

The Pioneer
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QUOTE OF THE DAY
The Pioneer
There is information that the BRS President's post will be given to BCs. I welcome the decision of the BRS to give its president post to a BC leader. This is the result of the Congress's caste survey. The BRS should reveal whether it will conduct the silver jubilee celebrations in the name of the TRS or as the BRS, as the BRS was formed only a few years ago
-Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Bhongir MP P4

PUBLISHED FROM: VIJAYAWADA DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD
PM's good governance mantra to bureaucrats
INDIA HOPES TO SIGN FIRST PHASE OF BILATERAL PACT BY OCT: FM
Rana Daggubati becomes first Indian celebrity to attend WRESTLEMANIA

DON'T MISS...
Gottipati opens slew of projects
Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar visited Addanki on Monday and took part in several developmental activities across Santamaguluru Mandal.

A papal visit that could not fructify
Pope Francis was likely to visit India next year but his sojourn could not materialise after he breathed his last on Monday.

Investors' wealth swells by Rs 32L cr
Investors' wealth soared by Rs 32 lakh crore in the five-day stock rally to Monday powered by foreign fund inflows and a broad-based gains in equities.

IPL: Delhi Capitals take on LSG
Delhi Capitals (DC) will expect a more productive effort from their openers when they visit the 'City of Nawabs' to face an increasingly confident Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in an IPL match here on Tuesday.



AP team ends Guj tour with focus on sports infra

The team headed by MA & UD Minister P Narayana toured the Jindal Solid Waste Management Plant in Gvaspur, where electricity and paver blocks are produced from waste.

On the second day of his official visit to Gujarat, Minister Narayana and his delegation continued their study tour, focusing on solid waste management and the development of sports infrastructure.



Pope Francis dies at 88

VATICAN CITY (AP)
Pope Francis, history's first Latin American pontiff who charmed the world with his humble style and concern for the poor but alienated conservatives with critiques of capitalism and climate change, died Monday.

Domus Santa Marta, where Francis lived. "At 7:35 this morning, the Bishop of Rome, Francis, returned to the home of the Father.

India announces 3-day state mourning
The government on Monday announced a three-day state mourning as a mark of respect on the passing away of Pope Francis.

Pope Francis inspired millions: Naidu

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday condoled the passing of Pope Francis and said he inspired millions through his humility, compassion and message of peace.

History's first Latin American pontiff, who charmed the world with his humble style and concern for the poor but alienated conservatives with critiques of capitalism and climate change, Pope Francis died on Monday at the age of 88.

Liquor scam: SIT takes Kasireddy into custody



The Andhra Pradesh police have taken liquor scam accused Kasireddy Rajasekhara Reddy into custody at Shamshabad airport in Hyderabad.

In a video message released earlier, Kasireddy had stated that he would appear before SIT officials at 11 am on Tuesday.



Eluru's first Collector wins PM's Award

V. Prasanna Venkatesh, former Collector of Eluru, has been conferred with the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration for 2023—one of the highest honours for civil servants in the country.

Amaravati gears up for PM's visit



In anticipation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Amaravati on 2 May to restart the State capital development works, a high-level coordination meeting was held in Vijayawada on Monday.

Public meeting venue. Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana instructed the police and other departments to ensure smooth traffic flow on the day of the visit.

Gannavaram Airport at 3:00 PM and then proceed by helicopter to a helipad near the State Secretariat. From there, he will undertake a 1.2 km roadshow to the main event venue behind the Secretariat.



CM to meet Union ministers today

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is expected to meet a string of Union Ministers in New Delhi on April 22, the TDP said on Monday.



AP to host national meet on power sector reforms today

Andhra Pradesh is set to host the prestigious 4th meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on Power Sector Reforms for the first time on Tuesday, April 22, in Vijayawada.

He emphasised the need for seamless coordination to ensure the smooth conduct of the meeting, which is expected to help shape the future direction of power sector reforms in the country.

AP gives land for TCS at 99 paise per acre; no nod so far for Ursa Clusters

The Andhra Pradesh Government has drawn sharp public and political scrutiny over its recent land allocations, particularly the sanction of land to TCS and Ursa Clusters Private Limited in Visakhapatnam.



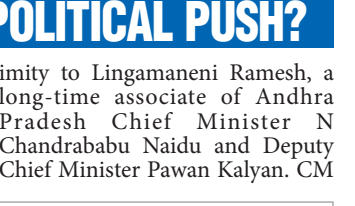
year horizon through the development of a large-scale IT campus. However, what has stirred greater debate is the same-day Cabinet approval granted to Ursa Clusters Pvt Ltd, a relatively unknown company.

Ecoren's meteoric rise sparks row in Telugu states

Ecoren Energy India Pvt Ltd's astonishingly swift expansion across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana has become the subject of murmurs and mounting concern within political and bureaucratic circles in both Telugu states.

POWER PLAY OR POLITICAL PUSH?

What has truly set alarm bells ringing is Yerneni's reported proximity to Lingamaneni Ramesh, a long-time associate of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan.



Ecoren Energy's whirlwind project approvals and billion-pound MoUs in AP and Telangana raise questions over political links, investor credibility, and the risk of déjà vu from past controversies.

Naidu has famously resided in Ramesh's riverfront guest house for years, and the latter is also known to maintain friendly relations with Pawan Kalyan.

grand investment promises were used as a pretext to acquire public land, only for the projects to be shelved or sold on. He cautioned against overlooking the risk of inflated valuations and unfulfilled commitments.



VMC Commissioner steps up City beautification efforts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a concerted effort to foster cleaner and greener urban development, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra has intensified initiatives focused on pollution control and the beautification of key city junctions.

On Monday morning, the Commissioner undertook a thorough inspection of several important locations, including Ramavarappadu Ring, Tikkle Road, Mother Teresa Junction, the Autonagar Garbage Transfer Station, the

Sewage Treatment Plant, and HT Line Road.

At Ramavarappadu Ring, he reviewed the ongoing beautification works, paying special attention to the newly installed unicorn statue, which has quickly become a notable landmark.

Surrounded by well-maintained greenery and pollution-control features, the statue reflects the city's commitment to sustainable and artistic urban design.

During his visit to Mother Teresa Junction, Dhyanchandra stressed the need to complete enhancement works at all major junctions

without delay, to facilitate smoother traffic flow, improve environmental sustainability, and boost visual appeal.

While inspecting HT Line Road, the Commissioner urged officials to expedite road construction while minimising inconvenience to the public. At the Autonagar Garbage Transfer Station, he called for swift completion of ongoing operations, highlighting the importance of cleanliness and efficient waste management.

At the under-construction Sewage Treatment Plant, Dhyanchandra directed officials

to accelerate the remaining works to ensure early commissioning of the facility, thereby improving sanitation and environmental health.

The inspection was carried out in the presence of several senior officials, including Chief Engineer R Srinath Reddy, Chief City Planner Sanjay Ratnakumar, In-charge Chief Medical Health Officer Dr Gopalakrishna Nayak, Superintending Engineers P Satyanarayana and P Satyakumari, Assistant City Planner Mohan Babu, and Executive Engineers Venkateswara Reddy and Samrajyam, among others.

Free HPV vaccination drive launched at Andhra Hospitals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Hospitals, in collaboration with the MB Foundation led by actor Mahesh Babu, has launched a free HPV vaccination campaign aimed at protecting women and girls from cervical cancer, one of the most common cancers affecting women globally.

The vaccination camp being held at Andhra Hospitals, Vijayawada, offers free Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines to eligible girls and women. The initiative is fully funded by MB Foundation, which has contributed ₹40 lakhs towards the cause.

As part of the campaign, girls aged 9 to 14 years will receive two doses of the HPV

vaccine, administered six months apart. Women aged 15 to 45 years will receive three doses at 0, 2 and 6-month intervals. Each dose costs approximately ₹2,000, totaling ₹6,000 per person, all provided free of charge under this program.

Speaking at the press meet, Dr PV Rama Rao, Head of Children's Services & Director at Andhra Hospitals and Dr Paturi Padma, Chief of Fetal Medicine & Director, expressed their appreciation for the MB Foundation's generous support.

They emphasized the importance of early vaccination in the prevention of cervical cancer and lauded the initiative as a significant step towards improving women's health in the region.



Gollapudi panchayat representatives meet with officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In recognition of their selection for the Atma Nirbhar Panchayat Special Award, part of the National Panchayat Awards 2025, several representatives from Gollapudi gram panchayat in Vijayawada Rural mandal, NTR district, met VR Krishna Teja Mailavarapu, the Commissioner of Panchayat Raj & Rural Development, and P Venkata Krishna, the OSD to Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan, at the Commissionerate in Tadepalli on Monday.

The accolade underscores the panchayat's significant contributions towards fostering self-sufficiency and promoting sustainable rural development.

The meeting was led by NTR District Panchayat Officer (DPO) P Lavanya Kumari. Gollapudi Gram Panchayat Special Officer and Extension Officer for Panchayat Raj & Rural Development, YDV Prasad,

in-charge MPDO P Murali Krishna Prasad, and Panchayat Secretary M Swaroopa were present. During their visit, officials from the NTR district and the Vijayawada Rural mandal parishad provided Commissioner Krishna Teja with explanations regarding their achievements.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Krishna Teja and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's OSD Venkata Krishna lauded Gollapudi Panchayat Special Officer Prasad and Secretary Swaroopa. They suggested that the officials maintain the same spirit in the coming days. The officials conveyed their gratitude for the recognition and engaged in discussions about ongoing and future development projects designed to enhance grassroots governance and rural infrastructure.

Vijayawada Divisional Panchayat Officer (DLPO) GLNV Raghavan and Sanitary Inspector Vani Prasad were also present.



Kumbhabhishekam at Geetha Mandiram concludes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The three-day Maha Samparkshana Kumbhabhishekam at Sri Geetha Mandiram in Nunna, Vijayawada Rural Mandal, concluded on Monday with the grand Sri Srinivasa Kalyana Mahadashirvachanam. Led by Pethaadhipati Sri Paripurnanandagiri Swamy and Sri Asanganandagiri Swamy of Sri Vyasastramam, the rituals included Vishvakshana Pooja,

Homams, and Maha Poornahuti. Devotees had darshan and offered prayers to Lord Krishna. Swamy's discourse highlighted faith, virtue, and spiritual guidance. Sri Geetha Mandira Bhaktha Brindam offered Anna Santarpana. Police ensured smooth conduct. Dignitaries, including Tahsildar B Suguna and Inspector Krishna Mohan participated and received blessings during the spiritually enriching celebration.

Mega medical camp held for women cops

10 screening tests, including those for cervical cancer and breast cancer, conducted

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu inaugurated a free Mega Medical Camp in Vijayawada on Monday, organised by the Suraksha Committee to support the health and well-being of women police personnel. The camp, held in collaboration with Top Star Multi-Speciality Hospital, aimed to provide comprehensive medical checkups and treatment for women officers, who often neglect their health due to the demands of their profession.

Medical experts from the Top Star Multi-Speciality Hospital located in Kanuru near Vijayawada conducted 10 different screening tests, including those for cervical cancer, breast cancer, and other health issues, and distributed necessary medications to those in need.



NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu inaugurating the free Mega Medical Camp for women police personnel in Vijayawada on Monday

Addressing the gathering, Commissioner Rajasekhara Babu acknowledged the immense contributions of women police personnel, noting that they often perform their duties under challenging

circumstances while simultaneously managing family responsibilities. "Women officers serve round the clock, 365 days a year, and yet rarely get the time to care for their own health," he said, expressing

gratitude to Top Star Multi-Speciality Hospital for their valuable service.

The initiative was held under the guidance of NTR District Suraksha Committee Convener KV Narasiah, who emphasised the committee's ongoing efforts to promote the safety and well-being of both the public and the police force. "This medical camp is a significant step in that direction," he said. Narasiah also mentioned that the Suraksha Committee has installed over 3,000 CCTV cameras across the city to strengthen public safety and now aims to ensure the health of those who protect it.

DCP KGV Saritha, Trainee IPS Officer Manisha, North Zone ACP Sravanthi Roy, Top Star Hospital MD Dr. Tatini Srinivas, hospital staff, and over 200 women police personnel were present.



Priority for grievance redressal, says Collector

Calls for permanent solutions to ensure that grievances are not repeated

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector M.N. Harendira Prasad, on Monday, directed officials to treat petitions received through the Public Grievance Redressal System with utmost priority, stressing the need for thorough investigation and time-bound resolution. He called for permanent solutions to ensure that grievances are not repeated.

Presiding over the grievance redressal session at the Collectorate Conference Hall, the Collector personally heard petitions and assured appropriate action. He urged the officials to engage directly with complainants to understand core issues and offer last-

ing remedies. "Each complaint should be handled with empathy and diligence to eliminate recurrence," he said. Joint Collector K. Mayur Ashok, District Revenue Officer Bhavani Shankar, and GVMC Chief City Planning Officer Prabhakar were among the senior officials who received petitions alongside the Collector.

Earlier, the Collector chaired a review meeting reiterating the State government's emphasis on swift resolution of grievances, especially those routed via the Chief Minister's Office. He called for daily reviews, appointment of special officers, and strict accountability for repeated grievances due to inadequate

resolution. He also warned of stern action against staff negligence, particularly in pension and land-related cases.

The Collector reviewed progress in employee enrolment under the household survey and the district's Vision Document, instructing timely completion and proactive follow-ups. He urged the officials to connect with petitioners after resolution of issues and gather feedback through the app-based system. A total of 402 petitions were received—173 pertaining to the Revenue Department, 110 to GVMC, 36 to the Police Department, and 83 from other departments. Officials assured prompt and effective redressal.

Archbishop Bala recalls personal bond with Pope Francis

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Archbishop Udamala Bala of Visakhapatnam has expressed deep sorrow over the passing of Pope Francis, describing it as an irreplaceable loss to both the Catholic Church and the global community. Pope Francis, aged 88, breathed his last after a prolonged battle with a severe lung infection. His health had been in a critical state during the recent weeks.

In a heartfelt tribute, Archbishop Bala fondly recalled his personal association with the late pontiff. "Pope Francis was a humble and transformative leader. He redefined the papacy by breaking



away from its traditional regal image and embracing a life of simplicity," the Archbishop said.

He praised the Pope's commitment to peace and justice, noting his strong denunciations of war. "He spoke boldly against violence and conflict, especially advocating for peace in Ukraine, Russia, Israel, and Palestine," he added.

The Archbishop highlighted

Pope Francis' historic role as the first South American and the first Jesuit to ascend to the papacy. "He brought a unique pastoral approach, marked by deep compassion for the poor and marginalised, and a strong voice for social justice."

Reflecting on a personal milestone, he shared that he was the first Indian bishop to be appointed by Pope Francis in 2013. "He later entrusted me with the role of Archbishop of Visakhapatnam. This connection was special, and I feel a profound sense of loss," he said. Archbishop Bala extended his deepest condolences to the global Catholic fraternity and offered prayers for the eternal rest of Pope Francis' soul.

Anomalies in '1 cent' housing

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Allegations have been raised across the district regarding large-scale discrepancies in the government's 'one cent' housing scheme, sparking concerns over systemic lapses in oversight, data manipulation, and irregular contractor payments.

Preliminary reports suggest that several housing units, though incomplete or yet to commence, have been falsely marked as completed in official records. Insiders allege that certain officials tampered with technical data and misused government portals, enabling favoured contractors to claim

undue payments without delivering the promised work.

A critical flaw lies in the scheme's geotagging system—designed to track construction progress through real-time photographic updates via a mobile app. In numerous cases, unrelated or completed house photos have reportedly been uploaded to falsely represent progress at yet-to-be-finished sites.

In the 22nd ward, at Vijayarampuram layout of Padmanabham mandal, glaring anomalies have come to light. One beneficiary's house, with construction halted at the roofing stage, is listed as fully completed online. Another structure, still at

the foundation level, has been officially documented as roofed.

In total, at least 10 such cases have been identified in this layout alone, with 42 roof-level and 17 foundation-to-roof stage houses falsely marked as complete. In a stark instance, a woman's plot—where no construction has begun—is reflected in records as having a fully built house. The issue appears far from isolated. Similar complaints have emerged from Maddi, Gottipalli, and parts of Pendurthi and Anandapuram mandals, all under the Padmanabham zone, pointing to a deeper malaise in project monitoring.



Gottipati inaugurates slew of projects in Addanki

PNS ■ ADDANKI

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar visited Addanki on Monday and took part in several developmental activities across Santamagalur Mandal. The minister inaugurated various projects aimed at strengthening infrastructure and enhancing public amenities in the region.

Among the key projects launched were the NTR Park and a water plant, built at a cost of Rs 10 lakh, to provide both recreational facilities and safe drinking water to residents. He also inaugurated newly laid cement concrete (CC) roads worth Rs 30 lakh, aimed at improving road connectivity and conditions.

In a significant step towards improving educational infrastructure, the minister inaugurated six newly constructed classrooms at a government school, developed with an investment of Rs 78.17 lakh. He said the initiative reflected the government's commitment to



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providing better learning environments for students.

Addressing the media, Minister Ravi Kumar highlighted the government's dedication to empowering youth, pointing out that 16,347 teacher posts were being filled through the Mega DSC recruitment drive — fulfilling a long-standing promise to aspiring educators.

He lauded the Telugu Desam Party for its record in issuing

the highest number of DSC notifications, thereby increasing employment opportunities for teachers.

Taking a dig at the previous YSRCP-led government, he alleged that teachers were humiliated by being assigned duties at liquor outlets and said that former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had shown disregard for the teaching profession, causing psycho-

logical distress among educators. The minister assured that under the leadership of Nara Lokesh, the education system would be further strengthened, ensuring dignity and opportunities for teachers and students alike.

Locals welcomed the minister's visit and expressed hope that the region would witness continued progress under the current government.

Retired ADGP ABV seeks fresh probe into driver Subramanyam's murder

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Retired Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) AB Venkateswara Rao has called for a reinvestigation into the alleged murder of car driver V Subramanyam, terming the current investigation a blot on the Andhra Pradesh Police Department.

The retired officer met the victim's parents at Gollalamidada village in Pedapudi mandal and later addressed the media. He criticised the police for filing what he described as a "flawed and weak" charge-sheet in the case.

"In my 35 years of service, I have never come across such a faulty charge-sheet. There is no relevance between the FIR and the charge-sheet submitted. It is so poorly constructed that the case is bound to be dismissed by the court. This investigation remains a stain on the image of the AP Police," Rao said, alleging that the charge-sheet had been influ-



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enced by YSRCP leaders.

He demanded that the case be reopened and reinvestigated after securing permission from the court. Rao added that he would raise the issue with the Kakinada District Collector

and Superintendent of Police and, if necessary, with higher government authorities.

Expressing disappointment, Rao noted that despite the change in government nearly 10 months ago, no meaningful steps had been taken to ensure justice for Subramanyam's family.

It may be recalled that the then YSRCP MLC Ananta Babu delivered Subramanyam's body to his parents on 20 May 2022, claiming he had died in an accident.

The suspicious death of Subramanyam, who belonged to the Dalit community, sparked outrage across the state.

Ananta Babu was later arrested in connection with the case but was released on bail.

AP SSC, Open School results tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Directorate of Government Examinations has announced that the results of the SSC Public Examinations held in March 2025, along with those of the Open School SSC and Intermediate exams, will be released on 23 April 2025 at 10:00 AM.

According to Vijay Rama Raju V, Director of School Education, students can access their results through various platforms for ease and transparency. The official websites to check the results are <https://bse.ap.gov.in> and <https://apopenschool.ap.gov.in>.

Students can also obtain their results through the 'Mana Mitra' WhatsApp service and the LEAP mobile application. To check results via WhatsApp, send "Hi" to 9552300009, select the Education Services option, choose either SSC Public Exam or Open School Intermediate Results, and enter the hall ticket number to receive a PDF copy.



Entire paddy produce will be procured during Rabi: Durgesh

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh has assured farmers that the entire paddy produce will be procured by the government during the rabi season.

The Minister interacted with farmers at Kanuru village in the Nidadavole constituency on Monday and sought their feedback on the government's

paddy procurement process.

He stated that the farmers expressed satisfaction with the current procedures. He urged them to bring any issues they face while selling their produce to his notice. He also explained that the government had further simplified the paddy procurement process to support farmers.

"To make services more

accessible, the government has launched a WhatsApp helpline (No. 73373 59375). The government is committed to procuring the entire paddy produce from farmers during the rabi season," he said.

The Minister advised farmers not to worry about the sale of their paddy and assured them of full support during the season.

Make isolation ward available for patients: DC

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P. Prasanthi has instructed the doctors at the Government General Hospital to ensure the isolation ward is made available to patients without delay.

During an inspection of the ward on Monday afternoon, the Collector reviewed the progress of work in the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) ward and the Critical Care Block with Hospital Superintendent Dr M. Lakshmi Surya Prabha.

Speaking on the occasion,



Collector Prasanthi emphasised that the isolation ward must be made fully operational for patient care. She also directed that the MCH ward be prepared to provide

adequate medical services at the earliest.

The Collector recalled that during the previous review meeting, she had instructed officials to take all necessary

steps to make the services in the MCH block accessible to the public. In response, doctors informed her that the MCH block would be ready to serve patients within 15 days.

She further directed officials to expedite the work to provide emergency medical services through the Critical Care Block, which is affiliated with the Government Teaching Hospital. The Collector also reviewed the availability of medical services and human resources and instructed the doctors and staff to strictly adhere to the prescribed timelines.

Swarnandhra Vision 2047 document essential for development: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K. VetriSelvi has stressed that the Swarnandhra @ 2047 Vision Document is vital for achieving holistic development in the district. A workshop on 'Capacity Building' was held here on Monday to guide officials in formulating the Vision Document. Chief planning officials, special officers from various constituencies, and other key officials participated in the session.

Addressing the gathering, Collector VetriSelvi urged officials to draft the Swarnandhra Vision 2047 document with a focus on the district's all-round progress. She said effective field visits by ward and village secretariats, based on data and public sentiments, would lead to better outcomes.

She noted that the State government has already initiated pilot projects to draft development plans at the Assembly constituency level, covering



Kuppam, Pithapuram, Mangalagiri and Urvakonda. The government's aim, she said, is to meet the aspirations of the people, raise per capita income, and eliminate poverty, with action plans to be prepared accordingly.

Collector VetriSelvi emphasised that the 2047 vision for Andhra Pradesh should prioritise key sectors for economic growth, improved living standards, sustainable and environment-friendly development, enhanced employment opportunities for youth, future skills, and workforce empowerment.

She also directed officials to include in the plan measures for women's empowerment, farmers' aspirations, and uplifting

weaker sections.

Referring to the national Viksit Bharat initiative, she said Andhra Pradesh must present effective plans aligned with the Swarnandhra @ 2047 vision. A detailed vision report should be prepared over the next five years, until 2029, she added, stating that every department must contribute significantly to achieving the goal. The Collector further stated that ongoing progress in agriculture, horticulture and fisheries must be reflected in the plan, along with focus on intercropping systems, higher yields, natural farming, and income generation. She also called for inclusion of components to boost milk

Kiran hails BRS move to appoint a BC party prez

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that there is information that the post of BRS president will be given to BCs. "I hail the BRS if it gives its president post to a BC leader," he said.

Addressing the media at the Gandhi Bhavan on Monday, Kiran said the BRS is going to appoint a BC leader as its president, and it is the 'result' of the Congress's caste survey. However, he said that the BRS is conducting its silver jubilee celebrations with the money it looted from the people.

He asked the BRS to reveal whether it will celebrate its silver jubilee in the name of the TRS or the BRS.

"Is it not correct that

KCR changed the name TRS to BRS to loot the nation? How can KCR conduct silver jubilee celebrations after removing Telangana from his party's name? KTR must apologise to the people of Telangana for looting them. I doubt whether the TRS is alive now," he said. Wondering at BRS leaders chanting the name of former United AP Chief Minister, the late YS Rajashekar Reddy, and the current AP CM N. Chandrababu Naidu, he asked BRS to explain why the people should make KCR Chief Minister again.

He said that BRS Working President KT Rama Rao has been distorting history by comparing KCR to Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

Nimmala: Polavaram Project to be completed by Dec 2027

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu has announced that the Polavaram irrigation project is progressing with the target of completion by December 2027. Addressing the media in Rajahmundry, the Minister stated that, in line with Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's vision, the diaphragm wall would be completed by the end of December this year.

He criticised the previous government, alleging that YSRCP leaders were unaware that the project included a diaphragm wall, let alone understood its importance. "They have no proper knowledge about the project. Earlier, under Chandrababu's leadership, the diaphragm wall was constructed at a cost of Rs 430 crore. However, it was dismantled by the Jagan-led administration," he remarked.

Ramanaidu added that the



current government has recommended the diaphragm wall construction with a revised budget of Rs 990 crore. "The work is progressing rapidly using two cutters and two grabbers. As of 20 April, over 202 metres of the wall have been completed. A third cutter will be deployed by 30 April," he said.

He also informed that steps are being taken to ensure construction continues even dur-

ing the monsoon. "We will complete the buttress dam by May to reinforce the upstream coffer dam. Meanwhile, without waiting for the diaphragm wall to be completed, we have already initiated construction of the ECRF dam at Gap-1 in April. Work on the ECRF dam at Gap-2 is scheduled to begin by 30 November this year, as per the roadmap laid out by CM Chandrababu," the minister explained.

Bike-lifting gang nabbed, 11 motorcycles seized

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Police have arrested a three-member interstate gang involved in bike thefts and recovered 11 stolen motorcycles in Tanuku.

Speaking to the media at Tanuku Rural Police Station on Monday, Tadepalligudem

DSP D Viswanath said the gang was notorious for lifting bikes parked outside houses at night. The gang had committed several such offences across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The arrested persons have been identified as Dasani Manibabu, Gudala Lakshminarayana, and Bonta

Raviteja. The police recovered motorcycles valued at Rs 13.4 lakh from the gang.

DSP Viswanath appreciated the efforts of Inspector B Krishna Kumar, Sub-Inspector K Chandrasekhar, and ASI P Sangeet Rao for successfully apprehending the gang.



Welfare of disabled is the goal: NTR DC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has emphasised the importance of utilising government-provided support to empower Divyangjans (persons with disabilities) and help them achieve greater heights in life.

On Monday, under the aegis of the Department for the Welfare of Differently Aabled Persons, the Collector distributed laptops and a hearing aid to six disabled students at the Pingali Venkaiah Conference Hall at the District Collectorate in Vijayawada.

Speaking at the event, Dr Lakshmisha noted that the government will implement a wide range of welfare programmes aimed at the uplift of the differently abled. He stated that the administration is actively working to identify their needs and provide the necessary tools to help them succeed, particularly in education.



monthly stipend of Rs 1,500 and Rs 1,000 towards study material. To support homemakers and those unable to attend offline classes, the government will now offer online coaching from 24 April.

She came down heavily on the previous YSRCP government for failing to recruit a single teacher in five years. "Jagan Mohan Reddy misled the youth with hollow promises, issuing a notification just three months before the elections," she remarked, also criticising the previous regime for deploying teachers to liquor shops during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DSC aspirants expressed gratitude to CM Naidu and Minister Lokesh for fulfilling their promises and prioritising employment for the youth. The event saw the participation of several aspirants, alliance leaders, and party workers.

Editor's TAKE

Visa shock for Indian students

US revokes hundreds of student visas: 50 per cent affected are Indian students

In a move that has sparked concern across academic and diplomatic circles, the Trump administration has revoked student visas for hundreds of international students, with a staggering 50 per cent of the affected individuals hailing from India. The American Immigration Lawyers' Association (AILA) has revealed this information. AILA collected 327 reports of visa revocations and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) terminations from students, attorneys, and university personnel. What is of concern to India is that this move disproportionately affects Indian nationals, followed by students from China (14 per cent), South Korea, Nepal, and Bangladesh. There are serious concerns about the transparency and consistency of the process, as the actions lack proper oversight and are leaving students with little to no recourse. The revocations are not only a personal and academic setback for the students involved but also reflect a growing unease in the international student community. Many have described the process as abrupt and arbitrary, with limited opportunities to appeal SEVIS terminations or clarify misunderstandings. For Indian students, who comprise one of the largest populations of international students in the United States, this development is deeply unsettling. These students invest heavily — both financially and emotionally — in pursuing higher education in the US. The visa revocations interrupt academic progress, affect employment opportunities tied to their studies, and, in many cases, may force them to leave the country abruptly. The psychological toll is equally significant. Students face uncertainty, fear of deportation, and the potential stigma of visa termination, which could affect future travel and academic prospects.

The ramifications of this policy move extend beyond individual students to American educational institutions. International students are a vital source of revenue for US universities, contributing billions of dollars annually through tuition and living expenses. Many graduate programmes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) — areas critical to US innovation — rely heavily on international talent, particularly from India and China. With increasing visa uncertainties, universities may find it harder to attract top global students. This could result in lower enrolment numbers, loss of funding, and a diminished reputation for academic inclusiveness and excellence. Moreover, such measures may deter future applicants, who may opt for more welcoming countries such as Canada, Australia, or Germany. While the Trump administration has not offered detailed justifications for these specific revocations, the actions are consistent with its broader immigration stance.

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump emphasised tightening immigration controls and "putting Americans first," often casting a sceptical eye on visa programmes — even those meant for students and skilled workers. One reason for these revocations may be tied to concerns about misuse of visa programmes, fraudulent enrolment, or security vetting. However, critics argue that such justifications are being applied too broadly, punishing legitimate students and tarnishing the US's image as a global education hub.

The Trump administration's decision to revoke a significant number of student visas, disproportionately affecting Indian nationals, marks a troubling development in US immigration policy. If left unchecked, such policies could shift global student mobility away from the US, undermining the nation's historical status as the premier destination for higher education.

India's expanding maritime vision

As India reimagines its role in the Indo-Pacific, this quiet yet profound pivot signals not only a strategic response to China's growing presence, but also a deeper civilisational reawakening rooted in partnership, not patronage

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi first outlined India's SAGAR vision — Security and Growth for All in the Region — in 2015 during a visit to Mauritius, few could have predicted how it would evolve into a sweeping geopolitical doctrine encompassing not only the Indian Ocean but the western coasts of Africa and beyond. Nearly a decade later, India's maritime strategy is undergoing a quiet yet profound transformation. From SAGAR, the nation is now navigating toward Mahasagar — literally, the "Great Ocean" — signalling a decisive pivot in India's foreign and security policy with Africa in clear sight. The SAGAR initiative, initially conceived to promote maritime security and economic cooperation among Indian Ocean nations, has served as a foundation for India's role as a "net security provider" in the region. But today's reality demands more than regional stewardship. The increasing footprint of China in the Indian Ocean, from Gwadar to Djibouti, and the growing strategic relevance of the western Indian Ocean island states, have prompted India to recalibrate. The shift to Mahasagar (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security And Growth Across Regions) represents not just a change in terminology but a fundamental reimagining of India's role in the Indo-Pacific.

At the heart of this transformation lies Mauritius, a small island nation with outsized significance. More than a maritime partner, Mauritius shares a cultural and civilisational bond with India that predates diplomatic relations. Home to a large Indian-origin population, Mauritius has become a trusted partner in India's security calculus. Over the years, India has extended grants, built infrastructure, supplied patrol vessels and aircraft, and helped set up coastal surveillance radar systems across the Mauritian archipelago. But it is the development of the Agalega Islands — with an airstrip and jetty capable of supporting military-grade assets — that best symbolises the quiet assertiveness of the Mahasagar vision.

Critics argue that India's investment in Agalega mimics the Chinese playbook of dual-use port development seen in Hambantota and Gwadar. However, the crucial difference lies in the nature of India's partnerships. Unlike China's debt-driven port diplomacy, India's maritime engagement rests on mutual respect, development cooperation, and the principle of shared security. The Indo-Mauritian relationship is one of kinship diplomacy — one that grows not just from strategic needs but from shared history and people-to-people ties.



But the Mahasagar doctrine does not stop at Mauritius. It casts a wider net — one that spans from Seychelles and Madagascar to Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. India is increasing its naval engagements, signing logistics and defence agreements, and offering capacity-building assistance across the African coast. The logic is strategic: the western Indian Ocean is not just a transit zone but a critical maritime highway for global trade, energy routes, and naval mobility. With China making aggressive inroads through the Belt and Road Initiative and military bases like the one in Djibouti, India is asserting its own footprint — not by coercion, but through collaboration. The pivot to Mahasagar also highlights India's ambition to become a blue-water navy with global reach. Indian naval ships are now a common sight in African ports. Naval exercises, hydrographic surveys, humanitarian missions, and training programmes have become regular features of India-Africa maritime relations. The Indian Navy is no longer a regional patrol force; it is fast becoming a symbol of India's strategic confidence, capable of shaping the security architecture of the



SANTHOSH MATHEW

entire Indo-Pacific. Importantly, this transformation is not purely militaristic. The Mahasagar vision also embraces the idea of the blue economy — a sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem health. India's support for maritime infrastructure, fisheries development, and coastal tourism in partner countries underscores its commitment to holistic maritime growth. It is a model that seeks not just security but shared prosperity.

The messaging is also clear. As China intensifies its presence through military bases and commercial ports, India is building friendships. Where Beijing offers loans, India offers trust. Where China sets up surveillance posts, India establishes radar stations with shared access. Where China builds harbours that could dock submarines, India helps build coast guard stations to fight piracy, smuggling, and maritime crime. This contrast is not lost on African nations seeking partners who respect sovereignty and sustainability. Domestically, the Mahasagar strategy aligns with India's broader geopolitical identity. As a civilisational power with ancient maritime traditions — from Chola expeditions to trade with East Africa and the Gulf — India is reclaiming its historical place in the oceanic realm. The Indian Ocean is not a frontier — it is India's historical highway, linking cultures, religions, and com-

merce. By integrating Africa into this vision, India is not expanding its reach; it is reawakening a dormant maritime consciousness. In geopolitical terms, this shift could not come at a more crucial time. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar and the Indo-Pacific emerges as the new theatre of strategic competition, India's Mahasagar doctrine provides a distinct alternative.

It blends hard power with soft diplomacy, regional ambition with global responsibility, and tradition with modern strategy. It positions India not just as a counterweight to China, but as a civilisational ally to Africa — one whose rise is guided by partnership, not patronage. What began in 2015 as a regional security initiative has now matured into a grand ocean dream. The journey from SAGAR to Mahasagar is more than a maritime shift — it is a statement of intent.

It tells the world that India is ready to lead not by dominance, but by example. And in doing so, it has found a natural partner in Africa and a reliable anchor in Mauritius. "An ocean for all, free and open, where every nation may sail in peace and security," aptly said Woodrow Wilson.

(The author is Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies and Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University, India. Views are personal)

India's demographic dividend at risk

SECOND Opinion

BY KAJLEEN KAUER

India boasts a demographic dividend, with a working-age population (15-64 years) of around 67 per cent, which can propel economic growth. This momentous opportunity, however, necessitates optimising the potential of the available labour force by ensuring a reduction in unemployment and underemployment and building human capital.

The macroeconomic growth models explain long-term sustainable progress as a function of labour force growth and technology built over time with human capital.

India faces no dearth in population and therefore labour force, but it lacks education, which is necessary to develop individuals' productivity and foster technological advancements. Besides, the economy languishes with high unemployment, which fails to realise the so-called "demographic dividend".

The India Employment Report 2024 shows the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) at 52 per cent, compared to 76 per cent in China. This indicates that nearly half of the possible dividend is forfeited.

To further add to the woes, the female LFPR stands at 37 per cent in India, compared to an average of 70 per cent in China. This places India as the 13th lowest female LFPR.

The report also highlights that India's youth grapples with soaring unemployment rates. Shockingly, they account for 83 per cent of the unemployed workforce. Even more disappointing is the share of youngsters with higher education in the total unemployed, which has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65 per cent in 2022.

This brings to the surface the grave reality that a large portion of the potential labour force capable of contributing to growth is dissipated.

More particularly, India adds 3 million graduates annually, but 33 per cent of them are unemployed or underemployed (CMIE, 2024). There exists a wide gap between industry requirements and the education system.

Only 15 per cent of our workforce has formal vocational training, compared to 70 per cent in South Korea (UNESCO). However, the Government's initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme, and Skill India Digital Hub are trying to bridge this divide. The Economic Survey 2023-24 notes that the Indian economy needs to generate an average of nearly 78.5 lakh jobs annually until 2030, in the non-farm sector, to cater to the rising workforce. This is further distressed as around 90 per cent of the workforce is engaged in informal work, facing irregular work and income, absence of social security benefits, and sub-standard working conditions.

The manufacturing sector, which has huge untapped potential to absorb unskilled and semi-skilled labour that

moves away from agriculture, contributes only 14 per cent to the GDP in India as compared to 27 per cent in China.

While the agrarian sector employs 43 per cent of the workforce, it contributes only 16 per cent to GDP. India's economic growth has been primarily driven by the services sector, which lacks employment absorption because of skill intensity.

Additionally, the advent of artificial intelligence is undeniably a threat to the already dismal employment situation, further aggravating the population-to-opportunities mismatch. There is an ardent need to prioritise labour-intensive manufacturing to engage unskilled labour, along with concentrated efforts to support MSMEs.

Moreover, the transforming nature of employment, such as the gig workforce, is expected to form 6.7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1 per cent of the total livelihood in India by 2029-30; the labour policy must ensure a robust minimum level of employment quality.

Most importantly, for India to harness its demographic dividend and not make it a missed opportunity, investment in skilled education is needed to nurture a workforce equipped with employable skills.

India's demographic dividend offers immense potential, but without addressing unemployment, skill gaps, and informal employment, it risks becoming a lost opportunity.

The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, SGGSC, University of Delhi. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



Very sad news on the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. On behalf of the people of Latvia I express my deep condolences to all the Catholics and the Church. Pope Francis was compassionate and kind human being and he will be greatly missed.

EDGARIS RINKEVICS, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

SC reins in overreaching Governor

Madam — The Supreme Court has issued a timely and firm reminder to Governors across various states that they are not political gatekeepers or watchdogs, but constitutional functionaries. They are duty-bound to act within the framework of the Constitution, and failure to do so will invite judicial intervention — as seen recently in Tamil Nadu. The case involving Governor R N Ravi is a stark example. His tenure has been marred by political friction, constitutional brinkmanship, and disregard for democratic norms. The Supreme Court made it unequivocally clear: Governors cannot stall the legislative process or undermine the will of elected Governments. Under the Constitution, a Governor may return a bill once for reconsideration or reserve it for the President. Prolonged delays — stretching into years — are unacceptable. Such actions are not only unconstitutional but also a dereliction of duty.

This ruling brings much-needed clarity and alignment between state and central governance. Just as the President must assent to a re-passed bill by Parliament, Governors must do the same at the state level. They have no veto powers based on political preference. By reaffirming that legislatures, not unelected officials, are the cornerstone of democracy, the Supreme Court has upheld the spirit of federalism. Its directive is both appropriate and timely.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

UNESCO recognises Bhagavad Gita

Madam — This refers to the recent news, "Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register" (April 19). It is a matter of immense pride for the spiritual and cultural communities in India and abroad that manuscripts of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra have been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

The Bhagavad Gita holds a timeless place in the spiritual consciousness of India. The guidance imparted by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, through 700 verses across 18 chapters, offers eternal wisdom and remains relevant to this day.

Its teachings continue to illuminate the path for followers of Sanatan Dharma and inspire philosophical discourse worldwide. Similarly, the Natyashastra — an ancient treatise on performing arts — underscores India's deep-rooted cultural traditions.

This international recognition reinforces the richness of India's intellectual and spiritual legacy. The inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita and Natyashastra manuscripts in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a proud moment for India.

This global recognition highlights the enduring spiritual, philosophical, and cultural significance of these ancient texts, reaffirming India's profound contributions to the world's intellectual and artistic heritage.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | FARIDABAD

Made in India gets global traction

Madam — India's "Made in India" initiative is gaining strong traction, positioning the country as a rising global manufacturing hub. Several developments signal this shift: India now produces 20 per cent of the world's iPhones, there's a notable rise in exports of Indian-manufactured weapons, and countries such as Canada are exploring collaboration on Vande Bharat Express trains.

The ongoing trade conflict between the United States and China is likely to accelerate this trend. With China threatening to withhold rare earth materials crucial for the manufacturing of weapons and electronics, the U.S. defence and tech sectors could face significant disruption.

This presents a unique opportunity for India to step up and fill the gap. Now is the opportune moment for India to aggressively promote its manufacturing sector.

With the right policies and strategic investments, this shift could lead to a substantial economic boost and elevate India's position in the global supply chain.

India's growing manufacturing capabilities, from iPhones to defence exports, signal its emergence as a global industrial hub.

Amid US-China trade tensions, India has a unique chance to fill critical supply chain gaps. Strategic investments now can propel economic growth and cement India's role in global manufacturing leadership.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

BANGLADESH MUST END TARGETED VIOLENCE AGAINST HINDUS

Proposes "Protect minorities without excuses: India tells Bangladesh" (The Pioneer, April 20), the recent brutal killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy — vice-president of the Biral unit of the Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad and a respected Hindu community leader — has shocked and saddened many. In just the past two months, there have been 76 attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, leading to 23 deaths.

These attacks have intensified following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amid student-led protests. Since then, the Hindu minority has faced relentless violence, property destruction, and severe harassment. Under the interim Government led by Muhammad Yunus, the situation has deteriorated further, with perpetrators enjoying impunity.

This pattern points to a systemic targeting of Hindus and an alarming disregard for basic human rights. The atroci-

ties against minorities not only weaken the secular fabric of Bangladesh but also strain its ties with India. Despite repeated diplomatic appeals and condemnations from India, the persecution continues unabated. It is imperative that Bangladesh acts swiftly to protect its minorities and uphold justice.

In light of ongoing violence against Hindus in Bangladesh, including the recent killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, India has rightly urged Dhaka to act without excuses.

Since Sheikh Hasina's ouster, attacks on minorities have surged under the interim Muhammad Yunus-led Government. With over 70 incidents in just two months, the impunity of perpetrators is deeply troubling.

Bangladesh must urgently uphold minority rights, restore law and order, and prevent further erosion of its secular and diplomatic standing — else it runs the risk of total breakdown.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

The Supreme Court roars for the forests

The Supreme Court has once again stepped in with unprecedented urgency and resolve. In a suo motu intervention, the Court expressed outrage at the illegal felling of over 100 acres of forest land in Telangana

FIRST Column

The Supreme Court of India, on December 12, 1996, in its epoch-making order on TN Godavarman Thirumullapad vs Union of India and Others, had set into motion a marvellous judicial intervention on forest conservation in the country — and the rest is the history of an innumerable number of orders in correcting the several wrong decisions affecting forest and wildlife conservation in the country.

After 29 years of experience of judicial intervention, in yet another suo motu intervention on April 3, 2025 — thanks to the students of Hyderabad University and the media — the Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih, helped by Senior Advocate K Parmeshwar (the amicus curiae in the Godavarman forest cases, who alerted the Court to media reports about the deforestation), acted.

The Bench acted swiftly, expressing shock at the scale of the tree felling and the use of heavy machinery to clear approximately 100 acres in just a few days — directing the Registrar General of Andhra High Court to visit the site of the felling and submit the report the same day in the afternoon of April 3 itself.

The Registrar General, after visiting the site in the afternoon, sent the report; and then the Bench, in a very forthright, acerbic tone, warned the state Chief Secretary and senior bureaucrats of putting them in jail in the same location by constructing a temporary jail.

The Court comments are scathing for the Telangana Government but in favour of trees, wildlife and the natural environment, which are part of our ecosystem but cannot speak and protest, yet they are the resource base for human survival.

The Court heard the case again on 16 April and again warned the Chief Secretary and other officers of sending them to imprisonment for felling trees over 100 acres if the damage was not addressed through a restoration plan and directed the Telangana government to submit the same in the next four weeks.

While hearing the case, the Bench reiterated that the 1996 Supreme Court order is sacrosanct in defining what constitutes forests — irrespective of the status of the land.

The Bench, while reiterating its warning to the officers of state, directed the state Chief Wildlife Warden to ensure protection to wildlife and asked for a restoration plan for the 100-acre felled forests, while also stating that high-rise buildings cannot be made in the company of wildlife. It made it clear that the State Government had to take permission for felling of all kinds of trees — be it recorded forests or otherwise — if it comes under the purview of deemed forests as outlined in the 1996 order of the Supreme Court.

So, the die has been cast so far as the definition of forest is concerned, coming as it did after



the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act was passed by Parliament in 2023. The amendment primarily clarifies the scope of forest land and simplifies procedures for certain activities.

The amendment clarifies that forest land includes areas notified under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, or recorded in Government records as forest land as on the 1980 Act's enforcement date.

The Act exempts certain types of land from its purview, such as land within 100 km of India's border needed for national security projects, small roadside amenities, and public roads leading to a habitation.

Now, the observations of the Supreme Court Bench have restored the 1996 order of the Supreme Court, and hence all states are duty-bound to obtain permission for non-forest use of



VK BAHUGUNA

THE BENCH, WHILE REITERATING ITS WARNING TO THE OFFICERS OF STATE, DIRECTED THE STATE CHIEF WILDLIFE WARDEN TO ENSURE PROTECTION TO WILDLIFE AND ASKED FOR A RESTORATION PLAN FOR THE 100-ACRE FELLED FORESTS, WHILE ALSO STATING THAT HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS CANNOT BE MADE IN THE COMPANY OF WILDLIFE

deemed forest land.

Now let us examine the context of such virulent observations of sending state officers to jail by the Apex Court on April 3, as well as reiterating it on April 16, 2025. After this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has also sought a report from the Telangana Government.

It is a stark fact that the forests of the country are not in good shape — and the most important reason is the public apathy for conservation of forests at all levels, be it the public at large, administrative or political leaders of all hues, though they keep tom-tomming on solemn occasions and provide lip service to the forests, biodiversity and river systems.

This is quite revealed from the way our Governments function at both the Centre and state level. We need to look at the State of Forest Report 2023, which clearly brought out that more than 37 per cent of tree cover out of the 82 million ha of forest and tree cover is created by the farmers of the country — and it is worth pondering the fate of forest-related biodiversity on these

farmers' land.

Another grim reminder is the lack of adequate regeneration in recorded forests, as only 48 per cent of the forest areas have adequate regeneration. The degradation is also increasing, as 46,000 ha of recorded forests have nearly completely lost their tree cover.

There is a need that the IAS and IFS officers sitting in the Ministry decide to change this matrix of degradation and work sincerely to ensure a policy framework for better forest and biodiversity management.

This writer is very forthright in asking the forest service mandarins to get over the clique syndrome and speak in a single voice for the trees, wild animals and our rivers and rivulets. The professionalism these days is seen more in acquiescence and lobbying than in standing for the real cause.

It is because of this that the Supreme Court Bench made these sarcastic comments — and it is time now that the officers work honestly and balance the need for development with conservation. Once they stand firm and truthful, then the political masters shall follow.

There is a need for increasing the budget of the forestry sector and empowerment of communities under the Joint Forest Management Programme.

But one of the biggest causes of deforestation is the lopsided and open-ended implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, who — along with foreign-funded NGOs and 'Jhola chhap' social activists and phoney foresters — portray the romantic vision of promoting encroachments on forest land.

They must desist or must be sidelined by the Government and asked to work to make the land so far allotted to tribals productive so that their socio-economic status improves.

It is hoped that this intervention of the Apex Court will force all concerned to change track. In conclusion, the Supreme Court's timely intervention once again underscores the vital role of the judiciary in safeguarding India's forests and wildlife.

The strong stance taken by the Court, including warnings of imprisonment for errant officials — reaffirms the sanctity of the 1996 Godavarman order and its relevance despite recent legislative changes. It also highlights the growing civic engagement, especially from students and media, in environmental issues.

Moving forward, it is imperative for administrative leadership and policymakers to prioritise ecological integrity, implement restoration measures, and foster genuine, professional commitment to forest conservation — balancing development with sustainability for future generations.

(The writer is former Director-General & Chancellor of ICFRE, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Views are personal)

Bridging the agritech divide with advanced farming technology

As the agriculture sector stands at a crossroads, scalable innovations like satellite-based sensing, region-specific tools, and inclusive pricing models offer a path toward a more sustainable and tech-enabled agricultural future

The farming industry is one of the significant pillars of the Indian economy, contributing a significant 16 per cent of India's GDP and engaging more than half of the country's population. However, to date, there has been a slow uptake of advanced technologies in agriculture. While several agritech start-ups have been launched and well-funded by investors, the connection between these ventures and farmers remains a challenge. One of the main problems that these start-ups have to contend with is that of high costs, which tend to be associated with technology.

There are many tools — including those used in precision farming, machinery such as weather stations, and sensors that can be applied to the soil — that hold the future of increased yields and sustainable farming. However, the cost associated with such technologies might be unaffordable for small farmers, who form the largest percentage of India's farming community. Devices such as IoT sensors can cost hundreds of dollars per year, meaning that while a slight increase in yield for such farmers is hard to come by, the devices do not offer value for money.

More than 80 per cent of farmers in India are marginal farmers, cultivating landholdings of less than five acres. These marginal lands are often fragmented into multiple smaller plots, allowing farmers to grow different crops on the same holding.

This fragmentation poses a challenge for agritech solutions designed for large-scale farming. However, satellite-based data solutions can bridge this gap by providing precise, farm-specific insights even for farms having an area of only a quarter of an acre (about 10,000 square feet), enabling even smallholder farmers to optimise their crop management and improve productivity.

The policies of the Indian agricultural sector fluctuate, and some crucial aspects like water — which is a basic necessity for agriculture — are controlled by the state government.

While such interventions as subsidies and grants are useful, they have led to a situation where agritech remains a state-subsidised model rather than a market-driven one.



Many new agritechs have come to depend on these Government partnerships for revenue instead of selling directly to farmers, which has impacted the growth and sustainability of most of them in the private market.

Among the challenges that have limited the embrace of agritech is ignorance among farmers.

It is essential to understand that large-scale farmers might invest time and resources to evaluate and consider adopting new technologies, while smallholder farmers are more likely to make decisions by word of mouth or based on regular practices.

This is mainly due to the poor devel-



SAT KUMAR TOMAR

opment of facilities and capacity-building to form the basis for adopting innovations in farming technologies.

Cost-Effective Solutions

The first area of intervention for farmer uptake can be increased through improved adoption of technologies that are cheaper to develop. Although IoT-based sensors are costly, satellite remote sensing is feasible.

While IoT sensors can cost several hundred dollars and give localised information, satellite technology offers information for the whole farm area at a considerably lower cost — usually less than 5 per cent of the price of sensors. Satellite remote sensing, combined with artificial intelligence and machine learning, can be used to monitor soil nutrient levels, manage pest and disease risks, and support irrigation water management across large areas of farmland.

These solutions are especially practical and accessible for smallholder farm-

ers. In this way, satellite-based solutions represent a constrained set of technological tools whereby agritech companies can propose complete and high-quality products and services at more competitive prices.

Localised Solutions

Given the highly heterogeneous climate of the country and the different farming practices followed across regions, it can be said that a market solution carved in one casting will not fit this agritech market. Start-ups must provide region-specific products.

They can, therefore, apply different ways of ensuring their solution reaches farms in varying regions so that farmers can adopt it.

Pricing Models

Long-term, technology must be accessible to small and marginal farmers and useful even for field crops like wheat — especially in terms of the ultimate cost

of the technology delivered to the farm. A scholar cited that the cost of any new technology farmers must consider has to be less than or equal to 10 per cent of the total farming cost. This is crucial for adoption.

Affordability is another value that agritech start-ups should embrace, enabling them to offer their products at a cheaper cost and within reach of many farmers. Other revenue models that can be used include fee-for-service or usage plans in which the farmer pays only for what is used.

Fostering Education

Guaranteeing extensive use of such technology — even if it is cheap — requires more education and support. Agritech companies must incorporate education campaigns as a key means of informing farmers about the benefits of using these products.

This might be achievable through human capital development programmes,

farmer organisations or local associations. This paper contends that hands-on training and demonstrations enable farmers to overcome hesitation stemming from a lack of familiarity. Current strategies point to the need to make technology simple and easy to use to minimise the chances of farmers being unable to adopt it on the farm.

Government and Private Sector Collaboration

Although major funding is currently being attracted to agritech start-ups via government grants, the long-term model will require the involvement of both public and private entities.

This implies a need for policies that encourage agritech growth while avoiding excessive dependence on state subsidies. This includes strengthening policy content, creating private-sector incentives, and guaranteeing support for farmers transitioning to better technologies. Scaling efforts via public-private partnerships may help deliver appropriate support to farmers.

Final Thoughts

The Indian agritech industry is at a turning point. Although there is hope in the power of technology to transform agriculture, challenges such as cost, accessibility and uptake remain significant. High-end technologies like IoT sensors and UAVs are often too expensive for small and marginal farmers.

However, affordable and scalable solutions — such as satellite remote sensing, regionalised products, optional pricing structures and farmers' sensitisation — are available. When combined with agricultural expertise and AI/ML, satellite remote sensing emerges as a practical and inclusive solution, making advanced technology accessible even to small and marginal farmers.

India, being one of the top agricultural producers globally, has a wealth of insights from its diverse farming landscape. These learnings not only improve Indian agriculture but are also leveraged globally to assist small and marginal farmers elsewhere.

(The writer is Founder, Co-founder & CEO, Satyukt Analytics. Views are personal)

FROM TRAFFICKING TO PSYCHOPATHS — NOW WHAT? **MARDAANI 3 TEASES NEW SINISTER THREAT**

The makers of the upcoming movie *Mardaani 3*, which stars Rani Mukerji in the titular role, have locked the film's release date. The film is set to arrive in cinemas on February 27, 2026. The makers took to their social media on Monday and announced the release date of the film marking the auspicious Holi festival as its release window. Holi, which falls on March 4, symbolises the triumph of good over bad and the makers are pegging this film to be a bloody, violent clash between Shivani's goodness vs sinister evil forces with its choice of release date.

Mardaani, produced by Yash Raj Films, is the biggest solo female-led franchise in Hindi cinema which came into force 11 years ago. The film franchise has since garnered love and acclaim for its taut storytelling. The blockbuster franchise has received unanimous love from people and has attained a cult status amongst cine-lovers. *Mardaani 3* will see Rani Mukerji reprise the role of a daredevil cop, Shivani Shivaji Roy, who selflessly fights for justice.

Rani had earlier revealed that the edge of the seat thriller is 'dark, deadly and brutal' and it immediately piqued curios-

ity amongst netizens, the fans of the star and the franchise *Mardaani*, which was released in 2014, was directed by Pradeep Sarkar. The second instalment was directed by Gopi Puthran, who wrote the first part of the film franchise.

While *Mardaani* followed the story of human-trafficking, *Mardaani 2*, which was released in 2019, followed the story of a psychopath, rapist and murderer. The film franchise is known for sketching dreadful characters of its villains who are eventually countered by the titular character symbolising the victory of good over evil.



SEEMA SAJDEH GETS REAL ABOUT DIVORCE

Seema and Sohail Khan tied the knot in 1998 and have two sons, Nirvan and Yohan. After over two decades of marriage, the couple went their separate ways in 2022. Speaking about their separation, Seema acknowledged that the environment at home plays a huge role in a child's emotional health.

"Seeing this irritable parent in the house, the atmosphere is tense — you can literally cut it with a knife," she said, describing how the emotional disconnect between parents affects children more than they often realize.

Seema also offered a refreshingly nuanced perspective on infidelity. Contrary to common beliefs, she stated that having an affair isn't necessarily a deal-breaker for her.

"We're human and we grow from our mistakes. It depends on the kind of affair it is. Even if someone's mind is elsewhere, if they're thinking about someone else, they've already cheated."



Her words suggest a deeper focus on emotional compatibility and shared happiness, rather than rigid boundaries.

More than infidelity, Seema believes the real red flag in a relationship is when couples stop enjoying life together. "Life is short — live it and be happy. Laughter is the best medicine, and the day you stop laughing together, it's over," she emphasized. Looking back, Seema admits she once held her ex-husband entirely accountable for their marital issues. But with time, she found clarity and the capacity to see things from a place of personal responsibility and growth.

"At that time, if you'd asked me, I would've blamed everything on him," she shared. "But you learn, you grow, and hopefully, you reach a point where you don't hate the person. You start liking them again, even if it's not in a romantic way." Seema also addressed her romantic life after divorce. In an episode of *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives*, she spoke openly about dating businessman Vikram Ahuja — who, interestingly, was once her fiancé before she married Sohail.

Aamir Khan ditches the nice guy tag for a flawed hero in *Sitaare Zameen Par*

Aamir Khan is all set to flip the script — quite literally — in his upcoming film *Sitaare Zameen Par*. In what is being touted as a thematic sequel to the 2007 classic *Taare Zameen Par*, this time around, Khan won't be the sensitive, compassionate mentor we once knew. Instead, he's playing a character he himself describes as "rude, politically incorrect and completely unlikeable." And fans couldn't be more intrigued. The actor, during a latest interview, he revealed exciting details about the project, ramping up the buzz among his global fanbase. He described *Sitaare Zameen Par* as a heartwarming comedy that retains the soul of its predecessor — exploring themes of love, friendship and the lives of differently abled people — but delivers it with a hearty dose of laughter.

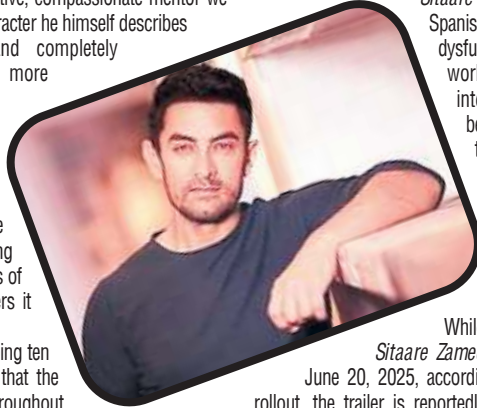
"This is a thematic sequel — we're going ten steps ahead," Aamir shared, adding that the story will have audiences laughing throughout. His character, Gulshan, stands in stark contrast to the much-loved Ram Shankar Nikumbh from *Taare Zameen Par*. "He is not sensitive at all. He's very rude, politically incorrect and insults everybody," Aamir admitted. "He fights with his wife, his mother, beats

up his senior coach — he's a person with a lot of internal issues. The film is about how he transforms."

Interestingly, the 60-year-old actor revealed that *Sitaare Zameen Par* is an adaptation of the Spanish film *Champions*. The story follows a dysfunctional basketball coach who ends up working with a team of players with intellectual disabilities — and slowly begins to learn from them what it means to be a truly good human being.

The film is directed by Shubh Mangal Saavdhan fame RS Prasanna and features Darshel Safary — who played Ishaan Awasthi in the original — along with Genelia Deshmukh in pivotal roles.

While the official announcement is awaited, *Sitaare Zameen Par* is expected to hit theatres on June 20, 2025, according to sources. As part of a strategic rollout, the trailer is reportedly planned to be attached to *Raid 2*, starring Ajay Devgn, which is releasing on May 1. "The idea is to communicate the date directly to the cinema-going audience," an insider revealed, "but knowing Aamir, there could be last-minute changes too."



'Learning polo was my most daunting challenge'

Actor Ishaan Khatter is set to don a crown — and a whole new persona — in the upcoming Netflix series *The Royals*. Taking on the role of Prince Aviraj, Ishaan ventures into unfamiliar territory, portraying a character rooted in aristocracy, tradition, and inner turmoil. In a latest interview, the actor shared insights into the transformation and how working in the OTT space compares with films.

Though Ishaan and Aviraj may come from vastly different worlds, the actor said he was able to find common emotional ground with his character. "We're both very emotionally intense people. Aviraj bottles things up, while I try to do better — hopefully, as I'm getting emotionally older. I definitely couldn't relate to his desperate need to run away from himself. I don't need to escape." This emotional duality helped Ishaan bring depth to Aviraj, a prince grappling with personal demons beneath a polished exterior. Portraying royalty also meant embodying a prince's physical grace — which, in Aviraj's case, included playing polo like a seasoned rider. For Ishaan, learning the equestrian sport proved to be one of the most demanding parts of preparation.

"Learning polo and appearing to play it like a pro in just two and a half months was the first impossible task ahead of me," he admitted. "It was very daunting and scary." However, the challenge ultimately turned into a rewarding experience. "Now that we've completed the task, I'm happy to report we really managed to get as good as I possibly could. It was a whole lot of fun," he added.

'I would have liked more opportunities — more 'yes' than 'no's'

Despite headlining popular films like *Pyaar Ka Punchnama* and *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweeti*, Nushratt Bharuccha says breaking through Bollywood's inner circle remains a challenge for her. In a heartfelt interview with Shubhankar Mishra, the actor opened up about the real, everyday difficulties she faces in accessing work, particularly compared to star kids.

Nushratt, who began her journey with *Jai Santoshi Maa*, expressed that success in films doesn't always translate into sustained opportunities. She acknowl-

edged the privileges that industry insiders enjoy, emphasising how their lineage often opens doors that remain firmly shut for outsiders.

When asked about the divergent career paths of her contemporaries, Nushratt pointed to examples like Sonakshi Sinha and Shraddha Kapoor. While Sonakshi debuted with a blockbuster (*Dabangg*) and Shraddha's *Teen Patti* may have flopped, their careers have continued to rise steadily.

"They definitely have an advantage. They know the industry, they know the people. And if they don't, their parents do," she said. "They



can knock on doors I may not even know the address of. If I want to meet a director, who's going to give me his number?"

Sharing a rare success in reaching out, Nushratt recalled messaging filmmaker Kabir Khan after the release of *Pyaar Ka Punchnama*. "He replied and agreed to meet — that made my month," she said. "It's so difficult to get a director's number or even set up a meeting."

According to her, this lack of access is a very real — and very practical — barrier for actors without connections. "It's a very tough road for people who are

not from the industry," she emphasized.

While many term the children of film families as 'nepo kids', Nushratt avoids using the phrase in a derogatory way. "They have their own struggles," she acknowledged. "But yes, they get inroads that we don't. That may have been the harder route for me."

Despite her struggles, she remains grateful for her journey. "I would have liked more opportunities — more 'yes' than 'no's'. But I'm still very happy with the films I've got. I value the people who want to work with me. I hold them close like family."

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

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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.

Yamini's 'life comes to full circle' moment with her 'paisa-vasool' debut

In a world where dreams are made and broken in the blink of an eye, Yamini Malhotra is a testament to perseverance and passion. After captivating audiences on *Bigg Boss* season 18, she's now stepping into the world of Bollywood with her debut film *Chill Maar Na Bro*. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, she opens up about her journey, her connection to Maya and what makes this film a special ride for her and the audience

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It started with a dream — like it always does in Mumbai. A girl from Delhi, armed with ambition, talent and just the right amount of madness, steps into the city of dreams hoping to find her place in the stars. That's Yamini Malhotra! And now, years later, in her debut film *Chill Maar Na Bro*, she plays Maya, an aspiring actor waiting for her big break — a character so close to her real life, she didn't need to prepare, she simply remembered.

From sharing screen space with veterans to recreating a Sridevi moment that brought an entire crew to tears, Yamini's journey is nothing short of cinematic. And as she opens up about comedy, courage and the quiet strength it takes to keep chasing your dream, it's clear: this is more than a role — it's a homecoming.

"The character's name is Maya and I felt an instant connection with her. She's an actor from Delhi who's moved to Mumbai with big dreams — just like me and so many others in this industry. She's waiting for that one big break, that one chance to be part of a film that changes everything. It resonated deeply with

my own journey. I didn't have to imagine her life — I've lived it."

While the film has its heart in comedy, Yamini had her share of deeply emotional moments during the shoot. One scene, in particular, took her by surprise. "There's an emotional breakdown scene where I perform to a Sridevi ji's song. I was in costume — this gorgeous blue sari — and we were getting ready to shoot when our dress dada suddenly began to cry," she recalls. What followed left the entire crew speechless. "He told us he used to come to film sets as a young boy with his father, who was also a tailor. He had seen Sridevi ji perform live during that exact song back then. And now years later, he was stitching for the same song recreation. It was a full-circle moment for him. That story hit everyone on set emotionally, including me. It added a real weight to the scene and gave me goosebumps while performing."

That kind of intensity wasn't something Yamini expected from a comedy film. But *Chill Maar Na Bro* isn't just about laughs — it's about finding your place, holding on to your dreams and having a little fun along the way. "It's a complete entertainer — funny, vibrant, and light-hearted. Every scene has a dash of comedy and you'll find yourself smiling throughout. The energy on set was always upbeat and that's exactly what the audience will feel too — full-on entertainment!"

To prepare for the role, she didn't need to go through heavy training, but there was a lot of spontaneity involved. "Because it's a comedy film, it really brought out the fun, spontaneous side of me. I believe comedy and entertainment are in my genes, so it came quite naturally. I was also lucky

to share screen space with senior actors like Paresh Ganatra ji. He was incredibly supportive — we would sit together, discuss our scenes, improvise lines and plan the rhythm. That collaborative energy made everything easier and more fun."

She's also fiercely proud of the fact that Maya — her character — isn't designed to be perfect. "Maya isn't your typical Bollywood heroine. She's raw, relatable and very real. She doesn't fit into a perfect mold — and that's exactly what makes her stand out. She's got dreams, drive and a charm that lights up the screen in her own way. She brings an authenticity that's refreshing."

Of course, her journey to this point didn't start with *Chill Maar Na Bro*. For many viewers, she's already a familiar face thanks to her stint in the *Bigg Boss* house. That experience, she says, changed everything. "It feels surreal," she reflects. "*Bigg Boss* gave me visibility, but cinema has always been my passion. It's a different kind of discipline altogether and I'm taking it one day at a time with full gratitude."

In fact, *Bigg Boss* played a direct role in her casting. "It's because of *Bigg Boss* that I got this film — the director saw my clips from the show and from Instagram and he told me I came across as so original and real that he immediately thought I was perfect for Maya. So yes, the transition feels beautiful and very special."

She vividly remembers the moment she knew she had officially "arrived" in Bollywood. "It was my entry shot! A bunch of boys were standing in front of me and the camera slowly zoomed in as they moved aside one by one. I was in a royal blue sari,

my hair blowing perfectly with the wind... and at that moment, the director looked at the monitor and said, 'WoW Maya WOW!' Everyone started clapping. That was it. That was my Bollywood moment. I felt like, 'Yes — I've arrived.'"

With its quirky title and feel-good energy, *Chill Maar Na Bro* promises to be a ride for audiences. "Expect a total rollercoaster ride! It's packed with crazy one-liners, awkward yet hilarious situations, surprise twists and nonstop comedy," she says. "You'll laugh like mad, maybe tear up a little, and definitely walk out with a warm heart. It's an all-in-all entertainment package — full paisa vasool!"

Naturally, she feels the pressure of living up to the love she's received post-*Bigg Boss*. But she doesn't shy away from it. "Definitely — but it's a good kind of pressure. I owe everything to the people who've supported me since *Bigg Boss*. Their love, encouragement and faith in me keep me going. I just want to make them proud with every performance — and this film is my first big thank you to them."

And if anyone thinks *Bigg Boss* is just drama and chaos, Yamini would disagree. That chaos, she says, is great training. "Oh yes — *Bigg Boss* teaches you patience, adaptability and how to stay centred amidst absolute chaos, which is exactly what you need on a film set too," she says. "That emotional stamina helped me stay grounded and focused, no matter what the day looked like. Also, when you've had 200 cameras on you 24/7, you completely lose that fear or inhibition. Now, when I face the camera, I don't even notice it — it's just me being me. That realness, I think, is what shines on screen too."

Transforming healthcare delivery under Ayushman Bharat

India's healthcare system is witnessing a massive digital transformation, much like the UPI revolution, with the advent of Ayushman Bharat, the world's largest government-funded health initiative. At the heart of this transformation lies the adoption of Electronic Medical Records (EMRs), now integrated with Artificial Intelligence (AI). These AI-driven systems are poised to revolutionise healthcare by making it easier for doctors to adopt, enhancing personalized patient care, improving operational efficiency and enabling data-driven decision-making.

Let's begin with understanding Electronic Medical Records (EMRs): these systems are used by doctors to prescribe treatments and manage patient records. EMRs contain a patient's medical history, including diagnoses, prescriptions, lab results, vitals, and treatment plans. They help store digital medical records for every patient and are especially useful for chronic patients or post-surgery cases, enabling doctors to monitor progress effectively.

Patient Health Records (PHRs), on the other hand, are digital repositories containing a patient's medical history, diagnoses, prescriptions, lab results and vitals.

EMRs enable seamless communication among healthcare providers, reduce errors and enhance the quality of care. However, traditional EMRs have faced challenges in adoption due to high administrative workloads, inefficient data management and a lack of interoperability across systems. Integrating AI into EMRs has significantly elevated their capabilities, solving these problems and increasing adoption among doctors.

AI-powered EMR systems have significantly transformed the healthcare provider experience by introducing advanced features that revolutionise healthcare delivery:

AI-driven voice recognition and Natural Language Processing (NLP) assist doctors and healthcare professionals in capturing patient data efficiently. By converting doctor-patient conversations into structured medical notes, AI eliminates manual documentation errors, saves time and enhances accuracy in medical records. The depth of data available now is far greater than before.

AI-integrated EMRs act as decision-support tools by analyzing patient histories, medical guidelines and real-time data to provide evidence-based treatment recommendations based on multiple protocols provided by different authorities. They also flag drug interactions, suggest diagnostic tests and guide physicians in making more informed clinical decisions.

By analyzing vast amounts of patient data, AI can detect early signs of diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, and cancer. AI-powered EMRs alert doctors about high-risk patients, enabling early intervention and personalised treatment plans, thereby improving patient outcomes.

One of the key challenges in India's healthcare system is the fragmentation of patient data across different hospitals, clinics, and laboratories. With the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), AI-integrated EMRs facilitate interoperability by standardizing data formats, allowing seamless exchange of medical records among healthcare providers, pharmacies and insurance firms.

AI-driven EMRs leverage machine learning algorithms to analyze a patient's medical history, travel history, parental medical history, vitals, symptoms and lifestyle factors. This enables the creation of highly personalised treatment plans, improving the effectiveness of therapies.

In a country like India, where many patients reside in remote



locations and doctors are concentrated in metropolitan areas, telehealth is the only solution to provide healthcare services. AI-integrated EMRs make it easier for doctors to prescribe treatments with features like document access via ABDM, language translation, and remote patient monitoring through IoT-enabled medical equipment. This allows doctors to track patient health remotely and provide timely interventions.

The Government of India is the largest health insurance provider. AI-powered EMRs help detect anomalies in billing, insurance claims and treatment patterns, reducing fraudulent activities in the healthcare system. With high accuracy confidence, these systems can expedite hospital reimbursements from the government. Additionally, AI-driven cost analysis helps hospitals optimise resource allocation and reduce operational expenses, making healthcare more affordable and efficient.

Despite the numerous advantages, implementing AI-powered EMRs in India presents several challenges similar to other digital transformations:

The use of AI in healthcare raises concerns about privacy and cybersecurity among providers. Some companies address this issue by implementing robust encryption, data anonymisation, and strict compliance with regulations such as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.

Many healthcare professionals, especially in rural areas, lack familiarity with digital tools. Government-led training programs and workshops must focus on enhancing digital literacy and equipping healthcare workers with the skills to use AI-integrated EMRs effectively.

Many healthcare facilities, especially in remote areas, lack the necessary IT infrastructure, such as high-speed internet and power backup, to support AI-driven EMRs. Investments in digital health infrastructure and improved connectivity are crucial for successful implementation.

The absence of standardised data structures, such as FHIR (Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources) and uniform data formats across various EMR platforms creates barriers to interoperability. The government must introduce nationwide standards and guidelines to ensure seamless data exchange among different healthcare providers and institutions.

Deploying AI-powered EMRs involves significant financial investments in software, training and SaaS fees. Public-

private partnerships and government subsidies can help healthcare facilities, particularly smaller clinics and rural hospitals, adopt these advanced systems without financial strain.

The Indian government is actively promoting the adoption of AI in healthcare through initiatives such as the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM). The future of AI-integrated EMRs & PHRs under Ayushman Bharat looks promising, with several key developments on the horizon:

AI chatbots and virtual assistants will enhance patient engagement by personalising their experience in booking appointments, receiving health advice, managing medications and accessing medical records conveniently through mobile apps.

The ABDM data security framework ensures that health data is secured and encourages healthcare providers to adopt technology with confidence.

By analysing vast amounts of anonymized patient data, AI can identify public health trends, predict disease outbreaks and assist policymakers in designing effective healthcare programs at national and state levels.

AI-integrated EMRs will continue to evolve by incorporating data from wearable health devices, allowing real-time tracking of vital signs and proactive management of chronic diseases.

To conclude, AI-integrated EMRs & PHR systems are set to revolutionize healthcare delivery under Ayushman Bharat by personalizing the patient experience, reducing costs, enhancing efficiency, improving decision-making, and ensuring better health outcomes. However, successful implementation requires a catalyst similar to UPI adoption during demonetisation or the COVID-19 crisis.

With continued public-private partnerships, technological advancements and strategic investments in digital healthcare infrastructure, AI-powered EMRs will play a transformative role in making quality healthcare accessible, efficient and affordable for all Indians. As India moves towards a digital-first healthcare ecosystem, AI will be at the forefront of this revolution, paving the way for a more connected, data-driven and patient-centric healthcare system.

(The author, Deepak Tuli, is the co-founder & COO at Eka Care.)

PIONEERING THE BRAIN GAIN IN RURAL INDIA'S HEALTHCARE

In the vast stretches of rural India, where healthcare infrastructure has historically lagged behind urban centers, one visionary is rewriting the narrative—Dr Vikram Pratap Singh. Committed to reversing the long-standing 'brain drain' of medical talent from rural regions to cities and abroad, he is leading a powerful 'brain gain' movement—bringing skilled medical professionals back to the heart of India's most underserved communities.

THE URGENCY OF RURAL HEALTHCARE TRANSFORMATION

With nearly 70% of India's population residing in rural areas, the stark gap in healthcare accessibility is both troubling and urgent. Many towns and villages in modern India continue to suffer from a severe lack of healthcare services, plagued by a shortage of specialist doctors, underqualified staff and crumbling infrastructure. This imbalance is only worsened by the mass migration of trained professionals to urban hubs in pursuit of better opportunities and living standards.

He saw this divide early in his career and chose a different path. Determined to bridge this widening gap, he harnessed his expertise and leadership to defy the tide of intellectual and infrastructural drain, shifting focus back to the communities that need it the most.

A VISION FORGED BY EXPERIENCE

A superspecialised radiologist with a distinguished career, he had every reason to build a life abroad. After spending seven years at one of India's top hospitals and completing a superspecialisation in musculoskeletal imaging from Harvard University, he came to a realisation that changed his life: the sophisticated medical infrastructure and expertise he had acquired were only benefitting a small, already well-served segment of the population.

He recognised that while only 25% of the population resides in urban areas, the majority of healthcare infrastructure, skilled professionals and financial resources are concentrated there. Most specialists follow a well-worn path—urban practice in high-end hospitals, serving the same limited patient base. This trend has silently perpetuated the drain of critical healthcare capacity from rural India.

Motivated to change this paradigm, Dr Singh launched a mission to bring advanced, precision-driven diagnostic care to tier 3 and tier 4 cities—areas that had long been overlooked.

BUILDING BHARAT'S HEALTH BACKBONE: TIRUPATI DIAGNOSTICS

India may be on its way to becoming the third-largest economy globally, but its human development indicators remain underwhelming. Despite its vast roadways, expanding airports, and rapid digital infrastructure growth, the country still ranks 66th in the Global Health Security Index. Rural India bears the brunt of this deficit—housing nearly 75% of the population but accessing only 25% of the nation's healthcare resources.

This is where social entrepreneurship fills the gap. His Tirupati Diagnostics and Labs stands as a case study in how impactful change is possible when professional

excellence meets a purpose-driven mission. Based in Haryana, Tirupati Diagnostics has made high-end, superspecialised diagnostic care accessible in some of the state's most underserved regions—Palwal and Mewat.

These areas, previously devoid of quality diagnostic infrastructure, now host advanced technologies such as MRI, Fibroscan and over 100 new diagnostic tests—many of which were previously unavailable in this part of the state. The facility has also introduced a comprehensive maternal and fetal medicine unit to combat high maternal and infant mortality rates. This includes fetal echocardiography, anomaly scans, Doppler studies, and Obs-Gynec MRIs.

Drawing from his advanced training, he has set up dedicated imaging suites for liver, gut and musculoskeletal systems—targeting regional health concerns like viral and alcoholic liver diseases, gut infections and trauma or sports-related injuries.

Strategically located near public transportation hubs, Tirupati Diagnostics has improved access drastically. Today, 35% of patients come from within 5 km, while 65% travel from distances of up to 40 km—distances that were once a deterrent for timely care. By optimising operational costs and providing services at affordable rates, Tirupati has shown that rural healthcare delivery can be both effective and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

India's journey toward becoming an economic superpower must be matched by an equally ambitious investment in human development. The work of Dr Vikram Pratap Singh and Tirupati Diagnostics is a powerful reminder that meaningful progress stems not just from GDP growth, but from grassroots transformation.

Their success demonstrates that advanced, affordable and inclusive healthcare is achievable—even in regions that have long been sidelined. This is not merely a healthcare initiative—it's a blueprint for change, a model for public-private partnership and a call to action for professionals to look beyond urban centers.

As India moves into the Amrit Kaal, it is visionaries like Dr. Singh who will help realize the dream of a truly self-reliant and equitable Bharat—one where no citizen is denied the dignity of health and the promise of a better tomorrow.



RANA DAGGUBATI BECOMES FIRST INDIAN CELEBRITY TO ATTEND WRESTLEMANIA



Actor Rana Daggubati has added another milestone to his career — and this time, it's outside the realm of cinema. The *Baahubali* star became the first Indian celebrity to make an official appearance at WWE's biggest annual event, WrestleMania 41, marking a unique crossover between Indian cinema and global sports entertainment.

Held in Las Vegas, WrestleMania 41 streamed live on Netflix and welcomed Rana as a special guest, placing him in the front row among some of the world's most iconic wrestling legends and fans. His presence didn't go unnoticed — WWE gave him a special on-air shoutout that reached millions of viewers across the globe.

Netflix celebrated the moment on Instagram by posting exclusive videos and pictures of Rana from the event with the caption: "Heels. Faces. Familiar faces @ranadaggubati is at WrestleMania. Jo line cross kiya, woh gaya. #RanaNaidu."

For Rana Daggubati, the experience was deeply personal. "Being at WrestleMania 41 is a surreal experience — WWE has been a part of all our childhoods," the actor shared. "Now, to witness it live and to be able to represent India on a global stage, especially with both WWE and *Rana Naidu* streaming on Netflix, feels like a full-circle moment."

Back in India, Netflix and WWE hosted a special watch party in Mumbai to commemorate the occasion, bringing together fans and celebrities for a live viewing of WrestleMania 41. The event celebrated the growing popularity of WWE in India and highlighted the shared global love for storytelling — whether in the ring or on screen.

Rana Daggubati is gearing up for the release of *Rana Naidu Season 2*, which is slated to premiere on Netflix in 2025. The crime drama also stars Venkatesh Daggubati and Surveen Chawla. The first season of the gritty, action-packed show dropped on March 10, 2023 and received widespread attention for its bold storytelling and powerful performances.



Allu Arjun and Atlee kickstart AA22xA6 with look test in Mumbai; shoot begins June 2025

Allu Arjun is gearing up for an exciting cinematic collaboration with blockbuster filmmaker Atlee for a high-octane project tentatively titled *AA22xA6*. The buzz around this upcoming film has intensified after reports confirmed that a look test and concept photoshoot were conducted in Mumbai.

Sources reveal that both Allu Arjun and Atlee were spotted in the city experimenting with multiple looks for the film, hinting at diverse styles and appearances for the actor. The visual test further cemented speculations that the film will be an ambitious venture involving layered characters and unique styling choices.

Set to go on floors in June 2025, *AA22xA6* is being mounted on a grand scale and is touted to be a never-before-seen cinematic experience. The project is said to revolve around a "parallel universe" concept — a first-of-its-kind for Indian cinema — and will involve

extensive use of VFX. Multiple international studios are expected to collaborate on the film's visual effects, further pushing the boundaries of storytelling and spectacle.

Reports also suggest that both Allu Arjun and Atlee are being paid record-breaking fees for their work on the film, underlining the scale and expectations riding on the project.

While the official announcement had already been made earlier by the makers, this latest development around the look test adds fresh excitement among fans eagerly awaiting more details. With Allu Arjun's star power and Atlee's track record of mass entertainers, *AA22xA6* promises to be one of the most anticipated films in the coming year.



Ajith Kumar's racing dream accelerates with second place in Belgium

Actor Ajith Kumar continues to make waves not just in Indian cinema but also on the international motorsport circuit. His team, Ajith Kumar Racing, secured a remarkable second-place podium finish at the prestigious Spa Francorchamps Circuit in Belgium, adding another laurel to their impressive racing journey.

Taking to X (formerly Twitter), the official handle of Ajith Kumar Racing shared the exciting news, stating,

"A proud moment for Indian motorsport! #AjithKumar and his team secure a remarkable P2 podium finish at the prestigious Spa

Francorchamps circuit in Belgium. A testament to passion, precision, and perseverance on the global racing stage."

This marks yet another international achievement for the actor-turned-racer, who has been consistently representing India on the global racing platform.

A significant number of fans gathered in Belgium to support and celebrate Ajith and his team. A video shared by Ajith Kumar Racing captured the electric atmosphere, with fans cheering as Ajith celebrated on the podium alongside his teammates.

"The crowd swells, and so does

the love! People of Belgium form a beeline to meet their idol! In cinema and sports, #AK continues to spread positivity wherever he goes! A true global icon," the caption read.

This latest achievement follows a series of commendable performances by Ajith Kumar Racing. The team had earlier secured third place in the 991 category of the 24H Dubai 2025 race and another third-place finish at the 12H Mugello event in Italy. With this second-place podium at Spa, the team has now bagged three international podium finishes within just four months.

Ajith Kumar is not only an

active participant but also the owner of Ajith Kumar Racing. He races alongside professional drivers Mathieu Detry, Fabian Duffieux and Cameron McLeod. The team has partnered with Bas Koeten Racing for technical and logistical support, ensuring a professional and competitive setup.

Ajith's passion for motorsport and his steady rise in international racing circuits continue to inspire fans and sports enthusiasts back home. As his team keeps pushing limits on the track, they're not just winning races — they're putting Indian motorsport on the global map.

Jr NTR and Prashanth Neel kick off NTR31 with serious seaside prep

After wrapping up his Bollywood debut with *War 2* alongside Hrithik Roshan, Jr NTR is now gearing up for his next high-octane project, *NTR31*, helmed by *KGF* and *Salaar* director Prashanth Neel. As anticipation builds around the collaboration, a new picture shared by the makers has sent fans into a frenzy.

The photo, posted by the official handle of NTRNeel, captures Jr NTR and Prashanth Neel in an intense discussion by the seashore. Captioned, "Two MASS ENGINES ready to wreck it all from tomorrow," the post hints at the explosive cinematic experience the duo is set to deliver. While Neel appears focused and composed, what truly caught fans' attention was Jr NTR's dramatic physical transformation. Dressed casually, the actor appeared significantly leaner and more chiseled than before—fueling widespread speculation online.

Rumours began circulating that the *Devara* star might have used Ozempic, a drug often associated with rapid weight loss. However, Jr NTR's team was quick to dismiss the claims, clarifying that the actor has adopted a strict new fitness routine, which includes consuming just one meal a day.

This upcoming film, *NTR31*, marks one of the most eagerly awaited pan-Indian collaborations, blending Jr NTR's mass appeal with Neel's larger-than-life action storytelling. Backed by Mythri Movie Makers, NTR Arts, and T-Series, the film promises to be a game-changer in Indian cinema.



Romantic drama Sumathi Shatakam launched with a traditional ceremony in Amaravati

Viision Movie Makers, known for their successful debut with *Mandira* featuring Sunny Leone, is back with a fresh and exciting project — *Sumathi Shatakam*.

The romantic drama, presented by Kommalapati Sridhar and produced by Kommalapati Sai Sudhakar, marks the directorial debut of M. M. Naidu. The film brings together a new pair on screen: *Bigg Boss* fame Amardeep Chowdhary and the talented Sayli Chaudhari.

The grand opening ceremony of *Sumathi Shatakam* was held at the Vykuntapuram Village Temple in Amaravati, where the cast and crew were joined by special guests to celebrate the occasion. The event was marked by a traditional *muhurtham* shot,

with Pedakurapadu MLA Bhashyam Praveen giving the first clap, while Venna Sambasiva Reddy switched on the camera. Following the ceremony, the team commenced regular shooting for the film.

Sumathi Shatakam promises to be a youthful and engaging romantic entertainer. Written by Bandaru Naidu, the film's music is composed by Subhash Anand, while the cinematography is handled by Halsewami. Suresh Vinmakota takes charge of the editing, ensuring a visually appealing and well-paced narrative.

The film features a talented ensemble cast, with Amardeep Chowdhary, Sayli Chaudhari and Tasty Teja in pivotal roles. With a fresh concept, a dynamic cast and an energetic team, *Sumathi Shatakam* is set to be a delightful addition to the romantic drama genre, and fans can expect an exciting ride with this new project from Viision Movie Makers.

Dhanush confirms two new films: AR Rahman on boards D56, Vignesh Raja directing next

In an exciting turn of events for Dhanush fans, the actor has announced not one but two highly anticipated projects. The updates came during the pre-release event of *Sumo*, where producer Ishari K. Ganesh revealed the dynamic slate ahead for the star. The first announcement is the official confirmation of *D56*, a film that sees Dhanush reuniting with acclaimed director Mari Selvaraj. What makes this collaboration even more special is that music legend A.R. Rahman will be composing the soundtrack. Their previous musical partnerships — *Maryan*, *Raanjhanaa* and *Atrangi Re* — have delivered chart-topping hits and expectations are sky-high for their next offering.

However, before *D56* takes off, Dhanush will begin work on another film — this one to be helmed by Por Thozhil director Vignesh Raja. This yet-untitled project is set to go on floors ahead of *D56* and promises a gripping narrative, given Raja's reputation for crafting intense thrillers. While both films are in early stages of production, fans are already abuzz with excitement. With Dhanush juggling genres and collaborating with some of the most sought-after talents in the industry, his upcoming lineup reflects a clear intent: to deliver bold, high-quality cinema. As more details unfold in the coming weeks, cinephiles can gear up for a powerful blend of storytelling, performance and music — all headlined by Dhanush.



SAMANTHA RUTH PRABHU'S INSTAGRAM 'LIKE' IGNITES DEBATE ON MEN ABANDONING SICK PARTNERS

Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu recently drew attention on social media after she 'liked' a powerful Instagram post discussing the troubling phenomenon of men abandoning their partners during illness. The post, which delved into gender-based disparities in caregiving within relationships, quickly gained traction with over 60,000 likes, sparking debate across platforms. The post, shared by the page Successverse, featured a clip from the popular YouTube podcast *Diary Of A CEO*. Titled "Why Men Leave Sick Partners: The Cold Truth Behind Relationship Abandonment", the video explored a disturbing statistic — men are reportedly 624% more likely to leave their partners if they become terminally ill, whereas women overwhelmingly choose to stay and provide care for their ailing spouses.

Experts in the video cited social conditioning, rigid gender roles, and emotional immaturity as contributing factors behind this gendered pattern of abandonment. Samantha's quiet acknowledgment of the post via a 'like' has reignited public conversation around gender dynamics in relationships, especially under the strain of illness.

The timing of Samantha's engagement with the post adds context, considering her own public battle with myositis, a rare autoimmune disease. Diagnosed in 2022, she has openly spoken about the debilitating impact the illness has had on her daily life, from muscle weakness to chronic pain. The revelation came a year after her divorce from Telugu actor Naga Chaitanya, whom she married in 2017 after dating since 2015. Their separation became the subject of intense speculation, particularly after Samantha dropped the 'Akkineeni' surname from her social media in 2020. While neither party linked the split to her health, fans have frequently drawn connections between her personal and public struggles. While Samantha hasn't commented publicly on the post she liked, her action has been interpreted by many as a subtle nod to the emotional and physical toll illness can take — not just on the patient, but on relationships as well. It's also prompted deeper reflection on the ways women are often left to suffer silently, both emotionally and physically, during life-altering health crises.

