

# The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1864

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**Bharat will not bend to terror**

**INDIA, SAUDI ARABIA TO WORK FOR STABILITY OF GLOBAL OIL MARKETS**

**'Can't Wait for the Kalki 2 Magic': Prabhas's birthday message to NAG ASHWIN**

**QUOTE OF THE DAY**  
The Pioneer  
Congress is once again working to privatise Singareni. Deputy CM Bhatti is selling it piece by piece. Half the profits are being given away, and workers are being betrayed. Even with 8+8 MPs, the state hasn't received a single rupee. They robbed Rythu Bandhu, made farmers feel helpless, and now are pushing them to fear of even sowing seeds. When untimely rains hit during our rule, we visited the fields and compensated farmers. Why is Sridhar Babu silent now. Till date, the Chief Minister hasn't even said 'Jai Telangana'

- Kavitha, BRS MLC

**DON'T MISS...**

**Job card to every eligible family**

East Godavari district Collector P Prasanthi directed the officials concerned to take steps to issue job cards to every eligible family to achieve 90 workdays in the district. The Collector held a teleconference with DWMA PD M Nagamalleswara Rao on the implementation of the NREGA and with In-charge Housing PD S Bhaskar Reddy on housing construction works. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prasanthi said that 1,68,140 job card holders have been registered under the employment guarantee scheme and 1,22,931 people...

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**'Direct assault on Indian state'**

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday termed the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people were killed as a direct assault on the Indian state, and said that at this moment the entire nation is one with the government to fight the terrorists. He urged the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorists, and also suggested that an all-party meeting be called to address the challenge of terrorism in a spirit of consensus. "Very unfortunate incident happened in Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir..."

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**Gold halts record rally, drops**

Gold prices took a U-turn from the historic Rs 1 lakh-mark and declined Rs 2,400 to Rs 99,200 per 10 gram in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak global trend. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity spurted by Rs 1,800 to hit the lifetime peak of Rs 1,01,600 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent fall sharply by Rs 3,400 to Rs 98,700 per 10 grams on Wednesday, a day after jumping Rs 2,800 to an all-time high of Rs 1,02,100 per...

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**Athletes condemn terror attack**

India's sporting fraternity oscillated between grief and rage as it joined the nation in condemning the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam with some demanding that the country should cut all sports ties with Pakistan. On Tuesday, terrorists opened fire at a prime tourist location in south Kashmir's Pahalgam, killing at least 26 civilians and injuring several others. The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow group of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, has claimed responsibility...

-SPORTS

## Pak links to Pahalgam attack

**India downgrades diplomatic ties  
Suspends Indus Water Treaty  
Expels military attaches  
CCS meets under PM's chairmanship**



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday suspended the Indus Water Treaty and announced downgrading diplomatic ties with Pakistan including expulsion of its military attaches in view of cross-border links to the Pahalgam terror attack. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met this evening under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and firmed up the responses to the terror attack. The CCS also decided to close the Integrated Check Post at Attari with immediate effect, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said at a late evening press briefing. It is learnt that the CCS lasted for around two and a half hours. Pakistani nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the

SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) and any such visas issued in the past to Pakistani nationals are deemed cancelled, Misri said. The CCS decided that the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be held in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism, he said.

On closing of the Integrated Check Post at Attari, Misri said those who have crossed over with valid endorsements may return through that route before May 1.

Misri said, "The defence, military, naval and air Advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi are declared Persona Non Grata." They have a week to leave India, he said.

Continued on Page 2



### 'Heinous act of terror'

VIJAYAWADA: Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer has expressed anguish and profound grief on the loss of innocent lives in the gruesome attack by terrorists on tourists in Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir on Tuesday. Abdul Nazeer offered his heartfelt condolences to the family members of JS Chandramouli from Visakhapatnam and Madhusudan Rao from Nellore, who lost their lives in the attack. The Governor has condemned the dastardly attack on tourists and said that such senseless acts of violence have no place in our society and the perpetrators should be dealt with stringent punishment. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has expressed his support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the wake of the attack. He also conveyed his deep sorrow over the loss of two Telugu individuals in the attack. The CM condemned the "heinous act" of terrorism, emphasising that violence achieves nothing. He called for strong and decisive action against those

responsible. Taking to 'X', the CM wrote, "Mourning the tragic loss of JS Chandramouli Garu and Madhusudan Garu, members of our Telugu community, who lost their lives in yesterday's terrorist attack in Pahalgam. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families during this time of profound grief, and I pray they find the strength to endure this immense loss." He further added, "Acts of terror are a stain on society. History shows that terrorism and violence have never achieved anything meaningful for the causes they aim to promote. The Government of Andhra Pradesh stands in solidarity with the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri @narendramodi ji, and the Union Government in their commitment to safeguarding our nation's sovereignty and responding to terrorism with firm and decisive action. Those responsible for this heinous act must be dealt with severely."

Continued on Page 2

## Girls surpass boys

**81.14% pass rate in AP SSC exams**

- Parvathipuram Manyam secured highest pass percentage
- Alluri Sitharama Raju district reported lowest

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh SSC Public Examination results were announced on Wednesday, revealing a commendable overall pass percentage of 81.14 per cent. Girls continued their consistent performance by surpassing boys once again, recording a pass rate of 84.09 per cent compared to 78.31 per cent among boys, a notable 5.78 per cent lead.

HRD Minister Nara Lokesh announced the results via the social media platform 'X', congratulating the successful students and encour-

aging those who did not pass to utilise the upcoming supplementary exams scheduled from May 19-28. This year, a total of 6,14,459 students appeared for the SSC exams held in March, of which 4,98,585 students cleared the exams. Parvathipuram Manyam district secured the highest pass percentage at 93.90 per cent, while Alluri Sitharama Raju district reported the lowest with 47.64 per cent.

A total of 1,680 schools registered a 100 per cent pass rate, while 19 schools reported zero pass percentage. Andhra Pradesh Residential Schools led institutional performance with a stellar 95.02 per cent pass rate. Among the passed candidates, 65.36 per cent secured first division, 10.69 per cent second division, and 5.09 per cent third division.

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## MEIL gets PO for ₹12,800 cr nuclear power project from NPCIL

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) has formally received the Purchase Order for a ₹12,800-crore EPC contract from the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) to construct two 700 MWe nuclear reactors -- Kaiga Units 5 & 6 -- in Karnataka. This is the biggest-ever order placed by NPCIL and marks MEIL's first major step into the nuclear energy sector, a field that will help shape India's energy future.

The order was formally handed over at NPCIL's Mumbai headquarters to Ch P Subbaiah, Director, MEIL (Projects), and his team. For the first time, NPCIL used the Quality-cum-Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) method for awarding this

project, striking a careful balance between quality and cost.

The project goes beyond engineering. It's about contributing to a stronger, self-reliant India. For MEIL, it's a meaningful leap into a sector that plays a key role in powering the nation's growth story. The leadership of MEIL shared their confidence in the team's ability to deliver the project on time while maintaining the highest standards of safety, quality and care.

With a solid track record of delivering large-scale projects across India and abroad, MEIL is stepping into this new responsibility with a strong sense of purpose and dedication. This step into nuclear energy adds a new chapter to MEIL's journey and strengthens its growing role in shaping India's infrastructure and energy future.

### STF seizes 23 kg hashish oil, three arrested

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major crackdown on drug trafficking, the Special Task Force (STF) Central Team seized 23 kg of hashish oil in Maradapalli village under Pedabayalu mandal, within the limits of Paderu SHO. Preliminary investigation revealed that the contraband was being supplied from neighbouring Odisha State.

A total of six persons are believed to be involved in the smuggling network. Of them, three have been arrested -- Vantala Mahesh, a habitual offender previously booked under Cr No 188/21 of V Madugula PS along with Chinna Rao and supplier Kurra Dasu. Efforts are underway to apprehend two more suppliers from Odisha and a local receiver from Alluri Sitharama Raju district.

## Preparations in full swing for PM Modi's Amaravati visit

- Minister inspects arrangements along with police officials
- Modi to inaugurate developmental works worth ₹1 lakh crore

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Preparations are underway at a brisk pace for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Amaravati, where the PM will relaunch the capital region's development works. The Andhra Pradesh government is leaving no stone unturned to ensure a successful event on May 2.

Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana visited Amaravati to oversee the prepara-



tion works on Wednesday. Accompanied by Guntur Range IG Sarvashresth Tripathi and District SP Satish Kumar, the Minister reviewed the condition of approach roads leading to the main event venue. He spent nearly two hours

inspecting the key routes and coordinating with officials.

Addressing the media, Minister Narayana said that over ₹5,000 crore had been spent on Amaravati's development between 2014 and 2019.

Continued on Page 2

## AP will fast-track irrigation projects: Ramanaidu

**Says balanced regional development, particularly in Uttarandhra, is priority for TDP Govt**

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu, on Wednesday, reiterated the State government's commitment to expediting long-delayed irrigation and drinking water projects, especially in

the underdeveloped northern districts. Speaking to the media in Visakhapatnam, he emphasised that balanced regional development, particularly in Uttarandhra, remains a priority for the current administration.

Ramanaidu criticised the previous YSRCP government for halting vital irrigation projects in North Andhra, which he claimed led to a revenue loss of Rs 50,000 crore. He attributed this setback to poor governance and mismanagement under the leader-



ship of former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. "Under the TDP government,"

Ramanaidu said, "efforts to rejuvenate infrastructure and irrigation projects are already yielding positive results." He highlighted that the TDP had taken swift measures to restart and accelerate stalled projects since assuming power, with significant progress visible in North Andhra. The Minister also announced that Rs 35,000 crore had been allocated to the Irrigation Department to strengthen the region's water infrastructure.

Continued on Page 2

## DESPITE CENTRE'S ₹11,440 CRORE LIFELINE RINL struggles to ramp up production

Workforce reduction and underutilised blast furnaces hinder Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's path to revival

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Even as the Centre's Rs 11,440-crore revival package for Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant brings a glimmer of hope, the management of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant finds itself grappling with serious operational hurdles—chief among them, a shrinking workforce. Tasked with scaling production to the plant's rated capacity of 7.3 million tonnes per annum, RINL is facing a formidable challenge. Industry experts say that despite the much-needed financial infusion, the path to revival hinges on effective utilisation of manpower and optimal



operation of production units.

A key feature of the revival plan is the proposed reduction of RINL's massive debt burden, which had ballooned to Rs 35,000 crore. While the package allocates Rs 5,000 crore towards debt servicing, trade union leaders caution that any potential relief in interest liability will be short-lived unless the plant resumes operations across all three of its blast furnaces.

Continued on Page 2

## Luxury items above Rs 10 lakh to attract 1% TCS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Handbags, wrist watches, footwear and sportswear, priced above Rs 10 lakh will now attract 1 per cent Tax Collected at Source (TCS), as per a notification issued by the Income Tax department.

TCS at 1 per cent rate is currently being levied on motor vehicles costing above Rs 10 lakh effective January 1, 2025. The Income Tax department on April 22 notified the list of specified luxury goods and collectibles on which 1 per cent TCS will apply henceforth.

The list includes wrist watches, art objects such as paintings, sculptures, and antiques, collectible items including coins and stamps, yachts, helicopters, luxury handbags, sunglasses, footwear, high-end sportswear and equipment, home theatre systems, and horses intended for racing or polo. TCS is collected from the buyer at



**"Although the luxury goods sector may undergo some transitional challenges, this measure is expected to promote formalisation and improved regulatory oversight over time."**



the time of sale of specified goods and can be adjusted against the tax liability of the purchaser at the time of filing of I-T returns. TCS does not garner any additional revenue, but helps the tax department to trace high value spending as PAN details have to be submitted at the time of purchase.

The TCS provision for luxury

goods as well as motor vehicles costing above Rs 10 lakh was introduced via Finance Act, 2024, as part of the Budget presented in July, 2024.

The obligation to collect TCS shall be on the seller in respect of the notified goods such as wrist watches, art objects such as paintings, sculptures, and antiques, collectible items includ-

ing coins and stamps, yachts, helicopters, luxury handbags, sunglasses, footwear, high-end sportswear and equipment, home theatre systems, and horses intended for racing or polo.

Nangia Andersen LLP Tax Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala, said this notification operationalises the government's intent to enhance monitoring

of high-value discretionary expenditure and strengthen the audit trail in the luxury goods segment. It reflects a broader policy objective of expanding the tax base and promoting greater financial transparency.

"Sellers will now be required to ensure timely compliance with TCS provisions, while buyers of notified luxury goods may experience enhanced KYC requirements and documentation at the time of purchase. "Although the luxury goods sector may undergo some transitional challenges, this measure is expected to promote formalisation and improved regulatory oversight over time." Jhunjhunwala added. AKM Global Tax Partner Amit Maheshwari said by bringing high-value items into the TCS framework with a 1 per cent rate, the government is widening the tax net beyond just motor vehicles. "This will enhance the traceability of luxury spending," he added.



## Meeting discusses strengthening PMAY implementation in AP

Special CS Ajay Jain reiterates State govt's commitment to providing permanent housing for all by 2029

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A key multi-stakeholder meeting was held under the leadership of Ajay Jain, Special Chief Secretary, Housing, at the Andhra Pradesh State Housing Corporation Limited (APSHCL) office in Vijayawada on Wednesday. The consultation was organised in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity India with the primary objective of reinforcing the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) in Andhra Pradesh.

The meeting brought together sector experts and representatives from Housing Finance Corporations (HFCs), Small Finance Banks, selected implementing Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local officials. The discussions focused on understanding the status of various housing projects in the State, identifying challenges and preparing a comprehensive roadmap for the next two-three years.

During the meeting, Ajay



Jain reaffirmed the State government's commitment to providing permanent housing for all eligible families by 2029 under the mission "Housing for All." He highlighted the government's initiative to issue land ownership documents, three cents in rural areas and two cents in urban areas to eligible beneficiaries, who lack both a house and land. Revenue Department GO Ms No 23,

dated January 27 outlines these policy guidelines.

Under PMAY 2.0, the State aims to construct pucca houses at a cost of ₹1.5 to ₹2.5 lakh per unit, with ₹1 lakh provided as state share. The housing initiative is part of the State's broader vision for "Zero Poverty," aiming to complete 7.32 lakh pending houses under PMAY 1.0 by March 2026. Additional plans include skill training for masons

and integration with PM Surya Ghar to promote energy-efficient housing solutions.

Siva Prasad, Managing Director, APSHCL; Anand B, National Director, HFHI; Justin Jebakumar, Director of Advocacy and Partnerships, HFHI, Chief Engineer, SEs (Urban & Rural), and Executive Engineers from Bapatla, Eluru, Guntur and NTR districts were present.

## CM pays homage to Veeraiah Chowdary

Vows support to bereaved family

PNS ■ NAGULUPPALAPADU

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has expressed deep anguish over the brutal murder of former MPP and Bapatla parliamentary constituency representative Muppavarapu Veeraiah Chowdary. Visiting the late leader's residence in Ammanabolu, Prakasam district, the CM paid floral tributes to the mortal remains and offered heartfelt condolences to the grieving family.

"I am unable to come to terms with the loss of Veeraiah Chowdary," said CM Chandrababu, highlighting the leader's unwavering commitment to the party and his constituency. Describing Veeraiah as a dedicated and accessible



leader, Chandrababu noted that his murder was a result of rivals' inability to confront effective leadership. He assured that 12 special police teams have been deployed to investigate and apprehend those responsible for the crime.

Consoling Veeraiah's wife Sucharita and son Chandra Siddharth, the Chief Minister promised that the party would

stand firmly with the family. "We consider you as part of our own family," he said.

Veeraiah's contributions were lauded as invaluable. He had walked for 100 days along with Nara Lokesh during the 'Yuvagalam Padayatra' and actively supported the Amaravati farmers' march. In the 2024 General Elections, he led the TDP to a majority of

over 10,000 votes in Naguluppalapadu mandal and served as the party in-charge for Chirala constituency.

Chandrababu urged the public, party workers, and media to share any information related to the incident with authorities, even anonymously through the toll-free number 9121104784. Several ministers, MLAs and TDP leaders also paid homage to the late leader.

## AP will fast...

Continued from Page 1

He revealed that the long-pending Polavaram left canal works are on track for completion by June, with an estimated cost of Rs 1,200 crore. Discussing the Polavaram project, Ramanaidu pointed out that 72 per cent of the work was completed during the TDP's previous tenure. He blamed the YSRCP government for splitting the project into phases, which caused delays and disrupted rehabilitation efforts. "We now aim for full completion by December 2027," he said, adding that while the full benefits depend on achieving a height of 45.72 m, work will continue up to 41.72 m until rehabilitation is completed.

Ramanaidu also took aim at the previous administration's neglect of Uppalavaram, highlighting the region's lack of investment and industrial growth. He accused the YSRCP of causing significant economic damage, worse than the post-bifurcation period, due to its anti-industry stance.

## AP challenges Centre's KWDT reference in Supreme Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant legal tussle over Krishna river water sharing, the Supreme Court on Tuesday heard arguments in a writ petition filed by the State of Andhra Pradesh seeking to quash the Further Terms of Reference (FToRs) issued by the Union government to the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal-II (KWDT-II) based on a 2014 complaint by Telangana.

The writ petition, numbered WP(C) 1230/2023, was filed on October 17, 2023, naming the Union of India and the Government of Telangana as respondents.

Andhra Pradesh contended that the Gazette Notification issued by the Centre on October 6, 2023, referring fresh terms to the existing tribunal, was arbitrary and legally untenable. The state also filed an interim application seeking a stay on KWDT-II proceedings under the newly issued FToRs.

However, the Supreme Court had earlier refused to grant any stay on the tribunal's hearings, allowing Andhra Pradesh to participate in the ongoing proceedings "subject to the outcome of these proceedings." On Tuesday, a bench com-

prising Justice Surya Kant and Justice Nongmeikapam Kotswar Singh took up the matter for detailed hearing.

Senior advocates Jaideep Gupta, G. Umaphathy, and Advocate General Dammalapati Srinivas appeared on behalf of Andhra Pradesh, while senior counsel C.S. Vaidyanathan, V. Ravinder Rao, and Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati represented the Union of India and Telangana.

The arguments remained inconclusive, with the bench adjourning the matter to Wednesday, April 24, for continued hearing.

## RINL struggles...

Continued from Page 1

"At present, only two of the three blast furnaces are functional, producing around 14,000 tonnes of hot metal daily. Full capacity can be reached only when the third furnace is brought back into operation," said D. Adinarayana, national vice-president of the All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), speaking to The Pioneer.

The steel plant, which produced 5.1 million tonnes three years ago with a workforce of 14,500, now operates with roughly 13,000 employees—largely due to a wave of retirements and voluntary exit schemes. This decline, according to labour representatives, is severely hampering efforts to meet production targets. Adding to the strain is the uncertain status of the contract workforce.

Of the estimated 14,000 contract workers, around 600 have reportedly not been issued gate passes, while approximately 1,600 employees aged above 40 have been directed to undergo mandatory medical evaluations, raising concerns over possible disengagement.

## Pak links to Pahalgam...

Continued from Page 1

India will be withdrawing its own defence, navy and air advisors from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.

"These posts in the respective High Commissions are deemed annulled. Five support staff of the Service Advisors will also be withdrawn from both High Commissions," he said.

"The overall strength of the High Commissions will be brought down to 30 from the present 55 through further reductions, to be effected by May 1," he said. The CCS was briefed in detail on the terrorist attack on Tuesday in Pahalgam that left 25 Indians and one Nepali citizen dead. A number of others sustained injuries. The CCS condemned the attack in the strongest terms and expressed its deepest condolences to the families of the victims and hoped for the early recovery of the injured," Misri said.

"Strong expressions of support and solidarity have been received from many Governments around the world, which

have unequivocally condemned this terror attack," he said.

The foreign secretary said the CCS recorded its appreciation for such sentiments, which reflect zero tolerance for terrorism.

In the briefing to the CCS, the cross-border linkages of the terrorist attack were brought out, he said.

"It was noted that this attack came in the wake of the successful holding of elections in the Union Territory (Jammu and Kashmir) and its steady progress towards economic growth and development," he said.

Misri said the CCS reviewed the overall security situation and directed all forces to maintain high vigil.

"It resolved that the perpetrators of the attack will be brought to justice and their sponsors held to account," he said.

"As with the recent extradition of Tahawwur Rana, India will be unrelenting in the pursuit of those who have committed acts of terror, or conspired to make them possible," he said.

## YSRCP alleges govt scheme to misappropriate public land using shell companies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has condemned the coalition government's scheme to 'misappropriate public land worth billions using shell companies tied to Minister Nara Lokesh'.

YSRCP State joint secretary Karumuru Venkata Reddy, addressing the media, criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Lokesh for plundering State assets through fraudulent entities like Ursa Clusters.

Venkata Reddy revealed that Ursa, a dubious company registered two months ago in a

Government Order on April 21. Negotiations began under the YSRCP's YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, delayed by COVID-19. Venkatreddy questioned the giveaway of land worth thousands of crores, noting only 2,000 of TCS's 12,000 jobs may benefit locals, as the coalition opposed the YSRCP's 75 per cent local hiring policy.

Ursa's representatives, Pendurthi Vijaykumar, his son Kaushik, and Abburri Satish, lack the capacity for their

claimed Rs 5,000-crore investment. No GO for Ursa suggests secrecy, unlike TCS.

Refuting anti-industry claims, Venkatreddy cited the YSRCP's growth of IT startups from 161 to 425, and jobs from 27,643 to 75,551. The YSRCP demands an investigation, document disclosure, and action. "Chandrababu and Lokesh's scams will face fierce resistance," Venkatreddy vowed, urging public and media support to protect State assets.

## Girls surpass...

Continued from Page 1

The State's pass percentage has seen a fluctuating trend in recent years: 100 per cent in 2020 and 2021 due to pandemic-related mass promotions, dropping to 67.26 per cent in 2022 and steadily improving since.

Of the 11,819 schools that presented candidates this year, standout performances include Yalla Nehanjani from Bhashyam School, Kakinada, who scored a perfect 600/600, followed by Enda Anisha from Sri Chaitanya School, Elamanchili, with 599, and Pavani Chandrika from ZP High School, Oppicharla, Palnadu district, with 598.

Applications for recounting and re-verification can be submitted online from April 24 to May 1. Digitally signed migration certificates will be made available to headmasters within four days, with original SSC certificates to be dispatched shortly.

Continued from Page 1

However, the previous government's indecisiveness left the capital project in limbo, turning the area into a neglected zone. He stated that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, upon returning to power, immediately directed the revival of the capital works.

The government has approved tenders worth '64,000 crore, of which works worth '41,000 crore have already been tendered and begun. These works will now be formally relaunched by the Prime Minister, according to a decision taken by the Chief Minister.

Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to arrive at Gannavaram Airport at 3 PM on May 2. From there, he will proceed to Amaravati and participate in a 1.1-kilometre-long roadshow before reaching

## Preparations in full...

The event will be held from 4 PM to 5 PM.

"An estimated five lakh people are expected to attend the gathering. Accordingly, elaborate arrangements are being made," said Minister Narayana. Eleven designated parking zones have been identified for the incoming vehicles. Eight roads have been identified to facilitate smooth access to the public meeting venue. These include two roads from Mangalagiri, one from

Tadepalli, one from the West Bypass, two from Prakasam Barrage, and one each from Tadikonda and Harishchandrapuram.

Traffic management measures are being put in place to prevent congestion.

The Police Department has inspected the roads and instructed that all potholes be filled. Narayana has directed CRDA officials to complete all necessary roadworks within the next two days based on police recommendations.

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

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

Dwadashi: Apr 24 02:32 PM to Apr 25 11:45 AM

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

Purva Bhadrapada: Apr 24 10:49 AM to Apr 25 08:53 AM

Rahukalam: 1:48 PM to 3:22 PM

Yamagandam: 5:57 AM to 7:32 AM

Variyam: 04:42 PM to 06:10 PM

Gulika: 9:06 AM to 10:40 AM

Amritakalam: 01:32 AM to 03:00 AM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:50 AM to 12:40 PM

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

Forecast: Mostly Sunny

Temp: 40°

Humidity: 63%

Sunrise: 5:46 AM

Sunset: 6:25 PM

Updated: Apr 23, 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.apereprocurement.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: 11812CLN/DT/11921-22, Dt. 22.04.2025

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## Major crackdown on illicit liquor trade along Andhra–Odisha border

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM

In a concerted inter-State operation, the Excise Departments of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, supported by local police forces, launched a series of targeted raids across forested zones along the Andhra–Odisha border, effectively crippling illegal liquor brewing activities.

Under the supervision of Rahul Dev Sharma, Director of Enforcement, and Nishanth Kumar, Commissioner of Excise, the crackdown focused on remote locations in Sandubadi, Tumbalibhai, and Panusatra. Drone surveillance played a pivotal role in identifying brewing clusters

7,700 litres of jaggery wash destroyed, 360 litres of illicit liquor seized following inter-State operation



deep within the forest, enabling precise strikes. The operation resulted in the destruction of 7,700 litres

of fermented jaggery wash and the seizure of 360 litres of illicit liquor. Authorities also recovered 3,000 kg of

Mohwa flowers, 2,400 kg of black jaggery, and 3,900 kg of ammonia—a hazardous, prohibited substance used in the

distillation process. Extensive infrastructure used for distillation, including plastic drums, furnaces,

buckets, and firewood, was dismantled on-site, dealing a severe blow to the illegal units' functioning. Two indi-

viduals were arrested and two cases registered, while several others have been detained for further inquiry.

The coordinated effort involved 26 Excise officials from Andhra Pradesh, 12 from Odisha, a six-member police contingent, and a dedicated drone surveillance team.

Authorities lauded the operation as a strong example of inter-State cooperation and pledged ongoing action to eradicate the illicit liquor trade.

Further raids are expected as enforcement agencies maintain momentum in curbing the illegal production and distribution of country-made liquor across the border region.

## SSC results: MJP BC Welfare Schools shine

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (MJP) BC Welfare Schools have once again proven their academic excellence, this time in the SSC (Class 10) results. The students from these schools achieved a remarkable 95 per cent pass rate, outperforming the overall State average of 81.14 per cent.

In a release on Wednesday, BC Welfare Minister S Savitha expressed her happiness over the outstanding results of MJP BC students. She noted that their performance was significantly higher than the State average and like the impressive results seen in the recently released Intermediate exams.

Education Minister Nara Lokesh released the SSC results, revealing that 6,14,459 students from 11,819 schools across Andhra Pradesh appeared for the exams conducted in March. Among them were 5,788 students from 102 MJP BC Welfare Schools, 95 per cent of whom successfully passed.

29 schools record 100 pc results



Of the 102 MJP schools, 29 schools achieved a perfect 100 per cent pass. Notably, not a single MJP school recorded zero pass percentage, highlighting the consistent performance across the network. In the Intermediate results as well, MJP institutions outperformed State averages.

When compared with other government educational institutions, MJP BC schools stood at par with the best. Andhra Pradesh Residential Schools

also reported a 95 per cent pass rate, while others lagged, AP model schools (84 per cent), social welfare schools (89.5 per cent), tribal welfare (67.6 per cent), KGBVs (83 per cent), zilla parishad high schools (71.9 per cent), aided schools (73.3 per cent), municipal schools (69.3 per cent) and government schools (62.7 per cent).

Minister Savitha attributed this success to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's focus on BC welfare and education. She stressed that MJP BC schools are now competing with corporate institutions in performance. She also praised the efforts of teachers, non-teaching staff and the administration for their dedication. "This outstanding achievement is undoubtedly the result of CM Chandrababu Naidu's vision and commitment to BC students' education," said the Minister.

## Electoral reforms essential to save democracy: Dr PV Ramesh

Elections in India being undermined by caste, religion, regionalism, money power, and alcohol inducements

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr PV Ramesh, former Special Chief Secretary to the State government, has strongly advocated for comprehensive electoral reforms to protect and strengthen Indian democracy, which he warned is gradually deteriorating due to systemic flaws and increasing misuse of power.

Speaking as the chief guest at a media interaction programme on electoral reforms, organised by Jana Chaitanya Vedika at the Vijayawada Press Club, Dr Ramesh highlighted that while 151 of the world's 200 nations are democracies, nearly 75 per cent of people in those nations are unable to effectively participate in democratic processes. Dr Ramesh pointed out that elections in India are being undermined by caste, religion, regionalism, money power, and alcohol inducements. He criticised political parties for making irre-



sponsible promises of freebies in election manifestos—offers made without regard for State finances or long-term sustainability.

He lamented that party tickets are increasingly being given to wealthy individuals or those with influence through caste, muscle power, or criminal backgrounds, turning electoral democracy into a farce and excluding capable, common citizens from entering public life. Meanwhile, Dr Ramesh called for a proportional representation

system to replace the current first-past-the-post model, arguing that governments being formed with as little as 33 per cent of the vote share weakens democratic legitimacy.

He also raised alarm over recent moves to exclude the Chief Justice of India from the process of selecting Election Commissioners, replacing him with the Union Home Minister. This, he argued, compromises the independence of the Election Commission of India and makes it vulnerable to

political bias. To ensure free and fair elections, Dr. Ramesh proposed that President's rule be imposed three months before elections, ensuring that the ruling party does not misuse government machinery during the campaign. "In the current scenario, the line between the government and the ruling party is dangerously blurred," he remarked.

Emphasising the need for greater people's participation in politics, Dr Ramesh urged political parties to practice internal democracy, encourage grassroots involvement, and promote transparency and accountability in both governance and electoral practices.

Jana Chaitanya Vedika State president Vallamreddy Lakshman Reddy coordinated the event and echoed the need for urgent reforms to restore faith in India's democratic processes.

## POCSO Court sentences man to 10-year RI in abuse case

Samala Naveen, hailing from Kannapudora Valasa, was found guilty in 2021 case

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

The Special POCSO Court in Vizianagaram, on Wednesday, sentenced a 26-year-old man to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 2,000 in connection with a child sexual abuse case reported in 2021. The accused, Samala Naveen, son of the late Chinna Rao, hailing from Kannapudora Valasa village in Jiyamavallasa mandal, was found guilty under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

According to the police, the case originated from a complaint lodged at the Chinamerangi Police Station on March 25, 2021. The complainant alleged that her minor daughter had been abducted by the accused in the early hours of March 21 and was taken to Visakhapatnam, where she was illegally confined and sexually assaulted over a period of three days.

Delivering the verdict, Special POCSO Judge K. Nagamani observed that the prosecution had successfully established the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt. District SP S.V. Madhav Reddy commended the police officers involved for their swift action in securing the conviction.

## Experts urge responsible use of AI in media

38th National PR Day celebrations held



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Amaravati Chapter of Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) celebrated the 38th National Public Relations Day in Vijayawada on Wednesday. Themed "Responsible Use of AI: Role of Public Relations", the event brought together prominent figures from government, academia and media to explore how AI and other advanced technologies can be harnessed responsibly for the greater good.

Addressing the gathering, Information and Public Relations Minister Kolu

Parthasarathy praised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's foresight in leveraging technology, citing the WhatsApp governance model as a benchmark. He described Naidu as a visionary leader whose policies have shaped the State's technological growth. The Minister also warned of the dangers of overreliance on technology and urged the media to use AI for constructive purposes rather than manipulation or blackmail, referencing recent misuse in neighbouring States.

Dr G Anita, Chairperson, PRSI Amaravati Chapter,

stressed that while AI offers immense potential, it also adds new layers of complexity to communication systems already impacted by social media. She stressed the need for ethical and responsible use of AI across all sectors, especially public relations.

Nusrat Mandrupurkar highlighted real-world examples of AI being used to enhance communication and public service delivery in Indian Railways. She cautioned against the misuse of technology, warning that irresponsible application can harm individuals and society.

Prof DVR Murthy voiced concerns over the erosion of journalistic values in the transition from traditional print to digital and AI-driven media. He called upon media professionals to self-regulate and uphold ethical standards to avoid the negative consequences of technological misuse. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Olive Yaramal, Treasurer PRSI Amaravati Chapter.

The conference was attended by communication professionals, students and faculty members, highlighting growing interest in ethical AI integration in media.

## Governor urged to attend AU centenary celebrations

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Forum for Development of North Andhra (FDNA) general secretary Aja Sarma has appealed to Andhra Pradesh Governor S. Abdul Nazeer to grace the centenary celebrations of Andhra University, set to commence on April 26. In a letter addressed to the Governor on Wednesday, Sarma emphasised the symbolic importance of the Governor's presence at the event, particularly in his capacity as Chancellor of the university. He later released a copy of the letter to the media.

Expressing concern over reports circulating in certain media and social media platforms suggesting that several key dignitaries, including the Governor, may not attend the centenary events, Sarma said such speculation could undermine the spirit of the milestone occasion.

"The Governor's participation would not only uphold the time-honoured traditions of this historic institution but also reinforce public confidence in the dignity of the constitutional office," Sarma stated.

## Pre-operative planning key in liver transplantation: Experts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Manipal Hospital, Vijayawada, and the South Asian Liver Institute Partnership is setting new benchmarks in comprehensive transplant and advanced liver care services. Manipal Hospital, in collaboration with the South Asian Liver Institute, plans to spotlight their

services in liver transplant, recovery and care excellence. The event emphasised the critical importance of meticulous pre-operative planning, donor selection protocols, and the implementation of Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS), a perioperative care pathway that significantly improves transplant outcomes.

## Sisodia takes charge as Special CS for Handlooms & Textiles

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Senior IAS officer RP Sisodia officially assumed charge as the Special Chief Secretary for Handlooms and Textiles under the Industries and Commerce Department at the State Secretariat on Wednesday. Known for his administrative acumen and visionary approach, Sisodia is expected to steer the department towards holistic growth, with a focus on empowering weavers, promoting indigenous textiles and enhancing global market access. Prior to taking charge, Sisodia performed a traditional puja. On the occasion, Handlooms and Textiles



Commissioner Rekha Rani briefed him on key departmental matters, ongoing schemes and future strategies. The discussions highlighted major initiatives to strengthen the handloom sector, modernise infrastructure and improve the livelihoods of artisans. The event was attended by VR Vijayaraghava Naik, Chief

Executive Officer, Andhra Pradesh Khadi and Village Industries Board; Murali Krishna and Srikanth Prabhakar, Handlooms and Textile Department Additional Directors; Kanna Babu and Raja Rao, Joint Directors; Nageswara Rao, APSCO General Manager, and others.

## ECE Dept hosts Open House Day 2025 at SRM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering (ECE) at SRM University-AP has hosted the inaugural edition of its flagship event, "ECE Open House Day 2025: From Microchips to Megatrends." The event brought together industry leaders, academicians, students and enthusiasts to celebrate innovation and technical excellence.

With over 150 student projects on display from Capstone, UROP and M Tech tracks, the event offered a glimpse into cutting-edge research and development in domains such as VLSI, Embedded Systems & IoT, Biomedical Signal Processing, RF & Antenna



Design, and Communication Engineering. These projects were developed under the guidance of ECE faculty, with a focus on innovation, problem-solving, and sustainability.

Eminent industry experts including Dr. Rajkumar Elagiri Ramalingam (Mphasis), Dr.

Kamal Das (IBM Research India), Bhavani Shankar (Efronics), and Dr B Surya Prasada Rao (IETE Vijayawada) were present, alongside university dignitaries such as Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Ch Satish Kumar, Registrar Dr R Premkumar, Dean-SEAS Prof

CV Tomy and Head of the ECE Department Dr KA Sunitha.

Students from local schools and colleges also participated, gaining exposure and inspiration from the innovative ecosystem.

Twelve standout projects were recognised by the panel

of judges for their exceptional technological contributions. The Open House served as a platform not only to showcase student learning but also to reinforce SRM AP's commitment to fostering a culture of research, creativity, and practical problem-solving in engineering education.

## CPM slams demolition of houses in Undi

Seeks action against MLA Raghuramakrishnam Raju

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Communist Party of India (Marxist) State secretary V Srinivasa Rao has strongly condemned the demolition of houses belonging to the poor in the Undi Assembly constituency of West Godavari district. He alleged that the evictions were orchestrated at the behest of local MLA and Deputy Speaker R Raghuramakrishnam Raju.

Addressing a press conference at Balotsav Bhavan in Vijayawada on Wednesday, along with party State secretary member B Balaram and State committee member Dadala Subbarao, Srinivasa Rao accused the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of betray-



ing the poor after promising housing during elections.

He revealed that over 800 families had already been displaced and demolition notices had been served to 600 more homes, invoking a colonial-era law from 1905. "It is unacceptable that a government which is revising laws in all sectors is using outdated British-era legislation to destroy the homes of the poor," Rao said.

He particularly highlighted the demolition of a colony in Palakoderu named after freedom fighter Alluri Sitarama Raju, calling it a symbolic "murder" of Alluri's legacy. He also accused local landlords of illegally cultivating 15 acres of land behind the demolished homes, while authorities remained inactive. He demanded that these lands be seized and distributed to the poor.

Rao also raised concerns about environmental hypocrisy. "They call the houses of the poor polluting, but ignore the pollution caused by nearby shrimp industries," he said. He added that coconut trees on canal banks, which the poor tended, were now being exploited by landlords.



# 'Houses will be provided to all eligible tribal families'

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendra Manohar has assured of providing a house to every eligible tribal family.

Nadendra Manohar, who is also district in-charge Minister, visited Puliramudigudem of Buttayagudem mandal on Wednesday.

The Minister, accompanied by the officials, inspected the houses construction works under the PM Janmajathi Adivasi Nyaya Maha Adyay (PM JANMAN) Central Scheme in Puli Ramudu Gudem, Buttaigudem Mandal. The Minister interacted with one of the beneficiaries B Madhavi and inquired about the construction works of her house.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Nadendra Manohar said that under the PM (Janmaha) scheme, the central government is constructing houses for the poor tribals in 340 yards at a cost of Rs 3.39 lakh.

The Minister revealed that 410 houses have been sanctioned for Buttaigudem mandal and instructed the officials to complete them by the end of June. The minister assured that every eligible tribal will be granted their own house.



On the occasion, the Minister inquired about the problems of the people of the village. The villagers apprised the Minister that there were problems like drinking water, roads, drainages, etc., and the Minister instructed the ITDA Project Officer to take steps to resolve the problems soon.

The minister was accompanied by MLAs Chirri Balaraju, Patsamatla Dharmaraju, Tricar Chairman Boragam Srinivas, ITDA Project Officer Ramulu Nayak and former

MLA Ghanta Murali Ramakrishna.

Later, Minister Nadendra Manohar inaugurated the tribal bamboo handicraft training centre at Puliramudigudem village. He interacted with differently-abled person Marayya by squatting on the floor. The Minister was explained by the officials about the training programmes of the centre.

Speaking on the occasion Nadendra Manohar said that training in bamboo handicrafts

would be imparted for three months. The ITDA would provide the required equipment during the training.

Training would be imparted to four batches during the years and each batch comprising about 200 tribal youths. After the training the tribal youths would be extended bank loans up to Rs 3 lakh to open their own unit, he added.

Marayya appealed to the Minister to provide them with a market facility for their handicraft bamboo articles.

# Vegetable market, municipal office to be developed at cost of Rs 100 crore: Kollu

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Excise and Mines Kollu Ravindra has said that the old vegetable market, municipal office and baby centre would be developed at a cost of Rs 100 crore under the PPP mode.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, plans were formulated, prepared and sent to the government for approval for the development of an old vegetable market, municipal office and baby centre by spending Rs 100 crore.

He highlighted the government's commitment to develop Machilipatnam town and beautify it. He reiterated that the stage has set ready to develop Machilipatnam town in a big way and as part of it tenders were invited for desilting works in the town.

Proposals were sent to the Government for approvals to take up the works at a cost of Rs 171 crore. As soon as approvals are received the works would be given, he noted. In addition to that work, other development works would also be carried out at a cost of Rs 13 crore in the town.

"Priority is being given for the development of crematoriums and burial grounds. The modernization of crematoriums will be taken up at a cost of Rs 1.50 crore for which the



DPR has already been prepared. We appeal to the donors to come forward to contribute their mite. The Green organization has come forward to develop the Chilakalapudi crematorium. A committee will be formed to monitor the development works," Minister Kollu Ravindra acknowledged.

Minister Kollu Ravindra revealed that as part of tourism development, they are planning to arrange temporary tents on Manginapudi beach, near here, after the monsoon season.

"A proposal of Rs 120 crore under Swadeshi Darshan will be sent to the Center through the Chief Minister. I will go to Delhi next week and meet Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and invite him to the Manginapudi Beach Festival. I call upon the people to become partners in the development of Machilipatnam. If tourism is developed that will generate employment in the district," he asserted.

He also promised to establish a park by clearing the

dumping yard located near here by October 2. The Minister reiterated the Government's commitment to implement welfare schemes and stated that Rs 33,000 crore worth social security pensions are disbursed to the eligible people, free gas cylinder scheme is implemented providing gas cylinders at free of cost to over 1 crore beneficiaries. The Naidu headed government has issued notification for the DSC to fill over 16,000 teachers posts.

# Issue job card to every eligible family, officials told

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari district Collector P Prasanthi directed the officials concerned to take steps to issue job cards to every eligible family to achieve 90 workdays in the district.

The Collector held a teleconference with DWMA PD M Nagamalleswara Rao on the implementation of the NREGA and with In-charge Housing PDS Bhaskar Reddy on housing construction works.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Prasanthi said that 1,68,140 job card holders have been registered under the employment guarantee scheme and 1,22,931 people have been provided work days so far in the EG district, adding that due to seasonal work in agriculture-related sectors, work days will be provided to the remaining families in the coming days.

"The employment guarantee workdays should be provided under the auspices of the respec-



ive MPDOs, following the suggestions of local public representatives and local priorities," she ordered the officials.

"An action plan has been prepared to provide 58,000 workdays every day under the NREGA and as part of that, 38,171 targets have been achieved so far. On average, 33,725 general workdays, 2,068 personal workdays, and 2,378 housing workdays are being provided in the district every day," she revealed.

The Collector clarified that an insurance scheme should be

implemented for every job-secured worker to provide family security. "The Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, a renewable life insurance scheme with a term of one year, will provide a life insurance of Rs 2 lakh in case of death due to any reason by paying an annual premium of Rs.436 under the PM Jeevan Jyoti Scheme," she explained.

The Collected asserted that 22.38 lakh workdays have been provided to 27,483 families for house construction work and a financial estimate of Rs 59.73 crore has been made. Out of these, 20.33 lakh workdays and Rs 55.21 crore worth workdays are being provided in connection with NREGA.

"Out of the target of 10,794 houses in the district, 5160 houses have been completed so far. The EG district has stood at the sixth position in the state. Out of 1232 houses in stage conversion, 476 (39%) have stood at the fourth position in the state.

# Take steps to curb maternal mortality: DC

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Chadalavada Nagarani directed the health officials to take steps to ensure that there would be no maternal mortalities in the district and expressed concern over some cases of maternal mortality which took place in the district.

The Collector held a meeting with the medical and health officials here on Wednesday and reviewed the maternal mortality and providing nutritious food to the pregnant women and children.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani said that the government is spending crores of rupees on maternal and child health, providing nutritious food from the time the woman conceives and until the child reaches the age of five.

The government is also providing expensive medicines to the sick free of cost, she noted. The onus lies on the doctors and medical staff to provide the best medical treatments to the mother and child.



"During the 2024-25, there are 8 maternal mortality cases registered in the district while 88 deaths of children have been registered," the Collector regretted, and she reviewed the five maternal mortality cases and two deaths of children which took place during the fourth quarters of 2024-25.

The Collector instructed the private nursing homes to be more careful while providing medical treatments to the pregnant women and attending delivery cases. The Collector reviewed the deaths of Achanta Sujata (28), S S Daisy (27), Suvarna Marry, Narripudi Rajeswari (26) and Somishetti

Padma Venkatalakshmi (32). She directed the DMHO to serve show-cause notice to the private nursing home on the death of Achanta Sujata.

DMHO Dr. Geetabai, DCHS Dr.M Suryanarayana, DAP Dr.Deva Sudhalakshmi were among those who attended the meeting.

# MP Putta Mahesh condemns Pahalgam killings

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and expressed deep sorrow over the death of many people.

In a statement released on Wednesday, he strongly condemned the act, calling it a heinous crime where terrorists deliberately targeted innocent civilians.

He stated that such attacks disturb the peaceful atmosphere in the Kashmir region and assured that the NDA government at the Centre will not tolerate such extremist actions. The MP also mentioned that the Central Government has already taken the incident seriously and initiated appropriate measures. Describing the Pahalgam incident as unfortunate, MP Mahesh Kumar conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased. He prayed for peace to the souls of those who lost their lives in the attack.

# Minister assures of extending help to differently-abled students

PNS ■ NIDADAVOLE

Tourism and Cinematography Minister Kandula Durgesh has revealed that after the coalition government came to power, it is paying special attention to students with special needs and providing them with appropriate encouragement.

Minister Kandula Durgesh here on Wednesday distributed wheelchairs, hearing aids and other equipment made to facilitate 20 students with special needs such as physical, mental disabilities, visual impairment, and instrumental hearing impairment at Samisragudem Zilla Parishad High School in under the School Education Department - Samagra Shiksha.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister noted that the School Education Department, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, and Human Resources Department Nara Lokesh are

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paying special attention to students with special needs. He maintained that the government is not just providing tools but also thinking about shaping the future of the students, and clarified that the government is committed to providing equal opportunities to all types of people with different talents.

The Minister appreciated that students with special needs are excelling in all fields on an equal footing with general students.

Durgesh exhorted the differently-abled to achieve their chosen goals without losing courage. He highlighted that after the coalition government came to power, the pension for the disabled people was increased to Rs 6000 on a war footing.

He asserted that they are providing support to the bedridden chronically ill by providing a pension of Rs 15000.

Minister Durgesh highlighted the government's commitment of providing them with support and providing employment after completing their education. He said that some disabled people in Nidadavole constituency had met him through Jana Sena leader Ranga Ramesh and assured that their ideas would definitely be implemented.

He called up on the differently-abled people to avail the benefits being provided by the Government. Municipal Chairman B Adinarayana ZPTC members and AP high school teachers were present.

# Min congratulates 10<sup>th</sup> students for obtaining highest marks

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY



Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh congratulated the 10th class students securing highest marks in the mandal.

The Minister appreciated Kattula Kusuma, who scored 560 marks and Kalavakunda Surya Teja, who scored 558 marks.

Both students studied at ZP high school at Satyavada and they achieved second and third ranks respectively in Undrajavaram mandal.

The Minister congratulated them to excel in education and reach heights. He also appreciated the parents of the students.

# SP assures to resolve even minor problems of people



PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru district Superintendent of police K Pratap Siva Kishore conducted a village visit program on Wednesday at Palaparru village of Mandavalli Mandal and he asked people to approach the police to get their minor problems also.

On the occasion, a face-to-face meeting was organized with the villagers and he inquired about their problems. Speaking on the occasion, the SP explained about the measures being taken by the

police to maintain law and order. The SP assured that the police personnel are always ready to protect the life, property, and honor of the people.

He suggested that the villagers should consult the police even for their minor problems and get them resolved. He opined that it would be beneficial, if small problems are resolved early before they escalate. The SP stated that all the people in the villages should continue their livelihoods with mutual cooperation, and the police personnel will provide complete assurance.

SP Pratap Siva Kishore warned that the police have set up special surveillance to eradicate anti-social activities and strict action will be taken against those who indulge in such activities.

The SP educated the people about the negative consequences of social media. He appealed to everyone to compulsorily follow traffic rules to prevent road accidents. K Pratap Siva Kishore assured the villagers that the police personnel will provide complete assurance.

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MLC Kavitha on Wednesday addressed a media conference at the BRS office in Peddapalli, declaring that the BRS silver jubilee celebrations would be an emotional moment for every Telangana citizen who believes in the movement's legacy.

Highlighting Peddapalli's role in the Telangana struggle, especially the Singareni workers' strike that shook Delhi, Kavitha

# Warangal Sabha will be TG's Kumbh Mela: Kavitha

Says it is an emotional moment for the people of TG

said, "This land has always stood at the forefront. Even during the agitation, when Singareni workers struck work, the tremors were felt in Delhi." She called BRS the only party that has stood strong for twenty-five years and said the party is intertwined with the identity of every Telangana citizen.

"Those who once mocked us found shelter under the pink flag. Telangana stood number one in the country during our ten-year rule," she asserted, adding that the BRS flag is etched into the state's modern history. She appealed to people from every village in

Peddapalli to attend the Warangal Sabha, calling it a once-in-a-generation event — a Telangana Kumbh Mela that would remain etched in the state's political memory.

Slamming the Congress government, Kavitha said, "They robbed Rythu Bandhu, made farmers feel helpless, and now are

pushing them to fear even sowing seeds. When untimely rains hit during our rule, we visited the fields and compensated farmers. Why is Sridhar Babu silent now?"

She questioned the cancellation of Group-1 exams and accused the Congress government of bringing in non-locals again despite the Telangana

movement being rooted in local identity. "KCR brought GO 55 to protect youth. This government brought GO 29 to snatch away their futures," she said, hitting out at what she called 'reverse governance'.

Kavitha warned that Congress is once again working to privatise Singareni. "Deputy CM

Bhatti is selling it piece by piece. Half the profits are being given away, and workers are being betrayed," she alleged, claiming that even with 8+8 MPs, the state hasn't received a single rupee.

She also took aim at Revanth Reddy, saying, "Till date, the Chief Minister hasn't even said 'Jai Telangana'. Gurukul schools are being destroyed, and the state is being driven backwards."

Korukanti Chander, also

speaking at the meeting, said that discussions about the upcoming Warangal public meeting are happening in every village and that Kavitha has become a symbol of Telangana's culture on the global stage. He accused Congress of winning power through false propaganda and said, "They couldn't repair a pillar, but they dried out an entire irrigation project."

Both leaders appealed for a massive turnout at the BRS silver jubilee meeting on April 27 to showcase the party's strength and spirit.



ACROSS THE STATES



Five held for running firearms racket in Odisha

Police have arrested five members of a gang from Odisha's Ganjam district for illegal possession of firearms and involvement in the supply of country-made guns. The arrested have been identified as D. Muna Rao (24), Tofan Bhuyan alias Santosh (28), Chinu Patra (24), Surya Pradhan (24), and Sanu Naik alias Chila (38). According to police, the arrests were made in Bhanjanagar on Tuesday and Wednesday. Inspector-in-charge of Bhanjanagar police station, Jeebananand Jena, said Rao, Tofan and Patra were apprehended during a raid conducted on Tuesday. Surya Pradhan reportedly fled the scene but was later taken into custody. Naik was arrested for allegedly acting as a middleman in the illegal supply of firearms to anti-social elements, including members of the arrested gang. Preliminary investigation has revealed that Sanu was involved in at least eight cases in different police stations in Nayagarh district and a case in Jharkhand, Jena said.



DoNER minister reviews Mizoram's action plan

Union Minister Jyotiraditya M Scindia on Wednesday virtually reviewed Mizoram's action plan with Chief Minister Lalduhoma to assess the progress of development initiatives undertaken by the government, official sources said. During the discussion held via video conference, the two leaders talked about key issues raised in previous review meetings, along with action taken reports, they said. The Development of North Eastern Region minister highlighted ongoing projects in Mizoram under various schemes such as North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) (Road), NESIDS-OTRI (Other than roads infrastructure), PM-DevINE, and North Eastern Council (NEC) and pointed out new projects that would be prioritised based on the discussion, it said. State planning secretary Lalmsawsma Pachuau delivered a presentation on the Mizoram Vision 2047 statement during the meeting.



Par panel on Home calls off tour of J-K

A key parliamentary panel has called off its scheduled tour of Jammu and Kashmir from April 25 following the terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam in order to avoid diverting the focus of the security agencies, which are currently fully engaged in handling the situation. The Standing Committee on Home Affairs headed by BJP MP Radha Mohan Das Agrawal was to go on a study tour of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, both Union territories, from April 25 to May 1, official sources said. However, Agrawal conveyed to the members of the panel the decision to defer the tour after the terror attack in which at least 26 persons were shot dead by terrorists. The sources said the decision was necessitated as the MPs, who are part of the committee, would have required heightened security and their engagements included interaction with senior security officials, including the DGP, and other top bureaucrats. At a time when they are fully involved in dealing with the aftermath of the terror attack, going after terrorists and reviewing other measures, it would not have been prudent to tax them with our requirements, a source said.

Bharat will not bend to terror

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday asserted that the country will not bend to terror and that those responsible for the killing of tourists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir will not be spared.

After laying wreaths on the bodies of those killed in the terror attack, he said on X, "With a heavy heart, paid last respects to the deceased of the Pahalgam terror attack."

"Bharat will not bend to terror. The culprits of this dastardly terror attack will not be spared," he said.

Shah laid wreaths on the coffins of the victims of the terror attack at the Police Control Room here.

The Home Minister later interacted with families of the slain persons and other survivors of the attack.

He assured them the security forces would leave no stone unturned to bring the perpetrators of the deadly attack to the book, officials said.

Shah also visited Baisaran meadows, the scene of gruesome killing of 26 tourists in

HOME MINISTER SHAH ON PAHALGAM ATTACK



Pahalgam. Later, in another post, the home minister said every Indian feels the pain of those who lost their loved ones in the terrorist attack and that words cannot express this sadness.

"I assure all these families and the whole country that

these terrorists killing innocent people will not be spared," he said. Shah arrived here within hours of the attack on Wednesday night and was briefed about the situation by Director General of Police Nalin Prabhat.

The Home Minister also

chaired a security review meeting, which was also attended by the Lieutenant Governor.

Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others.

Will hunt down those who plotted it: Rajnath Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

People responsible for the "cowardly terrorist attack" on innocent citizens in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam will soon get a "strong response" to their nefarious acts on Indian soil, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday, in the first clear indication of India's possible response to the massacre.

Singh while vowing a befitting reply also said India will not only hunt down the people who perpetrated the attack but will also trace those "sitting behind the scenes" who had conspired to carry out the deadly act on the Indian soil.

The defence minister's remarks while delivering the annual Arjan Singh Memorial lecture came a day after 26 civilians, mostly tourists, were killed by terrorists in Pahalgam in an attack that triggered wide-spread outrage within India and abroad.

Hours before the address, Singh reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir in a nearly two-and-a-half-hour meeting that was attended by NSA Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh and Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. "Yesterday, in Pahalgam, our country lost many innocent citizens in a cowardly attack by terrorists targeting religion. This extremely inhuman act has plunged all of us into deep grief and pain," the defence minister said. "From this platform, I assure the countrymen that in view of the incident, the government of India will take every step that is necessary and appropriate. "And we will not only trace those who perpetrated this incident. We will also reach out to those who, sitting behind the scenes, have conspired to carry out the nefari-

ous act on the soil of India," Singh said.

The defence minister said "India is such an old civilization and such a big country that it cannot be intimidated by any such terrorist activities." "The people responsible for such acts will get a strong response in the near future," he asserted. In the context of cross-border terrorist incidents, Singh said: "History is witness to the withering away of nations not due to the action of the adversary, but due to the result of their own misdeeds. I hope people across the border look at lessons of history more closely".

Singh described the attack in Pahalgam as "extremely inhuman" that has "left all of us in deep grief and pain".

"First of all, I express my deepest condolences to all the families who have lost their loved ones. In this sad time, I pray to God for the peace of the departed souls."

Non-bailable warrant against Medha for flouting order

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Wednesday issued a non-bailable warrant against Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar and said she "deliberately" flouted its order to submit probation bonds and deposit Rs 1 lakh fine in a defamation case of Delhi LG V K Saxena.

Observing her plea for adjournment was "frivolous and mischievous" and filed with the intent to "hood-wink" it, the court cautioned Patkar against her action saying it could make it "reconsider the benevolent sentence". Additional sessions judge Vishal Singh said, "Instead of appearing before the court to comply with the order on sentence dated April 8, the convict (Patkar) is absent and has deliberately failed to comply with the order on sentence and to avail of the benefit of probation subject to furnishing of the compensation amount."

The court went on, "The intention of the convict is apparent that she is deliberately violating the court order; she is avoiding appearing before the court and also avoiding accepting the terms of the sentence passed against her. There is no order of suspension of sentence passed by this court on April 8."



'Pahalgam terror attack is direct assault on Indian state'

The country is one in fighting; Kharge

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday termed the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people were killed as a direct assault on the Indian state, and said that at this moment the entire nation is one with the government to fight the terrorists.

He urged the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorists, and also suggested that an all-party meeting be called to address the challenge of terrorism in a spirit of consensus.

"Very unfortunate incident happened in Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir and the terrorists dastardly killed innocent and unsuspecting tourists yesterday around 2:30 pm. This has deeply hurt, shocked and saddened us all. The Congress party unequivocally condemns this cowardly act of terror and those respon-

sible for it in the strongest possible terms," Kharge said.

Addressing a press conference here, he said, this attack is a direct assault on the unity and integrity of our nation.

"Since the horrific Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000 this is among the most brazen and outrageous attempts by terrorists and separatists. We firmly reiterate that those who murdered unarmed and innocent civilians cannot be human," he said.

Noting that late last evening he spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was in Kashmir and to J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Congress leaders there, and gathered information, the AICC chief said, "Shah told me that they are going to take action drastically in that area."

The Congress Working Committee will meet at 11 am on April 24 at AICC office in New Delhi to discuss the terror attack, he said.

'Choose between post and freedom'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday told DMK leader V Senthil Balaji to make a choice "between post and freedom" as it warned him of cancelling bail if he did not step down as minister in Tamil Nadu.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih took exception to the fact that Balaji was reinstated as a Tamil Nadu cabinet minister days after getting bail in a money laundering case related to the "cash-for-job" scam.

"There is grave apprehension that you will interfere and will influence witnesses. You have to make a choice between the post (minister) and freedom. What choice you want to make, you tell us," it said.

High alert sounded in Bihar ahead of PM Modi's visit

PNS ■ PATNA

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Bihar on Thursday, a high alert was sounded across Bihar following the terror attack in Kashmir, a top police officer said here.

All district police and several other wings of the Bihar Police have been directed to maintain an "extraordinary" vigil by intensifying patrolling and search operations, Director General of Police (DGP), Vinay Kumar, said.



'Aero-engine development priority area of government'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said aero-engine development is a "priority area" of the government in view of the IAF's needs and the effort is to make this engine indigenously on a "co-development and co-production" model with full intellectual property rights.

Addressing an event at the Air Force auditorium in Subroto Park here, he said "shifting geo-strategic equations" have a direct interest in India's national security as was never before.

What kind of challenges these geo-strategic uncertainties pose for national security and how "we are prepared to handle them" is of paramount importance for India, Singh said. His remarks came on the occasion of a lecture hosted by the Air Force Association in memory of the Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh, whose birth anniversary was on April 15. "He was a visionary military leader who, even today, inspires the youth. If the IAF is one of the world's strongest air forces today, it is because of the vision and ethos of military leaders like Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh," Singh said.

"There are very few people who are part of history and also create history. Arjan Singh was

one of them. We all are aware of his role in the 1965 war against Pakistan. It was an example of his visionary leadership that the Indian Air Force started a counter-attack within just an hour," the minister said. In the address, he also spoke of "atmanirbharta" (self-sufficiency) in the defence sector and in the IAF.

Singh termed aero-engine development a "priority area" for the government, in view of the needs of the IAF. "The effort is to make this engine in India only on the model of co-development and co-production with full intellectual property rights," he said. The defence minister said the 21st century is seen as the century of Asia.

"The cross-Atlantic power equations of the 20th century have now shifted towards Asia and have come closer to us. Today, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the most important region in the world strategically. The change that we have witnessed has a direct relation with our national security," Singh said.

If one looks at the conflicts in different parts of the world, one will find one common thread; driven by technology, warfare methods are changing much faster with "more unpredictability and lethality" seen in combat, he added.



The top court referred to a previous judgment which recorded that he forced people to withdraw complaints against him. Grant of bail did not mean power to influence witnesses, it noted.

"When you were a minister, categorical findings have been

recorded against you in the manner in which you brought about settlement and the proceedings are quashed. Grant of bail does not mean power to influence witnesses. In the past, you have influenced witnesses," the bench said



US VP Vance visits Taj Mahal with family

Cancels proposed trip to City Palace in Jaipur

PNS ■ AGRA/JAIPUR

US Vice-President J D Vance on Wednesday visited the Taj Mahal along with his wife Usha Vance and their three children, officials said.

"The Taj Mahal is amazing. A testament to true love, human ingenuity and a tribute to the great country of India," Vance wrote in the visitor's diary after his visit.

The Vance family landed at the Agra airport from Jaipur on Wednesday, where he was welcomed by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, officials said.

"A warm welcome to hon'ble US Vice President Mr JD Vance and his family to Uttar Pradesh, the sacred heartland of India, renowned for its timeless devotion, vibrant culture and spiritual legacy," Adityanath posted on X. Vance was accompanied by his wife Usha, and their three children -- sons Ewan Vance and Vivek, and daughter Mirabel. The family is on a four-day visit to India.

Following the visit, Vance returned to Jaipur and headed to the Rambhadr Palace hotel after cancelling his proposed visit to the City Palace.

The Vance family was scheduled to visit the City Palace for two hours on their return from Agra. They are scheduled to return to the US on Thursday morning.

Study: 80% length of rivers poses risks from antibiotic pollution

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Eighty per cent of total length of India's rivers could be posing environmental and health risks due to antibiotic pollution, a study has estimated.

Along with India, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Pakistan are among the countries facing similar risks due to pollution from antibiotics, the research, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) Nexus, said.

Researchers from McGill University, Canada, explained that antibiotics -- they help fight bacterial diseases -- are

not completely metabolised while passing through the body, nor completely destroyed or removed by most wastewater treatment facilities.

Potentially 315 million people in India could be exposed to environmental risks arising from rivers contaminated with antibiotics, according to the study, which measured amounts of 21 antibiotics at 877 locations globally.

Findings highlight the need for appropriate wastewater management plans and improving current practices, the team said.

Regulations and guidelines on use of antibiotics also need



to be updated, with a particular focus on high-risk substances and locations that pose the greatest risk, they said.

Most high-risk areas were noted to coincide with places

where antibiotics are readily available without prescription and are sometimes used preventively.

Previous studies have estimated human consumption of

antibiotics to have increased by 65 per cent between 2000 and 2015.

For this study, the researchers analysed the 'RiverATLAS' dataset. The global network of RiverATLAS contains 8,477,883 individual river reaches (or segments), representing about 36 million kilometres of the world's rivers. The dataset is maintained by McGill University.

The team estimated that in a year, people consume around 29,200 tonnes of the 40 most used antibiotics -- about a third of the amount enters the world's rivers and 11 per cent enters oceans and lakes, after

metabolism and wastewater treatment.

Further, six million kilometres of rivers around the world could be exposed to antibiotic levels exceeding thresholds that protect ecosystems, with major contributions from amoxicillin, ceftriaxone, and cefixime, the authors said.

Cefixime, which helps treat bronchitis among others, was found to be the substance contributing the most to pollution in rivers in India.

The team also predicted high antibiotic levels in regions already affected by antibiotic resistance, including south and southeast Asia.



**Editor's TAKE**

## Humanity dies in Pahalgam

**Terrorists slaughter 28 tourists — a tragic reminder that terror still haunts the Valley**

In one of the deadliest terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, 28 tourists were massacred on Tuesday in the tranquil Baisaran meadow near the popular hill resort of Pahalgam. The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy terror outfit of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), claimed responsibility. This attack has not only shocked the nation but also reopened deep-seated concerns about the fragile security scenario in Kashmir.

The tourists, who included honeymooners, families, and two foreign nationals—from Nepal and the UAE—were gunned down in a sudden gunfire. Despite existing security measures, including checkpoints and patrols, the attackers managed to infiltrate and execute their mission with clinical precision, raising serious questions about intelligence and on-ground preparedness.

This incident is not an isolated act of violence but appears deeply orchestrated. It coincided with two significant geopolitical events: The visit of US Vice President JD Vance to India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it followed a combative speech by Pakistani Army chief General Asim Munir, intensifying suspicions that the attack was calibrated to internationalise the Kashmir issue and portray the region as a nuclear flashpoint. The synchronicity is disturbingly reminiscent of the Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000, where 36 Sikhs were murdered days before US President Bill Clinton's visit.

By targeting tourists — symbols of normalcy and economic recovery—the terrorists aimed to derail the narrative of a stable Kashmir and provoke communal unrest across India. Since Article 370 was revoked, the Indian government has maintained a tight security apparatus in Kashmir, focusing on counter-insurgency and infrastructure development to boost tourism. While there has been a marked decline in local recruitment into terrorist groups, proxies like TRF have stepped up infiltration, especially using foreign fighters and sleeper cells.

The attack also underscores significant lapses. Despite heavy surveillance, there was no forewarning of this operation. The use of Army uniforms by terrorists highlights a dangerous tactic to bypass trust and checkpoints. Tourists, previously considered off-limits, are now being directly targeted, expanding the threat matrix. But the question is why now? Indeed it has to do with the arrival of US Vice President JD Vance. Pakistan may be attempting to paint Kashmir as unstable and urge foreign intervention.

Tourism in Kashmir has seen a resurgence post-370, contributing significantly to the local economy. Attacking tourists directly threatens this recovery. The brutal nature of the attack — execution-style killings — aims to spread fear and signal the reach and intent of the perpetrators.

India now faces the dual challenge of responding decisively to terror while safeguarding the fragile gains in Kashmir. It is time to enhanced human intelligence and local collaboration to detect sleeper cells. Deployment of smart surveillance technologies in vulnerable areas is a must and should be taken on priority. In the wake of this unspeakable tragedy, India faces a critical inflection point — one that demands not just a military or tactical response, but a comprehensive strategic recalibration.

First and foremost, a robust diplomatic offensive is essential. India must intensify international pressure on nations that provide safe haven or support to terror outfits, directly or indirectly. This includes leveraging global forums such as the United Nations, and bilateral partnerships to isolate state and non-state actors that are responsible for terrorism. Silence and inaction on terror can no longer be diplomatically acceptable — strategic complacency must be met with unwavering clarity and consequence.

Second, the long-term antidote to terrorism lies not only in security but in stability. Continued economic development and civic engagement in Jammu and Kashmir are key to undermining extremist narratives. Investment in education, job creation, tourism infrastructure, and inclusive governance empowers local communities, weakens recruitment for terror networks, and fosters a sense of belonging among youth. A region that thrives economically is harder to radicalise. Most critically, it is time to revisit and reinforce the security architecture surrounding tourism. Tourists — once regarded as ambassadors of peace and economic revival — have now become targets. This demands a thorough overhaul of safety protocols, especially in remote and high-traffic areas like Pahalgam. The aim is not to deter tourism, but to restore confidence. Kashmir must not once again become a hostage to fear.

## Political fault lines shift in Bihar

With caste dynamics, coalition equations, and leadership challenges all in play, the stage is set for a high-stakes political showdown between the NDA and the Mahagathbandhan

The Bihar polls at the end of the year are pretty unpredictable. Currently, there will be no cakewalk for the BJP, RJD, Congress or the JD(U). The churning is quietly taking place in Bihar politics. There could be a potential shift in power dynamics. The BJP, playing second fiddle to the Janata Dal (United) for the past two decades, is eyeing a lead role. The RJD wants to form the government.

Two crucial power groups are in the fight. On one side, the NDA and, on the other, the Mahagathbandhan, which comprises the RJD, Congress, and the Left parties. Intra-party and inner-party dynamics are in full swing.

The NDA and Mahagathbandhan are making calculated moves for a high-stakes political showdown. Encouraged by consecutive victories in states where the odds were against it, a revitalised BJP has now set its sights on Bihar after winning Delhi.

Bihar's caste politics is interesting. Backward classes comprise 63.13 per cent of the population, and the upper caste is only 15.52 per cent. Other Backward Classes comprise 27.12 per cent of the backward class category, while the Extremely Backward Class population numbered 36 per cent. Dalits comprise almost 19.65 per cent and

Yadavs account for 14.26 per cent. Kurmi, Nitish Kumar's Kurmi caste, also categorised as OBC, is 2.87 per cent of the population. In the last Assembly polls, upper castes, around 15 per cent of the population, dominated ticket distribution in many parties. BJP gave 47.3 per cent of its tickets to upper caste candidates, whereas Congress gave 40 per cent of its seats to upper castes.

In the 2020 Bihar assembly elections, the Mahagathbandhan did not win a simple majority in the 243-member legislative assembly, missing it by just 12 seats. The RJD was the largest party in the House but could not form the government.

For the 2025 polls, JD(U) has confirmed Nitish Kumar as the chief ministerial face. The well-known poll expert Prashant Kishor predicted that Nitish Kumar would end his political career. The RJD has opted for its leader, Tejaswi Yadav. Congress has not opened its cards yet. A series of meetings between Congress and the RJD, which began this month, continues.

The Janata Dal (United) party and the BJP coalition currently rule Bihar. Nitish Kumar's deteriorating health, caste balance, and the functioning of the alliance make Bihar politically unpredictable. Even if the



BJP chooses Nitish, his health issues could significantly impact the election outcome.

The JD(U) wants to bargain for more seats with the BJP. In 2020, the JD(U) ran for 115 seats but only won 43. In contrast, the BJP ran for 110 seats and won 74. The Mahagathbandhan, which consists of RJD,

Congress, and some smaller parties, pose stiff opposition. The RJD and top Congress leaders met in Delhi last week to advance the alliance.

Political realignments since 2020 — the VIP joining the MGB, the LJP aligning with the NDA and the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party merging into the JD(U) — complicate the poll picture.

A key development since 2020 has been the change in the power equation within the NDA, with the BJP emerging stronger. The BJP has strategically cultivated non-dominant other backward classes (OBCs) and non-dominant Dalit communities.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah visit-

ed Bihar for two days. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Bihar.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav made a surprising announcement, stating that he is open to reconciling with his socialist ally, Nitish Kumar. In response to this mischievous statement, Nitish remarked that he had inadvertently aligned with the RJD. Tejaswi Yadav, however, asserted that there is no place for Nitish in the Mahagathbandhan. Many believe that Nitish, known for his U-turns, could switch sides.

The INDIA opposition bloc has appointed Tejaswi Yadav, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, as head of its coordination committee for the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections. This decision was made during a meeting of the six alliance partners in Patna on April 17.

The Congress and Left parties in the Mahagathbandhan are worried that the RJD will wait until the last minute to finalise seat-sharing agreements. The Congress party is unhappy with the weak constituencies it was given in 2020. It only won 19 out of the 70 seats it contested in the last election. The CPI(M), which did

well in 2020, wants a larger share of seats. Since 2005, the RJD has had difficulty regaining power, except for short periods in 2015 and 2022.

Currently, Tejaswi Yadav has two main tasks. First, he needs to expand the support beyond its core groups of Muslims and Yadavs to include other castes. This involves a stronger grassroots campaign, as the traditional voting trends are changing. The Congress has not developed younger leadership in Bihar. Its old core groups of Muslims and Dalits have shifted to other parties. The party has launched the 'Samvidhan Leadership Programme' to eye marginalised communities.

The main parties face challenges both within their groups and from outside, and a significant political change is expected. A point to note is that Nitish Kumar's EBC is intact and challenges the RJD-Congress alliance.

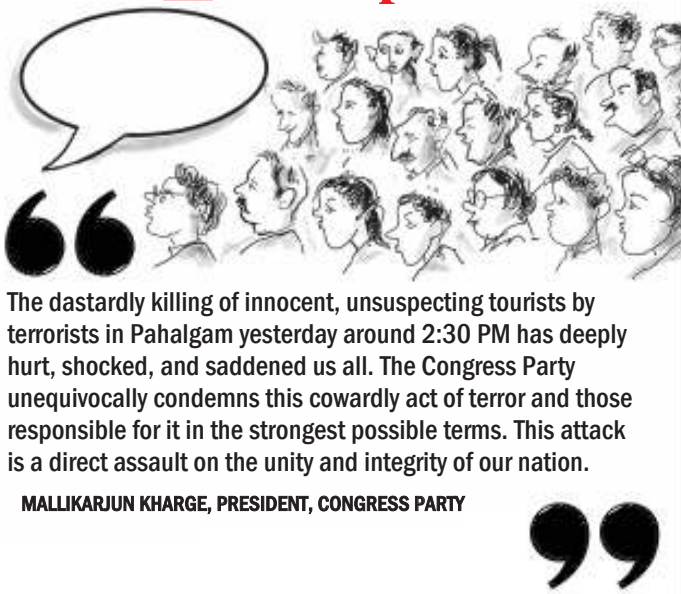
There could be many more changes before November; they would be interesting to watch. In politics, one week is said to be long. Six months is really long.

(The author is a popular columnist. Views are personal)



KALYANI SHANKAR

## Leaderspeak



The dastardly killing of innocent, unsuspecting tourists by terrorists in Pahalgam yesterday around 2:30 PM has deeply hurt, shocked, and saddened us all. The Congress Party unequivocally condemns this cowardly act of terror and those responsible for it in the strongest possible terms. This attack is a direct assault on the unity and integrity of our nation.

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE, PRESIDENT, CONGRESS PARTY

## SECOND Opinion

BY SHARMILA VAIDYA

In my most rewarding 26 years of experience working as an educator, I have had the privilege of working with students from diverse backgrounds and in different educational settings. It is during this period I started administering the state mandated IQ tests. These tests were administered to measure an individual's cognitive abilities, mostly logical reasoning, memory and verbal mathematical aptitude. They tell us how well someone can solve abstract problems under specific conditions.

I was surprised to see how these standardised tests categorised and measured individuals by numbers and scores often disregarding their potential, experiences and abilities, making it inherently biased.

This realisation prompted me to explore what IQ, intelligence and success fully mean in the real world. Hence, I decided to conduct a small survey. To get a fair sampling, I included people of different backgrounds - educators, parents, students, homemakers and professionals.

My questions were:  
1. What qualities make you see someone as intelligent?  
2. Do you think people with low IQ can be successful?  
I was pleasantly surprised to see the responses from the survey. According to the survey - some of these qualities were,

- someone who is empathetic, creative, problem-solving, curious, open to ideas, a good communicator, accepting without being judgmental ... and many more. Most people also believe that individuals with lower IQ scores can achieve success - especially when they possess strong emotional intelligence (EQ).

Based on this survey I concluded that there was a shift in people's perception from IQ to EQ. In general, the meaning of intelligence exceeded beyond the confinement of standardised test. In order to get a broader understanding of intelligence I started researching the different types of intelligences as per psychological theory.

In the 1980s, Harvard psychologist, Howard Gardner proposed a theory that broke away from the "one-size-fits-all" model of intelligence. He introduced eight distinct types of intelligence that reflected the diverse ways humans learn, express themselves, and solve problems. These were:

- Linguistic Intelligence: Word savvy like, writers, storytellers
- Logical: Mathematical Intelligence: Analytical thinkers, like scientists and engineers
- Musical Intelligence: Musically inclined, like musicians,
- Kinesthetic Intelligence: Physical grace and skill like, dancers
- Spatial Intelligence: Visual and spatial thinkers like architects and artists
- Interpersonal Intelligence: People skills and empathy like, therapists, teachers, and leaders.
- Intrapersonal Intelligence: Deep self-understanding like philosophers and spiritual leaders

Naturalistic Intelligence: Attunement to nature, like, gardeners and environmentalists.

Among other psychologists that followed, Daniel Goldman played an important role in introducing the concept of Emotional Intelligence, which includes empathy, self-awareness and emotional regulation which demonstrated that EQ plays an important role in personal success.

Together, these theories encourage us to look beyond IQ scores and appreciate the depth and diversity of human potential. Hence, even if one wasn't considered academically intelligent and didn't fit in the traditional high IQ "cookie cutter" mould, many have been very successful and have contributed to society at large. Examples include:

Thomas Edison was considered "difficult" in school and reportedly had very little formal education. His teachers thought he was slow or unable to learn. Despite this, he became one of the most prolific inventors in history.

Walt Disney was reportedly fired from a newspaper job for "lacking imagination," and he struggled academically. His success came through storytelling, creativity, and persistence.

Therefore, we must reconsider the tendency to label someone as lazy or unintelligent based solely on conventional standards. I believe my experience along with research and survey findings strongly support this perspective, which is aptly captured in the quote: "A high IQ may open a door, but emotional intelligence determines how far you'll go once you walk through it."

(The writer is an educator based in the US. Views are personal)

## Letters to the Editor

### National Panchayat Day

Madam — The evolution of Panchayat Raj System in India can be traced back to ancient Vedic period. On 24 April 1993 Panchayat Raj system in India came into effect with the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act on 22/23 December 1992, was ratified by state legislatures and came into effect on 24 April 1993.

To mark the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India through constitution, "National Panchayat Raj Day" is observed every year on 24 April to promote grassroots democracy, rural development, inclusive governance, women empowerment, ensure accountability and transparency, strengthening local governance, and empower rural communities.

The decentralisation of power, e-governance, capacity building, and financial oversight are some of the core responsibilities of PRIs in India. This day mainly focus on enhancing participatory governance, rural upliftment, rural women empowerment, and digital transformation in village-level administration.

The Constitution of India recognises PRIs as "Institutions of Self-governance". Currently, there are nearly 2.63 lakh Panchayats, 31.47 lakh elected representatives of PRIs of which 14.54 lakh are women. It is important for achieving inclusive growth and addressing issues like climate change and rural-to-urban migration.

B. MADHUSUDHAN REDDY | KARIMNAGAR

### Contempt plea against Dubey

Madam — The Supreme Court on Tuesday 22 April said it will hear next week a contempt plea filed against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey for his controversial remarks blaming Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna for "civil wars" in the country.

The matter was brought before a Bench comprising Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih by a lawyer who highlighted that the Attorney General had not responded to the request for sanction to initiate contempt proceedings.

"The remark is viral. Dubey says CJI responsible for civil wars. No reply from Attorney (General)," the lawyer said, prompting Justice Gavai to respond, "List it next week."

Dubey had sharply criticized the judiciary, claiming that if the Supreme Court continues to frame laws, then Parliament and state assemblies might as well be shut down.

His comments came after the Centre assured the court that it would hold off on implementing controversial provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, following judicial scrutiny. The BJP was quick to distance itself from Dubey's explosive comments.

Party president J.P. Nadda called the statements personal and reiterated the BJP's "utmost respect for the judiciary," instructing party leaders to refrain from such remarks in the future.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

### Mangoes can be a health risk!

Madam —Mango is a fruit rich in flavor, nutrition, and energy. It contains essential vitamins such as A and C, along with iron—nutrients that are highly beneficial for the eyes, skin, and immune system.

However, consuming mangoes before their natural season poses serious health risks, especially when they are artificially ripened using harmful chemicals like calcium carbide.

This chemical accelerates the ripening process unnaturally, but its toxic compounds can damage the stomach, liver, and nervous system. Prolonged exposure or consumption may lead to ulcers, nausea, and in severe cases, even increase the risk of cancer.

It is therefore wise to prefer naturally ripened mangoes and prioritize health over momentary pleasure. Naturally ripened mangoes are available only during the proper mango season. The ones found in markets before that time are often treated with hazardous substances to enhance their appearance and ripen them prematurely. In fact it is the duty of the Government that no food item is sold which is a health risk.

Those who indulge in this practice must be behind the bars. So, for now, stay away from your "beloved" mango—and choose health over desire. A little patience today can ensure a safer and sweeter tomorrow!

ABDUL MBOOD | MUMBAI

### PAHALGAM ATTACK: TERRORISTS ARE ENEMIES OF ENTIRE MANKIND

Once again Kashmir is lying in blood. It is very sad to note that at least 26 people mostly tourist were killed and several were injured by the Terrorist. The gruesome attack should be condemned by each and every one. The Government boasted a lot after abrogation of Article 370 that the terrorism will come to an end in Jammu and Kashmir. After the rhetoric of Amit Shah and PM Narendra Modi that there is normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir the attack has proved that the Central Government has failed miserably to crumble down the terrorism. While many tourist were enjoying a peaceful afternoon amidst snow-capped peaks and pine forests the militants had split blood in Pahalgam. This is a direct attack on the Indian state. The entire nation is in great shock. Previously in the gruesome terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir over 43 brave soldiers were killed. Every now and then many innocents people's

are being killed by terrorism. Now killing of 26 tourist is act of barbarians and act of cowardice and assault on the values of humanity. Conceded that there can be genuine grievances of the people and individuals but violence is certainly not an option for redressal. It is a crime against humanity and has to be condemned by one and all. The terrorists are the enemies of entire mankind and they do not belong to a particular religion or particular country. All religions are great and love should be the universal religion. I request the Government to take stringent action against those are behind the terror attack. My sympathies to the families and prayers to the injured. At this moment the nation must stand by the families of the brutally killed innocent people and make all efforts to bring the culprits and give them exemplary punishment.

ZAKIR HUSSAIN | KAZIPET



# WAVES 2025: Redefining global media diplomacy

WAVES weaves together storytelling, technology and international cooperation to reshape the global media and entertainment. This summit marks a decisive leap into a future where India leads with innovation, cultural capital and strategic foresight

FIRST Column

Some May 1st, India has truly arrived with the WAVES Entertainment Summit being held in Mumbai from 1st to 4th of May 2025. The summit echoes the vision envisaged in 2019 by PM Modi in his speech at the inauguration of the National Museum of Indian Cinema; highlighting Indian cinema as a powerful medium of global outreach and soft power, calling it a “silent force” that shapes global perceptions and connects cultures. He emphasised cinema’s potential to promote film tourism, inviting international filmmakers to explore India’s diverse landscapes. The design of WAVES is an unusual convergence of like-mindedness of M&E stakeholders; individuals or institutions that think alike in carving out a landscape that will be suited for the global fraternity responsible for creating content and its consumption.

WAVES 2025 brings a bold new phase of soft power diplomacy, focusing on transformative and technology-driven partnerships. Innovation in this segment is bound to create a new buzz for foreign policy tie-ups, carried forward on the wings of emerging tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and immersive content ecosystems. The diverse participation at WAVES will open unprecedented avenues for multilateral cooperation and dialogue across critical areas of knowledge sharing, media engagement, storytelling ecosystems, and digital co-productions. It provides India with an unparalleled opportunity to assert global leadership in the creative domain; by fusing its creativity quotient, strategic foresight, and cultural capital into a soft power matrix that fosters goodwill and purposeful international collaboration.

At the heart of WAVES 2025 lies its evocative tagline: “Connecting Creators, Connecting Countries”, a bold declaration of India’s intent to reposition itself as a global M&E powerhouse. As a summit that seeks to reimagine communication diplomacy, one of its most awaited outcomes is the WAVES Declaration, a visionary charter that could reshape the media discourse globally.

Rarely has a platform attempted to knit together creativity, business, leadership, and soft power into a cohesive global identity. But WAVES seeks to do just that, with a Global Media Dialogue, a declaration of shared values, and a structured roadmap for the M&E industry that reflects the ethos of a borderless, tech-enabled, creatively interconnected world. The declaration will place communication-clear, coherent, and collaborative-at the centre of a new global information order, founded on equity, access, equality, and participation.

WAVES has quietly but effectively given a new meaning to soft power diplomacy wherein all constituents that create charisma associated with knowledge sharing and storytelling play a critical role in bilateral or multilateral cooperation. It would be appropriate to mention that diplomacy will adorn new wings of change based on creati-



ity, innovation and the spirit of collaboration. WAVES will truly be the “Mahakumbh” of ideas, opportunities, experiences and knowledge sharing.

The philosophical underpinning of WAVES 2025 can be distilled into the 7 Cs of Communication: Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness, Coherence, Completeness, and Courtesy. These seven pillars not only ensure effective storytelling but serve as diplomatic principles guiding cross-border media collaboration. They offer a timeless framework as



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

we enter an era where communication is the new currency of power, diplomacy, and development. With narratives shaping geopolitics, trade, and international perception, there is a pressing need for a Global Media Charter, a binding commitment from nations to protect freedom of creative expression, foster diverse storytelling, and ensure ethical media practices. WAVES 2025 can be the birthplace of this transformative shift. In a world increasingly governed by digital influence and algorithmic reach, a unified declaration will help navigate the



THE SUMMIT ALSO AIMS TO INCREASE INDIA'S GLOBAL MARKET SHARE IN MEDIA, ATTRACT MAJOR INVESTMENTS, AND ENCOURAGE CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN INDIAN AND INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS. BY BRINGING TOGETHER CREATORS, INVESTORS, AND POLICYMAKERS, WAVES OFFERS A SHARED SPACE TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND GROW IDEAS

ethical dilemmas of deepfakes, information disorder, and cultural homogenisation. It's not just about content anymore; it's about cultural continuity, technological responsibility, and global unity through creative collaboration.

WAVES isn't just about short-term buzz, it's about building something lasting. It understands that media and entertainment (M&E) isn't a quick fix but a long-term strategic play. At its heart is a clear goal: to make India the global content hub and a net exporter of stories. With its rich cultural diversity and languages, India has all the ingredients to build a strong intellectual property base that resonates worldwide.

The summit also aims to increase India's global market share in media, attract major investments, and encourage co-production between Indian and international players. By bringing together creators, investors, and policymakers, WAVES offers a shared space to build partnerships and grow ideas. Platforms like WaveXcelerator and WAVES Bazaar will help startups and innovators scale up and plug into global markets.

WAVES 2025 is designed to be a complete experience. The Global Media Dialogue brings together ministers and top policymakers from around the world to exchange ideas. The Thought Leaders Track will host key sessions exploring future trends and challenges in media.

In the Exhibition Zone, companies will showcase the latest in gaming, animation, VR, and AI. The WAVES Bazaar will act as a meeting ground for buyers and sellers to find the right collaborators. WaveXcelerator will give startups a chance to pitch live and attract investors.

The Bharat Pavilion will spotlight India's storytelling journey; from folk tales to futuristic formats. The CreateSphere will feature masterclasses, creators' meet-ups, and the grand finale of the Create in India Challenge. And finally, a series of cultural performances will bring together talent from across the globe, blending tradition with innovation.

WAVES is expected to drive real outcomes, from new content partnerships and global investments to job creation and policy support. It will help position India as a creative and tech-savvy media partner for the world. With cutting-edge tech on display, including AI tools and immersive experiences, the summit will also show how India is shaping the future of media.

By promoting co-productions, content exchanges, and new distribution deals, WAVES could help Indian stories travel further. It also gives international stakeholders a chance to build real connections with Indian creators-paving the way for shared growth and innovation. Most importantly, it sets the stage for India to lead the way in global media diplomacy.

The timing couldn't be better. According to the EY-FICCI 2025 M&E Report, India's media sector grew to INR 2.5 trillion in 2024 and is expected to touch INR 2.7 trillion in 2025.

Digital media now makes up 32% of total revenue, with digital ads growing fast. OTT platforms grew by 18%, driven by regional stories finding global fans. The report projects that the sector will hit INR 3.1 trillion by 2027, powered by gaming, animation, and immersive tech. WAVES gives these numbers real meaning, by turning data into action, partnerships into policy, and content into soft power. It's where the industry meets diplomacy and the future is co-created.

India is no longer on the sidelines of the global media conversation, it is setting the agenda. With WAVES 2025, India is articulating a bold creative vision for the world: one that transcends platforms, breaks silos, and builds coalitions of creators. WAVES 2025 isn't just another summit, it is a cultural declaration, a geopolitical realignment of media narratives, and a commitment to connect not just creators, but countries, cultures, and communities.

By placing communication at the heart of global partnerships, WAVES brings together not only markets but also minds and meanings. The world is watching, and India is ready to lead.

(The writer is former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

# Reclaiming our humanity: A call to connection in a fragmented world

Amid global turmoil, Danish explorer Thor Pedersen's journey to every country without flying stands as quiet proof that kindness and shared humanity endure — even in the unlikely places. It's a story of contrast, conviction, and hope

Septuagenarian Dr Iain McGilchrist, a world-renowned philosopher, psychiatrist and neuroscientist, recently addressed a symposium titled The Future of Humanity, where he delved into some of the most pressing questions at the heart of our existence—the existence of what is good, beautiful, and true. Reflecting on his lifetime, he observed that these fundamental transcendental values have been increasingly sidelined, decried, debased, and even destroyed. “It is not just that we are distracted from the truth,” he noted, “but we demand protection from it, lest it hurt us—in case life itself hurts us.”



DEBASHISH BHATTACHARYYA

This observation resonates deeply in a world increasingly perceived as unkind, unfeeling, and unconnected, where the very essence of humanity—compassion, love, and concern—seems to be vanishing at an alarming rate.

In our hyper-competitive socio-political environment, every sphere of life—familial, social, professional, and spiritual—is under strain. Systems meant to support them are collapsing. Yet amid this bleakness, glimmers of hope remain. One such beacon is a traveller's journey—marked by twists, encounters, and insights, offering a powerful affirmation of the human spirit.

Take the journey of Thor Pedersen, a Danish explorer. Thor is the only person in history to travel to every country in the world without flying. Between 2013 and 2023, he visited over 200 nations—India being his 168th—using only ships, trains, buses, and other ground or sea-based transport. His journey was more than a feat of endurance; it became a profound exploration of humanity, transcending borders, cultures, and beliefs.

At the heart of his experience lay a simple truth: “People are just people.” Wherever he went, he met ordinary people living ordinary lives—finding joy in food, music, and sports, and valuing safety and stability over political and religious



divides. Across every border he crossed, he was met with kindness and generosity. Strangers offered him meals, shelter, contacts, translations, or simply a smile when he needed it most—true to the spirit of our shared humanity.

His realisation deepened when he observed: “If we reduce people to numbers and statistics, we create distance and lose empathy. Divide and conquer is an age-old strategy, and it works well—but at what cost? We can keep dividing the world until, eventually, we all sit alone.”

However, the Danish globetrotter's voyage was not without challenges. He encountered a few unpleasant incidents and individuals along the way, threatened by drunk, armed, and hostile men, battling cerebral malaria, and being held at gunpoint. While all this, however, did not dishearten him, we are reminded of Gandhiji's profound words: “You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean

are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.”

Thor's journey, devoid of privilege and elitism—underscores vital truths:

a) Even if gentleness and kindness seem to be in decline, they continue to thrive quietly at the grassroots.

b) Though humanity struggles to find its rightful place in a world consumed by the relentless pursuit of power, pleasure, and profit, it is not lost — only marginalised.

c) As we glamorise wealth, we risk losing the very qualities that define us as human—compassion, care, and cooperation.

History bears witness to countless individuals who, in moments of crisis, be it accidents, tragedies, or desperate need — step forward uninvited, saving lives and rekindling faith in humanity. Though often overlooked, their actions quietly pull humanity back from the brink. That said, the world remains enmeshed

in grave, interconnected crises—war, inequality, poverty, climate change—all demanding collective will. Sadly, world leaders, despite their promises, continue to ignore the catastrophic plight of millions. As they routinely gather to design an ostensibly better future, they remain either unable or unwilling to respond—revealing not just a failure of meaningful action, but a failure of intent.

## Grim Realities

For long, we have viewed the world as manipulable and controllable—ripe to be bent to our will. Therefore, few doubt that many crises plaguing our world are not mere accidents of fate or unavoidable circumstances; they are often the deliberate outcomes of power-driven agendas. Fueled by greed, ruthless self-interest, and an insatiable thirst for domination, these forces ignite brutal conflict, widespread deprivation, environmental devastation, racism, and religious extremism—creating

a reality steeped in suffering and division.

Poverty, an affront to human dignity, heightens vulnerability to abuse. Tied to climate change, it's set to intensify—new research led by Dr Timothy Neal (University of New South Wales) warns the average person could be 40% poorer if global temperatures rise by 4°C.

Shockingly, those who hold power—whether in struggling countries, developing economies, or even the most developed nations—have often abandoned humanity as the foundation of governance. Opportunistic toxic politics and hybrid forms of authoritarianism continue to destroy the sacred ground of human dignity, pushing aside the cardinal principle that must guide all leadership: People Over Everything.

Even the COVID-19 crisis—exposing vulnerabilities and inequities—failed to instil lasting solidarity. Human dignity remains dispensable. What of more grim realities?

According to the Geneva Academy, more than 45 armed conflicts are currently raging across the Middle East and North Africa. Africa follows closely, with over 35 non-international armed conflicts (NIACs). Asia remains a battleground for 19 such conflicts, while Europe contends with seven.

Bleak as it may seem, this is a call to action—one urging us to deepen our commitment to humanistic values, where every life is worthwhile, wanted, and welcomed.

While it may be simplistic to expect everything to align perfectly with the humanistic way, it is crucial to recognise the deeper causes of suffering, distress, and anguish within the fabric of human society—locally, nationally, and globally. In an age of deep disillusionment, we must remember: the world is not merely a map of borders, but a shared home.

As Professor Harvey Whitehouse of Oxford reminds us: “Remembering that we are all related and experience many of the same challenges could be the key to solving global problems—from intergroup conflicts to poverty and the climate crisis.”

What kind of world do we want to live in? If we fail to address this, we risk sliding into a soulless existence—a world full of people, yet empty of humanity. We may exist, but we will not truly live. The degradation of humanity is not inevitable. Though messiness and imperfection are part of what makes us human, it is in our ability to reclaim substantive conversation and enrich our relationships, based on humanistic virtues. Our hearts and minds—feeling, willing, knowing, sensing—must not grow numb to the suffering that surrounds us. We must not be swayed by eloquent words, empty rhetoric, or the shallow display of symbolism. Only through real, tangible action can we reclaim what is slipping away—the very essence of our shared humanity.

The imperative of our times: Reawakening our humanity — Embracing what matters most—People, planet, and our shared future.

(The writer is columnist and author. He is former Deputy General Manager, India International Centre, Delhi. Views expressed are personal)



IN BRIEF



Bank of Baroda aims to achieve net-zero target

Bank of Baroda has announced its Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) policy and aspiration to achieve net-zero emissions by 2057. The move reinforces the bank's long-standing commitment to promoting responsible and sustainable banking practices, mitigating ESG risks and seizing opportunities for a low-carbon future, Bank of Baroda said in a release. "In line with the theme for Earth Day 2025, 'Our Power, Our Planet', that highlights the importance of renewable sources of energy, Bank of Baroda would prioritise financing to renewable energy," it said. In its efforts to contribute towards a greener planet, the bank has also planted over 30,000 trees in 2025 till date on behalf of its customers for every auto and home loan disbursed under its 'Plant a Tree' programme. "The unveiling of our ESG policy and our net-zero commitment is a reflection of the importance that the bank places on being a responsible corporate citizen - through contributing meaningfully to the environment, promoting social well-being, and maintaining the highest standards of governance," said Debaddatta Chand, Managing Director and CEO, Bank of Baroda.



Rupee falls 25 paise to settle at 85.44 against US dollar

The rupee depreciated 25 paise and settled for the day at 85.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on surge in crude oil prices and importer demand for the American currency. Forex traders said the American currency recovered, supported by Donald Trump's softened stance -- particularly towards the Federal Reserve and China. However, positive domestic markets and weak US dollar index and foreign fund inflows supported the domestic unit at lower levels. Forex traders said the market found support after Trump on Tuesday backed off from threats to fire Fed Chair Jerome Powell after days of intensifying criticism against him for not cutting rates. Trump also signalled the possibility of lower tariffs against China. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.24, and touched an intra-day low of 85.52 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.44 (provisional), registering a loss of 25 paise over its previous closing level.



UP to link rural groups to silk production

The Uttar Pradesh government has set an ambitious target to boost silk production by connecting 7,500 rural groups to the State Rural Livelihood Mission in the 2025-26 action plan, an official statement said on Wednesday. To boost silk production, the state government has devised a focused strategy for intensive implementation across 15 districts during this financial year, it said. These districts will get support for training, adopting modern technology, and financial assistance to help silk producers compete globally. This initiative aims to blend traditional industries with innovation, strengthening the rural economy and promoting sustainable livelihoods. An agreement has already been signed between the State Rural Livelihood Mission and the Silk Department to increase women's participation in silk production. Under this agreement, a target has been set to connect 50,000 members of 5,000 women's groups with silk production in the next five years, the statement said.

India, Saudi Arabia to work for stability of global oil markets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has agreed to work with Saudi Arabia to enhance the stability of global oil markets and to balance global energy market dynamics, according to a joint statement issued on Wednesday.

The statement came after conclusion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia which was cut short following the terror attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam, where terrorists killed 26 people, mostly tourists.

"The Indian side agreed to work with the kingdom to enhance the stability of global oil markets and to balance global energy market dynamics. They emphasised the need to ensure security of supply for all energy sources in global markets. They agreed on the importance of enhancing cooperation in several areas in the energy sector, including the supply of crude oil and its derivatives," the joint statement said.

The two sides emphasised the importance of cooperation in the field of green and clean hydrogen, including stimulating demand, developing hydrogen transport and stor-



age technologies, exchanging expertise and experiences to implement best practices.

"The two sides also acknowledged the need to work on developing supply chains and projects linked to the energy sector, enabling cooperation between companies, enhancing cooperation in the field of energy efficiency and rationalizing energy consumption in the buildings, industry, and transportation sectors, and raising awareness of its importance," the statement said.

On climate change, both sides reaffirmed the importance of adhering to the prin-

ciples of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement and the need to develop and implement climate agreements with a focus on emissions rather than sources.

"The Indian side commended the Kingdom's launch of the 'Saudi Green Initiative' and the 'Middle East Green Initiative' and expressed its support for the Kingdom's efforts in the field of climate change. The two sides stressed the importance of cooperation to develop applications of the circular carbon economy by promoting policies that use

the circular carbon economy as a tool to manage emissions and achieve climate change objectives," the joint statement said.

This was Modi's third visit to Saudi Arabia. It followed the visit of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to India in September 2023 to participate in the G-20 Summit and co-chair the first meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council.

Both sides underscored the importance of co-operation in technology including in new and emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, semi-conductors etc. Highlighting the importance of digital governance, both sides agreed to explore collaboration in this area.

"They also expressed satisfaction on signing of the MOU between Telecom Regulatory Authority of India and Communications, Space and Technology Commission of Saudi Arabia for cooperation in regulatory and digital sectors." Both sides also agreed to enhance cooperation in tourism including through capacity building and sustainable tourism.

Govt not to raise stake in Voda Idea beyond 49%: Scindia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has no plans to increase its shareholding in Vodafone Idea (VIL) as it does not want the telecom operator to turn into a public sector undertaking (PSU), Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said.

Sending out a strong message to Vodafone Idea, Scindia said in an interview that it is now the telco's job to ensure it performs.

After the recent conversion of Rs 36,950 crore of outstanding spectrum auction dues into equity, the government now holds 48.99 per cent shares in Vodafone Idea Ltd. Prior to this, the government's stake was about 22.6 per cent.

It is pertinent to mention that any additional stake could potentially turn the company into a PSU - bringing it under the administrative control of the government which would then get to appoint the board. Also the company would come under the purview of CAG and other oversight bodies, under

such circumstances. "It is now their (VIL's) job to ensure that they perform. Government today has 49 per cent of the company. There is no intention for the government to make that into a PSU. So we will stick to 49 per cent," Scindia said.

On his assessment of impact of dues conversion on VIL's health and future competitiveness, specially given wide skepticism that the telco may still struggle to meet future payment obligations, the minister said: "That question should be directed at VIL...it is now their job to ensure that they perform".

Analysts have been saying that government relief to Vodafone Idea into through dues-to-equity conversion may ease near-term liquidity constraints for the telco, but that structural challenges remain for the operator with factors like stabilisation of subscriber base, tariff hikes, long-pending debt raise, and further relief on dues being vital for the telco's long-term survival.



Agrinnovate India declares maiden dividend of Rs 1.42 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Agrinnovate India Limited (AGIN), the commercial arm of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), has declared its first-ever dividend of Rs 1.42 crore for the 2023-24 fiscal since its inception in 2011.

The dividend was formally presented to Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan in a ceremony also attended by Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi and ICAR Director General M L Jat.

"AGIN has made a dividend payment for the first time since its inception," an official statement said.

Established in 2011, AGIN serves as the bridge between agricultural research and practical implementation, playing a crucial role in transferring, evaluating, and scaling up agri-technologies across India to benefit farmers and entrepreneurs. The dividend declaration underscores AGIN's commitment to financial sustainability, institutional accountability, and its broader mission of advancing India's agricultural innovation ecosystem.

Gold halts record rally, drops Rs 2,400 to Rs 99,200/10 g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices took a U-turn from the historic Rs 1 lakh mark and declined Rs 2,400 to Rs 99,200 per 10 gram in the national capital on Wednesday amid weak global trend.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity spurted by Rs 1,800 to hit the lifetime peak of Rs 1,01,600 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent fall sharply by Rs 3,400 to Rs 98,700 per 10 grams on Wednesday, a day after jumping Rs 2,800 to an all-time high of Rs 1,02,100 per 10 grams in the local markets.

"Gold prices corrected after reaching record highs, as safe-haven demand softened following President Donald Trump's comments that the steep tariffs on Chinese goods imposed during the trade war escalation will soon be substantially reduced," Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

Meanwhile, silver prices jumped Rs 700 to Rs 99,200



signalling a possible short-term reversal from recent peaks," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

As tariff concerns ease, gold is seeing some premium unwinding. Looking ahead, gold is expected to trade in a broad range between Rs 94,000-98,000 per 10 grams, with elevated volatility likely to persist, Trivedi added.

In the global markets, spot gold retreated from the record level to trade at USD 3,330.99 per ounce, down by USD 50.57 or 1.49 per cent. On Tuesday, the spot gold rose to hit a fresh high of USD 3,500.33 per ounce.

"...Gold extended its decline on Wednesday, dropping to USD 3,316 per ounce, as Trump clarified he would not fire Fed Chair Powell, which helped restore confidence in the Fed's independence and further eased investor anxiety," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

Spot silver in the Asian market hours rose 1.19 per cent to USD 32.90 per ounce.

Sensex reclaims 80k-level on rally in IT shares, FII inflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets extended the winning run to seventh day on Wednesday with benchmark BSE Sensex jumping 520 points to close above 80,000 level for the first time in four months driven by strong gains in IT and auto shares.

The 30-share Sensex rose by 520.90 points or 0.65 per cent to settle at 80,116.49, the highest closing level since December 18. During the day, it surged 658.96 points or 0.82 per cent to 80,254.55.

The NSE Nifty rallied 161.70 points or 0.67 per cent to 24,328.95. Foreign fund inflows and positive global trends also boosted the market sentiment,



analysts said. Among the Sensex firms, HCL Tech surged the most by 7.72 per cent after the firm posted an 8.1 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 4,307 crore for March quarter 2024-25, mainly on account of large deals with a total contract value of about Rs 25,500 crore.

Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel and Maruti were also among major gainers.

Banking shares witnessed a sell-off after recent sharp gains with leading private lender HDFC Bank dropping by 1.98

per cent to emerge as the biggest loser among Sensex shares.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, State Bank of India, Axis Bank, ITC and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in the positive territory. Shanghai SSE Composite ended marginally lower. Markets in Europe were trading significantly higher.

US markets bounced back sharply on Tuesday. Nasdaq Composite surged 2.71 per cent, Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 2.66 per cent and S&P 500 rallied 2.51 per cent.

Biologicals 'at forefront' of agricultural shift, says Syngenta India chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Syngenta India Country Head and Managing Director Susheel Kumar said on Wednesday that innovation in biologicals can transform the future of food security, emphasising partnerships to fast-track solutions for farmers.

"Farming is faced with multifaceted challenges. Therefore, we need to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to make sure that crops are cultivated in a viable and sustainable way," Kumar said at the BioAg World Congress while unveiling the company's roadmap.

Kumar highlighted that farmers face numerous challenges in ensuring global food security, with food chain pressures and public demand for better residue management limiting farming options.

"Reduced solution efficacy due to resistance and pest shifts demands new modes of action," he said in a statement.

"Meeting the challenge requires a significant effort, and biologicals and seed treatment are at the forefront of this shift," Kumar added.

Kumar said partnerships are crucial to accelerate innovation and deliver solutions to growers quickly.

He noted that Syngenta's research and development approach has helped establish an industry-leading biologicals pipeline.

Biologicals, which include natural microbial, seaweed and plant extracts, aid in nutrient cycling, pest and disease management, and improving plant growth, Kumar explained.

"Three main types of biologicals - bio-stimulants, nutrient use efficiency products and biocontrols - provide farmers with more choices to manage resistance, improve soil health, reduce residue in foods, and address climate change impacts," he said.

Sanjay Kumar Tokala, Head of Biologicals at Syngenta India, said the global biological sector is expected to grow to USD 20 billion by 2030, with robust growth in Indian markets.

He added that biologicals promote biodiversity and support long-term soil fertility, making farming systems more resilient to climate change.



Hospitality industry braces for travel booking cancellations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Anticipating largescale travel booking cancellations for Jammu and Kashmir in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, aggregators on Wednesday said they are working with airlines and hotels to offer free date change and cancellation waivers to travellers.

Hospitality industry players expect the terror attack to sow fear in the minds of tourists who were keen to visit Jammu and Kashmir, adversely affecting

the livelihoods of people in the state who are dependent on tourism.

At least 26 people -- mostly tourists -- were killed by terrorists on Tuesday at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam.

"As per the early observations, flight cancellations jumped 7x, and a drop in future bookings by nearly 40 per cent," said Manjari Singhal, Chief Growth and Business Officer, Cleartrip.

"As travellers navigate this difficult situation, our teams are



working round the clock with airline and hotel partners to provide flexibility and assistance

on bookings/ cancellations. Our on-ground team is doing everything in their capacity to offer

support to travellers. We remain committed to providing continued assistance to both our customers and partners during this difficult time," a MakeMyTrip spokesperson said.

EaseMyTrip Chairman and Founder Nishant Pitti said, "In light of the ongoing situation in Srinagar, we at EaseMyTrip are fully committed to supporting our customers who are travelling to or from Srinagar. We understand the uncertainty this situation may cause and

are here to minimise any inconvenience to your travel plans. To ensure flexibility, we have extended free change and cancellation waivers for all bookings made on or before April 22, applicable for travel up to April 30".

FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality) General Secretary Rajiv Mehra said for the people of Jammu & Kashmir, tourism is not just a livelihood, it is their pride, their legacy and their hope.



## Bhumi Pednekar responds to buzz about starring opposite Imran Khan in his comeback film



At the trailer launch of Netflix's upcoming series *The Royals*, actress Bhumi Pednekar was questioned about the swirling rumours regarding her collaboration with actor Imran Khan, who is reportedly making a comeback after nearly a decade. When asked about the speculations, Bhumi responded, "I never speak of anything until it's officially announced."

While Bhumi chose to remain discreet, industry sources have indicated that Imran Khan is set to return to the screen in a romantic comedy directed by Danish Aslam, known for his work on *Break Ke Baad*. The film is expected to feature Bhumi Pednekar as the female lead, with shooting scheduled to commence in April 2025.

This project would mark Bhumi's third collaboration with Netflix India, following her roles in *Bhakhshak* and the forthcoming *The Royals*. Fans eagerly await official confirmation of the pairing, which promises to bring together two dynamic talents in a fresh cinematic offering.

## ACTOR JAIDEEP AHLAWAT REVEALS HE HAD ONLY A DAY TO PREPARE FOR JAADU'S DANCE

Jaideep Ahlawat, renowned for his intense roles in series like *Paatal Lok*, has taken fans by surprise with his dance performance in the song *Jaadu* from the upcoming Netflix film *Jewel Thief: The Heist Begins*. The actor's unexpected display of smooth moves has quickly gone viral, showcasing a different facet of his talent.

In a latest interview, Ahlawat revealed that he had only a day to rehearse for the sequence. He likened learning the choreography to memorising a script, emphasising the importance of mental flow in dance. "If there are ten words in the script, you should know which one comes next. It's about mental memory—if the flow is good, you can manage till the end," he explained. He humorously added that he made his choreographer, Praveen, repeat the steps so often that exhaustion was evi-

dent on his face. The day *Jaadu* was released, Ahlawat experienced a phone malfunction, leaving him unaware of the song's immediate impact. Upon regaining access, he was met with an overwhelming number of messages and notifications, indicating the song's widespread popularity. Addressing the surprise surrounding his dance skills, Ahlawat shared that dancing has always been a part of his life, especially growing up in Haryana. "People who've known me since childhood know that I'm from Haryana. I've danced a lot. So, dancing is okay," he stated.

*Jewel Thief: The Heist Begins*, directed by Kookie Gulati and Robbie Grewal, features an ensemble cast including Saif Ali Khan, Nikita Dutta and Kunal Kapoor. The film is set to premiere on Netflix on April 28, 2025.



## Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi wrap up courtroom drama inspired by Shah Bano case

Actors Yami Gautam and Emraan Hashmi have completed filming a courtroom drama inspired by the landmark 1985 Shah Bano vs. Ahmed Khan case. Directed by Suparn S Varma, this film marks the second installment in his courtroom trilogy, following the 2023 release of *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai* starring Manoj Bajpayee. Yami Gautam portrays a character inspired by Shah Bano, while Emraan Hashmi plays a role based on her ex-husband, Ahmed Khan. The film delves into the intense legal battle that highlighted the rights of Muslim women to claim maintenance after divorce. Shot across various locations in

Lucknow, including Kakori and Sandila, the movie emphasises authenticity through extensive research and features several long courtroom sequences. The project wrapped up on Wednesday, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court's verdict in the Shah Bano case. The filmmakers are aiming for a global release around October or November this year. This film continues Suparn S Varma's exploration of significant legal battles in India, following his previous work on *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai*, which was based on the trial of Asaram for the rape of a minor.

## Frozen frontiers and fearless filmmaking Tom Cruise shoots in the Arctic for *Final Reckoning*



Tom Cruise, renowned for his dedication to authentic filmmaking, has taken his commitment a step further in the upcoming *Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning*. In the latest behind-the-scenes footage from *Mission: Impossible 8*, Cruise gives fans a glimpse into one of the film's most extreme locations yet—the icy wilderness of Svalbard, a remote archipelago in the Arctic Ocean. Located between mainland Norway and the North Pole, Svalbard isn't exactly known for easy living. But for Cruise, it was the perfect setting to

bring yet another death-defying chapter of *Mission: Impossible* to life. "The landscape is just breathtakingly beautiful," Cruise says in the video, standing in the middle of an endless sheet of snow and ice. But beauty comes at a cost. As co-star Simon Pegg puts it, "If you want to shoot on the ice cap, you are going with temperatures that are absolutely the most extreme."

Director Christopher McQuarrie emphasizes that this kind of raw environment simply can't be faked. "You cannot fake being in minus 40 degrees. Take

your gloves off for a few seconds and your fingers will start to freeze," he explains. The harsh reality of the shoot wasn't just about discomfort—it was about authenticity. And that's what Cruise is all about.

This isn't the first time Cruise has taken things to the edge for the *Mission: Impossible* franchise. From climbing the Burj Khalifa to hanging off airplanes mid-flight, his pursuit of realism has always been part of the thrill. But Svalbard adds a new element to the legacy—a haunting, frozen desolation

that no green screen could replicate. Actress Hayley Atwell, who joins the action once again, echoes that sentiment. She believes the stark, frozen setting adds not just spectacle, but genuine tension and atmosphere to the story. Cruise's drive to bring moviegoers something real, something raw, continues to define this franchise. "It looks amazing on screen," he says with a smile, despite the cold.

The film makes its way to cinemas in India on 23rd May in English, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu in 4DX and IMAX!

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



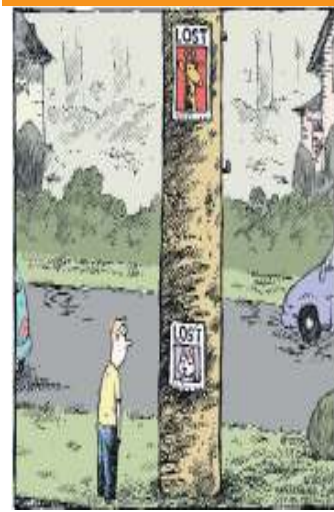
#### GARFIELD



#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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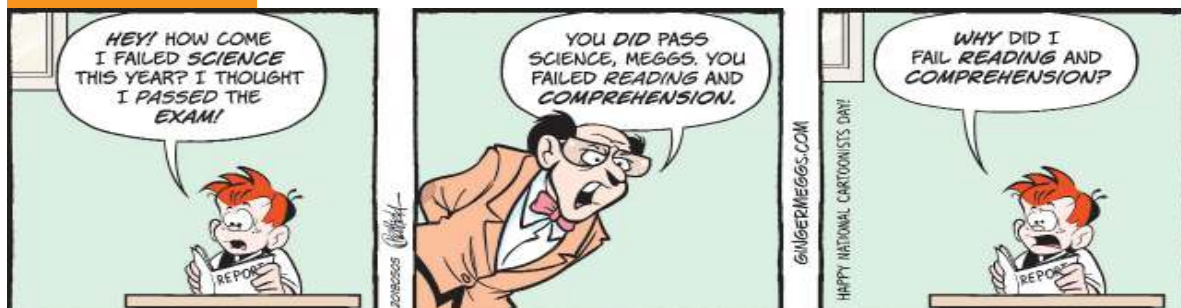
Rules

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

- ACROSS**
- Squirmed about
  - Tidy
  - The cold ocean at the North Pole
  - Perhaps
  - A gloved fighter
  - Permitted by law
  - The remains of a fire
  - Become smaller
  - A fruit with a stone
  - Always ready to give or share
- DOWN**
- Dutch buildings with spinning blades attached
  - Country with capital Rome
  - Jump over
  - Health professionals
  - 7 in Roman numerals
  - An annual festival for Christians
  - Burning strongly and flaming brightly
  - A greeting
  - The body's covering
  - Cured meat from a pig
- SOLUTION**
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | O | L | S | S |   |   |   |   |
| P | O | N | D | A | B | O | O | T |
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#### GINGER MEGGS





## Building future where no child goes to school hungry



focus has always been on 'Love All, Serve All' and on holistic human development. I envisioned nutrition as the foundation for a child's education, health and dignity." This vision brought a transformational depth to the initiative. "Under my leadership, the Trust adopted a compassionate, service-oriented model—anchored in the belief that no child should go to school hungry. We emphasized scalability with sustainability, forming partnerships with governments and communities to expand outreach while maintaining quality and care."

Beyond visible hunger, Sadguru emphasises the invisible threat of malnutrition. "Hidden hunger" refers to a form of malnutrition caused by a lack of essential vitamins and minerals in the diet—despite consuming enough calories. Children suffering from hidden hunger may not appear underfed but face serious developmental issues like poor immunity, fatigue, stunted growth and learning difficulties."

The Annapoorna Trust addressed this silent epidemic with a health drink fortified with essential nutrients. "Many children in India go to school on an empty stomach or eat food that fills them but lacks vital nutrients. Our programme tackles this invisible crisis head-on—ensuring children don't just survive but flourish." The Annapoorna Trust is deeply influenced by the spiritual philosophies of

Sathya Sai Baba and the living vision of Sri Madhusudan Sai. "The spiritual guidance of Sri Madhusudan Sai, rooted in the legacy of Sathya Sai Baba, profoundly shapes the Trust's ethos and decision-making," Sadguru reflects.

"This guidance influences every aspect of our work: a people-first approach with the

child's well-being at the core, integrity and transparency in our operations, inclusiveness without discrimination, and a focus on sustainable solutions that create long-lasting impact." He adds that spirituality is not abstract in this context—it is the grounding principle that ensures the work is humane, ethical, and enduring. The values of compassion and service aren't reserved for special occasions—they are woven into the Trust's daily operations. "Our child-centric approach ensures that every step, from planning menus to serving food, is guided by empathy and care," says Sadguru.

He emphasizes that volunteers are trained in the spirit of seva (selfless service), treating every meal as an act of love. "Leadership is compassionate, with leaders stepping into the field, staying connected, and making decisions with both heart and head. We also incorporate mindfulness practices like reflection and gratitude to keep the team anchored in purpose."

From 50 children to over 10 million, the Annapoorna Programme's journey of scale is remarkable. But such growth requires smart operational strategies. "We've built deep public-private-government partnerships to leverage infrastructure and resources. Decentralised operational hubs, using school kitchens, reduce transport delays and allow regional menu adaptations."

Maintaining quality is crucial. "Standardised yet flexible SOPs ensure consistency in hygiene and nutrition. Community and school ownership fosters trust and long-term sustainability." Innovations like fortified ingredients help address hidden hunger more effectively, while an ever-growing volunteer network bridges operational gaps.

Sadguru underscores the role of strategic partnerships. "We start by



aligning on a common purpose—ensuring no child goes to school hungry. Government partnerships enable rapid scaling, while we provide operational expertise."

Corporates and CSR partners find a transparent, impactful platform in the Trust. "We show them measurable results. Faith-based groups aligned with our values bring longevity and commitment. Our collaborations with education and health experts enhance credibility and outcomes." With over 600 volunteers and 1,50,000 school support staff, the Trust runs on human compassion. Recruiting and retaining such numbers isn't easy, but Sadguru credits their success to a spiritually rooted model.

"We communicate our mission clearly and engage communities aligned with the value of seva," he shares. Training involves hands-on mentorship and continuous learning. "We focus on recognition, offer leadership roles, and emphasize spiritual community through team-building activities and satsangs."

Volunteer motivation goes beyond tasks—it's about creating community. "We keep everyone connected to the cause by reinforcing our mission and values. We build belonging through inclusive activities, recognise contributions regularly, and ensure feedback and emotional support are part of our framework."

A significant operational challenge occurred during a supply chain disruption, which delayed the delivery of micronutrient health mixes to remote areas. "We maintained transparent communication, reorganised

logistics and sourced local alternatives. Volunteers and school staff stepped up, ensuring children didn't go without nutrition."

The experience underscored the importance of flexibility, communication, and community. "It also showed us the need for proactive contingency planning, which we've since strengthened."

The Trust is already venturing into broader community health initiatives, such as RO-based water plants, school toilets and health screenings. "We want to expand using digital health solutions like telemedicine, data analytics to track wellness, and collaborations with health tech startups. Holistic wellness, including mental health and fitness, is also a focus."

"Funding a mission of this scale requires strategic diversification. "We focus on government partnerships, CSR funding, and individual donations. We're also working to build an endowment fund and explore social impact bonds. Transparency in finances and impact reporting builds trust with donors, while cost-efficient operations ensure every rupee goes further." Asked about the key ingredients of the programme's success, Sadguru speaks with clarity and conviction. "It's our clear mission, community involvement, strategic partnerships, dedicated volunteers, commitment to quality, financial resilience and above all, our spiritual foundation."

To ensure a lasting legacy, the Trust will continue to empower communities, foster long-term partnerships, and harness technology—all while staying rooted in love, compassion and service.

TEJAL SINHA  
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Reflecting on the inception of the programme, Sadguru recounts, "The Annapoorna Morning Nutrition Programme began in 2012 when a group of volunteers started serving Morning Nutrition to 50 children in a village near Bengaluru. Inspired by the need to combat classroom hunger, the initiative aimed to support underprivileged children who came to school on an empty stomach." What began as a small service-oriented gesture soon expanded beyond expectations. "What started as a small act of service quickly grew into a nationwide movement, officially becoming the Sri Sathya Sai Annapoorna Trust in 2015. Today, it nourishes millions of children across India, enhancing their health, school attendance, and academic performance." The role of Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai's vision has been pivotal in shaping the Trust's mission. His guidance steered the programme beyond food distribution into the realm of holistic development. "My



**What began in 2012 as a humble effort to provide morning nutrition to 50 children in a Bengaluru village has evolved into a nationwide movement, reaching millions across India. In an exclusive interview with *The Pioneer*, Sadguru Sri Madhusudan Sai, founder of the Sri Sathya Sai Annapoorna Trust, reflects on the transformative journey of the Annapoorna Morning Nutrition Programme. He also shares insights into the programme's spiritual foundations, challenges faced and the collaborative efforts that have propelled its success**

## From waste to wattage!



ble burning. In Central India, where I grew up, I saw personally how agricultural waste was being burned rather than used, choking our air and harming the quality of our soil. I was aware that a sustainable, scalable substitute was required. Our idea for a zero-waste production strategy that turns agricultural waste into pellets of bio-coal came about at that point. On the ground, careful execution is the key to success. Working directly with farmers, we inform them of the financial and environmental advantages of supplying biomass instead of burning it. From sourcing to production, every stage is optimised to enhance usefulness and reduce carbon impact. To ensure that nothing is wasted, our factory is built to recycle all input materials. It's a dedication to climate-positive growth, not just a business.

**How does it maintain a high calorific value while minimising emissions, given that biomass pellets are increasingly a greener alternative to conventional fuels?**

It doesn't compromise on quality. Even traditional coal can't match the high calorific content (between 4000 and 4600 kcal/kg) that our pellets are designed to give, but with 80% fewer carbon emissions. Strict raw material sorting, sophisticated drying techniques and exact compression ratios are used to create this equilibrium. To guarantee consistency in calorific output, we frequently use third-party lab testing and perform real-time quality inspections. In order to ensure clean combustion, our drying process employs thermal optimisation and natural sunlight to lower moisture content. Industries that use these pellets report improved energy efficiency and a decrease in particle emissions as a result. It is clean energy without sacrificing power.

**What distinguishes your procedure in the field of renewable energy?**

The biomass conversion method blends innovation with conventional wisdom. The fundamental concept of turning agricultural waste into fuel is

not new, but it stands out for its end-to-end integration and unique compression process that boosts energy density without the need for chemical additions. After removing contaminants using a multi-stage sieve system, we employ low-moisture thermal drying and high-pressure extrusion to pelletise the mixture. Because of this, pellets are not only high in energy but also mechanically robust, which facilitates transportation and extends their shelf life. The factory is modular and easily scalable since, in contrast to many others, we co-create technology with engineers and local fabricators rather than just buying and processing. We are one of the few really sustainable bio-pellet manufacturers in India thanks to our circular, effective and replicable waste-to-energy conversion process.

**How does it interact with rural communities and guarantee equitable, enduring collaborations?**

Our backbone is the farmer! It would not exist without them. In rural Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, we have set up collecting hubs where farmers can bring their agricultural leftovers and get immediate payments, which are frequently more than what they would earn from middlemen. However, our involvement extends beyond business dealings. We fund community infrastructure projects like water pumps and rural road construction, conduct awareness campaigns and provide free workshops on soil health. Just by selling what was once waste, many of our partners have seen a 20-25% increase in their yearly income. Instead of short-term exploitation, we support long-term success. We establish relationships founded on mutual respect, trust, and growth by incorporating farmers into the value chain and providing them with observable advantages.

**What do you think will happen to green energy in India in the future?**

India is currently at a pivotal moment. The nation can spearhead the global green energy revolution with its sizable rural base and expanding industrial demand, but only if we support indigenous, decentralised and scalable alternatives. One of the best solutions for decarbonising small and medium-sized businesses in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities is biomass pellets. In the following two years, it plans to open five more districts, each of which will have a satellite pellet unit run by our staff. Additionally, we are in negotiations to ship pellets to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, where there is a growing need for clean fuel.



PNS/HYDERABAD

**T**ransforming agricultural waste into an environmentally revolutionary solution! A groundbreaking biopellet factory is doing just that, turning 40,000 kg of garbage into high-energy bio-coal every day. This creative solution addresses the enormous problem of stubble burning, which used to pollute the air and damage the environment. In addition to giving farmers a new source of income, this plant lowers air pollution by purchasing agricultural waste from them rather than burning it. A 15% decrease in the Air Quality Index (AQI) in just one year is an excellent accomplishment! Big brands like NTPC Mauda and Haldiram are already using the environmentally beneficial bio coal that is generated to power their factories and generate electricity. Both the economy and the earth benefit from it. Santerra Industries' founder, Nikhil Chandwani, explains how!

**EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW**

**Using agricultural waste, it promotes a zero-waste production method. What motivated this sustainable objective?**

It was created out of frustration with India's growing ecological crisis, particularly as a result of the country's reliance on fossil fuels and stub-



## How cruises are leading the shift in consumer expectations

**T**he travel industry is undergoing a remarkable transformation, fuelled by a seismic shift in what travellers seek from their journeys. No longer satisfied with simply checking landmarks off a list, today's modern explorers are prioritising personal growth, authentic connections, and immersive experiences. This evolution has given rise to the experiential economy, where travel is not just about the destination, but about the emotions, insights and stories gathered along the way.

At the heart of this evolution, cruise travel has found a new and powerful role. Cruises are increasingly being recognised as ideal vessels—literally and figuratively—for experience-driven travel. What we are witnessing is more than a trend; it's a cultural evolution. Modern travellers crave more than relaxation or luxury—they seek journeys that foster self-discovery, cultural immersion, and meaningful human connection. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated this shift by reshaping global values and inspiring people to focus on purpose, health, and presence. Travel is now a deeply personal pursuit, and cruise lines must adapt to these changing expectations.

StarCruises is positioned as a more affordable, lifestyle-driven cruise experience, offering intimate and unforgettable voyages aboard the Star Voyager and Star Navigator. Designed for explorers seeking adventure and connection without compromising on comfort, these ships deliver a relaxed, inclusive experience that blends leisure with cultural depth.

Yet, no matter which cruise line our guests choose, one thing remains constant: a commitment to experiential travel. Our cruises are no longer defined solely by their itineraries—they are defined by the moments that unfold onboard and ashore. Whether it's our signature 24-hour butler service for Palace guests, exclusive privileges that elevate every stay, or world-class entertainment and themed voyages, every element of our offering has been carefully curated to resonate on a deeper, more emotional level. We firmly believe that transformation is the new luxury. Our goal is not just to take guests from one destination to another, but to provide a series of experiences that inspire, engage, and uplift. Our themed cruises, ranging from wellness retreats and culinary adventures to cultural immersion voyages, are

designed to nurture the mind, body, and spirit. Guests are invited to explore not just new places, but new versions of themselves.

Onboard, guests can participate in comprehensive wellness programs, blending yoga, meditation and nutrition workshops led by expert practitioners. These are not simply relaxation tools—they're gateways to lasting lifestyle changes and inner renewal. Meanwhile, our gastronomic journeys celebrate regional and global cuisine with tasting menus curated by award-winning chefs, interactive cooking classes, and immersive dining experiences that spotlight the culinary heritage of Southeast Asia and beyond. Additionally, our shore excursions have been reimagined to provide deeper cultural insights and authentic local interactions. Instead of generic city tours, guests can now join community-led experiences—such as traditional craft workshops, or heritage walking tours—that offer a more intimate understanding of the destination.

Personalisation is another core pillar of our approach. In today's digital age, travellers expect—and deserve—a journey tailored to their individual interests. Through the use of innovative technology, we offer smart touchpoints from check-in to itinerary building to real-time recommendations onboard.

And while the destinations we travel to are breathtaking, we also view our ships as destinations in their own right. Each vessel is a floating world of possibility—constantly evolving to reflect the desires of the modern traveller. From a variety of dining options to experiential entertainment and innovative social spaces, we are crafting onboard environments that are as inspiring as the journeys themselves.

Ultimately, the future of cruising lies not in extravagance, but in emotional resonance. We are no longer in the business of just moving people across oceans; we are in the business of transformation. Whether it's a Fly-Cruise experience that opens up new worlds, or a themed voyage that sparks self-discovery, our mission is to create unforgettable journeys that leave a lasting imprint on the hearts of our guests.

*(The author, Naresh Rawal, is the Senior Vice President - Sales (India & Middle East) of StarCruises and Dream Cruises.)*



# Indian athletes condemn Pahalgam terror attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's sporting fraternity oscillated between grief and rage as it joined the nation in condemning the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam with some demanding that the country should cut all sports ties with Pakistan.

On Tuesday, terrorists opened fire at a prime tourist location in south Kashmir's Pahalgam, killing at least 26 civilians and injuring several others. The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow group of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli expressed shock as they mourned the loss of lives.

"The affected families must be going through an unimaginable ordeal — India and the world stand united with them at this dark hour, as we mourn the loss of lives and pray for justice," Tendulkar wrote.

"Heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. Praying for peace and strength to families all those who lost their lives and justice to be served for their cruel act," Kohli posted on his Instagram.

Similar sentiments were expressed by other top players such as Jasprit Bumrah and Suryakumar Yadav. Pacer Mohammed Siraj posted an emotional message in which he called for justice.

"To target and kill innocent civilians in the name of religion is pure evil... No cause, no belief, no ideology can ever justify such a monstrous act. *Yeh kaisi ladai hai... Jahaan insaan ki jaan ki koi keemat hi nahi* (what



The affected families must be going through an unimaginable ordeal — India and the world stand united with them at this dark hour — SACHIN TENDULKAR, CRICKETER



Praying for the families of the deceased. Those responsible for this will pay. India will strike — GAUTAM GAMBHIR, INDIAN CRICKET TEAM HEAD COACH

sort of a fight is this in which there is no value for human life," he asked.

"I hope this madness ends soon and these terrorists are found and punished, without mercy," he added. Former India cricketer Shreevats Goswami wrote a strongly-worded post, demanding an end to all sporting ties with Pakistan.

"And this is exactly why I say — you don't play cricket with Pakistan. Not now. Not ever. When BCCI or the government refused to send India to the Champions Trophy in Pakistan, some had the audacity to say, 'Oh, but sport should rise above

politics," Goswami wrote. "...Murdering innocent Indians seems to be Pakistan's national sport and India should respond with zero tolerance and not with bats and balls," he added.

While India has not played bilateral cricket with Pakistan since 2012-13, and the BCCI declined to send its team for the Champions Trophy earlier this year, other Indian teams have continued to travel to Pakistan for international events.

Goswami, who had recently visited Pahalgam, said he had sensed hope and peace returning to the valley.

"And now... This bloodshed again. It breaks something inside you. It makes you question how many more times we're expected to stay silent, stay 'sporting,' while our people die. No more. Not this time," he added. An "outraged" Olympic bronze medal-winning boxer and ruling BJP member Vijender Singh also called for firm "action".

"Our brave soldiers will definitely give a befitting reply to this cowardly attack in the coming times. In the presence of the brave sons of Mother India, the plans of those who want to disturb the peace in

Jammu and Kashmir will never succeed," he asserted. Indian cricket team head coach and BJP MP Gautam Gambhir wrote, "Praying for the families of the deceased. Those responsible for this will pay. India will strike." Two-time Olympic medal-winning badminton player PV Sindhu too penned down an emotional post.

"My heart aches for the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. So much pain. So much loss. No reason, no cause can ever justify such brutality.

"To the families left behind — your grief is beyond words, but you are not alone. We

are with you. In these dark moments, may we find strength in each other, and never let go of the hope that peace will return!" Sindhu wrote. Olympic gold medalist duo of javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and Abhinav Bindra prayed for the victims.

"Heartbroken by the tragic attack in Jammu & Kashmir. Prayers for the victims and their families," Chopra wrote.

"Heartbroken by the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam. My thoughts are with the victims and their families. Terror has no place in our world, we must stand united against hatred and violence," Bindra added. The attack is the deadliest terrorist act in the valley since the 2019 Pulwama strike. "Strongly condemn this cowardly act by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. India stands united with our brave Army, J&K Police, and Paramilitary forces in the fight against terrorism. Justice will prevail," said former India all-rounder Suresh Raina.

"My heart goes out to family members of all those who lost their lives in dastardly attack. This can't be forgiven," former India spinner Harbhajan Singh wrote.

Olympic medal-winning former hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, shuttler Saina Nehwal and two-time world champion boxer Nikhat Zareen also called for justice.

"Condemnation is not enough, justice must follow. Our hearts bleed for Pahalgam. Terror must never win. Prayers for all affected in the Pahalgam attack," Sreejesh wrote.

Zareen added, "Those who attack innocents attack humanity itself. Strongly condemn the cowardly terror attack in Pahalgam. Justice must be swift."

## No fireworks in MI vs SRH match; players to sport black armbands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

The players of Sunrisers Hyderabad and Mumbai Indians will wear black armbands during their IPL match which will not feature cheerleaders and fireworks here on Wednesday to mourn the victims of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam that caused 26 deaths.

The teams will also observe a minute's silence to pay their respects to those affected by the incident that has drawn international condemnation. "The players of two teams will wear black armbands and observe a minute's silence in memory of all those who lost their lives in the terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam," a BCCI source told to media.

"As a mark of respect there would be no cheerleaders on the sidelines of MI vs SRH game. No crackers will be burst," he added. Terrorists opened fire on civilians at the popular tourist location in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 persons and injuring several others.

The Resistance Front (TRF), which is a part of the banned Pakistan-based LeT terror group, claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack has drawn strong condemnation from across the world. The BCCI also issued a statement to condemn the "ghastly and cowardly" attack. "The cricketing community is deeply shocked and anguished by the tragic loss of innocent lives in the gruesome terror attack at Pahalgam yesterday," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia said.

"On behalf of the BCCI, while condemning this ghastly and cowardly act with strongest possible words, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayers for the departed souls. In sharing their pain and grief, we stand hand in hand at this hour of tragedy," he added. The Indian cricket team snapped bilateral cricket with Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and recently refused to tour the country for the Champions Trophy, prompting the ICC to make provisions for a neutral venue in Dubai.

## We never press panic button: CSK CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Chennai Super Kings as a franchise never presses the panic button and there is not much to worry about despite the five-time champions' ordinary run in the current season IPL, its CEO Kasi Viswanathan told to media on Wednesday. CSK have lost a record five games in a row this season and more than halfway into the tournament, find themselves at the bottom of the points table with six losses in eight games.

They have lacked firepower in the batting department and captain Rituraj Gaikwad's absence due to an injury has only made it worse for the storied outfit. CSK CEO has also spoken about his team's run in IPL 2025.

"We have not been performing up to the mark. We are trying to improve and we will try to do well in the next few games. We have never pressed the panic button in our franchise is not like that, it is just a game," Viswanathan told to media. MS Dhoni is back leading the side in Gaikwad's absence but as head coach Stephen Fleming put it 'he doesn't have



a magic wand' and can't change the team's fortunes overnight.

Following the defeat to Mumbai Indians, CSK find themselves in a must-win situation in their remaining six games with Dhoni already speaking about the planning for 2026.

Can Dhoni script a turnaround after taking over from Gaikwad midway into the

tournament? "See, it's not the question of anybody. It's a question that the team should do well and not just one individual. We don't talk to the team management. Dhoni will do what is right for the team.

"What we are expecting as administrators is good performance by the team and we don't criticise our team at all," he added.

## Current focus to win IPL with DC: Abishek Porel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Like any other cricketer from the country, young Delhi Capitals opener Abishek Porel aspires to represent India in the future but said his current focus is to help his side win its maiden Indian Premier League trophy this year.

Chasing 160, the 22-year-old made 51 off 36 balls to help DC win by eight wickets against Lucknow Super Giants here on Tuesday. "Obviously, I am enjoying every innings, trying to develop in every innings. The future plan is to play for India, play for the country for a long period," Porel said at the post-match press conference. "But current focus is the IPL trophy, how can I help the team in winning the trophy, how can I contribute for DC. This matters a lot right now.

"I know my game and the support staff also knows that. The support staff always tells me to play freely and not to take any tension." Asked to bat, LSG made a quick start with Aiden Markram (52) and

Mitchell Marsh (45) sharing 87 runs for the opening stand in 10 overs.

But DC bowlers made a brilliant comeback with Mukesh Kumar (4/33) leading from the front to restrict LSG to 159 for 6, a target which Porel feels was gettable. "The wicket was very good, so 160 score was a bit less, so we had that in mind that we need to chase these runs. Good toss to win. There was not much difference but the skipper took a good decision," Porel said.

"They (LSG) got runs initially but we knew we can restrict them in middle overs. We had good spinners so we backed ourselves and made a comeback with some good bowling in the second half." LSG assistant coach Vijay Dahiya said the hosts lost the momentum in the second half of their innings after a bright start.

"Let's give credit where its due. I think Delhi Capitals' bowlers assessed the conditions better. They made a very good comeback."

## RCB eye home improvement against struggling Rajasthan Royals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Struggling to find form in their own den, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to regain control of their IPL campaign at home when they meet a floundering Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday. RCB's three defeats at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in as many matches offer one of the biggest paradoxes of this edition. An outfit that has steamrolled opposition in all parts of the country has been left chasing shadows in their own backyard.

The RCB batters have appeared strangely subdued and their bowlers seem to have forgotten the lengths to adopt here.

Central to that woeful run is the changed character of the 22-year strip here which has offered some grip to the bowlers. The Bengaluru batters are yet to find the right tempo to tide over the slow-

ness in the pitch, as they seem to have been caught in the dilemma of whether to step on the gas or not.

It's evident in the team's totals here so far — 169/8, 163/7 and 95/9 (14 overs). They have scored over 9-10 runs an over in other venues, but here the rate has dropped down to 7-8 runs an over.

Their mainstay Virat Kohli has been in decent form this season, averaging 64, but more would be expected of Phil Salt, Devdutt Padikkal and skipper Rajat Patidar. The inconsistent bounce is holding back the RCB batters, particularly after the Power Play segment and, hopefully, they will find the rhythm against RR.

### Avoid mid-table tussle

RCB currently have 10 points to be placed at third on the table but Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants also have 10 points. Mumbai Indians are quietly sneak-

ing up the ladder with eight points. If they win against Sunrisers Hyderabad then MI too will have 10 points and can displace RCB (4.7) from the third slot on account of better net run rate (4.8).

Therefore, a favourable result will help RCB to stay above the possible mid-table logjam of four teams with 10 points.

### RR's turmoils

Rajasthan have a messy house to deal with. Sanju Samson will miss this match with an abdominal injury that earlier forced him to skip the game against Delhi Capitals as well.

Riyen Parag will continue to lead the Royals, who are currently tottering at eighth on the table with four points, in the absence of their regular captain.

Their front-line batsmen — Yashasvi Jaiswal, Parag, Shimron Hetmyer and Nitish Rana — are in reasonable form

despite six defeats in eight matches and the start made by young Vaibhav Suryavanshi is also encouraging. However, the bowlers' lack of penetration has hurt them badly.

Wanindu Hasaranga (6 matches: 9 wickets) is their leading wicket-taker but the Sri Lankan spinner has taken four wickets in one match and struggled in the rest. Jofra Archer (8 matches, 8 wickets), Maheesh Theekshana (8 matches, 7 wickets) and Sandeep Sharma (8 matches, 6 wins) too offer a similar tale.

They have not either been able to take wickets or stem the run flow, and Archer (9.33) has the best economy rate among the bowlers tells a story.

The Royals management will hope that they will regain some mojo on the Chinnaswamy track which, by the occurrences of the recent past, will have something in it for them to explore.

### Teams

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Rajat Patidar (capt), Phil Salt, Virat Kohli, Liam Livingstone, Jitesh Sharma (w), Tim David, Krunal Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Josh Hazlewood, Suyash Sharma, Yash Dayal, Devdutt Padikkal, Rasikh Dar Salam, Manoj Bhandage, Jacob Bethell, Swapnil Singh, Lungi Ngidi, Romario Shephard, Nuwan Thushara, Mohit Rathee, Swastik Chikara, Abhinandan Singh.

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

## Rahul left last season's baggage, will do well for DC: Pujara

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India Test specialist Cheteshwar Pujara feels KL Rahul has moved on from a disappointing last season at Lucknow Super Giants and the change in mindset is not only helping him flourish at his new IPL franchise but also making him a strong asset for the national team.

Rahul hit his third fifty of the season to take his new team Delhi Capitals to a commanding eight-wicket win against his former franchise LSG in Lucknow on Tuesday. "Just move on, don't carry any baggage from the past. And that's a good thing. KL is a mature player. Last couple of years, he's been batting well across formats," Pujara said on ESPNcricinfo's TimeOut.

"He doesn't want to think about the past and wants to enjoy his batting and be in his zone, rather than think about what went wrong when he was playing for the LSG team. It's good to move on, which will also help him play well for DC and even for the Indian team. Because, lately, he is someone the India team also relies on, the way he's batting."

Under Rahul's captaincy LSG had reached the play-offs in 2022 and 2023 seasons. However, the Lucknow outfit finished seventh last season.



Rahul's relationship with LSG owner Sanjiv Goenka also deteriorated last year. In a video that went viral on social media, Goenka was seen publicly reprimanding the former Lucknow captain after a defeat.

A few months later, the 33-year-old was released by the franchise ahead of the mega auctions. At DC, the wicketkeeper batter, one of the most consistent players in the IPL, has emerged as the leading run scorer this season, scoring 323 runs in seven

innings. "Even as a person, he looks a lot more mature now, he understands his game very well. We have seen a different KL Rahul this season. When he started (against LSG), he didn't look that (fluid), but still he picked it up," Pujara said.

Former England opener Nick Knight added that the absence of captaincy responsibilities may also be contributing to Rahul's freedom with the bat. "Captaincy can do funny things to you

— sometimes you thrive on it, sometimes it's a burden. Whether that's had any impact, of not being captain now, just being free and being able to play the match situation," Knight said.

"We've got this obsession in cricket that the best player has to be captain. That's not always the case, is it? I'm not saying that's the case with KL Rahul, or even Rishabh Pant, but he's batting with so much freedom and looks relaxed in the crease."

## Sri Lanka women bring in several changes for Tri-Series



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka on Wednesday announced a 17-member squad for the upcoming Tri-Series against India and South Africa, making sweeping changes to their ODI lineup. The hosts have made as many as eight changes to their squad since the 0-2 series loss to New Zealand in March.

Veteran Chamari Athapaththu will continue to lead the side, while medium pacer Malki Madara, who had impressed in her debut T20I against New Zealand, has received a maiden ODI call-up.

The likes of Vishmi Gunaratne, Nilakshi Silva, Hasini Perera, Piumi Wathsala, Dewmi Vihanga, Inoka

Ranaweera and Hansima Karunaratne have also made their way back into the squad. The tournament begins on Sunday with all matches set to be played at the R Premadasa Stadium here.

Sri Lanka will open their campaign against India on Sunday. The final is scheduled for May 11.

**Sri Lanka squad:** Chamari Athapaththu (c), Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshi Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Anushka Sanjeevani, Hasini Perera, Piumi Wathsala, Manudi Nanayakkara, Dewmi Fernando, Inoka Ranaweera, Inoshi Fernando, Hansima Karunaratne, Ranshika Sewwandi, Malki Madara, Sugandika Kumari, Achini Kulsuriya.



# 'CAN'T WAIT FOR THE KALKI 2 MAGIC': PRABHAS'S BIRTHDAY MESSAGE TO NAG ASHWIN



Actor Prabhas took to social media to extend heartfelt birthday wishes to director Nag Ashwin, expressing admiration for his visionary approach and hinting at the excitement surrounding their upcoming collaboration, *Kalki 2*. In his Instagram story, Prabhas shared a photo of Ashwin seated in the futuristic vehicle 'Buji' from *Kalki 2898 AD*, captioning it: "Wishing a very Happy Birthday to this amazing human, Nagi... Your vision and commitment always inspire me. Sending lots of love... Can't wait to see the *Kalki 2* magic... Super excited!!"

*Kalki 2898 AD*, released in 2024, is a sci-fi epic set in a dystopian future, featuring Prabhas as Bhairava and Amitabh Bachchan as the immortal warrior Ashwathama. The narrative follows their quest to protect SUM-80, the woman destined to carry the Kalki avatar, against the tyrannical rule of Supreme Yaskin, portrayed by Kamal Haasan. The sequel, *Kalki 2*, is anticipated to delve deeper into this universe, with reports suggesting an expanded role for Kamal Haasan's character and a more prominent presence for Amitabh Bachchan. Filming for *Kalki 2* is expected to commence in February 2025, with a projected release in 2026. Nag Ashwin, known for his previous works like "Yevade Subramanyam" and the critically acclaimed "Mahanati," has been lauded for his innovative storytelling and ambitious projects. His collaboration with Prabhas in the *Kalki* series marks a significant milestone in Indian cinema's foray into science fiction. As fans eagerly await the next installment, Prabhas's birthday message underscores the strong camaraderie and mutual respect between the actor and director, promising another cinematic spectacle in *Kalki 2*.

## Nag Ashwin jokes about *Kalki 2* release

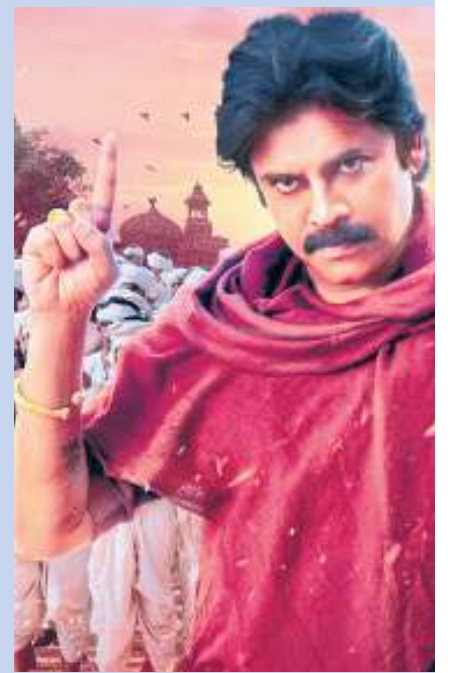
Following the monumental success of *Kalki 2898 AD*, director Nag Ashwin is gearing up for its sequel. However, production is delayed due to lead actor Prabhas's commitments to other projects. At a recent event, when asked about the sequel's timeline, Ashwin humorously remarked, "Last time, I said *Kalki 2898 AD* would release when 3-4 planets align. Now, I might release its sequel when 7-8 planets align," eliciting laughter from the audience. While the script for *Kalki 2* is complete, filming is expected to commence in late 2025, aiming for a release by the end of 2026. In the interim, rumors suggest that Ashwin is in advanced talks with actress Alia Bhatt for a new project. Reports indicate that both are keen on the collaboration, with discussions ongoing to finalize schedules and details.



## OG shooting to resume in May; September release on the cards for Pawan Kalyan starrer

OG is one of the most anticipated films in Powerstar Pawan Kalyan's career. Directed by Sujeeth and produced by DVV Danayya under DVV Entertainments, the film has faced delays due to Kalyan's political engagements. However, recent reports indicate that the actor is expected to resume shooting in May 2025, aiming for a release on September 5, 2025. The film features Priyanka Arul Mohan as the female lead and marks Bollywood actor Emraan Hashmi's debut in Telugu cinema as the antagonist. With music composed by Thaman S, OG is generating significant buzz among fans.

If OG releases as planned, it would be Pawan Kalyan's second film within a span of four months, following *Hari Hara Veera Mallu*, which is slated for a summer release. While an official confirmation is awaited, the production team is optimistic about completing the remaining shoot promptly once Kalyan is back on set. Fans eagerly await further updates on this high-profile project.



## Pawan Kalyan's *Hari Hara Veera Mallu: Part 1* faces delays, sequel nears completion

The highly anticipated historical action film *Hari Hara Veera Mallu: Part 1 - Sword vs Spirit*, starring Pawan Kalyan, has been marred by delays, leaving fans eagerly awaiting its release. Despite reports suggesting that Pawan Kalyan has allotted time to complete the remaining portions of the film, including dubbing, giving hope for a possible May-end release, a latest twist has emerged. The final outdoor schedule completed in Mumbai, according to sources, was not for Part 1 but for *Hari Hara Veera Mallu: Part 2*. This revelation has left fans wondering about the progress of Part 1. While the sequel appears to be moving full steam ahead, fans are still left wondering when Part One will finally hit the big screens. The film's delayed release has sparked ongoing

speculation and disappointment among fans. Despite the uncertainty surrounding Part 1's release date, the production team seems to be focused on completing the sequel. In fact, the costume designers' Instagram updates have added to the confusion, leaving fans eager for an official announcement from the production house. The historical action epic, produced by Mega Surya Productions, boasts a star-studded cast including Nidhi Agerwal, Bobby Deol, Nargis Fakhri and Nora Fatehi, with a rousing score by Oscar-winner M.M. Keeravani. Fans are urging the makers to prioritise the completion and release of Part 1 and all eyes are now on the production house for an official announcement that could end the wait this summer.



## Nani reveals Arjun Sarkaar was initially a cameo in *HIT 3*

Natural Star Nani is gearing up for the release of *HIT: The Third Case*, slated to hit theaters on May 1, 2025. Directed by Sailesh Kolanu, this action thriller marks the third installment in the HIT universe and features Nani alongside Srinidhi Shetty in lead roles.

In a recent interview, Nani revealed that his character, Arjun Sarkaar, was initially conceived as a cameo in *HIT: The Second Case*. Director Sailesh Kolanu had approached him to add a high-impact moment in the climax, either with Nani or another actor. However, due to a scheduling gap, Nani agreed to take on the role himself. This decision eventually led to the development of a full-fledged storyline for Arjun Sarkaar in *HIT 3*.

*HIT: The Third Case* follows SP Arjun Sarkaar, a tough and fearless police officer who believes that justice for criminals comes only in two forms—prison or death. The narrative begins with a disturbing incident involving the abduction of a nine-month-old infant. The child's mother, devastated and desperate, turns to Arjun for help. Driven by her appeal, Arjun takes on the case with unshakable determination. His investigation is intense and aggressive, marked by high-stakes confrontations and raw action. As he delves deeper, a key encounter hints at the struggles and battles from his early days on the force, revealing more about his character and past.

The film is produced by Prashanti Tipirneni and Nani under Wall Poster

Cinema and Unanimous Productions. Cinematography is handled by Sanu John Varghese and editing by Karthika Srinivas. Mickey J. Meyer composes the music, marking his second collaboration with Nani after *Shyam Singha Roy* (2021).

*HIT: The Third Case* is scheduled for a worldwide theatrical release on May 1, 2025. The film has received an "A" (Adults Only) certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification due to its intense violence and gore. Despite the certification, some cuts were made and certain scenes were blurred to comply with guidelines.

The trailer for *HIT 3* has already garnered significant attention, with fans praising Nani's intense portrayal of Arjun Sarkaar. The actor has expressed confidence in the film, stating that the unique narrative and raw action sequences will offer a fresh cinematic experience.



## STR discusses relationship mindset: 'Marriage isn't the problem; people are'

Simlambarsan TR, affectionately known as Simbu or STR, has often been in the limelight not just for his cinematic endeavors but also for his personal life. With his upcoming film *Thug Life* generating significant buzz, fans are eager to know more about his relationship status.

At a recent event, Simbu was candid when asked about his views on marriage. He shared: "Marriage is not the problem; the problem is people. These days, very few people are willing to let each other be. Everyone says, 'This is my life, that is important to me' and if someone isn't with them, it's like they're alone. That mindset doesn't work for me."

He emphasised the importance of mutual understanding in relationships, stating: "When the right person is meant to come into your life, she will. You can't force it. It's all about understanding. So, what I'm saying is there's nothing wrong with marriage. When the time is right, the right companion will come, and everything will fall into place."

Few rumors suggested that Simbu was in a relationship with actress Nidhi Agerwal. However, these speculations were swiftly addressed.

## Ajay Bhupathi's *Mangalavaram 2* to feature Bollywood actress, Payal Rajput not returning



Director Ajay Bhupathi, known for his bold storytelling in films like *RX100* and *Mangalavaram*, is set to embark on a sequel to his 2023 thriller *Mangalavaram*. However, in a surprising turn, Payal Rajput, who played the lead role in the original, will not be returning for the sequel.

Reports indicate that Bhupathi is in discussions with a popular Bollywood actress to take on the central role in *Mangalavaram 2*, aiming for a pan-India appeal. The sequel is expected to have a significantly higher budget than its predecessor, signaling Bhupathi's ambition to expand the film's reach and impact.

While the first film garnered attention for its intense themes and Rajput's compelling

performance, the sequel is rumored to shift towards a more family-oriented narrative. Sources suggest that Bhupathi plans to incorporate spiritual elements into the storyline, broadening its appeal to a wider audience.

As of now, the official cast and release details for *Mangalavaram 2* have not been announced. Fans of the original film are eagerly awaiting further updates on the project's development.

