office here on Friday, Sanjay said, "According to the Central Waqf Council (CWC), there are over eight lakh acres of Waqf properties in the country, worth more than Rs 10 lakh crore. These generate over Rs 12,000 crore annually. Where is that money going? No records. No auditing. Poor Muslims do not gain anything from that. The AIMIM leaders and the Owaisi family are pocketing that wealth. Even Waqf properties are being used by them," Sanjay said.



"In Tamil Nadu alone, a High Court probe found that Waqf properties worth Rs 2,000 crore were encroached. Alarmingly, they are claiming even symbols of the freedom struggle, temples, and Gurudwara lands as Waqf properties. In Trichy's Tiruchendur and Kadlakurichi villages, they claimed 500-year-old Chandra Shekhara Temple lands. In Haryana's Jatana, they grabbed Gurudwara land. In Karnataka and Kerala, even the lands of Lingayat and Christian fishermen are being claimed as Waqf. Is this justice?" Sanjay said.

"Should we stay silent just because it's done under the Waqf Board's name? If rich AIMIM leaders are grabbing assets and not helping poor Muslims, should we keep quiet? In Telangana, there are 77,000 acres of Waqf land. Only 20% (16,000 acres) are under dargahs and mosques. The remaining 80% are illegally occupied by people like Owaisi. They are running hospitals, offices, businesses and getting richer. Have they ever helped poor Muslims? Do they

provide free treatment in their hospitals?" Sanjay said.

"Do they think Waqf properties are their grandfather's property? Not even a square yard is accessible to poor Muslims. Has even a single poor Muslim girl been married using Waqf income? Many Waqf land cases are lost because the Congress, the BRS, and AIMIM leaders are involved," he said.

"Now they are spreading the lie that the new Central law will snatch ownership rights. Waqf assets in TG are worth Rs 5 lakh crore. Despite such massive wealth and income, there are no records or benefits for poor Muslims," he added.

Over 4,000 court cases are pending regarding Waqf land disputes. The Waqf Board is wilfully delaying cases by not even filing counter-affidavits. During the Dharani Portal process, thousands of acres were transferred, Sanjay said.

"When we question all this, people start shouting, 'Are Hindus interfering in Waqf? Tell us, has even one poor Muslim's life been improved with Waqf revenue? You've set up the Hyderabad Waqf Board HQ here, right? Do you have the guts to survey Waqf assets? Can you investigate how many lands were encroached on? How much income is generated annually from Waqf lands? Where is the money going? How much is used for welfare? If Congress has sincerity, let it release a white paper on all this," he said.

Uphold ethics and accuracy, media told

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Retired assistant director of Information and Public Relations, ADV Kameswara Rao, urged journalists to uphold ethics and accuracy while reporting news.

He was addressing a gathering organised by the Andhra Pradesh Journalists Union (APJU) for Print and Electronic Media at the Chamber of Commerce hall here on Friday, where elections were held for new office-bearers of the Amaravati Capital Region unit.

Kameswara Rao advised journalists to make wise use of modern technology in the field and cautioned them against filing reports based on assumptions or rumours. "Every news item must be verified and filed with utmost accuracy," he stressed.

APJU State general secretary Ch. Purnachandra Rao announced the unanimous election of Pokkururi Subba Rao, popularly known as Geetha Subba Rao, as President of the APJU Andhra Pradesh Capital Region. Senior journalist K. Padmavati was elected Vice-President, B. Yamini Krishna as General Secretary, and V. Durga Prasad as Treasurer.

MV Ramesh, Vijaya Jyothi, Kameswara Rao, M. Gopichand, and Babu G were elected as executive members. High Court advocate K. Ramachandra Murthy offered legal support to the union, while senior auditor Potthukuchi Shivarama Krishna agreed to provide financial guidance.

ACROSS THE STATES



Sharp rise in land value will prompt probe: BJP

BJP national general secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Arun Singh on Friday said Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra is being probed because of 'sharp rise' in value of land deals. The Enforcement Directorate recorded the statement of Vadra (56), the businessman husband of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, 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. The latest probe against Vadra is linked to a land deal in Haryana's Manesar-Shikohpur (now sector 83) in Gurugram. The deal of February 2008 was done by a company named Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd, where Vadra was a director earlier. It purchased a 3.5 acre of land in Shikohpur at a price of Rs 7.5 crore and then sold it to realty major DLF for Rs 58 crore in 2012.



Punjab Police seizes heroin, arms in narco-terror case

Punjab Police have recovered a hand grenade, heroin, some arms and ammunition during the ongoing investigation in a narco-terror case linked to a USA-based gangster, officials said Friday. Punjab's Director General of Police, Gaurav Yadav in an on X said that the recovery was made on the disclosure of Baljinder Singh, one of the two accused already arrested in FIR dated April 11, registered at Ramdas Police Station under the provisions of the Arms Act and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. "In a major breakthrough, Amritsar Rural Police recovers a hand grenade, 183 grams of heroin, and arms & ammunition during the ongoing investigation in a narco-terror case linked to #USA-based gangster Happy Passion," Yadav posted on X. Earlier, police had recovered a pistol and 523 grams of heroin on the disclosure of co-accused Palwinder Singh alias Pala, who had attempted to fire at the police team and sustained injuries in retaliatory action, he said.



Hospitals asked to carry out Ayushman Bharat Yojana

The Delhi Health Department has directed more than 100 hospitals to implement the Ayushman Bharat Yojana at the earliest, an official source said. The previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government did not implement the BJP-led NDA government's flagship healthcare scheme in the national capital. The source said the department has issued an advisory for the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana in 110 hospitals. As part of the initiative, a copy of the contract letter has been sent to these hospitals to enter into an agreement with the Delhi government. Along with this, the guidelines for implementation have also been shared with all the associated hospitals. The source said the hospitals have been asked to sign the agreement as soon as possible so that the beneficiaries of Ayushman Yojana do not face any problems in availing healthcare services. The BJP-led Delhi government inked an MoU with the Centre on April 5 to implement the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) in the city.

'Students tend to go against US laws will face consequences'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Students attempting to go against US laws will face the consequences, including deportation, the country's state department has warned.

In a virtual interview with PTI, US Department of State spokesperson Margaret MacLeod said the Trump administration was rigorously enforcing immigration laws, including the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Alien Registration Act.

"If you follow the law, America offers opportunities. But those who violate the law will face the consequences," MacLeod told PTI Videos on a question related to the issues faced by Indian students in various US universities.

Indian students in the US are grappling with a growing threat of deportation as authorities cancel F-1 visas over a range of issues -- from participation in pro-Palestinian protests to minor legal infractions.

During his weekly press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We are aware that several Indian students have received communication from the US government regarding their F-1 visa status, which happens to be the student visa. We are looking into the matter. Our embassy and consulates, they



are in touch with the students to provide support."

Jaiswal was responding to a question on several Indian students receiving communications from US authorities under the Trump administration on possible revocation of their visas.

While MacLeod did not mention specific cases, she emphasised that adherence to US legal and visa requirements was essential to avoid penalties.

On the broader issue of illegal immigration, MacLeod underscored the Trump administration's rigorous enforcement of immigration laws. "The US government is committed to securing its borders and will not welcome those who enter by breaking our laws."

MacLeod urged individuals residing in the US illegally, including relatives of Indian families, to voluntarily return to their home countries.

Fetters on powers of Guvs, no one above law: Surjewala

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Randeep Surjewala on Friday said the Supreme Court judgement putting constitutional fetters on the powers of governors and the president is timely, accurate and courageous as no one is above the country's law or the Constitution.

In a post on X, he disagreed with Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar's remarks on the judiciary and said the President of India must come forward and salute the supremacy of the Constitution above all else.

"I hold the Hon'ble Vice President of India in great esteem, both for his wisdom and eloquence, but I respectfully disagree with his formulation. The Supreme Court judgement putting Constitutional fetters on the power of governors and the President of India is timely, accurate, courageous and corrects the notion that 'those holding high offices are above any fetters or imposition of checks and balances in exercise of their powers,'" he said in his post.

Surjewala, who is a Congress general secretary and in-charge for Karnataka, said as a citizen, a student of law and a parliamentarian, his view is that in



our democracy, only the Constitution is supreme and most elevated.

"No office, be it of the president or the prime minister or governor, is so elevated as to be above the fetters of Constitutional propriety.

"Our democracy is founded upon the fundamental principle of 'will of people' expressed through elected Parliament and Legislatures. Hence, the highest bodies are Parliament and Legislatures. Even their decisions and law-making powers are subject to 'judicial review' by courts on the touchstone of Constitutionality," he

noted.

The Congress leader asked why the actions of governors and the president should not be subjected to the same review, more so when the governors are mere nominees of the central government and the president is elected by the same Parliament and legislatures. "Can the president be said to have unilateral or unchecked power to hold on to giving assent to the laws passed by Parliament or legislatures (vested by the Constitution to enact laws by majority mandate) for indefinite periods?"

nors were to have such power, it will go against the very tenets of democracy, for the elected Parliament and legislatures will be rendered powerless and helpless," he said.

Surjewala said the Constitution would never confer such unbridled powers on anyone, including the president.

"The office one holds, however high or elevated it may be, doesn't make the office immune to Constitutional control and adherence. In fact, the higher the office, the higher the responsibility to be fair, transparent and accountable," he asserted.

Judicial independence, he said, is indeed a "nuclear missile" to strike at injustice, arbitrariness, inequity, usurpation and assumption of power to subvert the Constitution and to defend the rights of people against arbitrary actions and decisions of those in power.

"If the last door of justice was to close for ordinary people and justice becomes subservient to or gets dictated by the powers that are, democracy will die and dictatorship will prevail," he said.

Surjewala said no one is above the law or the Constitution, be it the president or any other authority.

Indian astronaut Shukla set for space travel next month

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla is set to travel to the International Space Station next month as part of an Axiom-4 mission, four decades after Rakesh Sharma's iconic spaceflight onboard Russia's Soyuz spacecraft, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Friday.

Singh made the remarks after reviewing the work of the Department of Space and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) here.

"Group Captain Shukla's journey is more than just a flight -- it's a signal that India is stepping boldly into a new era of space exploration," Singh said. ISRO Chairman V Narayanan made a presentation on various upcoming space missions.

ISRO is set to launch the NISAR satellite -- developed jointly with NASA -- in June on board the GSLV-Mark 2 rocket, Singh said, adding that in July the space agency will put in orbit BlueBird Block-2 satellites of US-based AST SpaceMobile Inc. using the heavy-lift LVM-3 rocket.



Singh said Group Captain Shukla's mission, scheduled for May, marks a milestone in India's expanding international space collaborations.

A decorated test pilot with the Indian Air Force, Group Captain Shukla was shortlisted under ISRO's Human Spaceflight Program and is among the top contenders for the Gaganyaan mission.

His journey aboard the Axiom-4 mission is expected to provide critical hands-on experience in spaceflight operations, launch protocols, microgravity adaptation, and emergency preparedness -- all essential for India's crewed space ambitions, an official statement said.

"What sets Shukla's mission

apart is its strategic importance.

Unlike the symbolic undertones of India's first human spaceflight, this time the focus is on operational readiness and global integration," it said.

The statement said Shukla's participation underscores India's growing engagement with public-private international partnerships in space and its resolve to emerge as a serious contender in human space exploration.

Singh said the collaboration with international partners and the strategic momentum of projects like Gaganyaan reflect India's commitment to becoming a global leader in space technology.

DGCA orders probe into death of Air India Express pilot

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Aviation watchdog DGCA has ordered a detailed investigation into the circumstances that led to the recent death of an Air India Express pilot, including checking the medical history of the deceased crew member and examining the existing guidelines to deal with such emergencies.

The Air India Express pilot, who was the first officer, died due to a sudden cardiac arrest while operating the flight IX1153 from Srinagar to Delhi on April 9. Ordering the probe, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) investigation team will check whether the crew reported the sickness to the Air Traffic Controller (ATC) while in air and if so, whether the ATC initiated action appropriately.



Motion to combat anti-Hindu prejudice in Scottish Parl

PNS ■ LONDON

A member of the Scottish Parliament has tabled a motion in the House commending the work of a Glasgow-based Gandhian society that has drafted a report that highlights the "rising levels of prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation" of Hindus in Scotland.

Ash Regan, an Alba Party Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) representing Edinburgh Eastern, tabled the motion based on the report by the charity Gandhian Peace Society last week. Such motions are intended to draw attention to issues of importance and concern. The report 'Hinduphobia in Scotland' was presented to the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group on Challenging Racial and

Religious Prejudice in February by the society promoting Gandhian principles of peace, non-violence and harmony.

"That the Parliament commends the work of the Gandhian Peace Society in addressing prejudice against the Hindu community in Scotland," reads Regan's motion entitled 'Gandhian Peace Society's Report to Address Prejudice Against Scotland's Hindu Community'.

"(It) highlights rising levels of prejudice, discrimination and marginalisation experienced by members of Scotland's Hindu community; acknowledges the importance of their research, advocacy and public engagement in raising awareness and advancing interfaith dialogue, social cohesion and mutual respect across Scotland's diverse communities," it states.

Congress team meets Omar, discusses political situation

PNS ■ JAMMU

A high-level Congress team led by national general secretary Syed Naseer Hussain on Friday called on Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah here and discussed the current political landscape in the Union Territory.

Flanked by AICC general secretary G A Mir and Jammu and Kashmir Congress chief Tariq Hameed Karra, the Rajya Sabha MP met Abdullah at his residence, the party leaders said.

They were engaged in a productive meeting with the chief minister, they said.

"The discussion focused on the INDIA



alliance and the current political landscape in Jammu and Kashmir, highlighting collaborative efforts and the importance of addressing contemporary challenges in the region," a senior leader said.

Use of cryptocurrency in narco dealings flayed

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

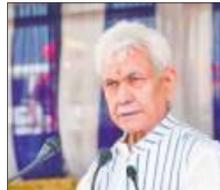
Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Friday said cryptocurrency is being used in narco dealings as the dark web is emerging as the new marketplace for drug trade.

Speaking at the passing out parade at Police Training School, Manigam, in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district, Sinha said technology is changing at a very rapid pace and the use of new technology outside the training schools, and upgradation of skills to tackle the challenges put up by enemies are the need of the hour.

"The threat of drug smuggling has not remained conventional now. Smugglers and narco-terrorists are changing their ways of communication every day. Dark web is emerging as the new marketplace for drug trade, and cryptocurrency is being used in place of conventional transactions," Sinha said.

The LG said the misuse of new technologies has expanded organised crime and increased the number of cyber-crime incidents as well.

"In such a situation, you have to implement a policy of continuous innovation to remain a step ahead of the criminals. I hope the J-K Police



force is dedicated and ready to tackle all these challenges," he said, assuring that the J-K administration and the central government stand with the security forces with full might.

Appreciating the security forces for curbing terror incidents in Kashmir to a large extent, Sinha said attempts were being made to revive terrorism in the Jammu region.

"In the last few years, J-K Police, Army and other security forces have succeeded to a large extent in controlling terrorism in the Kashmir valley. Attempts are being made to revive terrorism in the Jammu region, which was peaceful in comparison. I have faith in J-K Police. It is the collective resolve of J-K Police and other security forces to make both Jammu and Kashmir regions terror-free," he said.

The LG said he was sure the way the security forces succeeded in putting brakes on terror incidents in the Kashmir valley, "you will repeat that

resolve in Jammu".

"All the agencies have to come together as a strong team to take a resolve to uproot the neighbouring country's conspiracy," he added.

He asserted that the Jammu and Kashmir Police has to be made a future-ready police force which is equipped technologically, and capable of tackling emerging challenges of terrorism and crime.

"J-K Police is very different from other forces in the country because it has a huge responsibility. On one hand, our brave soldiers face terrorism, and on the other, they have the responsibility to maintain law and order and help in creating a conducive atmosphere for development in J-K," he said.

In the last few years, Sinha said, the performance of Jammu and Kashmir Police in real-time intelligence sharing and swift response has been appreciable.

"I hope the combination of special strategy, advanced technology, and specific intelligence will put the last nail in the coffin of terrorism and its whole support system. In future, the success of the anti-terror operations and (maintenance of) law and order missions will depend on the effective use of the technology," he added.

Sibal criticises Dhankhar's remarks on judiciary

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha member Kapil Sibal slammed Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday for questioning the judiciary over the timeline for the president to take decisions, saying this is "unconstitutional" and he had never seen any Rajya Sabha chairman make "political statements" of this nature.

A day after Dhankhar used strong words against the judiciary, Sibal asserted that the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman remain equidistant between the opposition and the ruling party, and cannot be the "spokesperson of the party".

"Everyone knows that the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair is in between. He or she is the



Speaker of the House, not the speaker of one party. They also don't vote, they only vote when there is a tie. The same is with the upper house. You are equidistant between the opposition and the ruling party," the senior advocate said at a press conference here.

"Everything you say must be

equidistant. No speaker can be the spokesperson of a party. I don't say that he (Dhankhar) is but no speaker in principle can be the spokesperson of any party. If it appears so then the dignity of the chair is lowered," Sibal asserted.

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 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.

He also described Article 142, which grants plenary pow-

ers to the Supreme Court, as a "nuclear missile against democratic forces available to the judiciary 24x7".

Slamming Dhankhar for his remarks, Sibal said, "If you give such statements it will look as if judiciary is being taught a lesson. It is not neutral and not constitutional."

The judiciary should not be attacked in this manner by the executive, especially two ministers -- Arjun Ram Meghwal and Kiren Rijju -- and the chairman of the house, as the judiciary cannot defend itself.

"Then the polity must defend the judiciary. Independence of the judiciary is fundamental to democracy in the country. What is being done is unconstitutional," he said.

Editor's TAKE

Searing Summer, Soaking Monsoon

IMD forecasts an above-average monsoon – a silver lining with a dark cloud: floods

As India braces for a searing summer, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has offered a glimmer of hope: this year's southwest monsoon is expected to bring above-normal rainfall, with the country likely to receive 105 per cent of the long-period average. While this forecast may bring a sigh of relief to the agricultural sector and rural economy, it also comes with a note of caution – because with abundant rain often comes devastating floods.

For a country where nearly 60 per cent of agriculture is rain-fed, the monsoon is nothing short of a lifeline. A good monsoon translates to better crop yields, improved groundwater recharge, replenished reservoirs, and stable food prices. It plays a critical role in the livelihoods of millions, especially in rural India, and drives growth in allied sectors like food processing, transportation, and retail. This year's monsoon is predicted to benefit regions like Marathwada and parts of Telangana – areas that have historically suffered from water scarcity. States like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh are also expected to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, offering much-needed respite for farmers and boosting kharif crop prospects.

Yet, the same monsoon that nourishes our farms can wreak havoc on our homes and cities. Floods are a recurring nightmare, leading to massive loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of communities. Year after year, cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Patna, and Guwahati come to a standstill due to waterlogging and poor urban drainage systems. Rural regions are not spared either. Unregulated riverbanks, deforestation, and encroachments worsen the impact of heavy rainfall. Low-lying districts near rivers often face catastrophic flash floods and landslides.

As the IMD also warns of below-normal rainfall in parts of Tamil Nadu and the Northeast, the risk of regional imbalances – where some areas drown while others dry – becomes very real. It is time we stopped treating floods as a surprise and started seeing them as an annual certainty.

Projects like river interlinking can redistribute excess water from flood-prone regions to drought-hit areas. While controversial and logistically complex, such initiatives, if executed sustainably, could balance water distribution across states. Constructing more check dams, especially in vulnerable areas, and upgrading existing ones with modern sensors can help manage water flow during peak rainfall. However, dams should be operated scientifically, with real-time data guiding water release schedules.

IMD's forecasting has improved significantly, but local authorities must act promptly on early warnings. Investments in community awareness and disaster response training can save countless lives. Besides, natural buffers like forests and wetlands absorb excess rainwater and reduce runoff. Reviving these ecosystems will go a long way in reducing the impact of flash floods. Our cities need a radical revamp of their drainage systems. Rainwater harvesting should be made mandatory in urban planning, and old stormwater drains must be widened, cleared, and maintained regularly. A lot of talk has gone down the drain to make smart cities. It is time that those cities are made functional at least. Providing efficient drainage systems is not rocket science. If Harappan people could do it, we can do it too.

The monsoon, India's annual gamble with nature, holds immense power, both to nurture and to destroy. As IMD's forecast signals a wet season ahead, it's time to plan not just for reaping its bounty but for mitigating its fury. We cannot stop the rain, but we can – and must – learn to live better with it. Let us not treat monsoon as a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon – it occurs every year and thus is no surprise. All we need is planning rather than acting shocked when the country submerges and nobody has any clue why that happened.

Leaderspeak

There is a directive to the President by a recent judgement. 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... So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament, and absolutely have no accountability because law of the land does not apply to them.

JAGDEEP DHANKAD, VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

Once hailed for secularism and cultural vibrancy, Bangladesh now finds itself at a critical crossroads. Islamist fundamentalist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami are regaining prominence, with alarming implications

Is Bangladesh moving once again towards becoming a cradle of Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism? Fundamentalism does not always mean terrorism, but it does create a discourse that facilitates the rise of extremism through the promotion of intolerance, leading to hatred towards those considered infidels and violence against them. Now, is Islamist fundamentalism waxing in Bangladesh? One needs to ask this because fundamentalist organisations like the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) and Hefazat-e-Islam (Hefazat) are having a ball. The Jamaat had fully cooperated with the Pakistani Army during the liberation war of 1971 and was complicit in the latter's mass murders, rapes and other atrocities. Besides, its members and leaders – as well as those of affiliated bodies like Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Razakars – perpetrated unspeakable atrocities themselves. On 1 August 2013, Bangladesh's High Court had cancelled its registration as a political party, upholding a writ petition by an organisation called the Tariqat Federation, saying that the Jamaat was a religion-based political party which did not believe in Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. It further claimed that the country's Representation of People Order did not allow the registration of a communal outfit as a political party.

The High Court had also observed that the Jamaat had no moral right to be in the country's political arena, given the atrocities it had perpetrated during the liberation war. Following the order, Bangladesh's Election Commission issued a gazette notification on 28 October 2018, cancelling the party's registration. On 19 November 2023, Bangladesh's Supreme Court dismissed the Jamaat's appeal against the High Court's verdict, as its counsels did not appear at the hearing. As a result of the High Court's order, the Jamaat could not participate in the parliamentary elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024. Besides, four of its top leaders – Abdul Quader Mollah, Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Motiur Rahman Nizami – were executed, and several others given long prison terms, following convictions in cases related to genocide and war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunals established in 2010 and 2012 under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, as amended in 2009. Finally, Sheikh Hasina's government banned the Jamaat and its students' organisation, Islami Chhatra Shibir (Shibir), on 1 August 2025 under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009. The grounds cited were



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

their responsibility for genocide and crimes against humanity during the Liberation War of 1971, and involvement in terrorist activities. On 28 August 2024, the Bangladesh interim government, headed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, reversed the order, saying that there was no proof that the Jamaat and the Shibir were involved in terrorist activities. On 23 October 2024, the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court restored the Jamaat's appeal, which the Supreme Court had rejected on 19 November 2023.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat is now politically fully active – holding meetings, demonstrations, meetings with other parties and foreign diplomats, and projecting itself as a major force to be reckoned with in the forthcoming elections, whenever they are held. Its ideology is quite clear. Its website says, "Jamaat performs as a spiritual party as spiritual life is important in Islam. Jamaat performs in political arena because Islamic law can't be implemented without political force." The Hefazat-e-Islam was formed in 2010 to oppose the Awami League government's women's development policy, promising women equal rights to property. It has considerable power to mobilise in the streets. Its intensely anti-India orientation was reflected in its violent protests against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on 26

March 2021. Thirteen persons were killed and scores injured in clashes between its supporters and members of the security forces and Awami League's supporters. The Hefazat is a hard-core Islamist organisation. This is clear from its 13-point charter of demands in support of which it held a rally in Dhaka on 5–6 May 2013. The Hefazat's 13-point programme includes the enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty; exemplary punishment to all bloggers and others who "insult Islam"; cancellation of Bangladesh's policy for women's development; bans on the erection of sculptures in public places, the mixing of men and women in public, candlelight vigils, and "shameless behaviour and dresses"; besides declaring Ahmadiyas as "non-Muslims." Nadia Sarmin, covering its rally for ETV, was mercilessly beaten for daring to be a woman "in a men only" event. Grievously injured, she was rescued by other journalists.

The rally in May was extremely violent. A BBC report dated 6 May 2013 cites one witness as saying that the demonstrators "were very aggressive, some people were throwing stones and the situation quickly become violent". The interim government has close and warm relations with the Hefazat. It has lifted the ban on the organisation. The Adviser for Religious Affairs, AFM Khalid Hossain, is the latter's Nayeb-e-Amir. Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus had a long and cordial meeting on 31 August 2024 with Mamunul Haque, the organisation's head. The Hefazat is holding rallies and processions all over the country. Doubtless, neither the Jamaat nor the Hefazat has been resorting to terrorist violence. Their elevated salience, however, gives a certain respectability to fun-

damentalist doctrines and encourages other fundamentalist organisations to flex their muscles. One of their principal targets is Bangladesh's moderate and liberal ethos – shaped by its rich literary and philosophical heritage, shaped by Rabindranath Tagore and the country's highly talented writers, poets and performing artists. A spiritual leader, philosopher, mystic poet and social reformer, Lalou articulated a weltanschauung, which encompassed the essence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism, rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed, and opposed theological conflicts and racism. A gathering of sadhus and a Lalou fair was to be hosted in Madya Narsingpur, Kashipur Union Parishad in Narayanganj, on 22 November 2024.

The district administration, however, ordered its cancellation. According to a report in The Daily Star (23 November 2024), Hefazat-e-Islam leader Maulana Abdul Auwal had warned the administration to stop the event or face intervention by protesters. The celebration of Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the annual Bengali calendar, has been an important part of Bangladesh's cultural scenario. However, a stage constructed for the purpose was vandalised on 13 April 2025 in Chittagong city. Earlier, the district administration had permitted the organisers to hold the celebrations but reduced the timings and requested them not to include any song that would be deemed "controversial."

In Dhaka, a theatre group was all set to stage a play titled Shesher Kobita on 13 and 14 April. The authorities of the auditorium concerned, however, decided to cancel the programme on the 13th after receiving a threatening letter from a mob. The police offered protection following a public outcry. The show scheduled for 13 April was shifted to 15 April. Earlier, on 10 February 2025, a group calling itself "Towhidi Janata" attacked a publishing house's stall at Bangladesh's celebrated Amar Ekushe Boimela for displaying Taslima Nasrin's books. Instead of taking action against the attackers, police shut down the stall and detained the publisher, Shatabdi Bobo, at the fair's control room. Whither Bangladesh?

(The author is the Consulting Editor of The Pioneer. Views are personal)

Inside the Mind of a Champion

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

What is the difference between the brain and the mind? While the brain is a vital physical organ within our body, the mind is the seat of consciousness – it is where thoughts, feelings, and emotions arise. And it is the mind, not just the body, that defines the greatness of an athlete. "On your marks, set, go!" – with a gunshot, the world watches as Usain Bolt blazes down the track. In the span of a few electrifying seconds, he leaves behind the competition and makes history.

What sets these titans apart from the rest? Beyond talent and training, it is the strength of their minds – their inner power – that elevates them. Their minds are like that of Ajjatashtru, a Sanskrit term for one who has no enemies, at peace with oneself and the world. This mental clarity and focus distinguish champions from others who falter under pressure or accept mediocrity as the norm. Why do many athletes freeze on the world stage?

Why do some settle for simply qualifying, for placing somewhere between fourth and tenth, rather than striving for the podium? It's not just physical preparation that separates winners from the rest – it's the mind. The mental resilience to endure, to persevere, and to focus with unflinching determination is what produces Olympic champions. We can draw

inspiration from Arjuna, the legendary archer of the Mahabharata, whose single-minded focus, humility, and faith in his mentor Dronacharya and friend Lord Krishna made him peerless.

Arjuna was not born a master; he became one by surrendering ego, trusting his training, and silencing doubt. His mind was his greatest ally – free from clutter, fear, and distraction. He truly embodied the spirit of Ajjatashtru. Contrast that with India's disappointing performance at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Despite fielding the largest contingent in our history, we finished 71st in the medal tally. The hunger to win, to dominate, or even to express the agony of defeat, often seems missing. The spirit of Citius, Altius, Fortius – faster, higher, stronger – is diminished when we don't instill in athletes the burning desire to climb the podium draped in the tricolour, national anthem playing, igniting pride across the country. A victory at the Olympics is not just personal – it has national significance. It inspires, uplifts, and can have a ripple effect across society, including in areas like the economy, education, and youth development. But for that, we need to foster not just skill but vision.

So, what are we lacking? First, a cultural shift. India is not a sporting nation. Parents often discourage children from pursuing sports, fearful of the risks and uncertainty. We lack adequate infrastructure, visionaries who can scout talent, and political will to support sports beyond cricket. How many politicians have championed the building of world-class facilities like Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad for other sports? Cricket dominates every sphere of Indian sports – the media, spon-

sors, public imagination. Yet even in this bleak scenario, some institutions like the Indian Railways have provided much-needed support. In Paris 2024, India secured six medals – one silver and five bronze. Shooter Manu Bhaker stood out as the first Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal. Her mental fortitude, her ability to thrive under pressure, was nothing short of Ajjatashtru-like. This mindset must become the norm, not the exception.

To nurture it, the Ministry of Sports must undergo a radical overhaul. We need public-private partnerships, active involvement of the armed forces and Indian Railways, and a robust CSR-driven funding model to create a sustainable ecosystem for sports. Administrators must also change their mindset. Instead of bureaucratic inertia, we need leaders who are flexible, visionary, and willing to take bold decisions. A daily regimen that includes yoga, pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, and meditation can help in building mental strength, resilience, and focus. Countries like China and several East Asian nations already use such practices, alongside ancient philosophies and texts like Sun Tzu's Art of War, to cultivate winning mindsets in athletes. Buddha once said, "Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is to the one who endures that the final victory comes." Victory is not accidental – it is earned by those who prepare relentlessly, physically and mentally. It is time we prepare for the Los Angeles Olympics 2028 – not tomorrow, but today.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

MGNREGA: A lifeline undermined

Madam – On April 17, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge strongly criticised the Modi government, labelling it "anti-poor" and accusing it of systematically oppressing MGNREGA workers. He demanded an increase in the minimum wage to ₹400 per day and an extension of guaranteed employment to 150 days annually under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Despite recommendations from both the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the 2023 high-level committee led by Amarjeet Sinha, the government has failed to raise the daily wage meaningfully. Instead, it continues to impose restrictions – such as mandatory Aadhaar-based payments – and has allocated the lowest MGNREGA budget in the last decade relative to the overall Union Budget. MGNREGA was originally introduced by the Congress Party as a safety net for the poorest families in rural India. Today, that legacy is under threat. If the government genuinely cares for rural India, it must adopt the two key demands: ₹400 per day as minimum wage and 150 days of guaranteed work per year. In conclusion, the government must act decisively to uphold MGNREGA's founding purpose. Adopting the demands for ₹400 daily wages and 150 workdays annually is essential to protect rural livelihoods and restore dignity to India's poorest. Anything less would betray the scheme's intent – and the people it aims to serve.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Funding threatens academic freedom

Madam – As someone who closely follows the intersection of politics and education, I find former President Trump's decision to freeze over \$2.2 billion in funding to Harvard University deeply troubling. The freeze was triggered by Harvard's refusal to comply with the White House's demands – to monitor pro-Palestinian protests, revise diversity policies, and scrutinise foreign scholars. Harvard, led by President Alan Garber, rightly resisted, citing violations of academic freedom and the First Amendment. This isn't just about one university; it's about the growing use of state power to intimidate academic institutions. When funding is used as a weapon to enforce political conformity, we edge dangerously close to authoritarianism. While concerns about hate speech or foreign influence are valid, they must be addressed through balanced, lawful means – not by bulldozing university autonomy. Campuses should foster debate, not silence. True leadership is measured by its tolerance for dissent – not its impulse to crush it. In threatening Harvard's funding, the government undermines academic freedom and sets a chilling precedent for all universities. Disagreement must not be silenced by coercion. In a democracy, campuses must remain spaces for open inquiry, not instruments of political control. Freedom of thought is not negotiable – it's foundational.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

The shame of trafficking

Madam – The Supreme Court's recent expression of dismay over a newborn trafficking case is a sobering reminder that 'son preference' continues to plague Indian society. In this case, a newborn was purchased for ₹4 lakh simply because the buyer "wanted a son." The Court rightly stated that hospitals must face immediate licence cancellation in such cases. This mindset fuels child trafficking, sex-selective abortions, and violence against women. With India's sex ratio at birth (933 girls per 1,000 boys) still alarmingly skewed, we are witnessing the long-term damage of systemic gender bias. Add to that the daily average of 1,200 crimes against women in 2022, and the picture turns bleak. There is a lesson to be learned from South Korea, which successfully normalised its skewed sex ratio through emotionally resonant campaigns like Daughters Are More Compassionate. Public messaging, school curricula, and media initiatives helped shift mindsets – not just laws. India must embrace a similar strategy – one that reshapes hearts and minds. Women like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta prove that daughters are not burdens – they are the nation's future.

SRINIVAS MADHAV | HYDERABAD

WAQF AMENDMENT ACT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

The Supreme Court's observations regarding the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, have brought much-needed legal scrutiny to what has largely been a media-driven, politically charged issue. For months, we were bombarded with claims that the original Waqf Act of 1995 led to unchecked land acquisition by the Muslim community, necessitating urgent amendments. However, the discourse lacked depth. There was little to no engagement from legal scholars or constitutional experts. Instead, television debates fuelled fear and division, with repeated claims that Waqf properties endangered national interests. Though passed by Parliament through procedural means and majority strength, the Amendment Act seems more symbolic than substantive. It has triggered a surge of petitions in the Supreme Court – and rightly so. Legislation of this nature should be grounded in law, not in populist fervour. The real tragedy is the deepening communal divide this has caused. A mat-

ter of such sensitivity could have been resolved through inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding. Instead, we are left with increased polarisation and unrest. As Mark Twain once said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect." In conclusion, the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, stands as a cautionary tale of what happens when legislative action prioritises political optics over constitutional rigour. The Supreme Court's involvement offers a glimmer of hope that legal reason will prevail over populist narratives. True progress lies not in reactionary amendments, but in fostering inclusive conversations that respect both religious rights and national interests. As citizens, we must demand more thoughtful governance – one that seeks unity, not division. Let this moment serve as a reminder that justice, not majoritarian sentiment, must remain the cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

AVINASH GODBOLEY DEWAS

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

The Saudis: Peacekeepers or power brokers?

In a transformation as ambitious as it is paradoxical, Saudi Arabia is rebranding itself from an austere theocracy to a cosmopolitan architect of global diplomacy. This evolution raises a fundamental question: can a state rewrite its past without reckoning with it?

FIRST Column

The transformation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from a puritanical theocracy to an aspiring architect of global peace is one of the most paradoxical and politically engineered evolutions of the modern era. Far from the deserts where Wahhabism first struck its austere roots, the Kingdom now positions itself as a mediator between global powers, a patron of modernity, and a crucible of cross-cultural aspiration. Yet beneath the glistening architecture of NEOM and the diplomatic smiles of peace summits lies a stratified narrative — one obscured by revisionist theatre and gilded silence.

Saudi Arabia's foundation in 1932 under King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud was not merely a unification of tribal territories; it was a theological consolidation. The strategic pact with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, brokered generations earlier, transformed Islam into an instrument of statecraft. As the CIA Handbook observed in 1972, "The Saudi Government is a monarchy based on a fusion of secular and religious authority, with the King at its apex." The same report stated, "The royal family dominates both the political and economic life of the country," a candid admission of dynastic monopolisation. Governance was less institutional than charismatic, mediated through familial bonds, tribal allegiances, and theocratic endorsement.

The Kingdom's export of Wahhabism, particularly from the 1960s onward, became one of the most under-scrutinised forms of ideological colonisation. Flush with petrodollars after the 1973 oil embargo — an embargo that King Faisal declared in defence of Arab dignity, stating, "Our oil is our weapon, and we will use it to protect our Arab rights" — Saudi Arabia embarked on a global proselytisation project. Mosques, madrassas, and clerical scholarships were funded from Islamabad to Jakarta, Sarajevo to Khartoum, shaping generations in an image that often opposed indigenous Islamic traditions. A lesser-known revelation from a declassified 1981 US State Department cable noted: "Saudi financial support to Islamic institutions in Southeast Asia has significantly altered the religious landscape, prioritising doctrinal rigidity over cultural synthesis."

The domestic reality, too, remained draconian under the veneer of religiosity. The 1979 Grand Mosque seizure by a fundamentalist group paradoxically catalysed a more regressive clampdown, as the royal family tightened its alliance with the religious establishment to legitimise its authority. It is telling that King Fahd, who in the 1980s declared, "We will build the future without abandoning our past," presided over an era where ministries functioned as courtiers rather than administrators. As noted in a 1972 CIA internal report, "Much of the bureaucracy remains inefficient, with key decisions often bypassing formal channels and handled by royal intermediaries."

The paradox deepens when juxtaposing Saudi Arabia's financing of foreign conflicts with its self-portrayal as a stabiliser. The Kingdom, directly or through proxies, has been implicated in the fomentation of conflict zones including Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In Yemen, particularly, its military intervention since 2015 has left an indelible humanitarian scar. UN estimates suggest over 375,000 deaths, mostly from indirect causes. Despite this, Riyadh now courts global opinion as a peace broker, hosting summits that purport to end the very conflicts it helped perpetuate. This performative peacemaking is a diplomatic palimpsest, rewriting its culpability in real time.



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Yet perhaps nowhere is the ideological volte-face more pronounced than under the stewardship of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). A man who rose to prominence not through military conquest or scholarly erudition but via internal court

calculus and the invocation of modernist necessity, MBS has become the emblem of Saudi Arabia's neo-nationalist rebranding. His statement in 2017, "We will not waste 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them now and immediately" serves as both mea culpa and strategic distancing. It is a rhetorical exfoliation of the kingdom's historical role in incubating the very ideologies it now condemns.

What makes this transformation most paradoxical is the simultaneous consolidation of autocracy. The same MBS who champions futuristic cities and cultural liberalisation also orchestrated the arrest of dissenting clerics, feminists, and businessmen — a campaign sanitised by the euphemism of anticorruption.

The chilling assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul became a gruesome watermark of the state's coercive architecture. This contradiction was prophetically foreshadowed by King Faisal decades

earlier, who once mused, "Injustice cannot be concealed, and one day it will speak."

In global diplomacy, Saudi Arabia is no longer content with petrodollar influence; it now seeks epistemic legitimacy. The launch of NEOM, a city touted as the world's first cognitive metropolis, symbolises this ambition — yet, emblematic of the new Saudi state, it is erected upon contested land and enforced silence. Beyond NEOM, the Kingdom's financial outreach has extended to international media, sports, universities, and even Hollywood, buying not just partnerships but narratives. This is cultural laundering masquerading as soft power.

Saudi Arabia's overtures toward mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict, brokering a rapprochement between Iran and Arab states, and its increasing engagement with China and Israel signify not merely a regional aspiration, but a superpower mimicry. In February 2023, Riyadh hosted talks to ease tensions in Sudan, while simultaneously continuing arms imports that fuel its military-industrial complex. As a 2022 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute noted, "Saudi Arabia remains one of the top five global arms importers, despite its increasing involvement in peace dialogues."

This dualism is not new but is now consciously choreographed. The kingdom no longer hides its contradictions; it flaunts them as strengths. It wishes to be judged not by the tenets of liberal democracy, but by a self-fashioned rubric of efficacy, vision, and global brokerage.

And in this, it has found unlikely endorsements. Elon Musk, after touring Saudi ventures, declared them "an exciting vision for civilisation". Goldman Sachs and SoftBank speak of "unprecedented opportunities". Even sceptics are drawn to the economic gravity Riyadh exerts.

But can a state undergo ontological transformation without historical accountability? Can it broker peace while archives of complicity remain sealed? The Kingdom's diplomatic epistles, such as the declassified 1973 letter from the US President to King Faisal praising him as "a voice of wisdom and reason," read today as documents of strategic appeasement, not genuine admiration. The phrase, "Your personal efforts to bring moderation and stability to the region are of great significance," thinly veils the realpolitik that underpinned Western support for autocracy.

Indeed, what Saudi Arabia seeks now is not reinvention but redemption. It seeks to transmute petrodollar moral hazard into soft power prestige. In doing so, it exploits the cognitive dissonance of the global order: that authoritarianism, when efficient and well-funded, can be tolerated, even admired. Perhaps this is the Kingdom's most radical export yet — a model where ideological elasticity replaces democratic legitimacy.

(The writer is a Colombo-based journalist. Views are personal)

The cost of the skies: The risk and reality of fighter flying

The recent crash of an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jet, which tragically claimed the life of a young pilot, has once again stirred public concern and debate over flight safety and the risks faced by those in uniform

A few days ago, the Indian Air Force (IAF) suffered a devastating loss when a fighter jet crashed during an operational sortie. The tragic accident claimed the life of a young fighter pilot, a promising individual in the prime of his life and career. The exact cause of the incident is still under investigation by a Court of Inquiry, and conclusions will only be drawn after a thorough examination.

While we collectively grieve the loss of a brave soul and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and comrades, the incident has once again ignited public debate — particularly on social media — about the IAF's safety record. Many have questioned why, after decades of technological advancements and operational experience, such accidents continue to occur. With each modern fighter aircraft costing upward of ₹500 crore, the financial burden is immense. Yet, even more valuable are the human lives put at risk and, at times, tragically lost.

This article attempts to offer readers an insight into the world of fighter pilots — a world often viewed as glamorous from afar but fraught with danger, discipline, and unyielding demands. It also seeks to dispel the widespread misconception that the Air Force forces its personnel to fly outdated or poorly maintained aircraft.

Fighter Flying Is Dangerous

To begin with, fighter flying is among the most high-risk professions in the world. Pilots operate incredibly powerful machines weighing up to 40,000 kg and powered by engines capable of producing over 25,000 kgf of thrust.

Achieving maximum performance from such a complex aircraft requires seamless coordination between the pilot, the aircraft, and multiple supporting agencies on the ground. Even a minor error in judgment or execution can have catastrophic consequences, especially during air combat.

Fighter pilots are selected after a rigorous evaluation of their flying skills, temperament, and psychological makeup. Qualities such as mental agility, fast decision-making, situational awareness, and emotional resilience are non-negotiable. Only after years of intensive training are they considered fit for combat missions.

Even during peacetime, these pilots undergo combat training that mirrors the conditions of actual warfare as closely as possible — minus the use of live weaponry. Every day in the cockpit is a test of their physical endurance and mental sharpness.

Camaraderie and Competition

Flying in formation, especially during combat training, demands absolute trust among pilots. Each member must perform at their best — not just for personal safety but for the team. There's an unspoken



RAJIV HORA

but powerful mix of pride, ego, and responsibility. No one wants to be the weak link, and this drives pilots to push the limits of their aircraft and themselves.

Air combat is binary, there are no partial victories. You either prevail, or you are outmanoeuvred. This stark reality instils a relentless drive for excellence and perfection.

Fitness: The Hidden Demands

Maintaining peak physical condition is critical. Fighter pilots regularly train to increase their G-tolerance, which is crucial during the high-speed, tight turns of air combat.

Even with G-suits, seasoned pilots can experience forces up to 8-9 times their body weight. The stress on the human body is enormous, and those unac-

customed to it can lose consciousness. Even minor illnesses such as a cold can impair judgment or sensory performance and are grounds for grounding a pilot. Strict rules govern alcohol consumption and sleep routines — standards summed up by the phrase "12 hours between bottle and throttle." Flight fitness is constantly monitored under the supervision of aero-medical experts.

Practice and Precision

Each training mission is carefully reviewed post-flight. Advanced tools allow for detailed debriefing, helping pilots analyse their performance, correct errors, and refine tactics. This ensures that when a real combat scenario arises, the pilot is ready for the critical moment when an enemy target appears in the radar scope.

Mistakes in modern warfare can be fatal — not just personally, but collectively. In the era of Beyond Visual Range (BVR) combat, where pilots often engage targets they cannot see, the risk of fratricide, or "blue on blue" incidents, increases. Identifying targets cor-

rectly in a high-pressure, information-dense environment demands exceptional clarity and focus.

The Systems in Play

Weather is another unpredictable factor. While missions are authorised based on available weather data, conditions can rapidly change mid-flight, presenting fresh challenges during takeoff, flight, or landing. Thunderstorms, turbulence, or poor visibility are all part of a fighter pilot's reality. To mitigate risks, the IAF, like other global air forces, uses an Operational Risk Management (ORM) system. This considers multiple variables, from pilot experience and aircraft condition to mission type and weather — to determine if a sortie should be authorised.

Even once airborne, the pilot must juggle a host of responsibilities. From interpreting radar and electronic warfare systems to tracking formation positions and navigating terrain at 900 kmph just a few hundred feet off the ground, everything hinges on razor-sharp timing. A single lapse can be fatal. At such speeds, there are no second chances.

Team Effort Behind the Scenes

A fighter pilot never flies alone in the truest sense. An extensive support ecosystem underpins every mission. Engineers, technicians, air traffic controllers, radar operators, and safety crews work in synchrony to ensure aircraft are airworthy and operations are smooth. Even older aircraft are rigorously maintained to official standards. The notion that pilots are forced to fly "junk" aircraft is baseless and unfair to the dedicated personnel who keep these machines operational. Still, aircraft can develop snags mid-air. Pilots are trained to respond to emergencies calmly and quickly, often practising drills in simulators. In worst-case scenarios, they may have to eject to save their own lives. While it's heartbreaking to abandon a multi-crore aircraft, saving a trained pilot — whose training takes 6-7 years and enormous investment — takes precedence.

Flight Safety: A Mission

Despite the best efforts, accidents do occur. They are rarely due to a single error; rather, they're often the result of multiple, layered failures — a concept known as the Swiss Cheese Model of accidents. A hole in the system, hidden until it aligns with others, can lead to tragedy.

The IAF maintains a robust flight safety mechanism. Every incident is examined thoroughly, and lessons are incorporated into procedures and even future aircraft designs. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), often forged in the aftermath of loss, are sacred and followed rigorously. Phasing out a fleet of aircraft is a strategic decision, balancing operational needs, cost implications, and national security. Not every accident warrants the retirement of an entire platform. Over time, accident rates do fall — thanks to continuous risk management, technological upgrades, and relentless learning from both successes and failures.

The Reality of Service

Behind the image of swaggering pilots in sunglasses lies a life of discipline, danger, and determination. Fighter pilots sacrifice comfort, health, and sometimes their lives — not for glory, but for duty. It's important for the public to understand that accidents often happen not due to negligence, but despite stringent precautions.

It is never as simple as flipping a switch or grounding a fleet. As the saying goes, "The safest place for a ship is in the harbour, but that's not where it's meant to be." Similarly, fighter aircraft and the warriors who fly them are meant to be in the sky, safeguarding our nation. Treading safely, always — but boldly.

(The writer is an Air Vice Marshal (Retired). Views are personal)

IN BRIEF



CMF Phone 2 Pro to set new benchmark

London-based technology company Nothing has announced today that CMF Phone 2 Pro will set a new benchmark in the budget smartphone segment with a best-in-segment triple-camera system and will be powered by a MediaTek Dimensity 7300 PRO chipset, a compact powerhouse that meets one's daily entertainment needs. One of the standout upgrades in the CMF Phone 2 Pro is its camera system, which includes a powerful 50MP telephoto lens, a high-performance main sensor, and an ultra-wide camera. The CMF Phone 2 Pro's telephoto camera comes with a 2x optical zoom - a first in the segment to deliver high-quality magnification with preserved detail and sharpness. Furthermore, the CMF Phone 2 Pro boasts a 50MP Main camera with a 1/1.57" sensor - the largest in the segment. Lastly, the triple camera system is completed only by an 8MP ultra-wide camera with a 119.5° field of view.



TVS Motor rolls out new Apache at Rs 2.77 lakh

Two and three wheeler manufacturer TVS Motor Company has rolled out the 2025 edition of its super premium motorcycle Apache RR310 equipped with a host of features and also adheres to OBD (on-board diagnostics)-2B norms, the company said. The new variant is priced from Rs 2,77,999 lakh (ex-showroom India), the city-based company said. In a press release on Friday, TVS Motor said the Apache RR 310 would be available in three built-to-order customisation options. It comes with four riding modes - track, sport, urban and rain and offers 38 PS at 9,800 rpm. The new features added to the 2025 edition is launch control, cornering drag torque control, Gen-2 race computer, 8 spoke alloys among others. The OBD-2B norms refers to on-board diagnostics conforming to stricter emission norms. "Since its debut in 2017, the TVS Apache RR 310 has emerged as a formidable force in the super-premium sport motorcycle segment, redefining performance benchmarks through its race-bred DNA.



Shekhar becomes new prez of CREDAI-National

Shekhar G Patel has become the new President of realtors' apex body CREDAI, which represents more than 13,000 real estate developers from across the country. Patel, the Managing Director of Ahmedabad-based real estate firm Ganesh Housing Corporation, has become the new president of CREDAI for the term 2025-27, the body said in a statement on Friday. He succeeds Boman Irani, CMD of Mumbai-based listed firm Keystone Realtors Ltd. Irani has now become CREDAI-National Chairman. CREDAI also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Quality Council of India (QCI) to establish a collaborative framework for skill training, capacity building, and worker certification in the construction and real estate sector. "Empowering the workforce with industry-relevant skills is paramount to enhancing productivity, improving quality and maintaining global standards. Through our collaboration with NSDC and QCI, we aim to create a robust ecosystem for talent development, ensuring that India's real estate sector remains competitive and future-ready," said Patel.

Positive outcomes from US Vice Prez visit expected

PNS ■ MANESAR

Ahead of US Vice President JD Vance's visit to India next week, Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday expressed optimism about "positive outcome" from the visit.

Vaishnaw cited pragmatic approach and continued engagement on both sides, and asserted that India has emerged as a trusted hub in electronics manufacturing.

"There will be very positive outcome is what I can say with a good level of confidence, because we have approached this thing in a very pragmatic way, and very agile way, and we have continuously engaged," Vaishnaw said when asked what outcomes he expects given the backdrop of Vance's upcoming visit, and India and US' economic and trade engagements.

"Over a period of time, India has emerged as a very trusted country, because the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi conducted foreign policy, that trust has got generated about our country today, and that is going to be a big and important factor for all of us," Vaishnaw said.

On whether there are any

apprehensions about electronics products being dumped in the country from China given the intense trade and tariff war playing out, the minister said "more or less our country is prepared for any situation" but added that the commerce ministry would be the nodal authority to respond to such a query.

On whether China's export



curbs on critical rare earth minerals would have any implication for Indian component manufacturing, the minister said Indian industry believes that they will be able to work out alternatives.

"Whatever we have had discussions with the industry so far, the industry feels that they will be able to figure out alternatives to this, because the entire world has been preparing for diversifying value chains since COVID struck," the Minister said. One of the biggest learnings from the pandemic for the industry was the need for building diverse supply chains.

Will make India self-reliant in defence, says Rajnath

PNS ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR (MAHA)

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the government is committed to make the country self-reliant in the defence sector and has already taken several steps in this direction.

Addressing industry representatives here, Singh said defence exports have risen from Rs 600 crore in 2014 to Rs 24,000 crore.

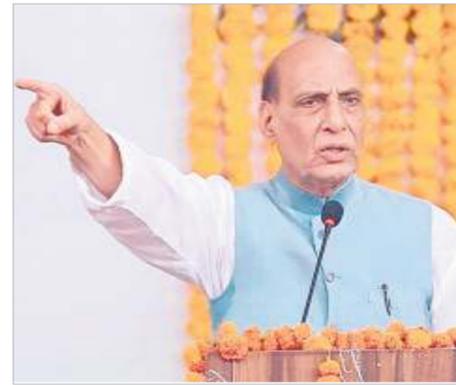
"Our target is to achieve (exports of) Rs 50,000 crore by 2029-30," he said.

The BJP-led government has taken several major steps to achieve self-reliance and declared items that will be indigenously manufactured and not imported, he noted.

The defence production is at Rs 1.60 lakh crore at present and the aim is to increase it to Rs 3 lakh crore, the minister said.

He sees good potential in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar as a production hub, Singh said, adding, "You have a mature industrial ecosystem here. Come to me with concrete proposals."

Meanwhile, Rajnath Singh said Maharana Pratap and



Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj are national heroes and not Mughal ruler Aurangzeb.

Speaking at a function after unveiling a life-size statue of the Mewar ruler at Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar

Maharashtra, Singh said Maharana Pratap was an epitome of courage and patriotism.

"Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj drew inspiration from Maharana Pratap, especially for guerilla warfare tactics," Singh said.

Post-Independence historians with Left leanings did not give due credit to both Rana Pratap and Shivaji Maharaj but eulogised Aurangzeb, the senior BJP leader claimed.

"Those who feel that Aurangzeb was a hero should have read Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who wrote that the Mughal emperor was a cruel, fundamentalist ruler," he said. Maharana Pratap sacrificed his life to uphold his self-respect and challenged the dominance of Mughal

The BJP-led government has taken several major steps to achieve self-reliance and declared items that will be indigenously manufactured and not imported, he noted

Emperor Akbar, Singh further said.

Apart from his exemplary bravery, Maharana Pratap united all sections of society, he said, adding, "Adivasis (tribals) and Muslims were part of his army. Hakim Khan Suri sacrificed his life in the battle of Haldighati, fighting against the Mughals. A Muslim youth was Shivaji Maharaj's bodyguard."

Those who eulogise Aurangzeb insult the Muslims, the minister said.

Infosys: Growth of 4.2% in CC, operating margin expansion of 0.5% in FY25

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Infosys (NSE: INFY), (BSE: INFY), (NYSE: INFY), a global leader in next-generation digital services and consulting, delivered \$19,277 million in FY25 revenues, growth of 4.2% in constant currency. Operating margin was at 21.1%, expansion of 0.5% year on year. Free cash flow was the highest ever at \$4,088 million, an increase of 41.8% year on year. TCV of large deal wins was \$11.6 billion for the year, with 56% net new.

Q4 revenues were \$4,730 million, an increase of 4.8% year on year in constant currency and 3.6% in reported terms. Operating margin was at 21.0%, an increase of 0.9% year on year.

"We have built a resilient organization with sharp focus on client-centricity and responsiveness to the market, thanks to the trust of our clients and dedication of our employees. Our performance for the year has been robust in terms of revenues, expansion in operating margins and highest ever free cash generation", said Salil Parekh, CEO and MD. "Our depth in AI, cloud and digital and strength in cost efficiency, automation, and



consolidation position us well for the needs of our clients", he added.

"FY25 operating margins expanded by 0.5% which reflects our relentless focus on identifying opportunities for efficiency and executing Project Maximus with discipline, after navigating through multiple headwinds in a challenging macro environment. We delivered the highest ever free cash flows in the history of the company in FY25," said Jayesh Sanghrajka, CFO. The Board has proposed a final dividend of ₹22, which along with the interim dividend, is an increase of 13.2% over last year," he added.

Infosys announced the expansion of its long-standing strategic collaboration with Citizens to Propel AI-led Transformation. Michael Ruttledge, Chief Information

Officer, Citizens Financial Group, said, "Infosys has been a key strategic collaborator in Citizens' next-gen transformation program for the last five years. Together, we have not only modernized our technology landscape with domain-centric, cloud native platforms but also built a foundation for future growth aligned with Citizens' north star technology vision without losing focus on resiliency and stability."

Infosys announced the expansion of its collaboration with Siemens AG to accelerate Siemens AG digital learning initiatives with generative AI. Jenny Lin, Global Head of Learning & Growth at Siemens AG, said, "A thriving learning and growth environment is essential for Siemens to maintain our competitive edge and foster innovation."

VVDN Tech to invest US\$ 200m to scale up manufacturing

PNS ■ MANESAR

VVDN Technologies on Friday said the company plans to invest USD 100-200 million over the next 3-4 years across its operations spanning design, manufacturing, as well as research and development.

Vivek Bansal, Co-Founder and President of VVDN Technologies told PTI that hiring, too, would keep pace with the significant investment and expansion blueprint. The company, which is into electronics design and manufacturing, is looking to scale up its engineering headcount by about 2,000 (from 5,000 at present). On the manufacturing side, the tally is set to double to 14,000 in the next 3-4 years, he said. "It is going to be a significant investment... Over USD 100-200 million of investment in next 3-4 years. We are getting into PCB fab, we want to do displays, camera modules, so we will be localising more and more in the country, and part of the investment will go into that," Bansal said.

Govt tweaks Delhi gas policy, moves to advance allocations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will now allocate natural gas to CNG and piped cooking gas retailers two quarters in advance to give city gas companies greater clarity, the Oil Ministry said Friday.

With city gas retailers like Indraprastha Gas Ltd, Mahanagar Gas Ltd and Adani Total Gas Ltd reporting pressures on margins after the allocation of cheaper administered price or APM gas to them was cut without giving enough advance notice, the ministry decided to tweak the allocation policy.

"From Q1 (first quarter) of FY 2025-26 (April 2025 to March 2026 financial year), domestic natural gas allocations for CNG (Transport) and piped natural gas (domestic household cooking gas) segments will be done on a two-quarter advance basis," the ministry said in a statement.

Besides the lower-priced APM gas produced from old fields given on a nomination basis, the allocation will also now include gas from new wells

drilled on the nomination fields of state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd (OIL), it added.

The gas from new wells is slightly more expensive than the APM gas.

While APM gas currently is priced at USD 6.75 per million British thermal units, the new well gas comes to close to USD 8 per MMBtu.

"Estimations by GAIL and ONGC will help ensure supply visibility to CGD entities in a d v a n c e , enhancing planning and delivery efficiency," it said.

GAIL is the state-owned marketer of gas.

The ministry said new well gas allocation will be done on a pro-rata basis.

"Auction-based allocation for new well gas has been replaced with a quarterly pro-rata allocation to ensure timely and reliable supply. GAIL will allocate new well gas to city gas distribution (CGD) entities in proportion to their requirements, in accordance with prevailing Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas guidelines," the statement said.

Parl panel members flag flight delays at Delhi airport

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

MPs from different parties have criticised the civil aviation authorities at a Parliamentary panel meeting, saying "mayhem" continues at the Delhi airport causing flight delays and serious inconvenience to passengers, according to sources.

At the meeting of the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture headed by JD(U)'s Sanjay Jha on Thursday, various members questioned the civil aviation ministry officials about the planning to deal with the fallout of the closure of Terminal 2 (T2) and the



recent flight delays.

The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) in the national capital, also the country's largest and busiest airport, has three terminals -- T1, T2 and T3 -- and four runways. Currently, T2 and one runway RW 10/28 are temporarily shut for maintenance works.

T2 was shut on April 15 and all the flights from there have been moved to the revamped T1.

At the meeting, some MPs noted that their flights were delayed to highlight the persisting problem.

In response, the ministry officials said the flight disruptions were mainly due to last week's dust storms and assured that efforts are being made to address the situation but the MPs flagged that the situation remains bad and far from normal, according to the sources.

The sources also said the ministry's explanation was not "satisfactory".

One MP, who was present at the meeting, said the only people happy in the airport were those running restaurants and cafes as they had a brisk business as delays and overcrowding have forced passengers to spend a considerable period of time at the airport.

Shrivastava is Revenue Secy, Samir to head Civil Aviation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior IAS officers Arvind Shrivastava and Samir Kumar Sinha have been appointed as Revenue and Civil Aviation Secretaries respectively as part of a top-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre on Friday.

Shrivastava, a 1994 batch Karnataka cadre Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer, is currently working as Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved Shrivastava's appointment as Secretary, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, a Personnel Ministry order said. Sinha, Shrivastava's batchmate from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, has been appointed as Civil Aviation Secretary in place of Vumlunmang Vualnam.

Vualnam has been named as Secretary, Department of Expenditure. He succeeds Manoj Govil, who has been

appointed as Secretary (Coordination), Cabinet Secretariat.

Vivek Aggarwal, a 1994 batch senior IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre, has been appointed as Secretary, Ministry of Culture.

Aggarwal is currently Additional Secretary in the Department of Revenue. He is also holding the charge of Director, Financial Intelligence Unit- India (FIU-IND).

Eighteen IAS officers, including two working in the PMO, have been appointed to different central government departments as part of this secretary-level reshuffle that comes ahead of the Civil Services Day on Monday.

Hari Ranjan Rao, another Madhya Pradesh cadre IAS officer of the 1994 batch, has been named as the Sports Secretary. Rao is currently working as Additional Secretary, PMO.

The ACC has approved his appointment as Officer on Special Duty (OSD), Department of Sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

No GST on UPI transactions above Rs 2,000, says FinMin

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday clarified that it is not mulling to levy GST on UPI transactions above Rs 2,000.

Clarifying on reports, which said that the government is considering levying Goods and Services Tax (GST) on UPI transactions over Rs 2,000, the finance ministry said they are completely false, misleading, and without any basis.

"Currently, there is no such proposal before the government," the ministry said in a statement.

GST is levied on charges, such as the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), relating to payments made using certain instruments.

Effective January 2020, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has removed the MDR on person-to-merchant (P2M) UPI transactions.

"Since currently no MDR is charged on UPI transactions, there is consequently no GST applicable to these transactions," the ministry said.

UPI transaction values have seen an exponential increase, growing from Rs 21.3 lakh crore in FY 2019-



20 to Rs 260.56 lakh crore by March 2025. The ministry also said the

government remains committed to promoting digital payments via UPI.

Clarifying on reports, which said that the government is considering levying Goods and Services Tax (GST) on UPI transactions over Rs 2,000, the finance ministry said they are completely false, misleading, and without any basis

To support and sustain the growth of UPI, an incentive scheme has been operational

from FY2021-22. This scheme specifically targets low-value UPI (P2M) transactions, benefiting small merchants by alleviating transaction costs and promoting wider participation and innovation in digital payments.

In 2023-24, the government paid Rs 3,631 crore under the scheme, up from Rs 2,210 crore in 2022-23.

"The total incentive payouts under this scheme over the years reflect the government's sustained commitment to promoting UPI-based digital payments," the ministry noted.





AKSHAY KUMAR CALLS *KESARI CHAPTER 2* A FIGHT FOR JUSTICE, NOT JUST ANOTHER ROLE

Actor Akshay Kumar has once again stepped into the shoes of a patriot in *Kesari Chapter 2: The Untold Story of Jallianwala Bagh*, which hit theatres on April 18, coinciding with the 106th anniversary of the infamous massacre. Directed by Karan Singh Tyagi and backed by Dharma Productions, Leo Media Collective, and Cape of Good Films, the film stars Akshay alongside R Madhavan and Ananya Panday.

Taking to Instagram, Akshay shared his emotional connection to the film. In a heartfelt Hindi caption, he described *Kesari Chapter 2* not as just another acting project, but as a mission that stirred him deeply as an Indian. "You may have heard many stories, but this one is a storm," he wrote, referring to the real-life tale of C Sankaran Nair, the man who dared to challenge the British Empire in court after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

"This story shook me because we didn't know that one individual dragged the British Empire to court and brought it to its knees," Akshay added. "In this film, I'm not just performing as an artist, but as a proud Indian. This is not just a film... it's unfinished business, a painful memory, and ultimately — justice."

Based on the book *The Case That Shook The Empire* by Raghu Palat and Pushpa Palat, *Kesari Chapter 2* is a spir-

itual sequel to the 2019 hit *Kesari*. While the first film spotlighted the Battle of Saragarhi, the sequel explores the aftermath of the 1919 massacre in Amritsar, highlighting the fearless legal fight led by lawyer and freedom fighter C Sankaran Nair.

As the nation remembers one of its darkest chapters, *Kesari Chapter 2* aims to not only inform but also stir the collective conscience with its story of resistance, resilience, and justice.

Harshvardhan Rane shares glimpses from *Deewaniyat* Muhurat, calls film 'grounded & sincere'

Actor Harshvardhan Rane shared some glimpses from the muhurat puja of his upcoming film "Deewaniyat" and revealed a heart-melting reason as to why the film's team wanted to work with him. Taking to Instagram, Harshvardhan shared a glimpse of himself posing with director Milap Zaveri and the producers. He then shared a picture from the Ganapati puja ahead of the shoot. "Am working with them because they are very talented, humble and passionate...but they are working with me because you guys bought tickets for Sanam Teri Kasam... So I want to thank... YOU," Harshvardhan wrote.

It was on April 17, when it was announced that the shooting of "Deewaniyat" starring Harshvardhan Rane and Sonam Bajwa began in Mumbai. Harshvardhan said: "There's something very grounded and sincere about this film. It's a pleasure to be working with Sonam, and Milap Zaveri has crafted a story that hits you emotionally." Touted as a music-driven love story, *Deewaniyat* brings together a fresh cast and a creative team that combines new energy with seasoned experience. Harshvardhan, whose re-release of the film "Sanam Teri Kasam" created a tizzy once again, had said that he is grateful to the audience for the overwhelming love they have given him for the movie.



Vaani Kapoor brings the heat in *Angreji Rangrasiya* from *Abir Gulaal*

The makers of "Abir Gulaal" dropped the dance number "Angreji Rangrasiya". Actress Vaani Kapoor said the track is a lively and high-octane track. Talking about the song Vaani Kapoor Shares, "The song has such an electrifying energy, it's vibrant, infectious, and full of life. I had an absolute blast shooting for it."

"It's a lively, high-octane track that's sure to get everyone on their feet and dancing. Whether you're at a party or just looking to let loose, this track brings the vibe," she added. This new song is a dance number showcasing the graceful dance moves of Vaani. The music is helmed by the acclaimed Music Composer and Singer Amit Trivedi, with additional vocals by the talented Chotu Khan. The lyrics that capture the song's lighthearted essence are penned by lyricist Kumaar, and the female

vocals are rendered by Akanksha Sethi.

"Creating the music for 'Angreji Rangrasiya' was a delightful experience, and I believe the upbeat Indian beats perfectly capture the fun spirit of the song," said Amit Trivedi. He added: "Our aim was to craft a song that resonates with joy and celebration, something that feels inherently Indian yet universally appealing. It's a track designed to uplift and create a fun moment for all."

On April 14, the first track "Khudaya Ishq" from the upcoming film was unveiled and Amit Trivedi shared that the song's melody is woven with emotions. "Creating the music for Abir Gulaal has been a truly enriching journey, and this first song is a testament to the beautiful synergy between Kumaar's evocative words and the melodious voice of Arijit Singh

alongside Shilpa Rao," said Trivedi, who is known for belting out hits such as "Ikara," "Naina Da Kya Kasoor," and "Love You Zindagi," among many others.

The music composer added, "It's a melody woven with emotion, and I sincerely hope it touches the hearts of everyone who listens."

Directed by Aarti S Bagdi and produced by Vivek B Agrawal, Avantika Hari, and Rakesh Sippy, it is slated for a May 9 release.

The shooting for the upcoming entertainer commenced on September 29 last year in the picturesque backdrop of London and was announced by production house Indian Stories.

Indian Stories Limited and A Richer Lens Entertainment, in association with Aarjay Pictures, present 'Abir Gulaal'. Produced by Vivek B. Agarwal, Avantika Hari and Rakesh Sippy, 'Abir Gulaal' will release in theaters on May 9.

Anurag Kashyap relocates, drops F-bomb on trolls: 'I'm busier than SRK'

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap may have bid goodbye to Mumbai, but he's far from retiring from cinema. In a candid and characteristically blunt post on X (formerly Twitter) on April 17, 2025, the Kennedy director addressed speculations about his career and mental state—making it clear that he's as active as ever, perhaps even more so.

Responding to critics who claimed that he's "frustrated and gone," Kashyap clarified: "I have relocated cities. I have not left filmmaking... I am here, and I am busier than Shah Rukh Khan (I have to be; I don't make as much money). I don't have dates until 2028."

Reports suggest that Kashyap has moved to Bengaluru, following his earlier statements about how toxic the Mumbai film industry has become. While he hasn't officially confirmed the city, he has been vocal about his admiration for the

South Indian film ecosystem and seems to have found a fresh creative environment away from Bollywood's glare.

Kashyap also gave fans a reason to look forward to his upcoming slate: "I have five directorials hopefully coming out this year, or maybe three now and two early next year."

He cheekily added, "I have the longest IMDB, and I am so employed that I say no to three projects a day." In classic Kashyap fashion, the message ended with a scathing sign-off to his detractors: "So please go suck your own @&? or, if you are flexible enough, lick your own a&&." Known for films like *Gangs of Wasseypur*, *Black Friday*, *Dev.D*, and the recent *Kennedy*, Kashyap continues to be one of the most distinctive and unapologetic voices in Indian cinema. Despite leaving Mumbai, his creative momentum appears untouched—if not accelerated—by the move.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



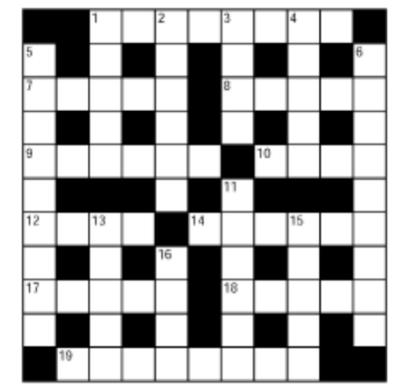
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Altering
 - 7 To cook something in an oven
 - 8 Last
 - 9 Failed to remember
 - 10 Injured by a bullet
 - 12 Stink
 - 14 An award for a successful university student
 - 17 One of the planets
 - 18 Lift up
 - 19 Tree limbs
 - 4 Follows eighth
 - 5 Favoured, liked better
 - 6 Squashed
 - 11 Look very carefully for something
 - 13 Mistake
 - 15 Straps controlling a horse
 - 16 Part of the face
- DOWN**
- 1 Sit on this
 - 2 The writer of a book
 - 3 Birthday present
- SOLUTION**
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SUDOKU

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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

BABIL KHAN HOLDS LOGOUT TOGETHER IN A SOLO-LED, SCREEN-CENTRIC THRILLER

TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

PLOT

Logout, directed by Amit Golani and penned by Biswapati Sarkar, dives deep into the psychological impact of social media obsession. The story follows Pratyush Dua (played by Babil Khan), a popular influencer addicted to the validation loop of digital life. Set in Delhi, the film showcases Pratyush's manic race toward hitting 10 million followers—his life revolving entirely around likes, shares, and content creation. But things spiral out of control when a mysterious admirer gains access to his phone, turning his virtual haven into a personal nightmare. The thriller captures the claustrophobia and fragility of a life lived online, where privacy dissolves and identity becomes a performance.

HIGHLIGHTS

The narrative shines in portraying the darker, more relatable aspects of influencer culture. It doesn't glamorize social media but rather reveals the mental strain and contradictions it breeds. From moments of high anxiety to quiet desperation, the film maintains an undercurrent of tension that reflects the protagonist's unstable reality. Smart commentary—like an influencer promoting a vegetarian brand while secretly enjoying non-veg food—adds satirical bite to the story. What really works is the eerie realism of the plot and how closely it mirrors the current digital age.

DRAWBACKS

Despite its sharp premise and promising setup, Logout stumbles in its final act. The big reveal—unmasking the stalker behind the digital chaos—lacks the punch the buildup promised. While the tension holds up for most of the film, the resolution feels rushed and slightly implausible, weakening the psychological grip it had initially established. Additionally, certain themes—like the pressure to create "authentic content"—are repeated without deeper exploration, risking tonal monotony.



PERFORMANCE

Babil Khan delivers a commanding performance in what can largely be described as a solo act. The camera rarely strays from him, and he handles the weight of that responsibility with remarkable maturity. His portrayal of Pratyush is equal parts ambitious, insecure, and slowly unraveling—a tough act to balance, which Babil manages with finesse. Supporting voices like Gandharv Dewan as his frantic manager and Nimisha Nair as the obsessive fan add dimension, while Rasika Dugal appears briefly as Pratyush's sister, grounding the narrative with emotional realism.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Visually, the film embraces minimalism to emphasize its protagonist's isolation. The confined settings and heavy use of digital interfaces mirror the film's thematic core—being trapped in a screen-driven world. The background score subtly amplifies the unease without overwhelming the narrative. However, the pacing occasionally lags, especially in scenes meant to heighten suspense but instead stretch the runtime.

Sound design deserves a nod for its clever use of notifications, calls, and alerts to maintain constant digital tension.

VERDICT

Logout is a bold and relevant commentary on the cost of digital validation, elevated by Babil Khan's breakout performance. It's a psychological thriller that taps into real-world fears with a contemporary lens. While it falters in wrapping up its high-stakes premise, the film successfully delivers a cautionary tale about losing oneself in the pursuit of online perfection. If you're someone who lives life logged in, Logout might just make you rethink your next scroll.

CAST: Babil Khan, Rasika Dugal, Nimisha Nair, Gandharv Dewan and Anisha Victor
DIRECTED BY: Amit Golani
WRITTEN BY: Biswapati Sarkar
RATING: 3/5

Understanding SPF ratings for babies and toddlers

For parents, protecting their baby or toddler from the sun is a major concern. With so many sunscreens available, selecting the safest and most effective one can be overwhelming. Dr. Swathi Ramamurthy, Head of R&D at Herby Angel, shares insights into SPF ratings and how to choose the best sunscreen for infants while minimizing exposure to harmful chemicals.

"Sun Protection Factor (SPF) measures how well a sunscreen shields the skin from UVB rays, which cause sunburn. SPF ranging from 15–35 is ideal for babies and toddlers, offering effective sun protection without excessive chemical exposure. Higher SPF levels provide only a marginal increase in protection while increasing the risk of irritation due to additional chemicals," explains Dr. Swathi.

A common misconception is that a higher SPF offers longer-lasting protection. However, regardless of SPF level, sunscreen must be reapplied every two hours to maintain its effectiveness.

Why Avoid High-SPF Sunscreens for Babies?

Many parents assume that higher SPF numbers mean significantly better protection. However, SPF 30 blocks 97% of UVB rays, while SPF 50 blocks 98%. The difference is minimal, but the potential exposure to harsh chemical filters increases.

Some high-SPF sunscreens contain ingredients like oxybenzone and avobenzone, which can penetrate the skin and disrupt hormone function. They may also lead to allergic reactions or irritation. Infants, whose skin is more sensitive and absorbent, are more vulnerable to these risks.

Best practices for sun protection in babies and toddlers

For infants under six months, direct sun exposure should be avoided. Instead, parents should opt for physical protection such as shade, hats, and lightweight, full-coverage clothing. When choosing a sunscreen, it is best to look for broad-spectrum protection (SPF + PA++), ensuring coverage against both UVA and UVB rays.

Dr. Swathi advises parents to opt for mineral-based sunscreens enriched with

natural ingredients like grapeseed oil, bala ashwagandha oil, licorice, and yashad bhasma (the ayurvedic zinc oxide). These provide safer and gentler protection for delicate baby skin. Spray sunscreens should be avoided, as inhalation poses potential risks. Before applying a new sunscreen, parents should conduct a patch test on a small area of the baby's inner arm to check for any skin sensitivity.

Reapplication is the key. Regardless of SPF level, sunscreen should be reapplied every two hours, especially after swimming or sweating.

Why Do Babies Need a Special Sunscreen?

A baby's skin is thinner, more absorbent, and has lower melanin levels, making it highly sensitive to UV damage. Chemical sunscreens can penetrate their delicate skin, potentially leading to irritation or other adverse effects. Mineral sunscreens or Organic sunscreens, on the other hand, remain on the skin's surface and reflect UV rays, making them the safest choice for infants.

Dr. Swathi further mentions, "The market lacks gentle, baby-friendly options, and Ayurvedic sun protection remains largely overlooked. Ayurveda, with its time-tested natural ingredients, offers effective and safe sun care, but it's often underestimated. It's time to shift our focus towards solutions that are both protective and nurturing for our little ones."

The ayurvedic approach to sun protection

When it comes to protecting delicate baby skin, Ayurveda has always had the answers. Here are some exceptional ingredients that have been trusted for centuries to soothe, nourish, and guard against environmental stressors while embracing sun care that's as safe as it is effective.

1. Bala Ashwagandha Oil – A Natural UV Shield

Used in Ayurveda for centuries, this oil enhances the skin's natural defense against UV rays. Rich in antioxidants, it helps combat free radical damage caused by sun exposure while deeply nourishing the skin.

2. Licorice – A Natural Brightener and Sun Protector

Licorice contains glabridin, a compound that helps reduce sun-induced pigmentation while offering mild SPF protection. It also calms inflammation, making it ideal for delicate baby skin.

3. Yashad Bhasma – The Ayurvedic Zinc Oxide

This purified form of zinc oxide is an ancient Ayurvedic remedy known for its UV-blocking properties. Unlike synthetic zinc oxide, it has additional healing benefits, helping soothe rashes and irritation.

4. Grapeseed Oil – Small but Powerful Protection

Packed with antioxidants, grapeseed oil helps prevent UV-induced skin damage. It strengthens the skin's protective barrier while being lightweight and non-greasy—ideal for infants' delicate skin.

Things to Look for in a Baby Sunscreen?

When selecting a sunscreen for babies, parents should prioritize:

- Broad-spectrum protection against UVA and UVB rays
- Mineral-based formulas with Zinc Oxide or Titanium Dioxide
- Fragrance-free and hypoallergenic formulations to minimize irritation

Additional sun protection tips

While sunscreen is an essential part of sun protection, Dr. Swathi also recommends the following measures:

- Avoid peak sun hours: Babies under six months should stay out of direct sunlight between 10 AM and 4 PM.
- Use hats and protective clothing: Lightweight, tightly woven fabrics and UV-protective clothing offer excellent protection.
- Choose shade over sunscreen: A stroller with a canopy or an umbrella can provide natural SPF 50+ protection without any chemical exposure.

Meet mother-daughter duo redefining healthy desserts

PNSHYDERABAD

So, you know what's really cool? This incredible mother-daughter team, Simran and Tina Bapu, are completely changing the Indian dessert landscape with their clean-label bakery, Paleo Bakes! Since 2019, they've been creating these amazing delights that are not only incredibly tasty but also incredibly healthy—without a trace of processed sugar, gluten, or maida! Tina is an incredible pastry chef, while Simran contributes her knowledge of nutrition. And guess what? They just nailed it on Shark Tank India, securing a Rs 1 crore investment to take Paleo Bakes to the next level!

Simran, who holds a Master's degree in Clinical Nutrition and a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics, is passionate about creating wholesome meals that taste great. Together with her mother, Tina Bapu, who has a knack for baking and a love of trying out healthy ingredients, they have developed a revolutionary brand. Paleo Bakes has had an incredible journey, growing 200% year over year and turning a 38% profit after taxes, from modest beginnings in their home kitchen during the epidemic to a 2000 square foot cloud kitchen in Versova. That's amazing! Simran and Tina are at the forefront of clean-label baking, which is undoubtedly the way of the future. Who knew eating well could taste so delicious? Can't wait to see what they do next! The update comes straight from the founders themselves.

In India, "healthy dessert" was still a niche idea when you started Paleo Bakes in 2019. What were the first indications that your vision of a clean-label future would be accurate and scalable?

Simran Bapu: When we first started out, folks would come to us just asking for something "healthy," but they weren't necessarily sure what that meant in terms of nutrition or ingredients. What was most notable was how those discussions began to change over time. Consumers started to inquire carefully about certain ingredients, nutritional information and the sources of our goods. It demonstrated to us that people were becoming

more conscious of their dietary choices. Parents searching for truly healthier solutions for their children as well as people with diabetes, thyroid problems and PCOD began placing repeat purchases with us. For us, that was a true turning point. It became evident that this was a deeper, more deliberate movement towards thoughtful, educated eating rather than merely a fad.

As a clinical nutritionist (Simran) and a pastry chef (Tina), you both embody opposite extremes of the food spectrum: self-control and decadence. What impact did this dichotomy have on its identity as a concept?

Simran Bapu: As a clinical nutritionist, I brought science and credibility to the table, ensuring that every ingredient we used had a purpose and was supported by nutritional value, while my mother, with her experience as a pastry chef, made sure that taste and experience were never compromised. This balance between discipline and indulgence allowed us to create desserts that felt truly indulgent but came with zero guilt and it significantly shaped our core philosophy: you shouldn't have to choose between health and happiness. That's exactly what we wanted it to stand for.

It has experienced a 38% PAT and 200% annual growth. What do these figures reveal about changing Indian customer attitudes as well as your business savvy?

Simran Bapu: These figures accurately capture our dedication as well as the changing attitudes of Indian consumers. Despite the fact that our products cost a little more than typical desserts, consumers are becoming more aware of what they put into their bodies. They would rather spend a bit more on guilt-free, clean treats than later medications. It demonstrates a move toward preventive options and it's heartening to see that consumers now prioritize health, quality and transparency over low costs alone.

What have been the most significant turning points or instances of reinvention in your path, from placing your first order to establishing a 2000 square foot cloud kitchen?

Simran Bapu: The transition from our home kitchen to a 2,000 square foot cloud kitchen was one of the most

significant turning moments in our lives. It wasn't an overnight success; rather, it was the consequence of consistent, natural expansion and a strong indication from our clients that demand was surpassing our initial setup. Although scaling up was necessary, we were adamant about maintaining its handcrafted touch and quality. The change in customer thinking during this phase was what was most noticeable. Desserts that felt decadent but guilt-free and truly nourishing were what people wanted, not simply diet-friendly or sugar-free options. Every phase of expansion reaffirmed how crucial it is to maintain flexibility and a close relationship with our clients' changing needs.

You were able to acquire a Rs 1 crore investment on Shark Tank India. What did that experience teach you about communicating a bigger purpose in a high-stakes situation?

Simran Bapu: Shark Tank taught us that effectively expressing the "why" behind your brand is more important than simply proposing a product. You just have a few minutes to convince others of your greater purpose in a situation like that, where the stakes are so high. For us, it was about demonstrating that it is more than just a dessert company—we're supporting a movement toward enjoyment that is mindful and guilt-free. The encounter truly forced us to hone our narrative, make our mission clear, and express the more profound influence we wish to have on people's lives. It made us realise that people relate to you on a deeper level than just your product when your mission is obvious.

Do you have concerns about "healthy washing" in the F&B industry as the clean-label movement gets traction?

Simran Bapu: Indeed, there is a lot of "healthy washing" that can confuse customers as the market for healthy desserts becomes more competitive. However, I bring genuine credibility to the table as a clinical nutritionist, which is what makes us unique. It's about comprehending the science of food and nutrition together, not just about utilizing trendy terms. Since most ordinary bakeries do not possess that level of expertise, we are able to maintain our integrity and transparency rather than merely adhering to a marketing fad.



How can the essence of traditional Indian desserts be combined with the science of nutrition, particularly when rethinking traditional recipes without the use of butter, sugar, or maida?

Simran Bapu: It's undoubtedly a fine balance. From gluten-free flours that are easier to digest to natural sweeteners with a lower glycemic impact to healthy fats that fuel the body, the science of nutrition assists us in carefully choosing components that offer genuine functional benefits. Preserving the essence of classic Indian desserts—their coziness, nostalgia and decadence—is just as crucial. To help individuals enjoy the flavors they grew up with while still supporting their health objectives, we strive to recreate the same depth and emotional connection. It's about preserving the heritage of these recipes while adapting them for the conscientious consumer of today, making sure they are satisfied without sacrificing anything.

Compromise is a common danger associated with scaling. What are the unavoidable factors that will shape its future as it transitions to FMCG retail and wider distribution?

Simran Bapu: Quality is the foundation of our brand and the confidence we have earned in our community, thus it is absolutely non-negotiable to us. We are not just expanding our reach but also establishing a new standard for clean-label sweets in India as we expand into FMCG and wider distribution. To guarantee that every product satisfies the highest standards of ingredient integrity, food safety, and consistency in flavor and texture, we have made significant investments in R&D and developed strong SOPs. Our procedures, which range from obtaining premium, ethically



produced products to strict quality control, are made to be uncompromising. However, our path is personal and goes beyond the scientific. A mother-daughter desire to make decadent pastries that nourish rather than hurt gave rise to it.

In an entrepreneurial climate that is dominated by men, what has it meant to establish a firm as a mother-daughter team?

Simran Bapu: To be honest, we have never worked in an entrepreneurial structure that is controlled by men, therefore it was never our main concern. It has always been about our shared passion and mission. Our greatest strength has been that we are a mother-daughter team, with one contributing the taste and the other the vision. Of course, there are bad days, but we always persevere because of our mutual trust, under-

standing and desire to create something significant.

How do you envision indulgence in India developing in the future?

Simran Bapu: It is obvious that indulgence in India will shift in the future toward more thoughtful, knowledgeable decisions. Individuals desire the best of both worlds; they long for that comforting, nostalgic flavor but no longer wish to bear the associated guilt. It all comes down to finding a balance: indulging in sweets that are both decadent and beneficial to the body and mind. Our goal is to spearhead this trend by establishing a new standard for inclusive, transparent, clean-label desserts that accommodate a range of lifestyles and health requirements. We want enjoyment without guilt to become the rule rather than the exception.

RR desperately need win against LSG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

An inconsistent Rajasthan Royals (RR) will be desperate to plug the holes across departments and halt a three-match losing streak when they host Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) here on Saturday.

With just two wins from seven games, the Royals are languishing at eighth on the table and come into the contest on the back of a gut-wrenching Super Over defeat to Delhi Capitals.

As the league hits the halfway mark, they'll need to shake off the heartbreak quickly if they hope to upstage Rishabh Pant's men and climb out of the bottom half. Plagued by inconsistency in both batting and bowling, RR's campaign has struggled to find momentum. To make matters worse, skipper Sanju Samson suffered a side strain in the previous match and had to retire hurt, though he later said he was feeling "alright".

The Royals' batting, built around Indian mainstays, has mis-fired far too often, leaving the middle order exposed and under pressure.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, however, seems to have shaken off his rustiness with back-to-back half centuries against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and DC. But it will have to be seen if he carries the momentum in Saturday's match.

Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, with the 66 he made in RR's first match against Sunrisers Hyderabad being his best so far. A lot will depend on his and Jaiswal's form regarding how RR fare



against the likes of Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Digvesh Rathi and Ravi Bishnoi.

Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have not made much contribution so far in the batting front and duo need to fire if RR have to post or chase down a big total.

Nitish Rana came back to form with a 51 against DC after the 81 he made against Chennai Super Kings last month, and he needs to carry on the momentum.

On the bowling front, Jofra Archer has slowly gotten into his groove.

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

LSG also head into Saturday's match

after losing to CSK but they are in a much better position currently, with their four wins from seven matches keeping them at fifth spot.

Their batting form has been impressive overall with Nicholas Pooran (357 runs from seven matches) and Mitchell Marsh (295 from six matches) in top form. Pooran and Marsh are in top and third spots in the batting chart.

South African Aiden Markram has also been among runs though compatriot David Miller's form has been a worry with 27 as his highest score in seven matches. LSG have scored more than 200 runs in three matches and above 160 in all the other games.

Fortunately for LSG also, captain Pant

has shown some form with 63 off 49 balls against CSK, his first fifty in this IPL from seven matches, though in a losing cause.

LSG's bowling was their weakest link at the start of the competition with injuries to main pacers but made amends later thanks to some on and off performances from Avesh Khan, and Shardul Thakur.

India's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav has joined the squad after the last game but the team management is still awaiting his fitness certificate from the Centre of Excellence.

Mayank has been recuperating from multiple fitness issues including a lower back stress fracture.

Teams

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

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (C&wk), David Miller, Aiden Markram, Aryan Juyal (wk), Himmat Singh, Matthew Breztko, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shabbaz Ahmed, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Arshin Kulkarni, Ayush Badoni, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Akash Deep, Manimaran Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Akash Singh, Shamar Joseph, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi.

IPL: Delhi Capitals to take on Gujarat Titans today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Mitchell Starc's mastery of death overs will be up against Mohammed Siraj's artistry when the high-flying Delhi Capitals (DC) take on an equally well-placed Gujarat Titans (GT) in a high-voltage top-of-the-table IPL clash here on Saturday. The Capitals sit pretty at the top with 10 points from six games, while the Titans trail close behind with eight from as many outings.

Confidence in the Delhi camp would be soaring after their dramatic Super Over win over Rajasthan Royals, another heist scripted under pressure with Starc at the heart of it. The Australian left-arm quick bowled three overs of pinpoint yorkers, including a nerve wracking Super Over, to turn the game on his head.

Having skipped the Champions Trophy to freshen up after the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Starc has returned to the IPL recharged and razor sharp. With 10 wickets at an economy just over 10, he's led the DC pace unit featuring Mukesh Kumar and Mohit Sharma. If Starc can conjure another match-defining spell, it could be the edge that Delhi needs.

His battle with Gujarat Titans' top order, led by skipper Shubman Gill, the consistent Sai Sudharsan, and Ashes rival Jos Buttler, could prove pivotal.

So far, the trio has carried the bulk of the batting load, with at least one of them notching a half-century in every match.

The GT middle order, largely untested, faltered when finally called upon against

Lucknow Super Giants, resulting in a defeat. If Delhi can crack that top-order code early, the ripple effect could tilt the contest in their favour.

On the other hand, after an underwhelming Border-Gavaskar Trophy and missing India's Champions Trophy-winning campaign, Siraj used his time away from the game to iron out flaws and the results are showing.

Refreshed and raring, Siraj has emerged as the cornerstone of Gujarat Titans' bowling attack this season.

With his Test-match lengths and ability to generate movement off the deck, he has picked up 10 wickets at an economy of 8.50, particularly excelling in the Powerplay. Up against him will be Delhi's relatively inexperienced opening duo of Jake Fraser-McGurk, who has struggled for rhythm, and the promising Abhishek Porel.

The pair will have their work cut out not just against Siraj but also Prasad Krishna, who is enjoying a standout season.

Should Delhi's top order crumble early, the Capitals will look towards the experience of KL Rahul and Karun Nair to steady the ship. Axar Patel, who plays for Gujarat in the domestic circuit, too will be eager to make an impact at his home-ground, having rediscovered his rhythm with both bat and ball. Both teams also boast of high-quality spin arsenals.

While Gujarat have banked on the reliable duo of Sai Kishore and Rashid Khan, Delhi's standout performer has been Kuldeep Yadav, ably supported by the impressive Vipraj Nigam.

SRH need to adapt to tough surfaces: Vettori after loss to Mumbai Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Urging his batters to suitably tweak their approach on "difficult" surfaces, Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) coach Daniel Vettori said they cannot expect belters at every venue and need to up their game after being outgunned by a wily Mumbai Indians (MI) in their Indian Premier League (IPL) clash here.

Mumbai Indians produced a perfect show on a tricky pitch here at the Wankhede Stadium which had assistance for spin and pace for the seamers, especially with the slow and short balls to win the contest by four wickets on Thursday.

Sunrisers Hyderabad could only post 162 for five after struggling to find their flow with the bat. MI pacers and right-arm off-spinner Will Jacks (2/14) set up the win.

"I feel like no one really has control over their surface, so there's a little bit of luck involved in terms of coming up against wickets that don't suit us," Vettori told the media after SRH failed to win another away game in this IPL.

SRH features big-hitters like Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head Heinrich Klaasen, Ishan Kishan and Nitish Reddy. Barring Abhishek (40 off 28 balls), and Klaasen (37 off 28 balls), the other batters could not make a noteworthy contribution.

"There has to be more to it from our

side that we have to adapt. We know that conditions like this exist in Chennai, sometimes (in) Ahmedabad. We're not expecting to go over around the country and come up on belters, so the ball's in our court to realise that," the former New Zealand spinner said.

Vettori said it was MI bowlers who made the job extremely tough for SRH batters in the first half of the game, especially in the middle overs.

It was a difficult surface. Mumbai Indians read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball

— DANIEL VETTORI, SRH COACH

"It was just incredibly tough through those middle stages," he said.

"It was a difficult surface. Mumbai read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball, but it was mainly effective because of their execution and there's some supreme exponents of it in (Jasprit) Bumrah and Trent Boult and even Hardik Pandya."

"The way they bowled, particularly through those middle stages, really stifled us. We were 66 for three through those 10 overs, and in these sort of conditions you probably need more than that," he added.

Jacks, who also scored 36 after an

impactful bowling show, acknowledged the pitch was tricky but his team's plans were clear.

"It was not what we have seen in the past here, but it was definitely still a good wicket. We felt when there was pace on the ball, we thought we could play our shots freely as long as we weren't trying to over-hit the ball," he said.

"I knew there was going to be a bit of spin assistance so as long as I was not floating the ball up there and bowling aggressively and bowling hard, using the wicket, that's what I was trying to do."

Jacks also revealed that MI spinner Karn Sharma suffered an injury to his finger webbing in the second half of the game. "He has got a slight finger-webbing issue. I'll be honest, I have not seen him but hopefully it's not too bad and he can bounce back quickly," Jacks said.

Jacks said the pitch did not change much from first to the second innings with SRH struggling to put bat on the ball but MI were not facing any such challenges given the nature of the surface.

"There was hold when people bowled slower balls into the wicket. There wasn't much dew either so I don't think there was massive change in conditions as such," he said.

"We executed well with the ball and I think we understood what we had to do with the bat," he added.

Shooter Shriyanka finishes eighth in women's 50m rifle 3P at ISSF World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lima

Paris Olympics shooter Shriyanka Sadangi finished eighth in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) final on the third day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage here.

She became the latest Indian shooter on this double-legged South American sojourn to make the cut for a maiden individual World Cup final, but made the exit after the 10th shot of the standing position round, the 40th of the 45-shot final.

Sagen Maddalena of the USA, the silver medalist in the Paris Games, won the gold. Sagen's effort took the USA to the top of the medal tally with three golds and six medals. India was second at the end of the competition on day three on Thursday, with two gold medals and a silver and a bronze each. Indian shooters had a challenging day overall with none of them making the men's 3P final and also finding themselves with lots to do after the first round of qualifying in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) event.

In the women's 3P as well, the Indians struggled after the first two kneeling and prone positions. But all three -- Shriyanka, Ashi Chouksey and previous World Cup gold winner Sift Kaur Samra -- picked up the pace admirably in the final standing position to make a dash for the qualifying mark. Shriyanka succeeded in taking sev-



enth with a solid 588, while Ashi finished stronger on accuracy than Sift, taking the ninth spot to the latter's 11th with both stopping at 587 and thereby missing out narrowly.

In the final, the Indian began well with a 10.5 as her first effort, but as the grind to the finish began in right earnest, Shriyanka petered out. Her best chance was when she had moved up to sixth with two more shots of the second Prone position remaining but returns of 9.8 and 9.3 effectively doused her challenge.

She closed with a 9.9 as her final shot to wrap with 400.7, bowing out alongside

seventh placed Brazilian Geovana Meyer. In the men's 3P, Aishwary Tomar, Niraj Kumar and Chain Singh finished at 17th, 18th and 19th respectively. The first two shooters shot identical scores of 587 to miss the last qualifying mark by a couple of points, while Chain shot 586.

There was also 25m action on the day with Anish, Vijayveer Sidhu and Gurpreet Singh all finishing the first day of qualifying in the men's rapid-fire pistol outside the top six qualifying mark.

They will need to be at their best in the second rapid-fire round on Saturday to get a shot at a medal.



Minister of Public Health Engineering of Assam Jayanta Mallabaruah inaugurating 5th All India Brahmaputra Squash Championship in Guwahati on Friday

PIONEER PHOTO

India sends squad for Asian U-15, U-17 boxing tourney

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India has fielded a 56-member squad for the Asian U-15 & U-17 Boxing Championships being held in Amman, Jordan. This is the first event organised by Asian Boxing, endorsed by both the Olympic Council of Asia and the newly-formed World Boxing.

The standout names in the U-17 boys' squad include Sahil Duhan and Devansh, who clinched silver and bronze respectively at the 2024 Asian Junior Championship, as well as Tikam Singh, who is the SGFI

2024 gold medalist. On the girls' side, Samiksha Singh, Anshika, and Khushi Chand were among the medal winners at the 2024 Asian School Boys and Girls Boxing Championships in Al Ain.

The U-15 lineup features Ravi Sihag, a bronze medalist from the Asian School Boys Championship in Al Ain in 2024, as well as the 2024 sub-junior national girls boxing champion (64-67 kg) Trushna Mohite. The team was selected by the World Boxing-formed Interim Committee, chaired by former Boxing Federation of India president Ajay Singh.

Veer, Anahat enter semis of world squash championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kuala Lumpur

Indian squash players Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh advanced to the semifinals of the World Championship Qualifying Event (Asia) after registering contrasting wins here on Friday.

Chotrani logged a come-from-behind win over home favourite Mohammad Syafiq Kamal in the men's event. The second seeded Indian prevailed 9-11 11-6 11-6 11-7 over his sixth-seeded opponent to make the last-four stage.

The 17-year-old Anahat, seeded fifth, produced a dominant display, defeating Japan's Akari Midorikawa 11-1 11-7 11-5 in the women's quarterfinals.

She will take on eighth-seeded Helen Tang of Hong Kong in the semifinals on Saturday. Tang had beaten India's Tanvi Khanna 11-5 11-6 10-12 11-9 in the quarterfinals. Khanna had upstaged top seed N Ching Cheng of Hong Kong in her previous match.

The winners of the tournament will qualify for the world championships scheduled in Chicago from May 9 to 17.

I have not lost hope: Max

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

Ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix this Formula 1 season is looking like McLaren vs McLaren. Still, defending champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull says he has not lost hope. McLaren drivers Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri are the only one to consistently have the pace through the first four rounds of the championship.

Norris has a three-point lead but admits he is not at his best, while Piastri is the driver with momentum after winning in Bahrain last week. Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes have all their had their moments, but none has been a consistent challenger, as McLaren's 58-point constructors' championship lead shows.

Max Verstappen is the only non-McLaren driver to win a Grand Prix this season but in Bahrain he was struggling so much that Red Bull motorsport adviser Helmut Marko said he was concerned Verstappen might consider his future. Verstappen said this week he was not considering the championship picture this early in the season.

"I am not thinking about that. I just go race by race," Verstappen said. "I think at

the moment, of course, we are not the quickest. So then naturally, it is very tough to fight for a championship, but it's still a very long road... I am hopeful that we can still improve things and we will see what we get." Two-time champion Fernando Alonso dampened speculation Verstappen could seek to join his team, Aston Martin, after Red Bull car designer Adrian Newey made that move last year.

Asked if he'd welcome being Verstappen's teammate, Alonso said Thursday: "Yes, but it's unlikely to happen. Very unlikely." Alonso's current teammate is Lance Stroll, son of team owner Lawrence Stroll. Busy scheduleJeddah hosts the fifth race in six weeks in a hectic start to the season, which stays at a record 24 races. There's a little respite after Saudi Arabia, with two weeks till the next race in Miami. "I think it's on the upper end of the limit. It feels like race 10 already," said Williams driver Alex Albon, adding it's especially tough on mechanics and other crew members.

"As drivers, we travel better than everyone else in the paddock. We stay in better hotels than everyone else in the paddock — it's just a function of being in a privileged position."

No plans to race till 50 but post 2026: Fernando Alonso

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

At 43, Fernando Alonso continues to defy age and push the boundaries of endurance in a Formula 1 car and while the two-time world champion doesn't see himself racing at 50, he plans to take it one season at a time once his Aston Martin contract runs out in 2026.

Aston Martin don't have a race-winning car at the moment but their long-term ambition is to win the championship. With the new regulations kicking in next year, Alonso is confident that genius car designer Adrian Newey will produce a formidable piece of machinery and even if it doesn't happen, he would be happy to walk into the sunset and start a new role at Aston Martin.

Speaking ahead of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, Alonso explained the rationale of signing the contract that will see him driving till the end of 2026.

"Not at 50 (racing), but I don't know. That's why we kept open the possibility as well. I wanted to race this year for sure and next year for sure because of the change of regulations — and I wanted to experience the 2026 rules and Honda coming



to the team. Then the surprise that Adrian was joining the team a few months after that," said Alonso.

"There were things that were appealing last year when we sat together and negotiated the contract. But after 2026, I don't know. I will go season by season. I will see how I feel, how motivated I am. Now I am very motivated, but I cannot guarantee that for three or four years and

compromise the team.

"If it's in another position, or I don't feel fast enough, I will be the first one to raise my hand. But my contract is much longer than my racing career, so I will stay with this team for many, many years in a different role. If that means we can win a World Championship even when I'm not behind the wheel, I will still feel very proud of the project."

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is another driver on the grid who is racing in his 40s.

Alonso's two titles with Renault came way back in 2005-06 and since then, his race starts have swelled to a staggering 405. He retired from the sport he loves in 2018 for "bigger challenges" only to make a comeback in 2021.

Alonso doesn't see a third title on the horizon but he knew what he was getting into at Aston Martin.

"It's not about right or wrong decisions. You make your choices. When I left Alpine, I thought that I would not fight for a World Championship there. They may do in the future, but not in the short term — and I don't have a long-term future, I will not race forever.

"So in the period when my racing career is active, I thought Aston Martin was a better place. I did enjoy 2023, being competitive. And I do enjoy now the process that we are in and the building of this team of the future. I sometimes say we are not the team of the present — and that's what I would like to have, because in the future I don't know if I will be behind the wheel," he said.

ARJUN S/O VYJAYANTHI: WEAK EMOTIONAL CORE OVERSHADOWED BY MINDLESS ACTION

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Senior actress and National Award winner Vijayashanthi is known for her portrayal of the cop role Vyjayanthi in the film Kartavyam, which released a few decades ago. Now, Nandamuri Kalyan Ram takes on the role of Vyjayanthi's son in the film titled Arjun S/o Vyjayanthi. Vijayashanthi reprises her iconic role in this film directed by Pradeep Chilukuri. 'Kantara' fame Ajaneesh Loknath has composed the music, and Saiee Manjrekar plays the female lead. Here is how the story unfolds.

STORY

The story is set in Visakhapatnam. Arjun Vishwanath (Nandamuri Kalyan Ram) is the son of honest IPS officer Vyjayanthi (Vijayashanthi). She dreams of seeing her son become a police officer like her, and Arjun is preparing for the exams. However, an unexpected incident leads Arjun to become a criminal who is supposed to attend a court hearing—but doesn't. As a result, Vyjayanthi decides to sever ties with her son, urging him to surrender and accept his crimes.

Arjun, along with his wife Chitra (Saiee Manjrekar), hides away while protecting local poor people from goons. Meanwhile, Pathan (Sohail

Khan) seeks revenge on Vyjayanthi. A new police commissioner (Srikanth) is appointed in Vizag. The film then unravels the reasons behind Pathan's vendetta, Arjun's criminal turn, and the fate of Arjun's father, who works as a naval officer.

ANALYSIS

Before its release, the makers pitched this film as an emotional mother-son drama. However, director Pradeep Chilukuri only lightly touches upon that emotional connection and instead delivers a routine and predictable action drama. The film's narrative revolves around the sincere police officer Vyjayanthi and her son who aims to follow in her footsteps but ends up on the wrong path. Unfortunately, the reasons behind his transformation are presented in a very formulaic way.

The director leans heavily on action sequences, many of which feel unnecessary. The attempt to blend mass appeal with emotional depth falls flat. Several characters, including Pathan, the commissioner, and a goon, are introduced but serve little purpose beyond conventional tropes. Scenes lack believability and veer into the overly cinematic, such as the protagonist easily taking down dozens of goons multiple times.

The first half offers very little, with the actors elevated only through a few select scenes. There are no significant twists, and the film

REVIEW



proceeds in an entirely predictable manner. Although the climax stands out as interesting and surprising, it feels like the entire film was made just to arrive at that final scene.

The police characters, surprisingly, never intervene while goons openly fight the protagonist. Similarly, Pathan and his sons move freely in and out of central jail and police stations without consequence—raising questions about the logic behind these scenes. Many moments are unnecessarily stretched. The romantic track between Kalyan Ram and Saiee Manjrekar is underdeveloped, and their songs seem forced rather than organic.

PERFORMANCES

Kalyan Ram delivers his role with intensity and performs well in the action sequences. This film highlights his mass appeal as it is a typical action entertainer. Vijayashanthi, being a seasoned performer, fits her role perfectly. Prudhvi is given a significant role and handles it with ease. Sohail Khan's character feels like a wasted opportunity. Srikanth is a surprising addition as the Commissioner and delivers well. Saiee Manjrekar, although the female lead, has a weak role with minimal scope. Other supporting actors play their parts without much impact.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

Following the success of Kantara,

Ajaneesh Loknath has been roped in for several projects. However, his work in this film is just average and lacks the uniqueness of his previous scores. Ram Prasad handles cinematography, but the visuals remain mediocre and merely serviceable. The dialogues are functional but nothing noteworthy.

VERDICT

Arjun S/o Vyjayanthi is a typical action drama filled with formulaic elements. The storyline is entirely predictable and fails to offer anything new. Except for the climax, the film doesn't engage, and the screenplay is clichéd. The emotional core between the mother and son is underexplored, and the film is bogged down by unnecessary, mindless action.

Cast: Nandamuri Kalyan Ram, Vijayashanthi, Saiee Manjrekar, Sohail Khan, Srikanth, Prudhvi, and others

Music Director: Ajaneesh Loknath

Cinematographer: Ram Prasad

Producers: Ashok Vardhan Muppa, Sunil Balusu

Story, Screenplay, and Direction: Pradeep Chilukuri

Rating: 2/5



Shine Tom Chacko of Dasara fame faces drug charge

Malayalam actor Shine Tom Chacko is in the news again. The actor, who is also known to the Telugu audience through films like Dasara starring Nani and Rangabali featuring Naga Shaurya, recently appeared in Robinhood alongside Nithiin, which was released a few days ago. According to reports, the Anti-Narcotic Special Action Force of Kerala raided the hotel where Shine Tom Chacko was staying. In a scene straight out of a film, the actor reportedly jumped from the third floor to the second and then into the swimming pool to escape. He fled from the hotel and is currently absconding. The police are searching for Shine Chacko to question him in connection with alleged drug use on film sets. The raid was conducted by the Kerala

police's District Anti-Narcotic Special Action Force (DANSAF), a team focused on narcotics enforcement. Reports indicate that no illegal substances were found in Shine's room. However, he will be questioned once located. Previously, Malayalam actress Vincy Aloshious publicly stated that she would not work with co-actors who used drugs on sets. She filed a complaint with the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) and the Kerala Film Chamber of Commerce regarding drug use by a co-actor. Though she didn't name anyone, it has now become evident that the complaint was about Shine Chacko. Vincy also alleged that the actor misbehaved with her on set. A spokesperson from AMMA confirmed to the media that the accused actor is Shine,

who shares screen space with Vincy in the upcoming film Soothravakyam. Shine Chacko had a notable role in Dasara, followed by Rangabali, and recently played a cop in Robinhood. It remains to be seen how Telugu filmmakers will respond to this controversy and whether they will continue to cast him in their films. Interestingly, now that Shine's name has come out publicly, Vincy reportedly wants to withdraw her complaint. She did not expect his identity to be revealed and is hesitant to pursue the matter officially.



Prabhas on break, film shoots halted

Two films are currently on the floors, and another is about to start, but actor Prabhas has gone on vacation. He was supposed to complete The Raja Saab first, but despite being in production for three years, the film is still not finished. Prabhas also began another film titled Fauji with director Hanu Raghavapudi, which is now also on hold.

According to sources, the actor has been dealing with a

knee problem since the time of Adipurush. It seems the issue has worsened, and doctors have advised him to rest for a few weeks. As a result, Prabhas has flown to Italy, his favorite holiday destination.

Due to his absence, all his ongoing projects are temporarily halted. The Raja Saab is being directed by Maruthi, but Prabhas is reportedly unhappy with how the film is shaping up. Meanwhile, Fauji has also started production,

and Prabhas has signed another film titled Spirit with director Sandeep Reddy Vanga. The latter has already finalized shooting locations and is waiting for Prabhas to return and give the green signal.

While Maruthi has been using Prabhas' body double for some portions, Sandeep is clear that he wants the actor physically present for the shoot. All eyes are now on when Prabhas will return from his vacation.



Sukumar supports indie film Dooradarshini

Fresh off the success of Pushpa 2, director Sukumar is busy writing the script for his next film with Ram Charan. Meanwhile, he has extended support to a small film titled Dooradarshini. On Friday, Sukumar launched the lyrical video of the song ApannaTannaManna from the film.

Suvikshith Bojja and Geethika Ratan play the leads in this nostalgic love story directed by Karthikeya Kommi. The film is

being produced by B. Sai Pratap Reddy and Jaya Shankar Reddy. Currently in post-production, the film is set in the 1990s and promises to evoke heartwarming memories of young love.

Speaking at the launch, Sukumar said, "The film's lead actor Suvikshith once farmed in the paddy fields just like me — that's how I first got to know him. He is truly passionate about cinema. This song is beautiful, and I wish the film great success. It

deserves to be a big hit and must bring recognition to everyone involved."

Actor Suvikshith Bojja expressed his joy, stating it was an honor to have his song launched by Sukumar. "Dooradarshini will take audiences back to the 1990s, reviving their memories and personal love stories," he said.

Anand Gururaj has composed the music. The film's post-production work is currently in progress.



SURIYA HOPES FOR A COMEBACK WITH RETRO

Actor Suriya is going through a challenging phase. His recent film Kanguva, which had a massive budget and high expectations, failed miserably at the box office. Suriya had pinned his hopes on it, but the film turned out to be a major disappointment. It also took a long time to make, during which Suriya did a few cameo roles in other projects.

Now, the actor is gearing up for the release of Retro on May 1. Directed by Karthik Subbaraj, the film stars Pooja Hegde as the female lead. The project began shooting last year and was

wrapped up by the year-end. With the release nearing, Suriya is promoting it aggressively.

The Telugu distribution rights of Retro have been acquired by Sithara Entertainment, which plans to release the film on a large scale. While Suriya remains a popular figure among Telugu audiences, he has not had a major hit in recent years. His last successful outing was Jai Bhim, which was released directly on OTT and received widespread acclaim.