



# The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1864

RNI No.APENG/2018/76468  
\*LATE CITY VOL. 7 ISSUE 168 | \*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

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



**Modi gov't 'squeezed' share of states in cess on petrol, diesel:**  
**Kharge**



**VANCE'S**  
VISIT TAKES INDIA-US DIALOGUE  
A STEP FURTHER: SCINDIA



**Priyadarshi: No pressure after Court, just excited for Sarangapani**  
**JATAKAM**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**The Pioneer**

**All police officials found responsible in the Lagacherla NHRC report should be dismissed within six weeks, as ordered by the Commission. If the government fails to act, we will take the fight back to the Supreme Court. If Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, who represents Kodangal as its MLA, has even a shred of decency left, he should hang his head in shame and take responsibility. Instead, he's shielding those who acted like savages**

**— KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA**

**DON'T MISS...**  
**Minister offers help to tobacco ryots**  
Minister for Social Welfare, Dola Balaveeranjaneya Swamy, has assured tobacco farmers that their issues would be addressed promptly. The Minister, accompanied by MLA B.N. Vijay Kumar, visited the Tobacco Auction Centre in Ongole on Tuesday. Officials of the Tobacco Board briefed him on the auction and procurement processes. During the visit, the Minister interacted with farmers and listened to their grievances. Leaders of tobacco farmers' unions explained the challenges they face in selling their produce, especially...  
-PAGE: 4

**Maha govt stays order to make Hindi**  
The Maharashtra government has stayed its order to make Hindi mandatory as a third language for students of Classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English-medium schools in the wake of opposition to the move from various quarters. State School Education Minister Dada Bhuse on Tuesday made the announcement about the stay on the government resolution (GR). "We are staying the word mandatory (as mentioned in the GR). We will issue a revised GR," he told reporters. Learning Hindi as the third...  
-PAGE: 5

**RBI: Migrate to '.bank.in' domain**  
The Reserve Bank on Tuesday directed banks to start migration of their existing domains to the '.bank.in' domain and complete the process by October 31 this year, aimed at combating increasing instances of fraud in digital payments. In the wake of fraud in digital payments, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to introduce the '.bank.in' exclusive internet domain for Indian banks. The initiative aims to reduce cybersecurity threats and malicious activities like phishing, and, streamline...  
-PAGE: 8

**SRH desperately need win against MI**  
The misfiring Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) will hope for a happy homecoming when they take on a resurrected Mumbai Indians (MI) here on Wednesday, eyeing a much-needed victory to revive their campaign in the Indian Premier League. With only two wins in seven outings, SRH are in a desperate situation. Their power-packed batting has let them down more often than not while their bowlers are not making any strong impression either. That SRH are a one-dimensional side has been proven by the...  
-SPORTS

## 26 killed in Kashmir terror strikes

PNS ■ PAHALGAM (J-K)

Terrorists opened fire at a famed meadow near Kashmir's Pahalgam town on Tuesday afternoon, killing 26 people, mostly tourists, in what is the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019. The 26 dead included two foreigners and two locals, a high ranking official said without getting into details. The toll is still being ascertained. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said while describing the terror attack as "much

### Deadliest attack in Valley since Pulwama



larger than anything we've seen directed at civilians in recent years". The attack, which comes as US Vice President J D Vance is visiting India

and just as the tourist and trekking season is picking up momentum, took place around 3 pm, officials said. Baisaran, about six kilometres from the resort town of Pahalgam, is an expansive meadow ringed by dense pine forests and mountains and a favourite with visitors from across the country and the world. Armed terrorists came into the grassland, dubbed 'mini Switzerland', and started firing at tourists milling around eateries, taking pony rides or just picnicking, officials and eyewitnesses said.  
Continued on Page 2

## Culprits won't be spared: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Condemning the terror attack on tourists in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that those behind the heinous act will be brought to justice. In a post on X, the prime minister said, "They (terrorists) will not be spared! Their evil agenda will never succeed. Our resolve to fight terrorism is unshakable and it will get even stronger." Modi also conveyed his condolences to those who lost their loved ones in the attack. "I pray that the injured recover at



the earliest. All possible assistance is being provided to those affected," he said. Terrorists struck in Pahalgam, a prime tourist location in south Kashmir, on Tuesday, killing multiple people and injuring at least 20.

## CM seeks Centre's help for projects

### REQUESTS UNION LAW MINISTER TO SET UP HC BENCH IN KURNOOL

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu held a series of crucial meetings with Union Ministers in New Delhi on Tuesday, seeking the Centre's support for a range of state development projects and policy initiatives. The meetings come soon after the Chief Minister's return from an international tour aimed at attracting investments to the state. During his visit, the Chief Minister met four key Union Ministers and presented several high-priority proposals, emphasising the need for timely assistance to accelerate Andhra Pradesh's development agenda. In his first meeting with Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil, Naidu discussed the allocation of central funds under the Jal Jeevan Mission. Stressing the importance of this flagship scheme, he urged the Centre to expedite the release of funds to expand the piped water supply across rural areas of the state. He also presented details of the proposed Polavaram-Banakacharla Link Project, a transformative initiative aimed at making Andhra Pradesh drought-resilient. Naidu highlighted the long-term benefits of the interlinking project and sought both technical and financial support from the Centre. The Chief Minister also discussed



- Naidu discusses Jal Jeevan Mission with Jal Shakti Minister and requests early release of funds for rural piped water.
- He proposes the Polavaram-Banakacharla Link Project and sought central technical and financial support.
- Enhanced funding under Atal Bhujal Yojana for groundwater conservation efforts in the state urged.
- Discusses tariffs on Indian seafood in a meeting with the Commerce Minister.
- Naidu proposes short-term and long-term measures to protect Andhra Pradesh's aqua sector.
- Union Ministers Rammoan Naidu and Pemasani Chandrasekhar and other MPs accompany the CM.
- The visit marks a renewed effort to strengthen Centre-State cooperation for Andhra Pradesh's growth.

the Atal Bhujal Yojana, highlighting state-level efforts to improve groundwater recharge and sustainability. He appealed for increased central funding to strengthen Andhra Pradesh's water conservation strategies. In a separate meeting with Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, the Chief Minister reiterated the longstanding demand for the estab-

lishment of a High Court Bench in Kurnool. He urged the Central Government to expedite the necessary procedures and extend full cooperation for the proposal. Later, during discussions with Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, Naidu focused on the challenges facing the state's aqua sector due to rising US import tariffs. He expressed concern

over the 26% tariff on Indian seafood, which has severely impacted aqua farmers in the state. The Chief Minister urged the Union Minister to initiate talks with the United States to resolve the issue and proposed a multi-tiered strategy, including short-term relief measures and long-term policy interventions to safeguard the sector.  
Continued on Page 2

## POWER SECTOR GoM MEET



## AP calls for lower interest rates, targeted subsidies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has called for reduced interest rates and targeted subsidies to improve the financial health of power distribution companies (DISCOMs), during the 4th Group of Ministers (GoM) meeting on Power Sector Reforms held in Vijayawada on Sunday. Speaking at the meeting, Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary and Special Chief Secretary (Energy), K Vijayanand, emphasised the need to balance financial viability and social equity in the sector. He urged financial institutions to lower interest rates to ease the burden on DISCOMs and advocated for targeted subsidies to protect low-income consumers while aligning tariffs with market realities. The state's Energy Minister, Gottipati Ravi Kumar, reaffirmed Andhra Pradesh's commitment to improving efficiency, sustainability and financial discipline in the sector. Hosting the meeting under the leadership of Chief

Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, the state showcased its proactive role in advancing reforms. The meeting, chaired by Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shripad Yesso Naik, saw participation from ministers and officials of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Union Minister Naik underlined the importance of coordinated regulatory reforms to address the financial and operational challenges of DISCOMs. He called for timely, inflation-indexed tariff revisions, mandatory fuel and power cost adjustments, and cost-reflective pricing. He also proposed adopting emerging technologies such as AI and energy storage systems to modernise power infrastructure, along with simplifying GST norms for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). States were urged to expedite the implementation of the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).  
Continued on Page 2

## POLAVARAM PROJECT



## Central team inspects quality of materials

PNS ■ POLAVARAM

A Central team is currently conducting a detailed inspection of the quality of concrete and rocks being used in the Polavaram Project, one of the nation's key irrigation and infrastructure ventures. Two expert teams from the Central

Soil and Materials Research Station (CSMRS) are carrying out assessments on-site. On Tuesday, the teams examined the concrete mix and various sizes of rocks incorporated into the structure, focusing on key locations such as the Buttress Dam, the Diaphragm Wall (D-Wall) construction area, and the 902 Hill zone.  
Continued on Page 2

## Kasireddy grilled



## Central team inspects quality of materials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kasireddy Rajasekhar Reddy, arrested in connection with the liquor scam, was interrogated by the Special Investigation Team (SIT) in Vijayawada on Tuesday. He was apprehended at Shamshabad airport in Hyderabad on Monday and brought to Vijayawada, where he was questioned for over seven hours.  
Continued on Page 2

## Ex-AP CID chief quizzed in actress Jetwani case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Crime Investigation Department (APCID) on Tuesday questioned former Intelligence Chief PSR Anjaneyulu in connection with the controversial arrest and alleged harassment of Bollywood actress and model Kadambari Jetwani. Anjaneyulu, a retired IPS officer, was taken into custody in Hyderabad on Monday and brought to the CID office in Vijayawada for interrogation. Anjaneyulu, along with two other senior IPS officers—Kanti Rana Tata and Vishal Gunni—is facing serious charges of unlawful arrest and harassment. CID officials allege that Anjaneyulu played a key role in orchestrating Jetwani's arrest and had advised the previous YSRCP-led government on how to proceed with the case.



Ibrahimpatnam police station. She later alleged that she and her family were harassed during the process and held the three IPS officers responsible. Following the formation of the NDA government in Andhra Pradesh, Jetwani and her mother met with Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha, claiming the case was politically motivated and fabricated. In response, the NDA government suspended the three officers—then Vijayawada Commissioner of Police Kanti Rana Tata, then DCP Vishal Gunni, and then Intelligence Chief PSR Anjaneyulu. While Rana and Gunni have filed anticipatory bail petitions in the High Court, Anjaneyulu has not sought any legal relief.  
Continued on Page 2

## Ex-MP Nani urges CM to scrap land deal with Ursa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

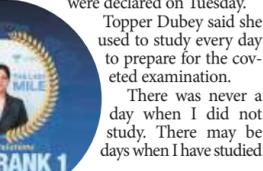
Former MP Kesineni Srinivas (Nani) has written to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu urging immediate cancellation of the land allotment to Ursa Clusters Pvt Ltd. He also called for a thorough probe into the company's ownership, funding sources, and political links — alleging a major benami scam involving his brother and sitting Vijayawada MP, Kesineni Sivanath. In his letter, Srinivas praised CM Naidu's 'visionary' decision to allot land to Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in Visakhapatnam, terming

it a step towards real investment, employment generation, and enhancing Andhra Pradesh's image as a tech hub. However, he expressed serious concern over a parallel allotment of 60 acres to the recently incorporated Ursa Clusters Pvt Ltd for a proposed Rs 5,728 crore data centre project. The allotment includes 3.5 acres in the IT Park and 56.36 acres at Kapuluppada. Srinivas alleged that the company is a front, floated without any prior experience, to mask the involvement of MP Sivanath, whom he accused of attempting to acquire prime public land through proxies.  
Continued on Page 2

## UP's Shakti Dubey topper; 3 women among first 5

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Banaras Hindu University's postgraduate Shakti Dubey and Haryana's Harshita Goyal have bagged the first and second rank, respectively, in the UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2024, with three women, including the topper, securing positions in the top four, according to the results announced on Tuesday. Shah Margi Chirag is the third woman in the top four. She earned the fourth rank in the coveted exam. Maharashtra's Dongre Archit Parag secured the third position, with the Delhi's Aakash Garg finishing fifth. Women bagged the top four ranks in the civil services examination 2022, too. As many as 1,009 candidates have cleared the civil services examination this year, the results of which



## Telugu candidates shine

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Several candidates from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have made remarkable strides in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination 2024, with top ranks among the nation's most prestigious exams. E Sai Shivani from the Telugu

were declared on Tuesday. Topper Dubey said she used to study every day to prepare for the coveted examination. There was never a day when I did not study. There may be days when I have studied for four to five hours. But there was never a day when I did not study at all," she said. Twenty-eight-year-old Dubey said that there was a time that made her think not to prepare for the exam anymore, but because of her parents' continuous encouragement, she took the test. "I took the interview last year, too. But, I could not find my name in the final results. At that time, I realised that I won't be able to do more than this. This is it! But for one last time, I mustered courage because of my parents' encouragement and gave the 2024 prelims. With the grace of god, I made it," she

(119), Challa Pawan Kalyan (146), N Srikanth Reddy (151), Nellore Sai Teja (154), and Kolipaka Srikrishna Sai (190) also secured commendable ranks, further highlighting the strong performance of students from the region. These achievements are a testament to the academic excellence and dedication of candidates from the Telugu states, who continue to make their mark on the national stage.

Second rank holder Goyal did her post-graduation in chartered accountancy. She also has a Bachelor of Commerce degree from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. Goyal (24) qualified the exam with political science and international relations as her optional subjects in her third attempt. Parag, who secured the third rank, is a Bachelor of Technology graduate in electrical and electronics engineering from Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Tamil Nadu. A native of Pune, 26-year-old Parag cleared the exam on his third attempt.

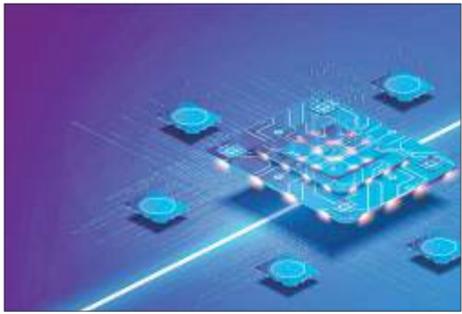
## AP govt plans India's first quantum computing village

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major step towards establishing India's first Quantum Computing Village, the Andhra Pradesh Government held a high-level meeting on Tuesday at the State Secretariat, under the leadership of the Real-Time Governance Society (RTGS).

The pioneering project, planned over 50 acres in Amaravati, aims to create a world-class ecosystem for quantum computing research and collaboration. Discussions centred on finalising infrastructure, ecosystem design, and technical aspects to fast-track the initiative.

Senior representatives from IBM, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), and L&T participated in the meeting. A key highlight was the proposed



construction of an Iconic Building by L&T, which will house advanced quantum systems from IBM. The facility is being designed for long-term scalability to meet future technological demands.

RTGS Secretary Bhaskar

Katamneni said the facility would serve as a collaborative hub for academia, startups, and industry leaders to access advanced quantum resources. It will also feature a dedicated data centre to support high-performance computing. IBM

and TCS will jointly finalise the infrastructure specifications, with the first phase set to host IBM's Quantum System Two.

"This Quantum Village will be a world-class facility—India's window to the future of computing," said Bhaskar.

Principal Secretary Pradyumna noted that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to fast-track the project to ensure timely completion.

IBM Quantum's Patryk Gumann presented an overview of the Quantum System Two and discussed deployment requirements with state officials and L&T.

Senior officials from L&T, IBM, and TCS, including Indrajit Mitra, Vijayan, G Ramakrishna, CV Sridhar, and L Venkata Subramaniam, were present.

## Religious leaders seek Central probe into cow deaths at Tirumala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Religious leaders and spiritual figures voiced strong criticism against the ruling coalition government during a conference held at Sri Venkateswara Swamy Temple in Labbipet, Vijayawada. Organised by the Saadhu Parishad, the event focused on "The Significance of Hindu Dharma and the Sacredness of the Cow".

Saadhu Parishad president Swami Srinivasananda Saraswati expressed serious concern over the repeated deaths of cows at the Tirumala Gosala, calling it a disgrace for a globally revered pilgrimage centre. He cited reports of nearly 15 cow deaths each month and demanded transparency from the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) regarding the number of cows in their care and their health status.



He further criticised TTD for failing to perform traditional rituals such as "Shanti Homams" following cow deaths. Questioning the use of crores donated by devotees for cow welfare, he called for a central probe by an independent agency to reveal the

truth and restore public confidence. Swami Srinivasananda warned that if sacred cows cannot be protected in Tirumala, the temple's sanctity itself would come under question. Former MLA Malladi Vishnu accused the state gov-

ernment of neglecting Hindu traditions and highlighted the administrative failures in managing the Gosala, where he claimed hundreds of cows have died in under a year. He also criticised Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan for remaining silent over the demolition of temple properties by forest officials.

Other speakers, including Swami Omkarananda, alleged that the Tirumala temple has become overly commercialised under the current regime. They expressed disappointment over the lack of response from BJP leaders, despite their participation in the ruling coalition.

The conference concluded with a call for stronger measures to protect cows and a demand for TTD to establish cow shelters in every district to uphold and promote Hindu values.

## Pinakini Express gets LHB coach upgrade

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The popular intercity daily train, No. 12713/12714 Pinakini Express, operating between Vijayawada and Chennai Central, will be upgraded with modern Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches from 22 June, replacing the existing ICF coaches. This major upgrade aims to enhance passenger safety and travel comfort.

Narendra A Patil, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, said, "With the introduction of LHB coaches, passengers on the Pinakini Express can look forward to a safer, smoother, and more enjoyable journey. This initiative is part of Indian Railways' broader efforts to modernise its infrastructure and rolling stock."

"We remain committed to prioritising passenger safety, convenience, and operational efficiency through technological advancements and service improvements," he added.

**ADVANTAGES**  
LHB coaches offer several



advantages over the older ICF design. These include:

**Superior Comfort:** Ergonomically designed seats with improved cushioning, advanced air suspension systems, and larger windows contribute to a more pleasant travel experience.

**Higher Speed and Stability:** The new coaches support higher operational speeds with enhanced stability, ensuring a smoother ride.

**Improved Ventilation and Aesthetics:** Modern interiors, better ventilation, and reduced noise levels provide a premium travel environment.

**Enhanced Safety:** LHB

coaches feature anti-climbing technology and improved crashworthiness, significantly reducing the risk of derailments.

**Safe Cooking Facilities:** The hot buffet car is fully air-conditioned and fitted with induction cooking, along with an Automatic Fire Detection and Suppression system.

**Greater Energy Efficiency:** Being lighter than ICF coaches, LHB coaches improve fuel efficiency and lower operating costs.

They can also run at speeds of up to 160–200 km/h, compared to a maximum of 110 km/h for ICF coaches.

## State in turmoil: Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) President YS Jagan Mohan Reddy came down heavily on the coalition government, alleging that the State is witnessing unprecedented and alarming developments that threaten the integrity of democratic institutions.

Addressing the Political Advisory Committee (PAC)—the party's highest decision-making body—in Vijayawada on Tuesday, Jagan said the government is arbitrarily arresting individuals and foisting false cases to stifle dissent and create a climate of fear. "It is time we raise our voice and question the State to safeguard democracy," he asserted.



He accused the government of using diversionary tactics to suppress public issues, corruption, and misgovernance. These include arresting prominent individuals and circulating false narratives about the YSRCP leadership, he said. Referring to the arrest of the former Intelligence Chief and the questioning of MP Mithun Reddy and other officials, Jagan alleged that the government is acting with vengeance.

## TDP leader murdered

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader and former Mandal Parishad president (MPP) Muppavarapu Veeraiah Chowdary was brutally murdered by three unidentified miscreants in his office here on Tuesday.

According to the police, the incident occurred while Veeraiah Chowdary was working in his office at Padma Towers, located on the bypass road. The assailants, with their faces covered, stormed into the office and hacked him to death. TDP activists stated that the attackers had concealed their identities using a cloth. Superintendent of Police Damodhar visited the scene of the crime.

The police have registered a case and shifted the body to RIMS for post-mortem examination.

## 26 killed in Kashmir...

Continued from Page 1

At least 20 people were injured in the strike in the volatile Kashmir Valley where tourists have so far mostly been spared. As news of the terror attack targeting tourists in Kashmir spread, The Resistance Front (TRF), shadow group of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, claimed responsibility. Officials said it was possible the terror group could have crossed over from Kishtwar in Jammu and reached Baisaran through Kokernag in south Kashmir.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is on a visit to Saudi Arabia, and left for Srinagar soon after to hold an urgent security review meeting with all agencies. "I strongly condemn the terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured recover at the earliest. All possible assistance is being provided to those affected," the prime minister said on X.

"Those behind this heinous act will be brought to justice... They will not be spared! Their evil agenda will never succeed. Our resolve to fight terrorism is unshakable and it will get even stronger," he added.

Eyewitnesses painted a chilling picture of gunfire breaking the calm of a regular Tuesday afternoon with scores of people enjoying their day out. Cries for help were heard as lifeless bodies lay motionless in pools of blood.

## CM seeks...

Continued from Page 1

In his final engagement, Naidu met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and briefed him on several key initiatives undertaken by the Andhra Pradesh Government. He sought the Home Ministry's support in implementing critical reforms related to governance and law and order.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by Union Ministers Rammoan Naidu and Pemmasani Chandrasekar, along with other Members of Parliament from Andhra Pradesh, during the meetings.

## Kasireddy grilled

Continued from Page 1

The SIT reportedly obtained vital details regarding the scam during the interrogation.

Following a medical examination at the Government General Hospital, Kasireddy was produced before the ACB court.

His lawyers, Ponnaveolu Sudhakar and Dushyant Reddy, sought bail, while prosecutors Kalyan and Vijay opposed it. Kasireddy told the judge that he had informed the police of his willingness to cooperate but was arrested nonetheless. He also claimed that only his car was seized by the police.

The court expressed dissatisfaction with the vague remand report, questioning the police on the arrest procedure and the absence of Kasireddy's name in the FIR. The Public Prosecutor argued for custody, stating it was necessary for further investigation.

## AP seeks Centre's support to power green energy push

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar, along with Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary K. Vijayanand, met Union Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy, Shripad Yesso Naik, during the 4th meeting of the Group of Ministers (GoM), and urged the Centre to support several key proposals submitted by the State in the power sector.

During the discussions, Ravi Kumar stressed the urgent need for early financial sanction for the Green Energy Corridor (GEC) project, calling it critical to strengthening Andhra Pradesh's renewable energy evacuation infrastructure. He said the GEC would facilitate the smooth integration of green energy into the national grid, aiding both State and national clean energy goals. The Minister also sought financial and technical assistance for the proposed Renewable Energy Management Zone (REMZ) in the State. He noted that the REMZ would boost forecasting, scheduling, and real-time grid management of



renewable resources, improving the utilisation of green energy.

Ravi Kumar further requested that the NP Kunta Solar Park be exempt from recently introduced General Network Access (GNA) charges. He highlighted the park's strategic importance and said the exemption was necessary to ensure its cost-effectiveness and viability.

Reiterating the State's commitment to clean energy, the

Minister said these proposals are vital to accelerating the energy transition and contributing to India's climate goals. In response, Union Minister Shripad Naik assured that the proposals would be favourably considered.

The meeting marked a key step towards securing Central support for Andhra Pradesh's energy initiatives and advancing India's green energy ambitions.

## Ex-AP CID...

Continued from Page 1

With Anjaneyulu now in custody, the high-profile case has resurfaced, drawing statewide attention. He is expected to be produced before a magistrate and sent to judicial remand. Anjaneyulu was known for his proximity to former Chief Minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and is believed to have played a pivotal role in the actress's controversial arrest.

The case, which had largely receded from public memory, has now re-emerged as a major political and legal flashpoint following the change in government.

## AP calls for lower...

Continued from Page 1

Financial relief measures, including reduced interest rates from REC and PFC and waivers on prepayment penalties, were key discussion points to help ease DISCOMs' debt burdens.

The GoM reaffirmed the need for a clear roadmap for regulatory and financial reforms aligned with India's 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision.

Rajasthan Minister Heeralal Nagar outlined plans to install 36,700 MW of rooftop solar capacity under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana by 2025–26, benefiting over 77 lakh households with 150 free electricity units per month.

Maharashtra's Meghana Sakore Bordikar highlighted financial reform efforts through Mahavitaran, while Uttar Pradesh's Aravind Kumar Sharma stressed the importance of affordable capital and rational coal allocation. Presentations from AIDA, REC and PFC capped the meeting, with strategic inputs on improving DISCOM performance.

Notable attendees included Avinash Lavania (MD, MPCL), Alok Kumar (DG, AIDA), and Pranav Tayal (Director, Ministry of Power), along with senior officials from APTRANSCO and APCPDCL.

## Central team inspects...

Continued from Page 1

The inspection team comprises subject specialists Ravi Agarwal, Lalit Kumar Solanki, and Sandeep Danote. They thoroughly reviewed the materials, evaluating different grades of concrete and aggregates to determine whether they comply with the required quality standards for a project of this magnitude.

Officials from the Department of Water Resources, including D Srinivas, M Sriram Patel, R Durgaprasad, RV Chiranjeevi, V Jagadeesh, G Surendra, and John Karan, accompanied the central teams. Representatives from Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd (MEIL), including GM Gangadhar and DGM Murali Pammi, coordinated and facilitated the inspection process.

These inspections underscore the central government's commitment to upholding quality benchmarks and ensuring the structural integrity of the Polavaram Project, which remains crucial for the region's irrigation and water management needs.

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Dashami: Apr 22 06:13 PM to Apr 23 04:43 PM

Ekadashi: Apr 23 04:43 PM to Apr 24 02:32 PM

Nakshatram: Dhanishtha: Apr 22 12:44 PM to Apr 23 12:07 PM

Shatabhisha: Apr 23 12:07 PM to Apr 24 10:49 AM

Rahukalam: 12:14 PM to 1:48 PM

Yamagandam: 7:32 AM to 9:06 AM

Varjyam: 06:56 PM to 08:26 PM

Gulika: 10:40 AM to 12:14 PM

Ahnikalam: 04:00 AM to 05:31 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: Nil

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 39°

Humidity: 63%

Sunrise: 5:47 AM

Sunset: 6:25 PM

Updated: April 22, 2025 5:00 PM

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH**

**RURAL WATER SUPPLY & SANITATION DEPARTMENT**

**E-PROCURE TENDER NOTICE**

No.01/2025-26 to 04/2025-26 Date: 21-04-2025

Online tenders are invited under e-procurement platform for 4 works for Providing drinking water facilities to the needy habitations in Aluri Sitarama Raju (3 works), Eluru (1 work) Districts under J.M Programme. Estimated Cost Rs.4960.60 Lakhs. Tenders can be downloaded from e-procurement market i.e. www.tender.approcurement.gov.in from 23.04.2025 to 07.05.2025 upto 3.00 PM. Officers concerned, SE, RWS&S Circles, Visakhapatnam, Eluru and Kakinada. Sd/- Chief Engineer-II, RWS&S Dept., Gollapudi, Vijayawada

OFFICE NO: 1183 ECL/NDV/11/19/21-22, Dt. 23.04.2025

## Summer Yoga Coaching Camp begins at IGMC Stadium

Camp aims to promote healthy lifestyles and encourage practising yoga

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra inaugurated the Summer Yoga Coaching Camp organised by the Amaravati Yoga and Aerobics Association at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium on Tuesday.

The camp aims to promote healthy lifestyles during the summer break and to encourage yoga as a daily practice among citizens. Marking the start of the camp, Commissioner Dhyanchandra performed yoga asanas alongside the students receiving training. Also, several trainees performed yoga asanas before the Municipal Commissioner.

In his address, the Commissioner underscored the holistic benefits of yoga, stating that regular practice can effectively address a wide range of health-related issues. He described natural yoga asanas as the simplest and an effective way to attain physical and mental well-being.

"Yoga is the only path to attaining true inner strength by harmonising all human energies," Dhyanchandra said. He highlighted that yoga not only brings balance between the body and mind but also contributes to building a positive societal environment.

Emphasising the ancient roots and global relevance of yoga, the Commissioner remarked that the practice is a priceless gift from India to the world. In today's fast-paced world, where mental stress



and lifestyle diseases are rampant, he stressed that yoga offers a natural and accessible solution.

He also noted the significance of World Yoga Day, celebrated globally to raise awareness and appreciation for the benefits of yoga. Encouraging citizens to embrace yoga as a daily habit, Dhyanchandra said it can help individuals maintain youthfulness, prevent illnesses such as hyperten-

ness, thyroid disorders, and diabetes, and even reduce dependency on medication. Finally, Commissioner Dhyanchandra urged parents to motivate their children to take an active interest in yoga. He stated that the discipline could shape not just healthy individuals, but also a healthier society.

Amaravati Yoga and Aerobics Association secretary PV Ramana, vice-president Miriyala Venkateswara Rao, treasurer A Lavanya Kumar, organising secretary P Prashant, K Gandhi Babu, additional SP Ch Lakshmiipathi, Inspectors Dasari Kasi Viswanath, Ch Arun Kumar, and others were present.



## VMC delegation inspects K-100 storm water drain project, white top roads in Bengaluru

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of an educational initiative, a delegation from the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC), comprising corporators and engineering officials, undertook a study tour to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)—Greater Bengaluru Municipal Corporation—on Tuesday to inspect key developmental projects.

The 43-member VMC team, led by YSRCF Floor Leader Venkata Satyanarayana, departed Vijayawada on Monday. The visit aimed to gain firsthand knowledge of Bengaluru's infrastructure models, particularly focusing on White Top Roads and the K-100 Storm Water Drain Project, both considered pioneering solutions to urban challenges.

Upon arrival, the delegation was received by BBMP Chief Commissioner Tushar Girinath, who gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation on Bengaluru's civic infrastructure and governance strategies. He informed the team that the BBMP administers a population of over 1.40 crore people across eight zones.

Highlighting the White Top Road Project, Girinath explained that this innovative concrete road model requires minimal to no maintenance for up to 25-30 years. So far,

BBMP Chief Commissioner gives PowerPoint presentation on ongoing projects in the city



around 200 km of White Top Roads have been developed across Bengaluru. The team also visited KR Road, which was laid 15 years ago and has not needed repairs since, showcasing the project's durability. The Commissioner also elaborated on the K-100 Storm Water Drain Project, designed to eliminate water stagnation during the monsoon. The project, which spans approximately 100 km, has seen 11 km completed to date. Notably, the drain includes natural pollution control through vegetation planted along the canal, contributing to both rainwater harvesting and urban greening.

He further emphasised BBMP's commitment to environmental sustainability. Bengaluru is one of the first three Indian cities to adopt a Climate Action Plan, with focused development on lakes, greenery, and clean air initiatives. The BBMP is managing urban challenges related to waste, roads, lighting, and lakes through an Integrated Command Control Room, which also monitors air quality, lake water levels, and traffic systems.

The VMC delegation actively interacted with BBMP officials, asking questions and seeking clarity on urban best practices. Venkata Satyanarayana expressed gratitude to Tushar Girinath for his insightful presentation and hospitality.

In a formal gesture, Deputy Mayor Avuthu Sri Sailaja Reddy, Venkata Satyanarayana, TDP Deputy Floor Leader Ummidi Venkateswara Rao, and BJP leader Bulla Vijayakumar were felicitated by the BBMP Chief Commissioner during the visit.

## Probe sought into star tortoise deaths at Srikurmam Temple

Sixteen endangered star tortoises found dead at ancient shrine



Carcasses of star tortoises found outside the Executive Officer's office at the ancient Lord Vishnu temple in Srikakulam district on Monday.

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

The discovery of 16 dead Indian star tortoises at the ancient Srikurmam temple in Srikakulam district has triggered public outrage and renewed demands for better conservation practices. The ninth-century temple, dedicated to Lord Vishnu in his Kurma (tortoise) avatar, is globally unique for sheltering these sacred yet endangered reptiles. On Sunday, devotees and temple staff were shocked to find seven tortoises charred and nine carcasses discarded behind the Executive Officer's quarters. The incident sparked anger and accusations of negligence against the temple authorities, who manage an enclosure housing nearly 180 tortoises.

District Forest Officer (DFO) S. Venkatesh, who visited the site with Animal Husbandry officials, said the tortoises appeared to have died over a period of time, not recently. "Only the shells were found, making post-mortem examination impossible," he said, noting the absence of viscera.

The temple has entrusted tortoise conservation to the Srikakulam-based Green Mercy Foundation, an arrangement that has drawn criticism from conservationists. Despite repeated appeals, the temple has resisted handing over the reptiles to the Forest Department, citing their deep religious signifi-

cance. In 2011, the temple even secured a High Court order to block such a move. DFO Venkatesh said the latest deaths had been reported to the Chief Wildlife Warden, who may recommend transferring the tortoises to the Forest Department or recognised zoological parks for better care.

Animal rights activists have raised concerns over inadequate infrastructure and protection. Pradeep Kumar Nath, founder of the Visakha Society for Protection and Care of Animals, urged the authorities to shift the tortoises to the Indira Gandhi Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam or place them under Forest Department custody. The star tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*) is listed as 'vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List and receives only limited protection under Schedule IV of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Temple officials, however, claimed that only two tortoises had died recently and insisted that all safety measures were in place. Endowments Assistant Commissioner (in-charge) Bhadraraj acknowledged the issue and said an inquiry would be initiated.

Meanwhile, Swami Srinivasananda Saraswati, president of the Andhra Pradesh Sadhu Parishad, demanded a formal government probe, as some devotees believe extreme summer heat may have contributed to the deaths.

## Visakhapatnam police hold second 'Vehicle Fair'

320 seized vehicles returned to owners

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a move towards citizen-centric policing, the Visakhapatnam city police conducted the second edition of its innovative "Vehicle Fair" on Tuesday, aimed at returning seized motor vehicles to their rightful owners, free of charge. This pioneering initiative, the first of its kind in the country, seeks to alleviate the challenges faced by vehicle owners who often encounter legal and procedural delays in reclaiming their vehicles. Over time, many of these vehicles deteriorate, losing both value and functionality.

The Vehicle Fair was designed as a streamlined process to ensure the efficient return of such vehicles, in

line with the guidelines set by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Collaborating with the Regional Transport Office (RTO), police teams meticulously verified ownership records from various police stations and reached out to vehicle owners.

The first fair, held on February 19, successfully returned 152 vehicles. Based on the positive feedback received, the second fair saw 320 vehicles being returned—272 by the Traffic Department, 37 by the Crime Department, and 11 by the Law & Order Department. City Police Commissioner Dr. Shankhabrata Bagchi formally handed over the vehicles, marking a total of 472 beneficiaries from the initiative.

## ISWAI commends State govt for progressive excise policies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI), representing the premium alcoholic beverage industry, has lauded State governments for introducing progressive excise policies that modernise retail, boost transparency and elevate consumer experiences while enhancing State revenues.

From Uttar Pradesh's composite retail formats to Andhra Pradesh's privatised model and Rajasthan's premium outlets in malls and airports, multiple States are reshaping the alcohol landscape.

Policies boost transparency and elevate consumer experiences while enhancing State revenues

Welcoming the positive change, Sanjit Padhi, CEO of the International Spirits and Wines Association of India (ISWAI), said, "The reforms we are witnessing across different States in India signal a paradigm shift in how the alcohol sector is perceived and managed, and reflects the State governments' positive intent and commitment. Progressive excise policies are not only improving compli-

ance and transparency, but also creating the foundation for sustainable, consumer-centric growth." Uttar Pradesh's FY 2025-26 policy targets ₹55,000 crore in revenue, a 10 per cent increase year-on-year. Digitisation efforts like e-lotteries for licenses have already yielded ₹2,250 crore, with licence fees expected to add ₹4,200 crore. With retail outlets reduced from 12,000 to 9,000 com-

posite vendors, consumer access and operational efficiency are significantly enhanced. Reforms also support vendors with two-year licenses, capped ownership, and streamlined operations promoting fair competition and responsible consumption. States like Andhra Pradesh have seen ₹1,800 crore in revenue growth and a 37 per cent rise in Scotch sales. Rajasthan's

landmark four-year policy has improved industry stability, with IMFL sales up by 55 per cent since FY 2021.

Padhi emphasised the need for pricing deregulation, stating, "Market forces should determine pricing. Removing controls will encourage investment and stronger revenue contributions." ISWAI also urged more States to digitise systems, following examples set by Madhya Pradesh, UP, and West Bengal.

As more States adopt these models, India's alcohol sector is set to become a globally benchmarked, inclusive, and consumer-focused ecosystem.

## Fund crunch cripples public libraries in North Andhra

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Over 60 public libraries across North Andhra are grappling with a severe financial crisis, casting a shadow over their crucial role as educational support systems during the ongoing summer holidays. The shortfall affects 16 libraries in Visakhapatnam, 35 in Anakapalli, and 13 in Alluri Sitarama Raju district, institutions that have long been cornerstones of community learning.

The crisis stems from the non-remittance of the legally mandated library cess by urban and rural local bodies, a requirement under the Andhra Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 1960. This act stipulates that up to eight paise per rupee of property tax

collected should be transferred to the Zilla Grandhalaya Samstha. However, widespread negligence in this transfer has resulted in substantial outstanding amounts, leaving libraries severely underfunded.

A particularly concerning situation prevails within the Greater Visakhapatnam

Municipal Corporation (GVMC), which, despite recording the highest property and land tax collection in the State at Rs 510 crore for the 2024-25 fiscal year, has failed to release Rs 40.8 crore owed as library cess. According to former Zilla Grandhalaya Samstha chairman Konda Rajiv Gandhi, GVMC's total

outstanding dues now exceed a staggering Rs 117 crore. Furthermore, other municipalities and gram panchayats collectively owe between Rs 5 crore and Rs 18 crore. State-run entities like APIIC and APSEZ are also among the defaulters, exacerbating the financial distress faced by the libraries.

With the summer break in full swing, the functional impairment of these libraries is acutely felt by students and educators alike. Concerned civic leaders and educationists are urgently appealing for government intervention and stricter enforcement of the cess remittance regulations to ensure the revitalisation and long-term viability of these indispensable public resources.

Living standards of Polavaram oustees to be improved: Manohar

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has assured that the living standards of those displaced by the Polavaram Project will be significantly improved...



welfare measures for them.

"Each displaced family is being given 35 kg of rice free of cost every month under the Antyodaya scheme. Employment opportunities will be created for youth from these families through special job melas and a detailed survey," Manohar said.

to ensure that essential amenities such as roads, drainage, potable water, education, and medical facilities are made available in the rehabilitation colonies within six months.

Highlighting the government's commitment to development, he said Rs 27 crore had been spent on road works in Polavaram con-

stituency last year, and Rs 20 crore more would be allotted this year. Full compensation will be paid to all eligible evacuees, he added. He also announced that new ration cards would be issued soon and reiterated the government's dual focus on welfare and development, including Rs 2,700 crore in monthly pensions ben-

efiting 63 lakh people across the State.

Further, he revealed that the coalition government's flagship scheme 'Talliki Vandanam' would soon be launched, under which eligible mothers will receive Rs 9,600 per annum.

Collector K. Vetri Selvi and MLA Chirri Balaraju also addressed the gathering. Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy, MLA P. Dharma Raju, and RTC Zonal Chairman Appala Naidu were among those present.

Earlier, Minister Manohar visited Reddy Ganapavaram and Rowthugudem villages, and took part in a traditional dance programme with tribal communities at Barrick Alapadu. He noted that 379 villages are expected to be submerged in the Polavaram backwaters, and Rs 4,853 crore has already been disbursed as compensation. Of the 10,000 targeted Antyodaya cards, over 3,000 have been issued so far, he added.

Take steps to tackle potable water shortage: Minister Dola



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Officials have been instructed to take necessary measures to ensure the supply of drinking water to areas facing scarcity.

The Social Welfare Minister emphasised the need to ensure that no village suffers from a drinking water shortage during the intense summer heat. "Immediate steps must be taken to supply drinking water to areas experiencing acute shortage, including through water tankers if required," he said.

Minister promises to resolve problems of tobacco farmers



PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare, Dola Balaveeranjanya Swamy, visited the Rural Drinking Water Supply department and other departments at his office in Kondepi on Tuesday to review the drinking water situation in several mandals.

Addressing the officials, the Minister emphasised the need to ensure that no village suffers from a drinking water shortage during the intense summer heat. "Immediate steps must be taken to supply drinking water to areas experiencing acute shortage, including through water tankers if required," he said.

He directed the officials to repair faulty motors and borewells without delay. The Minister also enquired about the current drinking water requirements in the affected areas.

Balaveeranjanya Swamy stated that the tobacco purchasing process in Karnataka had concluded, and instructed officials to speed up procurement in Andhra Pradesh. He enquired about the rejection of low-grade tobacco and assured farmers that he would look into the matter and resolve it.

The Minister further said that he would convene a meeting with tobacco purchasers to address the issues of no bids and pricing, and promised to ensure justice for the farmers.

He recalled that the government had supported tobacco farmers in the past during periods of price decline and asserted that efforts would be made to prevent any losses to them this season as well.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Minister for Tribal Affairs and Women & Child Welfare, Gummadi Sandhya Rani, has called for a reassessment of family planning norms to address declining birth rates. Speaking at the Poshan Pakhwada-2025 event in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday, she emphasised the need for families to consider having two or more children to balance population growth.

Reassess family planning norms: Minister

Families need to consider having two or more children to balance population growth



Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) module and raised concerns about the rising rates of childhood obesity. She also urged parents

to reject gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities for both boys and girls. District Collector M.N. Harendhira

Prasad, also present at the event, emphasised the importance of cultivating healthy habits in children. Drawing inspiration from Japan's model of early childhood fitness, he encouraged outdoor activities, cycling, and reducing screen time to combat obesity. "Promoting healthy habits from a young age will not only help in preventing obesity but also contribute to reducing economic poverty by building a healthier society," Prasad said.

The event, organised by ICDS and UDC, included a showcase of nutritious food stalls and awareness programmes. A traditional Sreemantham (pregnancy celebration) ceremony for pregnant women and a pledge-taking session concluded the event, with several dignitaries in attendance, including A. Suryakumari, Principal Secretary, Women & Child Welfare, and Resha N. Desai, UNICEF representative.

CM Naidu's policies harmed farmers: Roja

Arrest of PSR Anjaneyulu shameful distraction politics

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leader RK Roja has fiercely criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for using deceptive tactics to cover up his failure to keep promises.

Speaking to the media, Roja said Chandrababu's policies have harmed farmers and fuelled land, liquor and mining scams, creating chaos in Andhra Pradesh. Roja labelled the arrest of former Intelligence Chief PSR Anjaneyulu as "shameful distraction politics" to hide Chandrababu's unkept promises.

Chandrababu is protecting corrupt police, warning they will face consequences. Roja questioned the CM's halt of the Skill Development scam probe, daring him to allow a CBI investigation into his cases. "Chandrababu's promises are worthless, and his fourth term started with a failure signature," she said, warning of public backlash.

Roja criticised Chandrababu for politicising the Tirumala laddu issue, dismissed by the Supreme Court, and urged Prime Minister Modi to probe the Amaravati project's cost rise from Rs 36,000 crore to Rs 76,000 crore. She questioned the CM's exclusion of SC, ST, and BC communities and his Rs 150 crore plot. Roja demanded an end to the 59-acre, Rs 3,000 crore land deal with Ursa, a dubious company.

One electrocuted, 2 injured in mishap

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

One person was electrocuted and two others sustained injuries after coming into contact with a live cable wire at Jagananna Colony in Mallayapalem panchayat of Gudivada rural mandal on Tuesday.

According to police, a boy named Santosh touched a Jio cable wire in front of his house, unaware that electricity was passing through it, and collapsed on the spot.

Teja (35), who rushed to rescue the boy, was electrocuted and died instantly. Another local resident, Rama Swamy, who also attempted to help, suf-



fered burn injuries.

Santosh and Rama Swamy were admitted to the Government General Hospital (GGH), where they are currently undergoing treatment. Gudivada Rural Sub-Inspector N Chanti Babu registered a case and sent Tejas body to the GGH for post-mortem examination.

A pall of gloom descended on the colony following the tragic incident.

Naidu diverting attention through arrests: Ambati

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former Minister and YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Guntur District President Ambati Rambabu strongly criticised Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for allegedly resorting to diversionary tactics to shift public attention away from what he described as the coalition government's corrupt administration.

Addressing the media here on Tuesday, Rambabu claimed that the arrests of former Intelligence Chief PSR Anjaneyulu and Raj Kasireddy, purportedly in connection with a liquor scam, were deliberately orchestrated to deflect attention from the irregularities within the government.

He alleged that the State government transferred land worth Rs 3,000 crore in Visakhapatnam to a shell company named Ursa at a nominal rate of 99 paise per acre and siphoned off crores through commissions linked to Amaravati's capital city construction. Rambabu condemned the government's failure to deliver on its election promises, stating it had attracted unprecedented public discontent within just 11 months—an unmatched record in Indian political history.

He termed the arrests a staged drama aimed at diverting focus from alleged corruption and unfulfilled assurances. Rambabu further accused Naidu of engaging in vindictive politics by targeting



Anjaneyulu, a respected IPS officer with DGP potential, in retaliation for his role during Naidu's earlier arrest in the skill development scam.

Citing counter-cases against IPS officers Kanthi Rana Tata and Vishal Gunni, who secured anticipatory bail, Rambabu questioned the trend of filing cases against officials with every regime change. He urged members of

the IPS to introspect on this disturbing pattern and warned Naidu that such actions would have consequences, remarking that no Chief Minister holds power permanently.

Describing Naidu as a "master of diversion," Rambabu accused him of manipulating public perception to conceal failures and financial mismanagement, noting that even Naidu had admitted to fears over the State budget.

He alleged that massive loot had taken place through contracts, liquor, sand and soil scams, and that the government was planning a second foundation ceremony for Amaravati only to mask this plunder. Refuting the liquor scam allegations, Rambabu stated that the YSRCP government had sold liquor at lower

rates, eliminated 'belt shops', and issued no new distillery licences.

He also accused the coalition of undermining the police system through false cases, citing judicial rebukes in the cases involving Posani Krishna Murali and Premkumar.

Rambabu warned that suppressing dissent would only lead to stronger resistance, pointing to leaders such as PV Narasimha Rao, Indira Gandhi, Jayalalitha, and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who faced arrests but never retaliated against officials. Dismissing Vijay Sai Reddy's comments, Rambabu said his defection to Naidu's camp had stripped him of credibility and asserted that the YSRCP would intensify its fight against such injustices.

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Man, daughter killed as lorry hits bike

In a tragic road accident, a man and his teenage daughter lost their lives after a speeding lorry ran over their motorcycle at Pedda Hotur village in Aaluru mandal on Tuesday.

According to the police, the deceased girl, Vadde Shrevani (13), was a Class 9 student at the KGBV High School in Chippagiri village. As the school had declared holidays, her father, Vadde Veeranna (47), was taking her home on a motorcycle.

A speeding cement mixer lorry rammed into their bike from behind, killing both on the spot. Shrevani was reportedly crushed under the rear wheels of the lorry. A harrowing scene unfolded at the accident site, as the girls' body remained pinned under the lorry until it was



moved forward to retrieve her remains.

Poignant scenes were witnessed at the Government General Hospital, where grief-

stricken family members, along with a large number of students and teachers from KGBV, gathered. Police have taken the lorry driver into custody.

DM & HO inspects PHCs, DEI centre

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Medical and Health Officer, Dr G. Geetha Bai, paid a surprise visit to the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) at Attili, Relangi, and Palakoderu, as well as the District Early Intervention Centre (DEIC) in Tanuku on Tuesday.

During the inspection, Dr Geetha Bai reviewed the available medical facilities and the performance of staff at the PHCs and the DEIC.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Geetha Bai emphasised the need to provide all medical services, including maternity care, more efficiently. She



instructed the doctors to ensure that quality maternity services are delivered without imposing any financial burden on the beneficiaries.

As part of maternal and child care, she suggested that

pregnant women be identified at an early stage, and that special attention be given to those classified as high-risk. She also directed doctors to focus on improving nutrition and preventing anaemia among

pregnant women, in coordination with Anganwadi centres.

She advised that gynaecologists should be consulted when necessary and stressed that treatment should be documented through electronic health records in the outpatient department.

Dr Geetha Bai also highlighted the need for widespread health education to raise awareness about women's health and instructed officials to promote the PCPNDT Act, particularly in areas with a low sex ratio.

A review meeting was held with the medical staff of the respective centres, during which several suggestions were made.

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao launched a scathing attack on the Congress Government on Tuesday, asking Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to apologise for the police atrocities on tribal women in Lagadacharla which has been detailed in the National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) damning report.

KTR said that the NHRC's findings were nothing short of

a slap on Revanth Reddy's face.

"The report confirms what we have been saying from day one, that is, Dalit and tribal women were subjected to horrific sexual harassment and violence by police officers. If Revanth has any shame, he should apologise and resign immediately," he said.

At an interaction with the victims in Nandinagar in Hyderabad, where tribal women from Lagadacharla donated Rs 1 lakh towards the

KTR demands dismissal of police officials

BRS silver jubilee event, KTR spoke emotionally about their pain. "Despite facing torture, they came forward to support our cause. I bow to them with folded hands," he said.

Referring to the NHRC's observations, KTR said the report established that the police behaved like Revanth's private army. "Every form of physical abuse was inflicted on

LAGADACHARLA INCIDENT



tribal families. Officers acted like beasts, without even a shred of compassion for the women's dignity," he said.

He reminded that one of the victims even told the NHRC that not just she, but even her mother-in-law was sexually assaulted, while another said she was beaten on her thighs.

KTR demanded that all

police officials found responsible in the NHRC report be dismissed from service within six weeks, as ordered by the Commission. "If the government fails to act, we will take the case back to the Supreme Court," he warned.

Criticising the muted response in the media to the NHRC report, he pointed out that officials had used third-degree torture, threatened magistrates, and even assaulted farmers involved in the protest. "CCTV footage was

deliberately disabled so that no evidence would surface. It is a textbook case of state repression," he said.

The BRS leader also directed flak at the Chief Minister, calling him both the Home Minister and the MLA of Kodangal.

He accused the Revanth Government of ignoring a High Court stay and continuing land acquisition operations in Lagadacharla for a pharmaceutical firm allegedly linked to his family.

ACROSS THE STATES



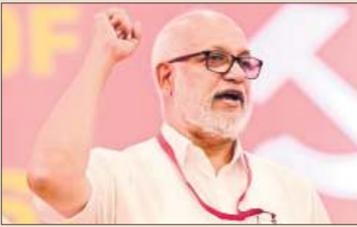
## Child sold for Rs 5,000 by step-grandfather; rescued

Assam Police rescued a one-year-old girl, who was sold around 11 months ago by her step-grandfather, and arrested two persons for their alleged involvement in the crime, a senior officer said on Tuesday. Deputy Commissioner (East) of Guwahati Police, Mrinal Deka, told reporters that the two accused have been arrested on charges of selling and buying a minor for a sum of Rs 5,000 and the child has also been rescued. "We received a complaint from the mother, a resident of an area near the Games Village here, yesterday stating that her stepfather had taken away the child on May 30 last year on the pretext of medical treatment in the absence of her husband," he added. Subsequently, the woman came to know that her minor one-month-old daughter was sold by her stepfather to someone for Rs 5,000, Deka said. "Accordingly, a case was registered with Basistha police station and an investigation was initiated. A police team rescued the child from Sontali area in Kamrup district," he added.



## Delhi sees sharp dip in minimum temperature

The national capital witnessed a sharp dip in the minimum temperature on Tuesday, which was recorded at 20.9 degrees Celsius, 5.3 notches below normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). In comparison, the minimum temperature on Monday was recorded at 26.2 degrees Celsius, the highest in the last six years for this time of the year. A similar temperature was last observed in 2022, the IMD said. The maximum temperature on Tuesday was recorded at 39.9 degrees Celsius, which is 2.2 degrees above normal. Humidity levels fluctuated between 17 and 26 per cent during the day. Several weather-monitoring stations in the city also recorded high daytime temperatures. The Ridge reported 41.7 degrees Celsius, Aya Nagar logged 41.1 degrees, Narela reported 40 degrees, and Palam recorded 40.5 degrees Celsius, according to the weather office.



## Bengal to play key role in revival of CPI(M): Baby

Newly elected CPI(M) general secretary M A Baby on Tuesday said that West Bengal has to play a very important role in ensuring independent strength of the party and the Left in the country's political scenario. Maintaining that West Bengal is an advanced outpost of the Left and democratic forces, he claimed that various parties came together in the state, and a systematic attack has been unleashed on it. Admitting that there has been "some decline in the electoral performance of our party and the Left in Bengal and Tripura", he said that the independent strength of the CPI(M) and the Left is important to fight "neo-fascist forces" in the country. "In ensuring the independent strength of the CPI(M) and the Left, West Bengal has to play a very important role, and so is Tripura," he said, addressing a press conference at the party's state headquarters here. The CPI(M) could not win any seat in the 2021 West Bengal assembly elections and in the 2024 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls in the state. During the state conference of the CPI(M) held from Monday in Kolkata, which he attended, the party planned political and organisational tasks to be undertaken in West Bengal so that its strength can be regained here, Baby said.

## VANCE TO INDIA

# Procure more American energy, military hardware

PNS ■ JAIPUR

US Vice President JD Vance on Tuesday called on India to drop non-tariff barriers, give greater access to its markets and buy more American energy products and military hardware as he outlined a roadmap of deeper ties between the two nations for a prosperous and peaceful 21st century.

In an address at an event here, Vance repeatedly praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing him as a "special person" and emphasised on the need for India and the US to work unitedly to deal with global challenges.

"I really believe that the future of the 21st century is going to be determined by the strength of the United States-India partnership," he said.

"I believe that if India and the US worked together successfully, we are going to see a 21st century that is prosperous and peaceful.

But I also believe that if we fail to work together success-



fully, the 21st century could be a very dark time for all of humanity," Vance said.

The US Vice President, accompanied by Indian-origin Second Lady Usha Chilukuri, and their three children -- sons Ewan, Vivek and daughter Mirabel -- landed in Delhi on Monday amid growing global concerns over the US's tariff war.

Vance and Modi held wide-ranging talks following the

and critical mineral supplies," he said.

"We have the capacity and we have the desire to help. Moreover, we think energy co-production will help beat unfair competitors in other foreign markets."

"But India, we believe, can go a long way to enhance energy ties between our nations. And one suggestion I have is maybe consider dropping some of the non-tariff barriers for American access to the Indian market," he added.

Vance said he and President Donald Trump are looking forward to stronger ties with India.

"Americans want further access to Indian markets. This is a great place to do business and we want to give our people more access to this country and Indians," he said.

"We believe, will thrive from greater commerce in the United States. This is very much a win-win partnership, certainly will be far into the future," he said.

## Modi govt 'squeezed' share of states in cess on petrol, diesel: Kharge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday hit out at the Modi government over imposition of cess on petrol and diesel despite falling global crude oil prices, and alleged that even though it has collected Rs 38.89 lakh crore since 2014, it has "squeezed" the rightful share of states by not sharing this with states.

"The Modi government's 'Cooperative federalism' = CESSation of federalism," Kharge said in a post on X.

He alleged that despite international crude oil prices falling to a 47-month low, the Modi government raised the central excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 2 each.

This year, the Modi government shall earn Rs 1.47 lakh crore from the total cess on petrol and diesel, and a whopping Rs 28,000 crore from this Rs 2 central excise duty alone,

he claimed.

But states, including the BJP-ruled ones, he said, would not get a single paisa from this cess, even though the states have been constantly demanding a higher share of the divisible pool from the Union government.

"Since 2014 to December 2024, the Modi government has collected Rs 38.89 lakh crore by taxing petrol, diesel and petroleum products.

"Instead of following the model of 'Team India' propagated by PM Modi, the Union government has passed on the burden of Rs 1 lakh crore revenue forgone in giving tax rebate to personal income tax up to Rs 12 lakh slab announced in the Budget 2025-26," the Congress chief said. He further claimed that Rs 5.7 lakh crore collected through various cesses and surcharges since 2019-20, will remain unspent by the Modi government (till March 2026).



## Maha govt stays order to make Hindi mandatory

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government has stayed its order to make Hindi mandatory as a third language for students of Classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English-medium schools in the wake of opposition to the move from various quarters.

State School Education Minister Dada Bhuse on Tuesday made the announcement about the stay on the government resolution (GR).

"We are staying the word mandatory (as mentioned in the GR). We will issue a revised GR," he told reporters.

Learning Hindi as the third language will be voluntary, Bhuse said.

The government decision taken last week to make Hindi compulsory as a third lan-



guage for students of Classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English-medium schools in the state had met with stiff resistance from different quarters, including some opposition parties.

The move comes days after the Maharashtra government's language consultation committee urged Chief Minister

Devendra Fadnavis to revoke the decision.

Minister Bhuse also asserted that learning of Marathi language will be made compulsory in the state and the education department will see to it that it is implemented effectively.

He stressed that the Centre

did not pressurise the state to "impose" Hindi.

On earlier GR which had made Hindi mandatory, Bhuse said both Hindi and Marathi had Devnagri script and that would have made the students easier to learn the language.

When asked why a third language was introduced from Class 1, Rahul Rekhawar, Director of the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), said efforts will be taken to ensure children do not feel any pressure of learning a third language.

He said a third language is only for speaking and listening purposes.

The three-language formula for classes 1 to 5 is a part of the new curriculum implementation under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

## Murshidabad violence orchestrated by 'outsiders': Mamata

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday asserted that "outsiders" were responsible for the violence that erupted in parts of Murshidabad district over the Waqf Act recently, and said she would visit the troubled areas in the first week of May to evaluate the situation.

Banerjee also said her government would "soon expose the conspirators" behind the riots that took place in two wards of Dhulian in the district.

"The violence was unfortunate. We do not want riots. Some outsiders orchestrated it, but we will expose them and their conspir-



acy," she said at an administrative programme in Midnapore. "I have promised the families of those killed in the violence to give a compensation of Rs 10 lakh each. We will also rebuild their houses under the 'Banglar

Bari' scheme... I will be going there in the first week of May and evaluate the situation," Banerjee said. The CM also said that the state government could take responsibility for the education of the children of those killed in the violence. "We are surveying the damages faced by the shopkeepers there," she said.

Governor C V Ananda Bose had on April 19 met family members of a man and his son, who were killed during violence over anti-Waqf (Amendment) Act protests in Murshidabad district, and assured them of all possible support.

At least three people died and over 280 have been arrested in connection with the violence earlier this month.

## Man in jail since 2018 for killing whom?

### Delhi HC asks, grants bail to accused

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a peculiar case, the Delhi High Court has granted bail to a man, who spent about seven years in jail on a murder charge, even as the victim's identity remained a mystery.

"To say the least, investigation in this case shocks the conscience of this court," Justice Girish Kathpalia said on April 21.

The judge added, "Till date,

deceased has not been identified. As regards the 'last seen' hypothesis, the said last seen was with Soni alias Chhoti, who has been found to be alive."

Accused Manjeet Karketta booked for the murder sought bail on the ground though he had been incarcerated since 2018, nobody knew who was killed. "It is extremely saddening that a human being lost life in such a gruesome manner and the body was cut into

pieces way back in the year 2018 but till date even identity of the deceased has not been established," the judge said.

The incident took place in 2018 and the mortal remains were identified to be that of one Soni alias Chhoti. After the arrest of the accused on May 17, 2018, Soni was reportedly found alive and the dead persons has remained unidentified till date. The police filed about five

chargesheets in the case, but the court opined it was not just the investigator, but also the senior police officers who had to "supervise investigation" and they "seem to have not been diligent".

The prosecutor opposed the bail plea and said the evidence of "last seen" connected the accused with the murder. The bag used to dispose of the victim's body was recovered from the accused, the prosecutor added.

## Don't do anything that may affect the review petition

### Bengal Edu Min to protesting teachers

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Asserting that the West Bengal government was firmly with the school teachers who lost their jobs, Education Minister Bratya Basu on Monday urged them to refrain from doing anything that might weaken the review petition which the state was planning to file in the Supreme Court.

Addressing a press conference, Basu said the School Education Department is working to ensure that those deemed eligible can continue with their jobs in accordance with the court's order.

"The state government is with the agitating teachers. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has assured all sorts of help. We are working in the interest of those who lost their jobs, and will continue to do so," he said.

"We are filing a review petition. So, I request the agitating teachers not to act in any way that may weaken our petition, violate the Supreme Court's order, or result in contempt of court by them or us," he added.

On April 3, the top court invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in the state-run and aided schools, calling the entire



selection process "vitiated and tainted".

"According to the Supreme Court verdict, eligible teachers have been requested to continue in their schools till December 31.

Our department is working on the salary issue, and we are taking responsibility to resolve it. The SSC case will come up for hearing in the division bench of the Calcutta High Court tomorrow," Basu said.

"We have the data with us, and we are working accordingly. Please do not do anything or compel us to do anything that could go against you during the review petition," he said, responding to the protests outside the West Bengal School Service Commission (SSC) office in Salt Lake.

## ROW OVER BILLS

# SC to examine if TN verdict covers issues raised by Kerala

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would examine whether the recent judgement on a plea of Tamil Nadu, fixing timelines for the grant of assent to bills, covered the issues raised by the Kerala government in its pleas.

A bench comprising Justices P S Narasimha and Joymalya Bagchi agreed to hear on May 6 the pleas of the Kerala government against Governor over the delay in approving bills passed by the state assembly.



"We will look into that judgement and see whether issues raised here are covered,"

the bench said when Attorney General R Venkataramani and Solicitor General Tushar

Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Governor's office, said the recent judgement delivered by a bench headed by Justice J B Pardiwala did not cover the issues raised by the Kerala government.

The bench comprising Justices Pardiwala and R Mahadevan on April 8 delivered a significant verdict on the plea of Tamil Nadu and set aside the reservation of the 10 bills for President's consideration in the second round holding it as illegal, erroneous in law.

The bench, for the first time, also prescribed that President should decide on the bills reserved for her consideration by Governor within a period of three months from the date on which such reference is received. Kerala seeks similar directions in its case.

On Tuesday, senior advocate K K Venugopal, appearing for Kerala, said the pleas of the state were covered by the recent judgement.

"What is the timeline for making a reference to the President by the Governor and

this issue is dealt with by that judgement and there are no other questions," he said.

He urged the bench to allow the pleas of the Kerala government in terms of the Tamil Nadu judgement. Mehta, however, insisted on making submissions saying the case of Kerala was not covered by the Tamil Nadu judgement. "The (Tamil Nadu) judgment does not cover certain issues in this case on facts which are essentially different," the bench said and fixed the pleas for hearing on May 6.

### Editor's TAKE

## A cultural gesture or a strategic reachout?

JD Vance's 3-day visit to India is more than a family trip. It's a message

United States Vice President JD Vance's three-day visit to India might appear on the surface as a cultural homecoming for his family, but beneath the surface lies a layer of strategic nuance that reflects the evolving dynamics of India-US relations — particularly amid the backdrop of Donald Trump's sanctions policy. Vance's India trip is being billed as a family-focused tour, with cultural visits to Jaipur and Agra aimed at helping his children connect with their Indian heritage through their mother, Usha Chilukuri Vance.

However, even such personal diplomacy carries weight. As the highest-ranking US official to visit India under the current administration, his presence alone sends a strong signal: despite recent tensions and Trump-era trade policy headwinds, the US values its long-term strategic relationship with India.

While the official itinerary includes only one major formal engagement — a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi followed by a state dinner — the subtext of that conversation is expected to be significant. Trade negotiations between the two nations remain in a delicate phase, especially with Trump's reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods paused only temporarily until July. The resumption or removal of those tariffs hinges on political will from both sides. Vance's visit offers a diplomatic window for quiet discussions, signalling a willingness from Washington to keep dialogue channels open even if the Trump administration's broader rhetoric leans toward economic nationalism.

Vance's visit comes just weeks after Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard's trip to India, indicating a deliberate staggered engagement from Trump's key officials. Vance's attendance at regional and business forums in Jaipur, including a speech at the Rajasthan International Centre, and his interactions with political figures, provide an opportunity to reinforce bilateral ties beyond just military or economic frameworks.

His presence also comes at a time when Modi is preparing for a high-profile visit to Saudi Arabia, underscoring how both nations are recalibrating their global engagements and seeking balance in a multipolar world order. Vance's India stop, sandwiched between Italy and other key visits, thus plays a quiet yet strategic role in maintaining American visibility in the Indo-Pacific theatre.

By prioritising a family-led cultural immersion alongside limited political engagements, Vance is walking a fine line. It's a display of soft power — highlighting shared values, people-to-people ties, and the significance of diaspora connections — while also reaffirming the transactional, interests-based nature of current US foreign policy under Trump.

The symbolic guard of honour, shopping trips for Indian handicrafts, and visits to Jaipur's heritage sites are diplomatic gestures that soften the harder edges of policy friction. This duality makes Vance's visit a potent blend of optics and opportunity. Whether Vance's trip translates into tangible outcomes on trade or security remains to be seen. But the fact that his first visit to India is being positioned as a cultural one, while quietly engaging on serious policy matters, reflects the Biden-Trump transition's lingering complexities — and how Vance is being groomed not just as a vice president, but as a statesman with cross-cultural appeal.

In a time of strained alliances and recalibrated partnerships, JD Vance's India visit is a quiet assertion: that while policy may shift, relationships endure — and sometimes, it's the personal visits that pave the way for political resets. As India and the United States navigate a landscape marked by shifting alliances and political flux, visits like Vance's offer more than ceremonial value. They signal intent, test the waters of diplomacy and often sow the seeds for future policy recalibration. In an age when optics can drive narrative, such symbolic overtures may well prove to be the quiet bridges over turbulent geopolitical waters.

## India bolsters ties with Sri Lanka

As China deepens its presence through major investments, India is doubling down to protect its strategic interests — offering aid, infrastructure to send a message that it is Sri Lanka's most reliable partner

Amid the intensifying India-China battle for influence in Sri Lanka, New Delhi has reason to be satisfied following the recent two-day state visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the island nation during which economic, defence, and energy ties with an important neighbour were shored up. India's strategic interests are intrinsically tied with those of Sri Lanka, hence the need to maintain close and robust bilateral relations with it. New Delhi also sought to convey to the Anura Kumara Dissanayake — led Government the message, yet again, that it can reap greater benefits from India, which is a reliable friend.

The underlying message herein being that China isn't one. It was also conveyed to Colombo once again that protecting India's security interests as well as its own should be of paramount importance. Towards this end, New Delhi also extracted from President Dissanayake an assurance, yet again, that he will keep in mind India's security interests.

To New Delhi's undoubted relief, President Dissanayake reiterated that he will not allow Sri Lankan territory to be used in any manner that will threaten India's security interests. For now, the Dissanayake Government appears to be walking the talk on this account going by news reports that Sri Lanka cancelled a joint naval exercise with India's arch-foe Pakistan, which was to be held in the waters off the strategically located Trincomalee, not too far from the Indian coastline. But not before New Delhi intervened and made its security concerns known, following which the exercise — which was to have been held around the dates PM Modi was to visit the island nation — was scrapped. Given its strategic imperatives in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it's essential for New Delhi to consolidate its influence in Sri Lanka where India no longer holds sole sway, and to maintain robust ties with the new Government in place there.

In its outreach to the island nation, New Delhi is also seeking to burnish its credentials as a leader of the Global South, projecting itself as a dependable partner for nations facing economic hardship, and who need not fear falling into a debt trap as is often the case when they avail of loans from China.

During the PM's visit, there was also important messaging for Colombo about the perils of hob-nobbing too closely with Beijing, with PM Modi stating during the visit, "We have shared security interests. The security of both countries is inter-connected and co-dependent." As a maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean straddling vital sea



lanes, New Delhi knows that Chinese expansionism can pose a strategic threat to both India and Sri Lanka.

The spreading tentacles of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Sri Lanka too have given New Delhi sleepless nights. As China's footprint in Sri Lanka increase, New Delhi knows well that it cannot afford to let its guard down vis-à-vis Beijing as the latter builds deep inroads into India's immediate and extended neighbourhood.

This has forced India to redouble its efforts to ramp up its engagement and provide all manner of development assistance to countries in its neighbourhood so that they remain within its sphere of influence.

In the case of Sri Lanka, India provided financial assistance totalling \$4.5 billion in 2022 and 2023 to it during its post-pandemic economic meltdown. This played a vital role in helping Sri Lanka obtain an IMF bailout. India's outreach to the Dissanayake Government has also seen it convert \$20.66 million given as lines of credit into grant assistance to reduce Sri Lanka's debt burden. All this, plus New Delhi's willingness to help Sri Lanka achieve economic stability, is possibly what has helped it forge close ties thus far with the Dissanayake Government.

Despite pursuing a policy of 'Neighbourhood First', India's strategic space in the IOR is increasingly shrinking amidst a relentless Chinese onslaught. Though India has coined the new term 'Mahasagar' (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) replacing the earlier coinage of 'Sagar' (Security and Growth for All) for countries in the IOR, containing China's influence remains a challenge. India's efforts don't always bear fruit, especially when China-leaning Governments are in power in the neighbourhood. Besides, the offer of Chinese loans and financial assistance to build infrastructure is too tempting to resist for cash-strapped neighbours of India struggling to execute mega projects.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the Left-leaning Dissanayake has adroitly managed to balance his country's diplomatic ties with the two Asian giants in the six months since he took charge. It also means that the island nation for now is seeking to reap the benefits from the fierce India-China rivalry in Sri Lanka and the wider IOR. So if Dissanayake earlier this year managed to secure the largest foreign FDI (foreign direct investment) of \$3.7 billion for his country from China for a state-of-the-art oil refinery at Hambantota to be built by Sinopec, he's being wooed by India as well in the area of energy security. PM Modi's visit saw the joint launch of the plan to build the Sampur solar power plant.

It will be developed by the Trincomalee Power Company, which is a joint venture

between Ceylon Electricity Board and India's NTPC. To boost the island nation's energy security, all the more imperative as it went through a crippling forex crisis post the pandemic — which meant huge fuel shortages — the visit saw a tripartite agreement between India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE to develop Trincomalee as a regional energy hub. India needs to consolidate its foothold in Trincomalee on the island nation's eastern coast and keep China at bay. With its huge natural harbour, Trincomalee is of immense geo-strategic import and has the potential to be developed as a naval base. India is also already jointly redeveloping with Sri Lanka World War II — era strategic oil tank farms in Trincomalee. Apart from Trincomalee, New Delhi is also keeping a close eye on another strategic port, the one in Kankesanthurai, which lies not too far away from the Indian coastline. The port in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated northern province is close to the Indian coastline and is being "rehabilitated" with a \$61.5 million grant assistance from India. Given its vital security stakes in Sri Lanka, a defence cooperation agreement with the island nation, the first between the two countries, inked during the visit would also help India counter Chinese moves in the region.

After all, China's hegemonic ambitions present a real and present danger to India and indeed the entire IOR.

(The author is Senior Journalist. Views are personal)



PARUL CHANDRA

## Overthinking is injurious to mental health

### SECOND Opinion

BY SAKSHI SETHI

Overthinking is a subtle but destructive habit that many people silently suffer from. It often disguises itself as caution or deep reflection, but in truth, it's a mental loop that traps individuals in cycles of worry, doubt, and inaction. While it may seem like a method of preparation or problem-solving, overthinking is far from harmless — it quietly undermines peace of mind, self-confidence, relationships, and even opportunities.

What begins as a desire to make the right choice or prepare for future outcomes quickly spirals into obsessive thinking. The mind replays conversations, dissects every detail, and invents endless "what ifs" and "should haves."

Instead of arriving at clarity, individuals find themselves stuck in a loop of mental noise that prevents real progress. A 2013 study published in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology found that overthinking is closely linked with anxiety and depression. Repetitive negative thinking was shown to be a shared factor in many mental health issues. This highlights that overthinking isn't just an annoying quirk — it's a serious risk factor that drains emotional energy, limits engagement with real life, and inhibits personal growth. Overthinkers often question every decision they make, fearing failure or embarrassment. This undermines

self-trust, making even small choices feel high-stakes. When someone begins to believe that every decision must be perfect, they become paralysed by the fear of imperfection, holding themselves back from growth, both personally and professionally. Relationships are also affected. Overthinkers tend to overanalyse texts, tones, or expressions, often creating negative narratives. A delayed response from a friend can spiral into "They're mad at me," or "I must've said something wrong." These imagined scenarios create emotional distance, tension, and unnecessary stress, making it hard to connect authentically. On top of that, the constant mental activity can interfere with sleep, leading to insomnia or disrupted rest, which further affects emotional well-being. So what fuels this habit of overthinking? At its core, overthinking is driven by fear — the fear of failure, of being judged, of losing control.

Often, these fears stem from past experiences where mistakes were punished or outcomes were unpredictable. As a coping mechanism, the brain tries to take control by playing out every possible scenario. Ironically, this attempt at control results in more chaos and mental fatigue. To escape the grip of overthinking, the first step is awareness. You can't change what you don't recognise. Start by observing your thought patterns and identifying when helpful reflection turns into rumination. The next step is to disrupt the cycle. One effective technique is to set a "thinking deadline." For instance, give yourself 30 minutes to evaluate a decision, weigh the pros and cons, and then make a choice. This method trains your brain to move from overanalysis to

action. Journaling is another powerful tool. Writing down your thoughts gets them out of your head and onto paper, immediately reducing their emotional charge. It also engages the logical part of the brain, helping you process emotions more constructively.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), a scientifically supported method, is built around this very idea — challenging irrational thoughts and replacing them with more realistic, balanced perspectives. Most importantly, take action. Overthinking convinces us to wait until we feel perfectly ready, but clarity often comes after we start. Even the smallest step — sending a message, making a phone call, beginning a project — can break the mental gridlock and build momentum.

We begin to see that the consequences of our decisions are rarely as catastrophic as we imagine, and even when things go wrong, we gain experience and resilience. Building trust in yourself is crucial. Each small, confident decision reinforces your capability. Along the way, practising self-compassion helps loosen the grip of perfectionism. You don't need to be flawless or have all the answers. Life is unpredictable by nature, and embracing that truth allows space for peace and growth. In the end, overthinking drains our most valuable resources — time and mental peace. It disguises itself as preparation but only delays action and postpones growth. Life isn't meant to be overanalysed — it's meant to be lived fully and authentically.

(The writer is an educator. Views are personal)

### Leaderspeak



Deeply Pained by the Passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. Pope Francis will always be remembered as a beacon of compassion, humility, and spiritual courage by millions across the world. From a young age, he devoted himself towards realising the ideals of Lord Christ. He diligently served the poor and downtrodden. For those who were suffering, he ignited a spirit of hope.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

## Letters to the Editor

### SY Quraishi and the politics of identity

Madam — Former Chief Election Commissioner SY Quraishi responded firmly to BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's recent remark labelling him a "Muslim Commissioner." On Monday, April 21, Quraishi stated his unwavering belief in an India where individuals are defined by their contributions, not their religious identities. He noted that for some, such identities are used to push hateful political narratives. Quraishi served India with distinction as Chief Election Commissioner from July 2010 to June 2012. During his tenure, he introduced key reforms such as the creation of a Voter Education Division and Expenditure Control Division, and he founded the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management.

A proud member of the Haryana cadre of the IAS, Quraishi's public service career is a model of integrity and dedication. His work has been recognised by many, including Dr Gopalkrishna Gandhi, the distinguished grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and C Rajagopalachari. Dr Gandhi lauded Quraishi's efforts to uphold the values of India's constitutional institutions. Dubey's inflammatory comment followed Quraishi's criticism of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, which he described as a "sinister and evil plan" to seize Muslim lands. In a time when hate speech threatens the fabric of democracy, voices like Quraishi's serve as crucial reminders of the constitutional values India must continue to uphold.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

### Rohit Sharma's wankhede moment

Madam — There could be no better timing than this for Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma. Soon after the Mumbai Cricket Association honoured him by naming a stand after him at Wankhede Stadium, he delivered a stunning unbeaten 76-run knock against Chennai Super Kings, featuring four boundaries and six sixes.

His performance not only secured victory but also pushed Mumbai Indians up to sixth place on the IPL points table. From a young boy in Borivali known for breaking window panes to a cricketing legend who has broken records on the global stage, Rohit's rise is truly inspirational.

His success stems from a passion for the game and an unrelenting commitment to his team, not personal milestones.

What sets Rohit apart is his leadership, consistency, and ability to inspire. He is the only Indian cricketer to win two T20 World Cups — once as a player, once as captain — and has led the team to multiple ICC titles.

He is also the only player with three double centuries in ODIs and holds records for the most international sixes and the highest ODI score.

A fearless and flamboyant cricketer, Rohit Sharma's name now fittingly graces a stand at Wankhede. When he bats, it's nothing short of a festival for fans — an experience of joy, energy, and unforgettable moments.

G DAVID MILTON | MARUTHANCODE

### Nurturing emotional bonds

Madam — Recent scientific research lends weight to poet William Wordsworth's timeless observation that "the child is father of the man." A study conducted by King's College London, Duke University, and the University of Oslo emphasises that children given the right emotional support can positively influence society as a whole. It is troubling to see that emotional bonds within families are weakening. The lure of seductive technologies is isolating children from authentic human interaction, inhibiting essential emotional and intellectual qualities such as empathy, compassion, and kindness.

In the 21st century, children are often subjected to rigid schedules and academic pressure, leaving little time for meaningful connection with their parents. Given the rise in societal violence, insecurity, and alienation, even small acts of kindness — whether a warm gesture, kind word, or embrace — can serve as seeds for empathy and resilience. In a world increasingly fragmented by ego, hatred, and authoritarianism, the parent-child relationship remains a powerful antidote to many of humanity's ills. Emotional support fosters empathy, resilience, and compassion — qualities essential for a humane society. As technology and pressure erode connection, small acts of love within families can counteract alienation and help shape a more compassionate, unified future.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | TAMIL NADU

### A BREWING CRISIS THREATENING KERALA'S COMMUNAL HARMONY

Munambam, the jewel of Vypeen Island in Kochi, is a picturesque suburban area nestled along the Arabian Sea. However, it has now become the Achilles' heel of Kerala. In 1902, Abdul Sattar, a prominent member of the Kutchi Memon community — a Muslim trading group from Gujarat that had migrated to the state — was granted a lease for over 400 acres of land in Munambam by the princely state that governed the area. Later, in 1948, his close relative Mohammed Siddique Sait registered the deed, and in 1950, he endowed the land to Farook College in Kozhikode.

Over time, the college sold portions of the land to various encroacher-occupants. In 1971, the Paravur Sub Court ruled that the land was covered under a formal waqf deed. This decision was upheld by the Kerala High Court in 1975. Reports submitted by the Emakulam Collectors to the High Court in 2008 and 2009 also confirmed the land's waqf status. Subsequently, in 2019, the Kerala Waqf

Board formally registered the property as waqf, effectively nullifying all previous land sales. Amid the ensuing confusion, numerous tourist resorts have been established on the disputed land. The residents of the area — primarily Latin Catholic fisherfolk — have been staging a relay hunger strike for over 175 days, demanding recognition of their revenue rights over the land they have long inhabited. Unfortunately, the issue has been framed as a Christian-Muslim conflict, driven by partisan political narratives that now threaten Kerala's communal harmony. Union Minister Kiran Rijju, during his speech in Parliament while introducing the Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025, stated that the Munambam issue would be resolved in favour of the residents once the Act came into force. These statements reflect a lack of sincere intent to address the serious concerns of the affected residents. A respected Archbishop recently told the media that the hope for a resolution now lies with the State Government.

— HARIDARSAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

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

# Why India must cut GST on farm equipment?

As rural labour dwindles and food security demands rise, mechanisation is no longer optional – it's imperative. Yet the very tools needed to modernise farming are taxed more than luxury items, placing an unjust burden on small and marginal farmers

FIRST Column

India's agricultural sector, the backbone of rural livelihoods, is at a critical juncture. The transition to modern and mechanised farming is no longer a choice but is necessary to ensure food security, optimise productivity, and improve farmers' incomes. Yet, a significant bottleneck hampers this transition — the irrational Goods and Services Tax (GST) structure on tractors and other agri-implements.

Today, farm equipment is taxed at 12 per cent, more than a luxury watch is taxed at 5 per cent. For a small or marginal farmer purchasing a low-horsepower tractor costing ₹5-7 lakh, this means paying ₹60,000 to ₹84,000 upfront as GST alone — a prohibitive cost for most. This, in turn, delays the mechanisation process in areas where it is needed the most.

## Pre-GST Scenario Was More Farmer-Friendly

Before the implementation of GST on July 1, 2017, tractors and most agri-implements were exempt from excise duties and subject to only 4-6 per cent Value Added Tax (VAT), depending on the state. Fertilisers, an essential element of agriculture, were previously taxed at 6 per cent (1 per cent excise and 5 per cent VAT). In the GST regime, the introduction of a 12 per cent GST rate on fertilisers was reduced to 5 per cent. However, on agricultural machinery still, 12 per cent GST disrupted the affordability landscape, disproportionately impacting small and marginal farmers, who make up over 86 per cent of India's total landholdings and are responsible for producing more than 60 per cent of the country's food grains.

While GST has unified the country's indirect tax system, it has also inadvertently penalised these vulnerable farmers by making essential farm tools more expensive. Rationalising GST to 5 per cent or even zero for tractors, their components, and agri-implements would significantly ease their financial burden and accelerate rural mechanisation.

Haryana's Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has recently written to the Union Finance and Agriculture Minister seeking GST exemption on 10 essential farm implements like rotavators, zero-till drills, super-seeders, straw-balers, and tractor-mounted spray pumps — a move and other states CMs should also collectively endorse.

## Policy Contradictions: Subsidise on One Hand, Tax on the Other

The contradiction is glaring. The Government's flagship schemes, like the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation (SMAM), offer subsidies of up to 50 per cent on machinery such as tractors, combine harvesters, sugarcane harvesters, cotton pickers, for establishing custom hiring centres (CHCs) and also to individual farmers for buying pump sets, tractor mounted sprayers, zero till and seed drills. Yet, these efforts are undermined when the same equipment attracts a steep GST rate.



A reduced GST rate on farm machinery will empower smallholder farmers and reduce the Government's subsidy burden. Lowering upfront taxes means farmers can buy machines at more reasonable prices, translating into more minor subsidy requirements for the Government.

## Inconsistencies in the Green Energy Push

The policy incongruities extend to the renewable energy sector as well. Renewable energy devices such as solar panels, biogas plants, and windmill components attract only 5 per cent GST to promote sustainability. Electric vehicles (EVs) also enjoy a 5 per cent GST and a 15 per cent discount on third-party insurance premiums. Yet, electric tractors — vital for reducing agriculture's carbon footprint — are taxed at 12 per cent GST, the same as diesel tractors, and do not qualify for any insurance premi-



AS MITTAL

INDIA'S AGRICULTURAL FUTURE HINGES ON WIDESPREAD MECHANISATION, YET HIGH GST RATES ON ESSENTIAL FARM EQUIPMENT ACT AS A MAJOR ROADBLOCK. SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS — ARE UNFAIRLY BURDENED BY THE 12 PER CENT GST ON TRACTORS AND IMPLEMENTS, A RATE HIGHER THAN THAT ON LUXURY ITEMS.

um relief. According to a study by the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT), aligning electric tractors with EV incentives could reduce the price gap between electric and diesel tractors by nearly 40 per cent, helping India make a greener shift in agriculture.

## The Urgency for Mechanisation

Mechanisation is the key to addressing India's agricultural productivity paradox. Despite India being the world's second-largest agricultural producer, only 47 per cent of its farming processes are mechanised, compared to 95 per cent in the United States, 75 per cent in Brazil, and 57 per cent in China. At this pace, India will need at least 25 more years to reach comparable levels.

Labour shortages due to rural-to-urban migration have further exacerbated the crisis. The share of the agricultural workforce has dropped from 59 per cent in 1991 to just 39 per cent in 2023. Mechanisation is essential to offset this shrinking labour force, increase yields, reduce drudgery, and make farming more attractive to rural youth.

## Limited uptake

Tractors dominate India's farm equipment market,

while implements such as harvesters, seed drills, tillers, and planters account for only 15-20 per cent of the market share. This limited uptake is due to the prohibitive costs and a lack of awareness about the productivity benefits of modern equipment.

The Government and multilateral agencies are already focusing on mechanisation schemes. However, these interventions will not reach their full potential unless complemented by lower taxation.

Farm mechanisation is not merely about replacing manual labour; it is about optimising inputs, improving efficiency, and securing rural incomes in a challenging agrarian landscape. It is time for the GST Council to undertake an urgent review of agri-implement tax slabs. A uniform GST rate of 5 per cent or zero on all agricultural machinery and their components would make mechanisation affordable for small and marginal farmers, stimulate demand in under-mechanised regions, encourage the adoption of green technologies like electric tractors, and reduce Government subsidy outflows in the long run. The 'magical' character of farm mechanisation needs a booster dose. Rationalising GST will empower farmers, create rural entrepreneurship opportunities via CHCs, and help India achieve sustainable development goals. It will bridge the mechanisation gap and unlock the true potential of Indian agriculture. Mechanisation is the future, but affordability is the key.

India's agricultural future hinges on widespread mechanisation, yet high GST rates on essential farm equipment act as a major roadblock. Small and marginal farmers — who form over 86 per cent of India's agrarian base — are unfairly burdened by the 12 per cent GST on tractors and implements, a rate higher than that on luxury items. This policy contradiction undermines Government subsidies offered through schemes like RKVY and SMAM, inflating costs and stalling progress. Haryana's call for GST exemption on key implements is a step in the right direction that other states must support. The mismatch extends to green technologies too — electric tractors face the same GST rate as diesel ones, with none of the incentives that electric vehicles enjoy. This hinders both affordability and sustainability goals.

Meanwhile, India's mechanisation rate lags behind other major agricultural economies, slowed further by rural labour shortages and high upfront machinery costs. Rationalising GST to 5 per cent or zero for all agricultural equipment is critical. It would ease financial pressure on farmers, reduce Government subsidy burdens, and accelerate the adoption of both conventional and green technologies. Mechanisation is not a luxury — it's a necessity. Affordability, enabled through fair taxation, is the key to unlocking a more productive, sustainable, and prosperous agricultural future.

(The writer is Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views are personal)

# RTI amendment erodes transparency

By removing the public interest safeguard from Section 8(1)(j), the amendment now imposes a blanket exemption on all personal data — even when linked to public duties — thereby crippling the citizen's ability to hold public officials accountable

The recent amendment to the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, through the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, marks a pivotal retreat from the transparency regime that India painstakingly built over nearly two decades. By shielding personal information under a blanket exemption, the Modi Government has altered the balance between privacy and the public's right to know.

The operation of the RTI Act — informed by several judgments by the Supreme Court and High Courts — has shown that personal information not related to public activity was already protected.

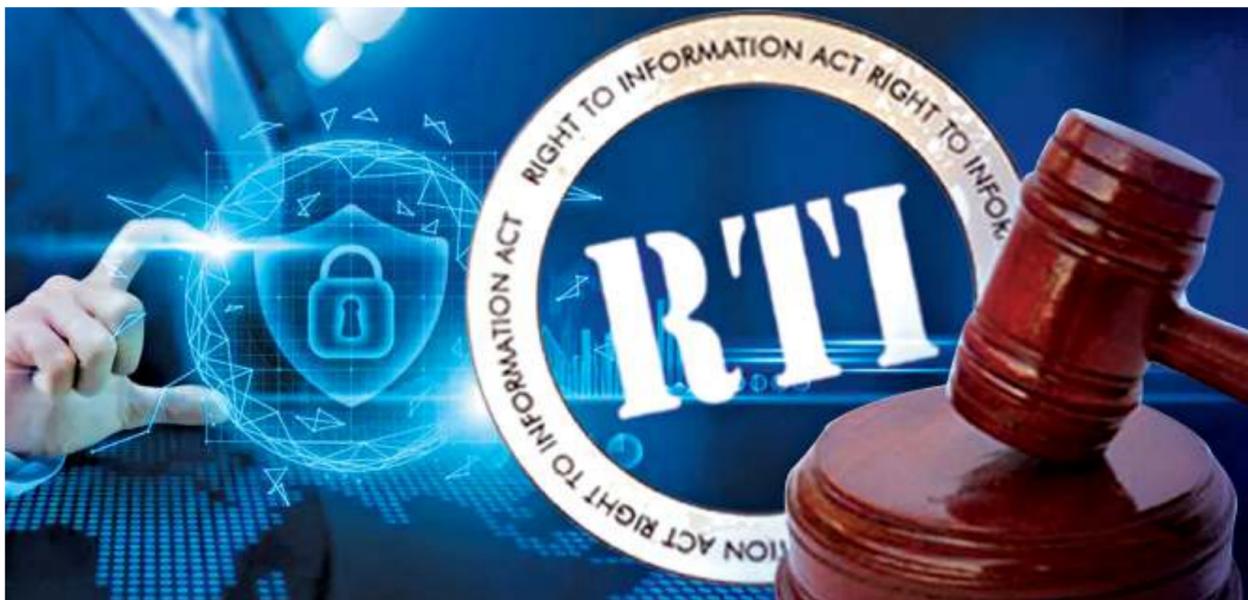
It underlines that there was already sufficient judicial restraint in place to protect genuinely private data. Landmark rulings like *Girish Deshpande vs CIC* (2013), and the *Puttaswamy* (2017) privacy judgment, drew clear boundaries between personal data and information relevant to public interest. Courts consistently held that unless the disclosure of personal information served a larger public cause, it should be denied.

Therefore, the amendment was not needed and shows legislative overreach, reflecting mistrust in judicial discretion. It signals a shift from a principle-based regime to a bureaucratic shield where no scrutiny is possible. The amendment now legalises the denial of information that courts had earlier allowed when public interest was evident — setting a regressive precedent that may encourage arbitrariness and corruption.

The SC judgment reinforces that safeguarding personal privacy and promoting institutional transparency are not mutually exclusive but are jointly essential.

This point underscores a vital democratic balance. The Supreme Court, especially in the *Puttaswamy* case, held that privacy is a fundamental right but not an absolute one; it must be balanced with transparency, especially when public interest is involved. The original RTI Act embodied this balance by permitting the release of personal information where larger institutional accountability or public interest was at stake.

The amendment breaks this balance by giving unchecked primacy to privacy, even when it is used as a smokescreen to hide inefficiency, nepotism, or corruption. For instance, public access to officials' attendance, disciplinary records, or property



details — which can reveal disproportionate assets — would now be blocked. The implication is that institutions become unanswerable to the public, reducing the citizen's role from a watchdog to a mute spectator.

The sweeping changes have been introduced through the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, which amended Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act. Earlier, this section exempted disclosure of personal information unless there was an overriding public interest. The amendment removes this public interest override

and comprehensively exempts all personal data from disclosure under RTI, regardless of its connection to public duties. It is a fun-

THE AMENDMENT BREAKS THIS BALANCE BY GIVING UNCHECKED PRIMACY TO PRIVACY, EVEN WHEN IT IS USED AS A SMOKE-SCREEN TO HIDE INEFFICIENCY, NEPOTISM, OR CORRUPTION.

damental shift from a "case-by-case" evaluation to an "absolute bar" on access to personal information, thereby hollowing out the core of the RTI regime.

The implication is grave: details about the conduct, performance, assets, and public duties of Government officials — even when crucial to detect corruption — can now be shielded from public scrutiny under the excuse of "Privacy". It turns the RTI from a transparency-enabling instrument into a tool riddled with opaque exemptions, undermining citizens' ability to hold officials accountable.

This proviso was a crucial equaliser — it mandated that any information which cannot be denied to Parliament or a State Legislature should not be denied to a citizen.

Its removal gives disproportionate access to legislators while stripping ordinary citizens of equal standing in accessing information. It opens the doors for selective transparency, where MPs and MLAs can access sensitive Government information

while citizens are stonewalled. This defeats the spirit of the RTI Act, of 2005 which was built on the idea that transparency is not a privilege but a right.

The move indicates a central tendency to empower the political class at the cost of democratic equity. It also allows the bureaucracy to selectively disclose information to suit political interests while denying the same to activists, journalists, or public-spirited individuals.

This technical change has a wide-ranging impact. By using the DPDP Act to amend Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, the Government has effectively introduced a data protection regime that overrides the RTI's foundational purpose — access to public information. The phrase "all personal information" is undefined and absolute, allowing information officers to deny almost anything under the guise of personal data.

Details such as educational qualifications, performance appraisals, transfer postings, and reasons for disciplinary action can all now be denied, even if such data expose

abuse of power or fraud. This will embolden non-performance, discourage whistle-blowers, and limit the ability of journalists, lawyers, or citizens to demand accountability. In essence, it turns a democratic law into a bureaucratic fortress.

The Modi Government claims that legal obligations under RTI remain unaffected but this assertion is misleading. Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act directly amends the RTI Act itself, thereby altering the legal obligation.

There is a common perception amongst the citizens having consciousness about the RTI Act that the center should pause and review the amendment which reflects a broader democratic concern as it will dilute the purpose of the entire process of seeking information. The vociferous demand to reconsider the amendment is a red flag from the opposition and civil society as these changes are not about protecting privacy but about restricting scrutiny.

The repeal demand stems from fears that the Government is creating an architecture of secrecy behind the smokescreen of data protection. If allowed to persist, this may institutionalise opacity and convert public institutions into information black holes — something antithetical to participatory democracy.

The RTI Act was a landmark law that was an unprecedented achievement of the people's movement under Magsaysay winner, Aruna Roy that democratised access to governance and brought the citizen to the center of accountability. By altering its core provisions, the Modi Government risks reversing this progress.

While data protection is necessary in the digital age, it should not come at the cost of institutional transparency. Instead of finding a nuanced balance, the Government has chosen to impose blanket opacity.

The implications go far beyond legalese-they erode the foundations of a transparent republic, where the citizen has the right to question power. This amendment must be revisited, reviewed, and if necessary, repealed to restore the sanctity of the RTI Act.

(The writer is a senior political analyst and Ex-Chairperson of the Standing Committee of All-State Public Service Commissions in India. Views are personal)

### MONEY MATTERS



## Licence for tobacco farmers valid for 3 yrs

Giving a big relief to tobacco growers, the government on Tuesday said the registration certificate or licence of tobacco farmers will now be valid for three years instead of one year currently. This increase in the licence period from one to three years will help around 83,500 farmers of the country covering around 91,000 barns in renewing their registrations/licences across Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana and Odisha. "This measure will save the time of the farmers' for renewing their registrations/licences every year to plan their logistics and finance to take up cultivation for three years ahead," the commerce ministry said in a statement. India is the second largest producer and fourth largest exporter of unmanufactured tobacco in the world, in value terms, during 2023. In 2024-25, the exports contributed about USD 2 billion (Rs 16,728 crore) to the Indian exchequer. Virginia tobacco is regulated in India under Tobacco Board Act, 1975. As per the Act, every grower intending to take up cultivation of Virginia tobacco has to obtain certificate of registration as a grower and a licence for operation of a barn. Accordingly, the Tobacco Board is facilitating the registration/licensing on annual basis.



## Kaushalya Logistics expand network to over 100 depots

Logistics and supply chain firm Kaushalya Logistics on Tuesday said it has grown its depot network to over 100 from 70 depots within the past four months, thereby significantly expanding its national footprint. This acceleration underlines the company's strategic focus on scaling capacity to meet rising demand across India's infrastructure and construction sectors, the company said. Aligned with its network expansion, Kaushalya Logistics also recorded a sharp rise in cargo handling, managing 3-lakh tons of cement in March 2025 – a 50 per cent month-on-month increase from 2 lakh tonnes handled in February, it said, adding the company's operations now service over 2,000 dealers on behalf of the cement majors, solidifying its position as one of India's leading logistics partners for the cement industry, Kaushalya Logistics said. As part of its robust growth strategy, the company said, it has strengthened key partnerships with industry giants like Adani Cement, Dalmia Bharat & JK Cement, enabling the company to expand its operational footprint and meet the growing demand for cement logistics. These collaborations have been crucial in driving the company's growth and operational efficiencies across multiple states in India, it said.



## Rupee falls 8 paise to settle at 85.23 against US dollar

The rupee consolidated in a narrow-range and settled for the day lower by 8 paise at 85.23 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by dollar short-covering by investors. Forex traders said foreign fund inflows supported the domestic unit. However, a recovery in crude oil prices dented investor sentiment. Moreover, concerns persisted over economic headwinds from tariffs and US monetary policy that could dampen demand. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.11 and moved between the intraday high of 85.07 and the low of 85.23 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.23 (provisional), registering a loss of 8 paise over its previous closing level on Tuesday, after witnessing a gaining streak for five straight sessions. On Monday, the rupee appreciated 23 paise to settle at 85.15 against the US dollar. In the last five trading sessions, the Indian currency had added 155 paise since its April 9 closing mark of 86.68 against the greenback. "We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on rise in risk appetite in global markets and fresh FII inflows."

### 6 DAYS OF MARKET RALLY

## Investors' wealth jumps Rs 33.55L cr

Equity investors became richer by Rs 33.55 lakh crore in six days of market rally where the benchmark Sensex jumped nearly 8 per cent during this period. The 30-share BSE benchmark index climbed 187.09 points, or 0.24 per cent, to settle at 79,595.59 on Tuesday. Since April 9, the BSE benchmark Sensex has jumped 5,748.44 points, or 7.78 per cent. During this period, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms surged by Rs 33,55,384.01 crore to Rs 4,27,37,717.23 crore (USD 5.02 trillion). "Nifty extended its winning streak for the sixth straight session, closing at 24,167.25, while Sensex gained 187 points to 79,595.59. Despite the gains, markets showed signs of a breather amid over-bought conditions.

# RBI asks banks to migrate to '.bank.in' domain by Oct

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Tuesday directed banks to start migration of their existing domains to the '.bank.in' domain and complete the process by October 31 this year, aimed at combating increasing instances of fraud in digital payments.

In the wake of fraud in digital payments, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has decided to introduce the '.bank.in' exclusive internet domain for Indian banks. The initiative aims to reduce cybersecurity threats and malicious activities like phishing; and, streamline secure financial services, thereby enhancing trust in digital banking and payment services.

"It has now been decided to operationalise the '.bank.in' domain for banks through the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT), which has been authorised by



National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI), under the aegis of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), to serve as the exclusive registrar for this domain," it said in a statement.

Banks may contact IDRBT at sahyog@idrbt.ac.in to initiate the registration process. IDRBT shall guide the banks

on various aspects related to the application process and migration to the new domain.

All banks have been advised to commence the migration of their existing domains to the '.bank.in' domain and complete the process at the earliest and in any case, not later than October 31, 2025, the RBI said.

## India to get benefit from supply chain realignments: RBI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India is poised to benefit from supply chain realignments, diversified FDI sources, and engagement with global investors seeking resilience and scale, given its already established trade linkages, said the RBI's April bulletin. Moreover, India's consistent strength in services exports and remittance inflows continues to provide a vital buffer for the current account, said an article on 'State of the Economy' in the bulletin.

"Calibrated policy support can help India turn global volatility into an opportunity and strengthen its position in the emerging world economic landscape," it said.

## Ather Energy's Rs 2,626-cr IPO to open on Apr 28

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Electric two-wheeler maker Ather Energy Ltd is set to launch its much-anticipated Rs 2,626-crore initial public offering (IPO) on April 28.

This will be the first main-board public issue of the current financial year (2025-26). The three-day public issue of Ather Energy will conclude on April 30 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on April 25, according to the red herring prospectus (RHP).

The proposed IPO is a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 2,626 crore, and an offer-for-sale of 1.1 crore equity shares by promoters and other shareholders.

## In talks with states for signing PPAs of 40 GW RE capacity: Pralhad Joshi

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday said 40 GW of renewable energy (RE) can soon come online as talks are on with states for signing power purchase agreements (PPAs).

"We are targeting 50 GW of RE capacity annually to meet the 500 GW target by 2030, which of course includes 292 GW of solar energy", Joshi told reporters on the sidelines of inauguration of solar PV module testing facility at National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) here.

India added 29.52 GW RE



capacity in 2024-25.

The New & Renewable Energy Minister said peak power demand will double in 2032 from the present levels.

The peak power demand touched an all-time high of 250 GW in May 2024. The power ministry has estimated 270 GW peak power demand dur-

ing this summer. Joshi said India needs to create innovative solutions to maximize solar energy generation from available land resources.

The minister also called for use of innovative solutions for using building materials like glass to generate solar energy from limited space available like in high-rise buildings.

He said talks are on with states to sign PPAs for 40 GW RE projects.

Joshi also said that 12 lakh households have installed rooftop solar under Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.



## Cement demand may rise 7%: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cement prices are expected to rise 2-4 per cent in the ongoing fiscal year, helping companies increase their sales realisation, according to a report from rating agency and analytical firm Crisil.

Besides, it also expects demand for cement to grow from 6.5 to 7.5 per cent in the current fiscal year, driven by increase in budgetary allocation for core infrastructure, rural housing projects and above-normal monsoon.

"The cement sector is expected to see a 6.5-7.5 per cent demand growth this fiscal driven by a 10 per cent rise in budgetary allocation for core infrastructure ministries and on expectation that an above-normal monsoon will boost agricultural profitability, in turn lifting rural housing demand," it said.

"The cement sector is expected to see a 6.5-7.5 per cent demand growth this fiscal driven by a 10 per cent rise in budgetary allocation for core infrastructure ministries and on expectation that an above-normal monsoon will boost agricultural profitability, in turn lifting rural housing demand."

In FY25, the cement industry had a moderate demand growth of 4.5-5.5 per cent owing to a sluggish start to the year because of the general elections, well-distributed monsoon that impacted construction, along with high price of the past three fiscal years.

# Trade pact with India will help open new markets for American goods: USTR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The proposed trade pact with India will help open new markets for American goods and create new opportunities for workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs in both countries, the USTR said on Tuesday.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer said that there is a "serious" lack of reciprocity in the trade relationship with India.

The USTR also welcomed Vice President J D Vance and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement reaffirming the importance of the India-US COMPACT (Catalyzing

Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce & Technology) initiative and highlighting the

progress in the negotiations for a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), launched by both nations on February 13.

"These ongoing talks will help achieve balance and reciprocity by opening new markets for American goods and addressing unfair practices that harm American workers. India's constructive engagement so far has been welcomed and I look forward to creating new opportunities for workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs in both countries," he said.

## 'Safeguard duty on steel may halt imports; raise prices'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Imposition of 12 per cent safeguard duty on five steel product categories may halt their imports and force importers to buy these goods from domestic players, who are likely to raise prices following the levy, think tank GTRI said on Tuesday.

It said since Indian producers can not meet demand for specialised steels like abrasion-resistant plates, imports are essential but the new safeguard duty could raise input costs by 8-10 per cent, just



like the recent hikes by local steel mills.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that "12 per cent safeguard duties with high threshold values, is expected to halt most imports, effectively forcing buyers to shift to domestic

suppliers. Indian steel companies are likely to exploit this policy to raise prices further, a trend already evident with an 8-10 per cent price increase seen in recent months following news of the safeguard proposal."

It raised concerns that the DGTR (Directorate General of Trade Remedies) recommended these duties without verifying claims of industry injury, even though domestic steel production has grown by 19 per cent and capacity utilisation is high (83.90 per cent).

## 'India a great market'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Tuesday threw his weight behind having more players in satellite internet space, saying the service was needed particularly in the rural and underserved areas of the vast market that is India.

The government has already granted licences to firms backed by billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Bharti Mittal to offer satellite internet services, and Scindia indicated more may be granted if players meet security and regulatory norms.

# Traders' body demands regulator for digital commerce

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Traders' lobby CAIT on Tuesday demanded setting up of an independent regulatory body for digital commerce for oversight and fixing accountability on e-commerce and quick commerce platforms, alleging anti-competitive practices like predatory pricing, deep discounting and exploitation of gig workers.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) also sought expeditious roll-out of the National e-Commerce Policy and e-Commerce rules under the Consumer Protection Act, both currently under finalisation by the Commerce as well as Food & Consumer Affairs Ministries,

respectively, to safeguard the interests of retail traders.

It recommended an imposition of a 'luxury tax' under the prevailing GST framework on goods sold via e-commerce platforms, arguing that the practice of buying goods online be considered a 'luxury'.

Currently, goods and services tax is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent.

Dhairiyasheel Patil, National President, All India Consumer Products Distributor Federation (AICPDF), and CAIT's Senior Vice President, told PTI that as per estimates, as many as 10 lakh kirana stores have shut down operations in the last two-three years, owing to lack of viability



"Quick commerce has now expanded to 100 cities. In metro cities, 70 per cent of the retailers are using rented shops. Till now 10 lakh shops have been shut as per our estimates in the last two-three years. Though new shops have also opened, the number of new shops that have opened is less as compared to the number of small retail stores that have shut down due to lack of affordability and viability of operations."

and affordability. While several kirana stores have also come up during the period, he said, more shops have closed as compared to the number of new retail shops opened.

"Quick commerce has now expanded to 100 cities. In metro cities, 70 per cent of the retailers are using rented shops. Till now 10 lakh shops have been shut as per our estimates

in the last two-three years. Though new shops have also opened, the number of new shops that have opened is less as compared to the number of small retail stores that have shut

down due to lack of affordability and viability of operations," he shared.

The traders' body also recommended prohibition of inventory-led operations by platforms posing as marketplace.

As per existing rules, 100 per cent FDI is allowed through an automatic route in the marketplace model of e-commerce. However, overseas investment is not permitted in an inventory-based model.

In the marketplace model, e-commerce entities can only provide a platform for third-party sellers and they cannot own the inventory. They also cannot directly or indirectly influence the price of the goods.

# PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS TO RECEIVE INAUGURAL GLOBAL VANGUARD AWARD AT 2025 GOLD GALA

Global icon Priyanka Chopra Jonas is set to be honoured with the inaugural Global Vanguard Award at the highly anticipated Gold Gala 2025, hosted by Gold House. The fourth edition of this premier event will take place on May 10, 2025, at the Music Center in downtown Los Angeles, spotlighting the 2025 A100 List and celebrating multicultural excellence. Chopra Jonas, who has spent 25 years bridging Asian Pacific and Western cultures through her acclaimed work in both Bollywood and Hollywood, will become the first-ever recipient of this prestigious accolade. The award recognises her trailblazing contributions across entertainment, entrepreneurship and philanthropy, as well as her global platform that continues to amplify underrepresented voices—an influence acknowledged by Time 100 and Forbes' Most Powerful Women lists.

The glamorous evening will bring together over 600 influential figures, honouring luminaries across various fields.

Joining Chopra Jonas in the spotlight are names like filmmaker Jon M. Chu, singer Laufey, author Min Jin Lee, designer Prabal Gurung, Pokémon CEO Tsunekazu Ishihara—accompanied by Pikachu—legendary director Ang Lee and artists Anderson. Paak

and Megan Thee Stallion. The creators and cast of the upcoming *Moana 2* will also be celebrated, along with decorated Olympians and Paralympians Suni Lee, Chuck Akio and Lee Kiefer. Megan

Thee Stallion will receive the One House Award for her celebration and elevation of Asian Pacific culture through her work in music, anime and fashion.

The night will include a live debut performance by Laufey, presenting her upcoming single *Silver Lining*, aligning with this year's theme, "First Light." The theme symbolises rays of hope born from adversity and honours trailblazers who have not only broken barriers for themselves but illuminated paths for future generations. A standout feature of the gala will be the specially curated Filipino-inspired dinner presented by OpenTable and crafted by James Beard Award-winning chef Lord Maynard Llera, renowned for his Los Angeles restaurant Kuya Lord. As the Gold Gala continues to grow as a cultural milestone, Chopra Jonas' historic honour signals a powerful recognition of her role in reshaping global narratives and empowering representation worldwide.



# Armaan Malik and Raveena join forces with nature for Earth Day musical tribute

Indian American singer-songwriter Raveena, alongside GRAMMY winners and genre-spanning musicians from around the world. The lineup includes French composer Yann Tiersen, Swedish House Mafia's Steve Angello, Seattle-based indie artist SYML and many others, representing diverse countries as diverse as India, the US, Colombia, Denmark, Japan and Argentina.

Each artist has uniquely infused nature into their music—some using personal field recordings, others collaborating with celebrated nature recordist Martyn Stewart and The Listening Planet. The result is an intimate, immersive collection that celebrates the Earth's beauty while urging urgent reflection.

Armaan Malik contributes *What In The World (feat. NATURE)*—a dynamic anthem blending pop energy with environmental

consciousness. Originally performed during a Billboard Live session amid the pandemic and later at the GQ Men of the Year Awards, the track has now evolved into a fully produced release. "Nature is speaking—we just have to listen. This track is a call to pause, reflect, and reconnect. Music can inspire

change, and together we can make a difference." The song builds from a gentle introspection into a rousing pop-rock call-to-action, mirroring the growing urgency of our environmental crisis.

Raveena offers *Morning Prayer* (feat. NATURE)—a tranquil, soul-soothing track that blends ambient soundscapes, ancestral memory and nature's healing presence. Inspired by a meditative moment in the rain-drenched forest, the song was born from a spontaneous collaboration with her partner Jenn, who crafted an instrumental from that very day's rain sounds. "This track felt like a perfect offering for Earth Day. It came from a place of peace, light, and deep connection with nature," says Raveena.

Other contributors drew from personal stories and environmental themes. I. JORDAN focused on endangered UK birds, weaving in the call of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Rosa Walton's track is inspired by her father's lifelong study of moths, while Rozzi reflects on California wildfires in *Orange Skies - Chapter 2*. Alice Boyd's *All We Are* contrasts birdsong recordings from 1976 and 2024, revealing a haunting reduction in biodiversity over time.



To mark Earth Day 2025, over 30 celebrated artists from across the globe have come together in harmony—with nature itself. As part of the ongoing Sounds Right initiative, these musicians have released a powerful collection of songs that incorporate real sounds from the natural world—ranging from bird-song and ocean waves to the calls of antelopes and moths. The initiative, which made headlines last year by officially launching NATURE as an artist on streaming platforms, continues to inspire listeners worldwide while generating vital royalties for conservation efforts.

Fronting this year's musical movement are Indian pop sensation Armaan Malik and

# KARTIK AARYAN TURNS NAAG FOR DHARMA PRODUCTIONS' NAAG ZILLA

Bollywood actor Kartik Aaryan is all set to headline a Dharma Productions film—marking his long-awaited collaboration with filmmaker Karan Johar after their highly publicised fallout during *Dostana 2*. The project, which also starred Janhvi Kapoor, was shelved midway, reportedly due to differences between Kartik and Karan. Their professional relationship turned cold, and the two remained distant for years.

But in a surprising twist, the actor and director have now buried the hatchet and are coming together for a film that's as quirky as it is unexpected—*Naag Zilla*, a "naagon wali picture."

Yes, you read that right. Kartik will play a shape-shifting snake in

this fantastical entertainer backed by Dharma Productions.

Both Kartik and Karan announced the film with a dramatic animated video shared on

their Instagram profiles. The video shows a cartoon version of Kartik transforming into a serpent, while his voiceover quips: "Insaanon wali picturein toh

bahut dekh li, ab dekho naagoon wali picture! *Naag Zilla* - Naaglok ka phela kaand... Fumm phailaane aa raha hai - Preyanvadeshwar Pyare Chand."

The film is set to release on Naag Panchami, August 14, 2026, and promises a mix of mythology, humor, and fantasy. Produced by Mahaveer Jain and co-produced by Adar Poonawalla, the film also has names like Apoorva Mehta, Mrighdeep Singh Lamba and Marjike D'Souza attached to the project.

Interestingly, *Naag Zilla* isn't the only Dharma film in Kartik's kitty. Before this shape-shifting extravaganza, he will also star in another Dharma venture titled *Tu Meri Main Teri, Main Teri Tu Meri*—a romantic comedy.



# Fawad Khan and Vaani Kapoor on their easy chemistry in *Abir Gulaal*

Pakistani heartthrob Fawad Khan is all praise for his *Abir Gulaal* co-star Vaani Kapoor, describing her as an incredibly spontaneous performer, especially when it comes to dialogue delivery.

"It's been an amazing experience working with Vaani. It's been an absolute pleasure. She's an amazing person and a very spontaneous actor,"

said Fawad, adding, "She keeps the energy up on screen. If she could tone down the self-analysis and self-criticism just a bit, that's the only thing I'd say—because she truly is amazing."

*Abir Gulaal*, directed by Aarti S Bagdi, is a romantic comedy that marks a fresh on-screen pairing between the two stars. The film is

produced by Vivek B Agrawal, Avantika Hari, and Rakesh Sippy, and is set to hit theatres on May 9.

Vaani Kapoor echoed Fawad's sentiments, calling him a dream co-star. "It's amazing to see the love coming our way. Working with Fawad has been an incredible experience for an artist like me. He is truly one of a kind."

Describing her collaborative experience with the *Zindagi Gulzar Hai* actor, Vaani said, "Fawad is super easy to work with—no ego, no hassle. He's so gifted that it makes you want to level up your own performance. I love how he delivers his lines so organically. It doesn't feel rehearsed or performative. Nothing sounds scripted when he says it."

Filed against the scenic backdrop of London, *Abir Gulaal* began production on September 29, 2024, with the announcement made by Indian Stories, the production house behind the project.



## FUN

### ARCHIE



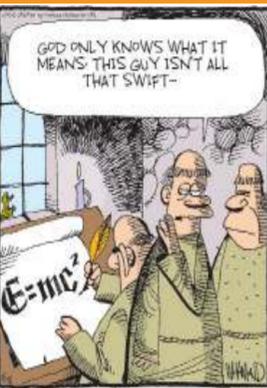
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



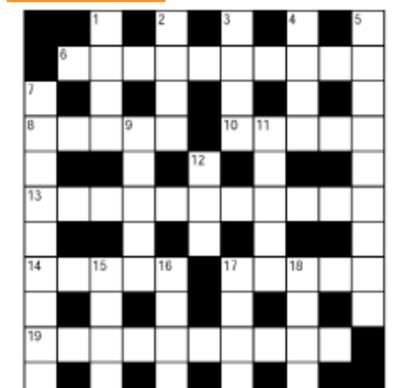
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### NANCY



### SUDOKU



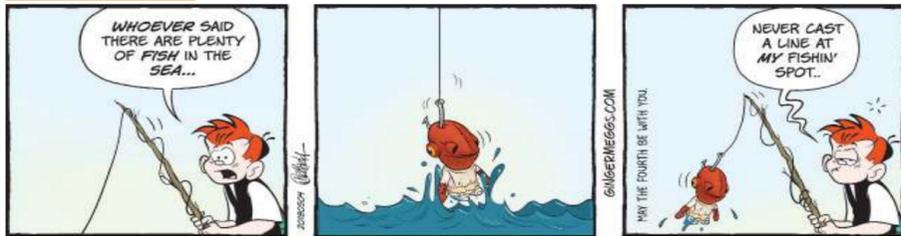
Yesterday's solution

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

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.

### GINGER MEGGS



### ACROSS

- 6 A traffic circle where roads cross
- 8 A pointy thing that indicates direction
- 10 Snapshot
- 13 A greeting (4,7)
- 14 Salty water from the eyes
- 17 Rubber covers on wheels
- 19 Getting better after illness
- 9 A command
- 11 Bees make this
- 12 A fishing pole
- 15 A curved support under a bridge
- 16 Rescue
- 17 Grow weary
- 18 Wear this on a finger

### DOWN

- 1 Bitter-tasting
- 2 Cold winter crystals
- 3 Moist
- 4 A song for one singer
- 5 The most powerful
- 7 Female children

### SOLUTION



## 'I've surpassed the stage of finding similarities between me and my characters'

TEJAL SINHA  
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

**H**elly Shah has long been a familiar face on Indian television, known for her emotionally layered and impactful performances. But with *Zyada Matt Udd*, the actor is entering uncharted skies—this time, quite literally—as she steps into the shoes of Kajal, a spirited air hostess in a genre she's been itching to explore: situational comedy. With its vibrant setting and ensemble-driven storytelling, *Zyada Matt Udd* marks a departure from the intense roles that have defined her career so far, offering Helly the perfect playground to experiment with comic timing and character quirks.

For Helly, this role wasn't just another assignment—it was a chance to stretch creative boundaries and dive into a character who's bold, self-assured and unapologetically herself. In this interview with *The Pioneer*, the actor opens up about breaking stereotypes, the camaraderie with her co-stars, the challenge of perfecting comic timing, and the joy of staying connected to her Gujarati roots through her upcoming film projects.

Stepping into a fresh avatar in the sitcom *Zyada Matt Udd*, and playing an air hostess named Kajal—a character that stands apart from anything she's portrayed before. For the actor, the appeal of the show was immediate. "I think the show itself is a very fresh one, something that we haven't seen in a really, really long time. This is a sitcom, and that genre isn't much explored. I've been wanting to explore it for a while, so when this came in, it was a no-brainer," shares the *Gullak* season 4 fame.

Kajal, her character, is bold, assertive, and unapologetically herself. Helly said that while she no longer tries to find similarities between her characters and herself, Kajal still left a mark. "She doesn't give a damn. She has that main character energy all the time, twenty-four seven," Helly said with a smile. "She knows her worth really well. She's that sorted girl who knows what she wants and what not. She treats herself as a queen and that's really beautiful."

**In a candid chat with *The Pioneer*, actress Helly Shah opens up about her refreshing new avatar in the sitcom *Zyada Matt Udd*, where she plays a feisty air hostess with unapologetic sass and "main character energy." From navigating the challenges of comedy to drawing strength from her Gujarati roots, Helly talks about breaking stereotypes, her instinctive approach to picking roles, and why she believes *Sufiyana* still remains a defining moment in her career**

Interestingly, Helly didn't draw much from real-life air hostesses or pop culture while preparing for the role. Instead, the emphasis was on the dynamic between the six lead characters and their camaraderie. "There's this vibe between these six friends that we really wanted to bring out. It's something like 'yeh log bahut saalon se jaante hain ek dusre ko, but unki apni hi alag bhasad chal rahi hai life mein'. We did have our workshops and tried to improvise ourselves."

Comedy, she admits, came with its own challenges. "Yes, comedy is definitely difficult. I feel in real life I'm not very funny. This is all about timing and being nuanced. We had our share of reading workshops and everything to understand each other better." She added that regular meetings and rehearsals with the team played a huge part in making the process easier. "We used to meet regularly, and that really helped in understanding who's doing what, sharing suggestions and being on the same page. We have a great cast that's very, very supportive."

When asked about who made her crack up the most on set, she laughed and said, "If I had to name one, I think Gaurav. He has really, really good timing. And also Satish. But overall, I feel we have a very, very good cast."

Having explored television, OTT, and now a sitcom, Helly described how she chooses her roles. "I go by gut feeling. If I'm unsure or in two minds, I don't do it. I have to be extremely sure and it has to be exciting enough for me to just even go and audition for the character," she explained. "I also look at the project as a whole—the premise, the genre and whether it's something I've done before. I want to do different projects and characters that people don't imagine me doing."

One such defining role for her was in *Sufiyana Pyaar Mera*, where she played a double role. "That show really pushed me as an actor. Now that I think about it—it's been five or six years—I know I could have done so many things differently. But at that time, with the schedule we had, I gave it my all. That show changed my perspective on how I pick projects and characters. It's very close to my heart."

As for what's next, Helly revealed that she has two Gujarati films lined up for release this year. "One is a film that I shot in January, and the other was done about two years ago. Now that they're finally releasing, I'm very excited. Both are very different, and being a Gujarati, it makes me very proud to be working in the Gujarati industry. Like I always say, I'm a proud Gujarati—you can't take that out of my system!"



## Guiding dreams, not just applications

PNS|HYDERABAD

**F**or many students, studying abroad is a dream clouded by confusion and conflicting advice. But for those who find their way to eduVelocity Global, that journey becomes a thoughtfully mapped-out adventure. Founded by Vinu Warriar, the organisation doesn't just prepare students for college—it prepares them for life. With a mentorship model that starts early and goes deep, they are reshaping how India approaches global education.

"We're probably the most personalized education advisory in the country," says the Managing Partner adding, "Most consultancies come in just a year before applications. We start working with students four to five years in advance. It's about understanding who they are, not just where they want to go."

Here, students are matched with dedicated counselors who guide them through profile building, psychometric testing, subject selection, extracurriculars and eventually, college essays and applications. "Our goal is to build a relationship, not just submit forms," he adds.

Warrior stresses that getting into a top college isn't the only marker of success. "For us, it's not about brand names—it's about fit. That includes academics, personality, finances, even geography," he says.

This best-fit model has helped over 5,000 students receive admission offers from universities across the globe—many of them on scholarships. "We've helped students secure over \$45 million in scholarships. You don't get that kind of success with a cookie-cutter approach."

Long before the world went online, eduVelocity was already serving students in multiple countries through virtual sessions. So when the pandemic hit, their transition was seamless.

"We didn't have to change much. In fact, that year alone, 115 of our students received over 600 admission offers."

What stood out was the commitment of the team. "Many of our team members voluntarily took pay cuts just so we could continue supporting students. That's the kind of culture we've built," he says.

The pandemic also shifted how students evaluated universities. "Health, safety and wellness became as important as academics. We adapted quickly to those changing priorities."

Warrior is especially passionate about bringing quality counselling to smaller towns. "There's so much untapped potential in tier 2 and 3 cities. Our model is particularly effective for mid-range students—not just toppers."

Unlike agencies that cater mostly to urban elite, eduVelocity aims to democratise access. "Our strongest growth has come through word-of-mouth. That says a lot about the trust parents and students

place in us." In an industry often driven by commissions and affiliations with foreign universities, eduVelocity stands apart. "We don't take a single rupee from colleges or aggregators. That's a conscious decision," Warriar states.

He believes that such independence allows the organization to focus entirely on what's best for the student. "We're not here to fill quotas or push certain universities. That's why our students get into places like Brown, UPenn, Dartmouth and Cornell—with scholarships."

Beyond academics, they encourage students to explore their interests and grow as individuals. One such initiative is the eduVelocity Global Business Challenge (EGBC), where students work on real-world business ideas.

"These platforms help students develop critical thinking, teamwork and leadership," Warriar says. "It also strengthens their college applications, because they're doing meaningful work, not just attending workshops for certificates."

Some students even travel abroad for competitions or campus visits. "It's not just about winning. It's about broadening their perspective," he adds.

They also works with schools to host university fairs and awareness sessions. One standout initiative was in partnership with Satluj Public School in Panchkula, where students from smaller towns got to interact with global university reps on their own campus.

"Events like that are game changers. It opens doors for students who may never have thought studying abroad was possible."

Behind every student's success is a well-informed counselor. eduVelocity takes this seriously, investing in monthly training sessions, expert-led workshops and international visits.

"We have people from the College Board, IELTS and top universities come in to train our team. Our counselors have visited campuses like Yale, NYU Abu Dhabi, and NUS to stay updated. That firsthand exposure helps us guide students better." As they enter its second decade, the mission is clear—scale responsibly while staying true to their student-first values.

"We want to do more pro bono work, especially for students from financially weaker backgrounds. And we're expanding our services in Indian university admissions too. Families need help navigating that space."

He also sees tremendous opportunity in spreading awareness through early psychometric testing and career exploration. "Whether it's a top Delhi school or a rural campus in Himachal Pradesh—we want every child to have access to the right information at the right time."

At its core, their success lies in its unwavering belief in the student. "We're not agents. We're mentors. We don't sell dreams—we guide them," Warriar concludes.

**MANY OF OUR TEAM MEMBERS VOLUNTARILY TOOK PAY CUTS JUST SO WE COULD CONTINUE SUPPORTING STUDENTS. THAT'S THE KIND OF CULTURE WE'VE BUILT**

**I**n a digital economy where every click costs, every lead counts—and yet, most businesses still struggle to turn interest into intent, and intent into action. The problem? Lag, friction and missed opportunities. And the culprit behind that? Outdated engagement models built for another era of customer behaviour. Enter Agentic AI—a smarter, context-aware, goal-driven solution that's rapidly reshaping how businesses approach lead conversion. By enabling real-time, two-way engagement, it doesn't just chat—it acts. It's not here to replace marketers; it's here to supercharge them.

### FROM GENERIC TO GENERATIVE TO AGENTIC

We've come a long way from static lead forms and templated emails. Generative AI took a leap forward by making conversations feel more natural. But this goes a step further. It's not just about generating content—it's about generating outcomes. It is built to take ownership of workflows. It doesn't just answer questions—it asks the right ones. It doesn't just respond—it remembers, adapts and drives each interaction forward toward a defined goal. Think of it as a digital salesperson, one that never sleeps, never misses a lead, and always knows what to say next.

## Boosting conversions with agentic AI

### THE POWER OF REAL-TIME, TWO-WAY ENGAGEMENT

What makes Agentic AI so powerful is its ability to meet users where they are—and guide them intelligently in real time. Whether it's a website visitor at 2 a.m. or a WhatsApp message triggered from a YouTube video, Agentic AI steps in immediately, holding a context-rich, two-way conversation that feels personal and purposeful.

**This real-time responsiveness does more than improve the customer experience—it directly impacts conversion rates. In fact, businesses using Agentic AI report:**

- Massively reduced lead leakage due to instant qualification
- 5-7x improvement in

conversion from CTWA (Click-to-WhatsApp) campaigns

- Reduced call center load, freeing up teams to focus on high-intent leads

It's Not Just a Chatbot. It's a Closing Machine. Unlike traditional bots, which follow rigid flows, Agentic AI is flexible. It understands nuance. If a customer changes direction midway through a conversation—asks about pricing, or jumps to another product—the system pivots. It re-routes the journey, not with pre-set scripts but with intelligent decisions.

And this isn't just for SaaS or D2C brands. Agentic AI is already making a measurable impact across verticals like real estate, fertility clinics, financial services, and education—industries where high-ticket items demand high-touch engagement, but scale has always been the problem.

### FROM ENGAGEMENT TO INTELLIGENCE

The other unsung superpower of Agentic AI? Data. Every conversation becomes a data point. Every drop-off, a lesson. Every conversion, a map. And when these interactions are unified into a single dashboard, marketers get a clear, actionable view of the entire funnel—from first click to final decision. Agentic AI doesn't just help you engage better. It helps you understand better. And that intelligence feeds right back into the system, creating a closed loop of optimisation that drives consistent growth.



### SUMMING IT ALL UP

At its heart, Agentic AI is about reducing the distance between interest and action. It's about making every interaction count. And for marketing and growth teams, it's about finally having a system that works as hard as they do. We're already seeing businesses rethink their entire marketing stack around Agentic AI—not just as a support tool, but as a central engine for customer engagement. The brands that adopt it early won't just see better conversions. They'll build smarter, more responsive businesses ready for the next era of growth. Because in a world that moves fast, the ones who respond faster—win.

(The author, Dikshant Dave, is the CEO of Zigent.)

# SRH desperately need win against Mumbai Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

The misfiring Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) will hope for a happy homecoming when they take on a resurrected Mumbai Indians (MI) here on Wednesday, eyeing a much-needed victory to revive their campaign in the Indian Premier League.

With only two wins in seven outings, SRH are in a desperate situation. Their power-packed batting has let them down more often than not while their bowlers are not making any strong impression either. That SRH are a one-dimensional side has been proven by the manner in which it has struggled on slow and turning pitches. The Pat Cummins-led outfit has lost two home matches too.

Their four-wicket defeat to MI in Mumbai on a tricky Wankhede pitch with grip and turn was the most recent instance of their frailties being exposed in challenging conditions. SRH batters thrive on flat wickets which produce high-scoring contests and having a favourable surface against MI would give them the best chance to find some momentum.

Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head will have their task cut out against MI given SRH's chances of winning hinge, to a large extent, on the left-handed opening pair. Their success in the powerplay defines the team's fortunes in a contest.

Abhishek smacked a 55-ball 141 in his

last outing here against Punjab Kings to record the highest individual total for any batter in this IPL.

There will be, however, some concerns around Head who hasn't got any guns blazing like he usually does and SRH will want their Australian star to be at the top of his game.

A defeat would put SRH in a tough situation. They will also have to be wary of their head-to-head record against Mumbai Indians. The team has won 10 out of their 24 matches while losing 14.

For Mumbai Indians, it is a perfect opportunity to test their resurgence in an away game before they return home to face Lucknow Super Giants in Mumbai on Sunday. Mumbai Indians have put their disappointing start to the IPL behind with three consecutive wins.

The five-time champions are coming off a massive nine-wicket hammering of Chennai Super Kings on a batting-friendly wicket on which they went over the line chasing a target near 180 with more than four overs to spare. Rohit Sharma's sensational 76 not out and Suryakumar Yadav's 68 not out with all his trademark shots coming out fluently signalled the return to form of MI's two batting pillars.

Tilak Varma did not get to bat against CSK but the left-hander has been in prime form, while Naman Dhir has shown signs of hitting his strides as a finisher alongside skipper Hardik Pandya.



Jasprit Bumrah has not been at his menacing best when it comes to taking wickets but the ace India bowler has begun nailing his line and lengths perfectly.

This could be a warning sign for the SRH batters given MI tend to use Bumrah more strategically, with Trent Boult and Deepak Chahar sharing the new ball.

The nature of the surface could have a bearing on the outcome with SRH's two wins here coming on flat decks ensuring run-fests in their contests against Rajasthan Royals and Punjab Kings earlier.

### Teams

**SUNRISERS HYDERABAD:** Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Smaran Ravichandran, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Simarjeet Singh, Zeeshan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga.

**MUMBAI INDIANS:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz, Ryan Rickelton (wk), Shrijith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Karn Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, VS Penmetsa, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

# KKR batters are low on confidence: Bravo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) batters are "low on confidence" right now, the team's mentor Dwayne Bravo conceded after the franchise slumped to its fifth loss in eight IPL matches this season but refused to blame the much-talked about Eden Gardens pitch for the side's woes.

KKR were handed a 39-run loss by Gujarat Titans here on Monday with skipper Ajinkya Rahane's 36-ball 50 being the only knock of substance in the steep chase of 198 here.

"IPL is a tough tournament, and when you do not start well, you know, batsmen go into a period where they lose confidence," Bravo said at the post-match media interaction, summing up the mood in the dressing room.

"That's what's happening at the moment. So like I said, we just have to keep backing them, and hopefully they come good. Our batters, low in confidence and normally runs bring confidence.

"Form brings confidence. And we, at the moment, to be honest, don't have that confidence," he explained.

The Eden Gardens surface has been under the spotlight this season after the KKR camp voiced concerns about not getting its preferred home track. However, Bravo steered clear of blaming the pitch.

"Nothing is wrong with the wicket. I didn't come here to talk about the wicket. I think both teams play on the same wicket. We did not play a good game of cricket. They played better than us," he asserted.

Last night's loss came close on the heels of an embarrassing collapse against Punjab Kings, where they were bundled out for 95 while chasing just 112. Bravo insisted that despite the horror run, the batsmen have been doing everything they can to regain rhythm in practice.

"...They are not sitting back and missing practice. So as coaches, as a group, we cannot fault the effort. It's just not working out in the middle. But I have to just



keep backing the team and supporting the guys." Asked about the big-hitting Andre Russell's continued struggles with the bat, Bravo was quick to dismiss the idea of teams targetting their star all-rounder in particular.

"Russell is not the only one who is struggling at the moment. Russell is an experienced player, he's a successful player. Actually as a team we're not batting properly. So that's just the reality.

"...But as a group, we have to make sure that the players keep putting in their work and practice, keep preparing well, try to keep them mentally focused," he explained.

Rahane has done the heavy-lifting, and young Angkrish Raghuvanshi has impressed with his fluent strokeplay. KKR's decision to send the promising youngster as low as number nine as an impact sub raised several eyebrows in their match against GT.

Bravo, however, defended the move. "Well, we didn't start the game for him to bat at number nine. But the way how

the game panned out, eventually, he ended up at number nine. So, you know, we tried to create that left-right combination," he reasoned.

"He's one of our better players. He's been doing very well for us throughout the season. But when you're chasing 200, you try to maximise as much as possible and try to get the guys who have the ability to really hit the ball in the middle."

Bravo however did admit that they were "caught up" with the left-right combination and Raghuvanshi ended up batting way down the order when the match had all but slipped out of their hands.

Bravo acknowledged that finishing has become a massive problem for KKR.

"...There is a fine line between backing a player and trying to come up with the best combination that we can also try to make some changes, make some necessary adjustments to give the team that spot that is missing.

"It's something we have to discuss as a group, as a staff."

# It was not on my roster: Harsha Bhogle on absence from commentary panel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Noted commentator Harsha Bhogle has rejected speculation that he was kept away from the IPL match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Gujarat Titans on Monday due to a complaint by the Cricket Association of Bengal, insisting that he was only empanelled for two games in Kolkata, which are over.

His clarification came a day after the CAB's letter to the BCCI, sent about 10 days ago by its secretary Naresh Ojha, was revealed in media reports. In the letter, the body asked for the removal of Bhogle and New Zealand's Simon Doull from the

commentary panel for matches in Kolkata after they stated that the Eden Gardens pitch was not helping the local franchise Kolkata Knight Riders.

"There are some inappropriate conclusions being drawn about why I wasn't at yesterday's game in Kolkata. Quite simply, it wasn't on the list of matches I was down to do!" Bhogle posted on 'X'.

"Asking me would have resolved the issue. Rosters are done before the tournament starts. I was rostered for two games in Kolkata. I was there for the first and an illness in the family prevented me from being at the 2nd," he added without specifying the games. KKR played against

Gujarat Titans at the Eden Gardens on Monday and lost by 39 runs.

Both KKR captain Ajinkya Rahane and head coach Chandrakant Pandit have demanded a more spin friendly track at the venue and expressed their frustration at not being given a track that suits their attack featuring Varun Chakravarty, Sunil Narine and Moeen Ali.

After the CAB threw its weight behind curator Sujan Mukherjee, Doull had suggested that KKR should look for a new base given that Mukherjee was not fulfilling the team's requirements.

Bhogle had also stated that KKR deserved to have the home advantage.

# Kolkata Knight Riders struggling in IPL 2025: Morgan after loss to GT

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) have struggled with batting issues throughout this IPL season and the changes made for the home game against Gujarat Titans (GT) were not effective, feels former captain Eoin Morgan.

KKR's loss to Gujarat Titans by 39 runs here on Monday was their second consecutive defeat in the tournament, third in the last five matches and overall fifth in eight games.

It has also been a season of struggle at home for the three-time champions who have also lost three of the four matches at the Eden Gardens.

"Kolkata Knight Riders has simply not bounced back as well as we would have liked them to. It's always a good sign for a strong team with a lot of character around, but they had the same failures that they've shown throughout the tour-

nament," said JioStar expert Morgan. "They made a couple of changes (against GT), mainly to try and gain some impetus in their batting line-up, and it didn't necessarily come off. Were the changes worth it? They'll sit back and say no."

**They made a couple of changes (against GT), mainly to try and gain some impetus in their batting line-up, and it didn't necessarily come off**

— EOIN MORGAN, CRICKETER

Morgan said KKR failed to forge partnerships in chase of 199 as they finished at an ordinary 159 for eight.

"It was interesting to hear Ajinkya Rahane talk about 199 being a chaseable score because towards the back end of Gujarat Titans' innings, we thought the ball held up more than we expected (and) that made finding boundaries harder,"

Eoin Morgan said. Morgan added, "But there was no rhythm, no substantial partnerships - almost the polar opposite of what Gujarat Titans displayed."

Morgan was all praise for India and GT pacer Prasad Krishna who delivered another vital spell of 4-0-25-2.

"He's the purple cap holder at the moment, and his rhythm just keeps getting better. We know he has that extra bit of pace to work with, but you have to admire the strength he brings during the middle phase of the game," he said.

"As a captain, having a seamer who can make that kind of impact in the middle overs is absolutely priceless."

"He now finds himself with the most wickets in this year's tournament - by some margin, actually, by four. It's great to see him growing as a player, evolving across formats, and now being rewarded with national honours as well," Morgan added.

# Jasprit Bumrah, Mandhana honoured in Wisden



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah was on Tuesday named as Leading Men's Cricketer in the World while prolific batter Smriti Mandhana grabbed the honour in the women's category in the 2025 edition of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack.

The two Indian players were honoured for their stand-out performances last year. The 31-year-old Bumrah picked up 71 Test wickets in season 2024 at an average of 14.92, the most by any bowler with such an economy in a single year. He became the first Test bowler in history to claim 200 wickets at an average of less than 20.

In the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia, Bumrah almost single-handedly carried India's attack with 32 wickets at an average of 13.06.

At the T20 World Cup, he was named

Player of the Tournament for his 15 wickets at an economy rate of just 4.17, leading India to their first ICC trophy since 2013. Women's team senior batter Smriti Mandhana made it an India double as she was named as Wisden's Leading Women's Cricketer in the World.

The 28-year-old Mandhana scored 1659 runs across formats in 2024 - the most by a woman cricketer in a calendar year of international cricket - including four ODI hundreds, which was another record. She capped her efforts with a second Test century - 149 - in a 10-wicket win over South Africa.

Mandhana became the first Indian woman since the inception of the award to earn the title twice. She had already earned the coveted honour in 2018 also.

West Indian Nicholas Pooran was named as the Leading T20 Player in the World.

# Novak Djokovic returns to Madrid Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Former champion Novak Djokovic has returned to the Madrid Open for the first time in three years in hopes of achieving his 100th four-level title. Djokovic is seeded fourth in the same half of the draw as second-seeded Carlos Alcaraz, the home favorite who arrives at the Caja Magica this week with fitness concerns after reaching consecutive clay-court finals.

The 37-year-old Djokovic, a three-time champion in Madrid, hasn't played in the Spanish capital since losing to Alcaraz in the 2022 semifinals, their first meeting. Djokovic won his 99th title last August at the Paris Olympics. He has lost four finals since then, most recently last month in Miami.

The 100-title club features only Jimmy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103).

Over the last two weekends, Alcaraz has won the Monte Carlo Masters and lost in the Barcelona Open final, where he needed treatment on his upper right leg on Sunday.

"I'm confident it won't affect me in Madrid," he said. "That's what happens when you play so many matches and have so few days to rest. It's so demanding, and you have to give 100 per cent every day. Having played a tournament like Monte Carlo and arriving in Barcelona with few days to adapt is really tough." Alcaraz said fellow Spaniard Rafael Nadal, a five-time winner in Madrid, wrote to him after the Barcelona final to encourage him and say he hoped he wasn't injured.

"I bow at the feet of Rafa because of what he did week after week," Alcaraz



said. "You have to respect that."

Alexander Zverev, number 2 in the world after winning in Munich at the weekend, was the top seed in Madrid and Taylor Fritz was the third seed. Defending champion Andrey Rublev was the seventh seed. Djokovic has a 30-9 record in Madrid, with titles in 2011, 2016 and 2019. He beat his coach Andy Murray in the 2016 final. Alcaraz won Madrid in 2022 and 2023.

### Sabalenka leads women's draw

The women's draw has 29 of the top 30 players. Number 15 Barbora Krejickova is missing because of an injury.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka seeks her fourth final appearance in Madrid in five years. She won the tournament in 2021 and 2023, and lost last year's final to Iga Swiatek, the second seed this week.

# Michael Slater gets jail term for domestic violence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sydney

Australian cricketer-turned-commentator Michael Slater was on Tuesday sentenced to four years in prison after pleading guilty to multiple charges, including domestic violence, but will be allowed to walk free immediately after having served over a year in custody.

According to a report in ABC Sport, his sentence was "partly suspended" due to the time served. The 55-year-old was charged with more than a dozen offences including domestic violence, unlawful stalking or intimidation, breaking into a dwelling with intent at night, common assault, assault occasioning bodily harm and choking or suffocation.

The prosecution told the Maroochydore District Court, that alcohol "was a repeating feature with his offending as his behaviour becomes more erratic."

"The court heard Slater made threats of self-harm as he warned the victim not to report harassment and she felt extremely fearful and exhausted by Slater's behaviour," the report read. The identity of the victim was not revealed in the report. It merely stated that she hailed from Noosa region (Queensland) and was being allegedly subjected to "assault, strangulation, burglary and stalking" since late 2023. Judge Glen Cash described Slater as an alcoholic and warned that his rehabilitation "will not be easy."

# PRIYADARSHI: NO PRESSURE AFTER COURT, JUST EXCITED FOR SARANGAPANI JATAKAM

PNS|HYDERABAD

With a string of successful films under his belt, actor Priyadarshi is currently on a high. Following the success of *Court*, his next film *Sarangapani Jatakam* is gearing up for release on April 25. Directed by Mohana Krishna Indraganti and produced by Sivalenka Krishna Prasad under the prestigious Sridevi Movies banner, the film promises to be a deeply emotional, relatable narrative—something that has become a hallmark of Priyadarshi's film choices. In an interaction with the media ahead of the film's release, Priyadarshi shared his excitement and insights into *Sarangapani Jatakam* and his career trajectory. Reflecting on his current frame of mind post-*Court*, Priyadarshi said, "I heard the story of *Sarangapani Jatakam* last year. It was supposed to be released at the end of last year but got delayed a bit. Now it's releasing on April 25. I'm really happy to come back with this film right after a hit like *Court*. I'm confident and not under any pressure." The film's protagonist is a man deeply rooted in astrology. When asked if he personally believes in horoscopes, Priyadarshi admitted, "Not to the extent shown in the movie, but I do believe in them to some extent. In this industry, nothing is really under our control. We just try to make good cinema, but the result is not in our hands." He added that while the team initially

planned to release the film earlier, business and theatre availability factors led them to finalise April 25 as the release date. Clarifying the film's stance, Priyadarshi said, "We're not saying one should believe or shouldn't believe in horoscopes. But we are showing what happens when someone imposes their beliefs on others. We haven't taken sides in the story." When it comes to his preferences in film narratives, Priyadarshi is clear: he gravitates towards stories that reflect real, grounded experiences. "I believe common man characters reach a wider audience. Be it *Mallesham* or *Sarangapani*, these are people we see around us. Their journeys are often painful. Stories like *Mallesham*, *Balagam*, *Court* and *Sarangapani* are all rooted in our surround dings," he explained, adding that in this film, he plays a young man who strongly believes in horoscopes. While Priyadarshi's roots lie in comedy, his evolution into a



Riding high on the success of *Court*, actor Priyadarshi returns with *Sarangapani Jatakam*, a film he describes as emotionally rich and rooted in the lives of everyday people. Set to release on April 25, the film is directed by Mohana Krishna Indraganti and produced by Sridevi Movies. Confident and excited, Priyadarshi says there's no pressure this time—only joy in bringing another heartfelt story to the audience.

lead actor hasn't strayed far from his origins. "Making people laugh is very difficult these days. Indraganti has great comic timing. I've never played a role like this before. It feels very fresh. I believe the character and the film will connect with everyone," he said. *Sarangapani Jatakam* also presented a linguistic shift for the actor. "So far, I've mostly spoken in the Telangana dialect. But in this film, I speak in the Andhra dialect. I tried to follow Indraganti sir's style. He created a separate track and timing for me, and I think audiences will like it," he noted. Speaking about his experience working with industry veterans, Priyadarshi shared, "They are all amazing actors and true legends. Tanikella Bharani, Naresh, Avasara Srinivas—working with them was a delight. Vennela Kishore is a fantastic artist. Viva Harsha has great timing. Despite being seniors, everyone was very friendly and we had fun during the shoot." As for whether he felt any pressure as the lead actor, Priyadarshi was quick to dismiss the idea. "It was Indraganti sir who worked the hardest for this film. More than me, it was his effort. I just followed his direction on set. I never felt any pressure," he said. Priyadarshi also recalled how astrology once tried to dissuade him from pursuing a film career. "Yes, before I entered the industry, astrologers said I would never become an actor. But I didn't care about any of that. My mother got my horoscope checked out of concern. I came into the industry with faith in myself and my work," he said.

Speaking about what truly draws audiences to theatres, Priyadarshi remarked, "Some films revolve around characters. In *Court*, not just me, all characters stood out. It got great word-of-mouth and became a blockbuster. People don't come to the theatres just because I'm in a film—they come because they believe the film will have a strong point or content. Today's audiences are very clear about what to watch and what to skip. Only meaningful films are working." When a film doesn't perform well, Priyadarshi believes in learning from the experience. "Absolutely. When a film fails, I always introspect. I look at where I went wrong, what could've been done differently, and make sure to be more careful next time," he said. While emotional, content-driven roles remain his forte, Priyadarshi isn't opposed to donning a massy avatar. "There are many action heroes in our industry. Mass commercial entertainers pull great collections too. But look at Nani—he did *Dasara* and then *Hi Nanna* and both were hits. Earlier, even Chiranjeevi, Rajinikanth, and Balakrishna followed this format—doing all kinds of films and impressing everyone. I want to do the same. If Srikanth Odela is ready, I'll pick up a sword!" he quipped with a laugh. Describing his first interaction with director Mohana Krishna Indraganti, Priyadarshi recalled, "I used to dream of just taking a picture with Indraganti sir. But he came to me with a story! The moment I heard it, I felt it was amazing. He called it the story of a horoscope-crazy guy and told me the title *Sarangapani*

*Jatakam*. I loved the title too. I told him, 'Sir, it's an amazing title.' I'll never forget my first day shooting with him. I hope everyone gets a chance to work with Indraganti sir." On working with veteran producer Sivalenka Krishna Prasad, Priyadarshi said, "He's a great producer. He produced classics like *Aditya 369*. Even now, he respectfully addresses newcomers like me as 'sir'. He's very humble. I consider myself lucky to have worked under his banner." With the film's release just around the corner, the team is in full promotional swing. "We're going to Vizag for *Sarangapani Jatakam* promotions. We're doing events there and will be organizing premiere shows too. We want to show the film a bit early—if people like it, they can come to the theatres. Our film will entertain everyone with laughter," Priyadarshi assured. Priyadarshi firmly believes that today's audiences are more inclined toward content-rich films. "Yes, today's audience prefers films with solid content. They love stories of the common man. In films like *Lucky Bhaskar* and *Pushpa*, the hero is a common man who rises. Even Chiranjeevi sir did many such films in the past and won hearts," he said. On the work front, Priyadarshi has exciting projects lined up. "I'm doing a film called *Premante* with a new director under Asian Cinemas. I'm also doing another project titled *Mitraramandi* under Geetha Arts, produced by Bunny Vas. I'm listening to a few more scripts. I want to focus more on films with strong roles," he concluded.

## Mahesh Babu summoned by ED in real estate scam case involving Rs 5.9 crore



ture is his reported association with one of the prime accused companies—Sai Surya Ventures. According to the report, the Kurchi Madathapetti star received Rs. 5.9 crore for endorsing the firm, which has now come under the ED's radar for financial fraud. While there's no direct allegation of wrongdoing on Mahesh Babu's part, authorities are probing whether the actor was paid using proceeds from the scam. His promotion of the brand allegedly encouraged several investors to put money into the venture, unaware of its potential fraudulent background. Sources close to the ED reveal that the cash payment made to the actor is considered a significant lead in the ongoing probe. The case gained momentum after Telangana police registered an FIR against the directors of the two real estate firms. As of now, there has been no official statement from Mahesh Babu or his team regarding the summons. However, he is expected to fully cooperate with the authorities as the investigation unfolds further. On the work front, Mahesh Babu continues to draw fan frenzy with his upcoming project *SSMB29*, touted as a cinematic spectacle. With a massive star cast including Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Prithviraj Sukumaran, the film has been creating buzz despite the makers keeping all details tightly under wraps. Outside the professional whirlwind, the actor recently returned from a serene European getaway with his family. Wife and former actor Namrata Shirodkar shared picturesque glimpses from their countryside vacation, showing Mahesh in a relaxed avatar far removed from the current headlines.

Superstar Mahesh Babu, who is currently immersed in the shoot of his much-anticipated film *SSMB29* with director SS Rajamouli, has found himself in an unexpected spotlight—this time off-screen. According to reports, the actor has been issued a summons by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a real estate scam and an alleged money laundering case involving a staggering Rs. 5.9 crore. He has reportedly been asked to appear on April 27. The investigation centers around two Hyderabad-based real estate companies that are under fire for allegedly duping homebuyers. What brings Mahesh Babu into the pic-

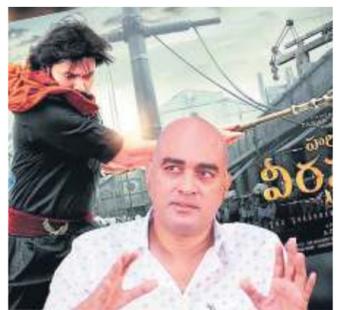


## JR NTR BEGINS NEW SCHEDULE OF ACTION DRAMA WITH PRASHANTH NEEL

Man of Masses Jr NTR has officially resumed shooting for his highly anticipated action drama with director Prashanth Neel. Tentatively titled *NTR-Neel or Dragon*, the film is being touted as a high-octane, mass-loaded saga that fans are eagerly waiting for. After a brief initial schedule in Hyderabad a few months ago, Jr NTR has now joined the team for a new leg of the shoot in Karnataka. A massive set resembling a port has been constructed near the seashore in Mangaluru, where the actor began filming today. Although the makers have yet to share any official pictures or sneak peeks from the location, fans have already taken to social media demanding a first look at Tarak in action. The buzz surrounding the shoot has been palpable, with expectations riding high on the film's scale and intensity. This particular schedule is expected to span four days, with an official update from the production team anticipated shortly. The film marks Jr NTR's first collaboration with KGF and Salaar director Prashanth Neel, adding further excitement to the project. Rukmini Vasanth is likely to be cast opposite Jr NTR in the film, which is being made on a grand scale under the Mythri Movie Makers and NTR Arts banners. Music for the film is being composed by Ravi Basrur, whose high-energy scores have become synonymous with action blockbusters.

## Director Krish's career in limbo as *Ghati* stalls & *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* remains unfinished

Director Krish, known for his impactful storytelling with films like *Gamyam* and *Vedam*, once stood as one of Telugu cinema's most promising filmmakers. While his work has often received critical acclaim, Krish's career has been marred by recurring setbacks when it comes to large-scale commercial success. One of the most highly anticipated projects in his filmography was *Hari Hara Veera Mallu*, a historical action drama starring Power Star Pawan Kalyan. The announcement of this collaboration raised major expectations across the industry. Many believed it would catapult Krish into a new league of stardom. However, the reality turned out to be far more complicated. The project faced an endless series of delays, from scheduling conflicts to logistical issues, eventually pushing Krish to walk away from it. While the film remains unfinished with no clear timeline in sight, it marked a significant detour in the director's career. Post-*Veera Mallu*, Krish shifted gears and quietly began work on a new project titled *Ghati*, starring Anushka Shetty in the lead role. The film's first look and initial promos received an encouraging response, sparking hope among his fans for a strong comeback. The release date was locked for April 18, and even a promotional video confirmed the announcement. However, as the date neared, silence engulfed the project. With no updates on the film's progress, marketing, or release



strategy, the buzz around *Ghati* began to fade. Fans were eagerly waiting to see Anushka's return and Krish's signature storytelling were left disappointed once again. Now, with both *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* and *Ghati* in limbo, the director's journey seems to be at a standstill. It's a tough spot for someone who once redefined mainstream Telugu cinema with content-driven narratives. Supporters of Krish still hold faith in his talent and vision, hoping that he gets the platform and momentum he deserves. As the film industry continues to evolve, it remains to be seen when the director will finally make his much-awaited return to form.

## Romance, action & mystery await as *6Journey* hits screens on April 25

The upcoming Telugu film *6Journey*, produced by Palyam Ravi Prakash Reddy under Aruna Kumari Films, is all set for a grand theatrical release on April 25. Directed by Basir Alluri, the film features an ensemble cast including Ravi Prakash Reddy, Sameer Datta, Tasty Teja, Pallavi Rathod and Ramya Reddy. At the trailer launch event, director Basir Alluri expressed his gratitude to the team and shared his excitement about the film's release. "Our hero Sameer has worked incredibly hard for this film. Ravi Prakash Reddy has led this project from the front. Our heroines have delivered outstanding performances and Tasty Teja brought tremendous energy to his role. Simha garu provided us with excellent songs and Surendar Reddy garu guided us throughout. This film reached this stage because of him and I will always be indebted to him. We're thrilled to release the trailer and the movie will hit theaters on April 25. I'm confident it will impress the audience," he said. Lead actor Sameer Datta described the



film as a compelling mix of genres. "*6Journey* is a unique love, action, and thriller movie. The entire team has worked tirelessly and Basir garu has crafted the film beautifully. I thank our producer, Palyam Ravi Prakash Reddy garu, for his support. As the movie releases on April 25, I wholeheartedly request everyone to bless and support our film." Actress Pallavi Rathod added, "*6Journey* is coming to you on April 25. With the support of Basir garu and Ravi

Prakash garu, the film has been made exceptionally well. It has all the elements to entertain, and I'm sure it will resonate with everyone." Tasty Teja, who plays a full-length role in the film, also shared his excitement: "Playing a full-length role in *6Journey* will earn me recognition as an actor. The success of this journey is thanks to Basir garu and our producer, Ravi Prakash garu. We urge everyone to support this film, releasing on April 25."

## ALCC RECEIVES WARM RECEPTION AHEAD OF RELEASE

The upcoming film *ALCC* (*O Universal Bachelor*), directed and produced by Leleedhar Rao Kola under the LR Film Circuits banner, is all set for a grand theatrical release on April 25. Following a positive response to the trailer, the team recently hosted a pre-release event was attended by notable directors, media personnel, and well-wishers from the industry. Hero JP Naveen, who marks his debut with this film, shared his heartfelt appreciation for the opportunity and support. "I sincerely thank all the media friends for attending today's event. For a youngster with no background, getting an opportunity as a lead actor is very rare — and the media knows that best. I'm truly thankful to director Leleedhar Rao Kola garu for giving me such a big break. The cinematography and music in this film have come out wonderfully. I request everyone to support newcomers like us," he said.



Director Nagesh, speaking at the event, emphasised the importance of supporting unique voices in cinema. "Whether it's a small film or a big one, unique content should always be encouraged. Though this is a small film, it offers a fresh perspective. Director Leleedhar Rao Kola has crafted it very well. Just as a farmer doesn't quit farming due to

losses, we too won't stop making films because of failures. We'll continue striving to make meaningful cinema." Director Samudra lauded the director's transition from education to cinema, saying, "Leleedhar Rao Kola is a good teacher who has inspired many young minds with valuable lessons. Today, he's taken a new path as a director and produc-