HYDERABAD, SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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No one can dare carry out blasts now: Shah 5

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Chiranjeevi calls out unauthorised fan meeting CHARGES IN UK P11

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

Refrain from spending large sums of money on shawls and bouquets during events and meetings. Today I was given bouquets by our officials. These cost about Rs 2,000 and is of hardly any use. Instead use that money to feed poor people. I call upon forest department not to give bouquets but support the under privileged, particularly those struggling with hunger

- Konda Surekha, Minister

DON'T MISS...

RTA cracks whip on defaulters

The Transport Department is intensifying efforts to recover 100 per cent of the Motor Vehicle (MV) tax from vehicle owners. Over 6,000 vehicle owners in the district have yet to pay their tax dues. To address this, officials are issuing notices and warning vehicle owners of severe consequences, including the suspension of vehicle registrations. The district aimed to collect Rs 6.96 crore annually in MV tax but has managed to recover Rs 6.04 crore so far. There are over 12,000 vehicles in the district, and vehicle owners are required to pay their ...

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Treatment of deportees flayed

India has "strongly registered" its concerns with the US authorities on the treatment meted out to deportees on a flight that landed on February 5, particularly with respect to use of shackles, especially on women, the Centre informed Parliament on Friday. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in a written response to a query in the Lok Sabha also said the "US side has conveyed" to the MEA that detainees on the three deportation flights (that landed on February 5, 15 and 16 respectively)...

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India crosses 1 bn tonnes coal output

India crossed a record milestone of 1 billion tonnes of coal production in the current fiscal, a landmark, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi described as a proud moment for the country, showing its commitment to energy security and self-reliance. Coal, which is predominately used to produce electricity as well as fuel in several industries, is the mainstay energy source for the world's fifth largest economy. In a statement, the Coal Ministry said the momentous milestone was achieved on March 20...

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New rules, saliva ban reversal for IPL

New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off here on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain. There is plenty to look forward in the league. Among the most prominent rule changes is the lifting of saliva ban. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, bowlers will be allowed to use it to shine...

-SPORTS

CM Revanth, KTR for Stalin's fair delimitation meet today

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy and BRS working president K T Rama Rao arrived in Chennai on Friday. Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin has called a meeting related to Delimitation today, March 22.

In a show of Opposition unity, the Chief Ministers of Kerala, Telangana, and Punjab — Pinarayi Vijayan, A Revanth Reddy, and Bhagwant Mann — along with Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, and senior representatives of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) will attend the first Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting on "Fair Delimitation" convened by the DMK in Chennai on Saturday. West Bengal's ruling party Trinamool Congress (TMC) was also invited but is learnt to have decided to not send any representative.

The meeting in Chennai comes in the wake of a growing regional push-back against the parliamentary delimitation exercise, which many in the southern and eastern states fear will erode federal principles and disproportionately diminish representation from certain states.

Terming it as a historic day for Indian federalism, MK Stalin said, "I extend my warmest welcome to the leaders from Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal & Punjab who are joining us for the Joint Action Committee meeting on Fair Delimitation.

MPs Thamizhachi and Kanimozhi welcome Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy, who arrived in Chennai on Friday

All-Party Meeting on March 5 saw 58 registered political parties of Tamil Nadu set aside their differences and came together for a singular cause—FairDelimitation.

Stalin said, "This is a defining moment in our collective journey. This is more than a meeting—it is the beginning of a movement that will shape the future of our country. Together, we will achieve Fair Delimitation!"

Under KTR's leadership, a team comprising several senior BRS party leaders will participate in the conference. KTR has warned that the current delimitation policy weakens the representation of southern states, severely

Continued on Page 2

No hike in power tariffs this year

Public hearing on tariff proposals begins before ERC Chairman

Presenting tariff proposals before the Commission, Faruqui said the revenue gap for the current year stands at Rs 9,758 crore. He said the corporation has requested the state government to cover the shortfall through subsidy, rather than burdening consumers with increased charges

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant relief to consumers, the TGSPDCL Chairman and Managing Director, Musharraf Faruqui, said that there is no proposal to increase power tariffs this year.

TGSPDCL CMD Musharaf Faruqui speaking at the public hearing

He made this announcement during a public hearing on TGSPDCL's revenue requirement and retail supply tariff proposals held at the Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERC) headquarters on Thursday under the chairmanship of Justice D. Nagarjun.

Presenting tariff proposals before the Commission, Faruqui said the revenue gap for the current year stands at Rs 9,758 crore. He said the corporation has requested the state government to cover the shortfall through subsidy, rather than burdening consumers with increased charges.

Explaining the current power situation in Telangana, Faruqui said the state recently recorded its highest-ever power demand of 17,162 MW. The government has entered into power swap agreements with other utilities in the country to meet such demand surges. These agreements have resulted in a savings of Rs 1,614 crore for TGSPDCL, he added.

Detailing improvements in the network and efficiency, he said the corporation spent Rs 578.88 crore to strengthen distribution infrastructure. "Distribution losses have come down to 8.38 per cent and the power purchase cost has been brought down to Rs 5.76 per unit. The PTR failure rate has been cut to 1.55 per cent and the DTR failure rate now stands at 5.70 per cent," he said.

The CMD said the corporation is focusing on increasing efficiency while maintaining quality and that the proposals before the commission reflect this commitment.

The public hearing was presided over by ERC Chairman Justice D. Nagarjun. TGSPDCL Joint Managing Director C. Srinivasa Rao and other senior officials from the energy department were also present. Representatives of the Railways, Hyderabad Metro Rail Limited (HMRL), and power sector experts including Venu Gopal Rao were present during the hearing.

CM asks NABARD to provide soft loans, funds for irrigation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy appealed to NABARD chairman, Shaji KV, to strengthen existing cooperative societies and to set up new cooperative societies.

NABARD Chairman Shaji KV meets Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Friday

He also urged the NABARD Chairman to provide loans at low interest rates under RIDF and to sanction funds for micro irrigation projects.

NABARD Chairman Shaji KV met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on Friday. During the meeting, the CM and the NABARD Chairman discussed the strengthening of women's Self-Help Groups and the CM requested the NABARD chief to launch a special scheme for women's SHGs.

The Chief Minister wanted NABARD to help increase rice milling capacity by linking IKPs, godowns and rice mills in the state.

The CM asked officials to use sanctioned NABARD funds by March 31 and

Continued on Page 2

Cong: Budget is reality, not illusion

BRS never followed fiscal discipline; spent Rs 2.30 L cr without approval

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU
venkat.k.warlu@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said the previous BRS Government headed by K. Chandrasekhar Rao borrowed loans without following financial discipline.

While replying to the debate on the budget on Friday in the Assembly, Bhatti said the BRS government spent Rs 16.70 lakh crore in 10 years and questioned as to what it has to tell as to when it was constructed.

Bhatti made it clear that the Congress government budget is in reality and decided not to be in imaginations and illusions.

"Did the BRS government construct Nagarjuna Sagar with Rs 16.70 crore? Or is it the SRSP? Or is it constructed ORR? Or BDL or ECIL? However, the BRS government spent Rs 1 lakh crore for the Kaleshwaram Project. But it crashed. The BRS government kept Rs 77,000 crore arrears for SCCL. Did the BRS government construct double-bedroom houses in any village. The CAS revealed that the BRS government spent Rs 2.30 lakh crore without the approval of the Assembly.

Bhatti said the BRS government did not spend funds totally on any day. It never spent the funds although it had introduced huge budgets. He said the BRS government did not spend Rs 8000 crore in 2016-17, R 40,000 crore in 2018-19, Rs 48,000 crore in 2021-22, Rs 52,000 crore in 2022-23, Rs 58,571 crore in 2023-24.

The BRS government did not spend 38 per cent of the budget and BRS leaders should tell where they were gone?, Bhatti asked.

Bhatti alleged that the BRS government sold ORR for Rs 7,000 crore for 30 years. The BRS government sold ORR and government lands through the backdoor. The BRS government took the revenue that was supposed to go to the next government. KCR deceived people while giving

Continued on Page 2

Hailstorm hits Adilabad & Karimnagar; CM orders review

CS Shanti Kumari holds teleconference with Collectors

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Wirth hailstorms lashing parts of erstwhile Adilabad and Karimnagar districts on Friday, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy directed Chief Secretary Shanti Kumari to hold an urgent review with Collectors to assess the situation and ensure immediate response.

Following the CM's instructions, the Chief Secretary held a teleconference with officials from the affected districts and enquired about the damage caused by the unseasonal weather. She instructed the district administrations to remain accessible to the public and extend all necessary relief and support.

With weather alerts indicating heavy rainfall accompanied by strong winds in the next 48 hours, Shanti Kumari asked officials to stay on high alert. "The district machinery must be on continuous watch and ensure timely review of the evolving conditions," she told the collectors.

The Chief Secretary stressed the importance of taking preventive measures to avoid loss of life and property.

Sanction funds for Musi cleansing, drinking water projects: Eatala

Malkajgiri MP Eatala Rajender speaking in the Lok Sabha on Friday

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP's Malkajgiri MP, Eatala Rajender, has requested the Centre to allocate funds for cleaning the Musi River, establish sewage treatment plants and to supply safe drinking water.

Speaking on the demand for grants to the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti on Friday in the Lok Sabha, Eatala said that with rapid urbanisation, state governments are struggling to provide adequate infrastructure and services to meet the needs of the growing population. It is commendable that the Centre has allocated thousands of crores to provide sanitation and safe drinking water facilities through the Smart Cities Mission and AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation), he said.

"In the same spirit, I would like to bring to your attention the urgent needs of Malkajgiri, one of the fastest growing

Continued on Page 2

TG GST growth rate fell to 5.6% against national average of 10%: Harish

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Lashing out at the Congress Government during the Budget debate in the Assembly, BRS MLA Harish Rao accused the Revanth admin of presenting an unrealistic, deceptive budget and failing to fulfil its key electoral promises mentioned in the so called 'six guarantees.'

Accusing the government of hiding behind the "global slowdown" narrative, Harish reeled out data saying that Telangana's GST growth dropped to 5.63%, compared to the national average of 10%.

"Karnataka recorded 10.72%, Maharashtra 12.18%.

Continued on Page 2

Mission Bhagiratha Helpline resolves 90% complaints

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The toll-free helpline set up under Mission Bhagiratha has been declared a super success, with officials reporting that nearly 90 percent of the complaints received have already been resolved. Since its launch, the call center has received a total of 554 complaints.

Out of these, 120 were related to water supply issues in urban areas, while 434 were directly linked to the Mission Bhagiratha department. Officials stated that of the 434 departmental complaints, 389 have been fully resolved, with only 45 cases pending.

This outcome is being seen as a strong indicator of the efficiency and responsiveness of the Mission Bhagiratha system. With quick redressal and transparent tracking, the helpline has become a reliable platform for citizens to report and resolve water-related issues.

Axe falls on two offices for bungling in dispatching wrong question paper bundle 4

Don't give me bouquets and waste Rs 2,000: Konda Surekha

Recalls cultural ties to trees during World Forest Day event

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister Konda Surekha has urged officials of the Forest Department and others to refrain from spending large sums of money on shawls and bouquets for her during events and meetings. Instead, she has emphasized the need to redirect those funds towards supporting the underprivileged, particularly those struggling with hunger. She said, "Today I was given bouquets by our officials. These cost about Rs2000 and is of hardly any use. Instead use that money to feed poor people. I call upon forest department, not to give bouquets"

Marking World Forest Day, Forest and Environment Minister Konda Surekha made an emotional appeal for collective action to conserve forests and live in harmony with nature. Participating in an awareness event at KBR Park along with KrystynaPyszková, reigning Miss World 2024 on Thursday, she said she felt proud to be part of tree conservation efforts in her role as minister. She called on forest department officials not to

Continued on Page 2

'Cong govt borrowing Rs 1 cr every minute'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Bharatiya Janata Legislative Party (BJLP) leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy said the Congress government is borrowing around Rs 1 crore every minute.

He said the Congress Government ran up debts of Rs 1.63 lakh crore in just 15 months. The debt burden on every resident of Telangana is Rs 2.27 lakh, he said.

The BJLP leader demanded that the Congress government should implement the six guarantees and recover looted public funds from BRS leaders. Participating in the debate on the budget on Friday in the Assembly, Maheshwar said the Congress Government is borrowing Rs 1,700 crore every day. Telangana's debts have now touched Rs 8.6 lakh crore, he said.

Maheshwar demanded that the Congress Government should reveal how the state would develop if it had huge debts.

He said that Finance Commission funds have increased under the NDA admin compared to UPA times. "The state's share in Central funds was 32 per cent during UPA rule. However, it increased to 42 per cent during NDA rule. It is not proper for the state government to criticise the Centre even after increasing its share of taxes," he said.

Maheshwar said the state has become debt-riddled. The BRS government borrowed lakhs of crores. The Congress Government did not probe the BRS admin's corruption and irregularities even after 15 months.

He asked the CM whether the allegations he had levelled against the BRS admin when he was TPCC President were not correct. If they were factual, why is the CM not filing cases against BRS leaders? he asked.

The Pioneer
HYDERABAD | SATURDAY | MARCH 22, 2025

Telangana: Magnanimous FMs & miserly CMs

It has been our misfortune that we had miserly Chief Ministers since Telangana became a separate state. Though we had very generous finance ministers all along, who make enormous outlays in every budget, our miserly Chief Ministers have never had the heart to spend the generous monies allocated by the Finance Ministers in their budgets. It did not matter which party was in power - Bharat Rashtra Samithi for the first nine and a half years or Congress party for the last one and a half years - the story has been the same.

Take, for example, this year's budget by the current finance minister, Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka. Like last year, this year, too, he introduced a record-breaking budget. While he made allocations worth 2,91,000 crore last year, he introduced a budget of 3,05,000 crore this year. These are not small sums. On average, the allocation crosses 75,000 rupees per person. Similarly, during the two terms of BRS, budgets set new records every year except once. The budget rose from one lakh crore (1,00,637 crore) in 2014 to a whopping 2,90,396 crore in 2023. Our finance ministers, either BRS or Congress ones, never disappointed us: they generously dished out bigger and bigger budgets every year.

Yet, it is our misfortune that our Chief Ministers - Chandrasekhar Rao and Revanth Reddy, did not have the heart to spend all the money their finance ministers have so generously allocated year after year. Of the 10 budgets introduced during his tenure, only twice did the then Chief Minister, Chandrasekhar Rao, come close to spending the amounts allocated by his finance ministers. So is the case with the current Congress Chief Minister, Revanth Reddy. He did not spend anywhere close to the 2,91,000 crore allocated by his finance minister, Bhatti Vikramarka, for the year ending 31st March 2025. The miserliness of our Chief Ministers is evident from the fact that even during 2020 - when we were reeling under COVID, our then Chief Minister Chandrasekhar Rao could not bring himself to spend the entire allocated amount.

It is our misfortune that our Chief Ministers - Chandrasekhar Rao and Revanth Reddy, did not have the heart to spend all the money their finance ministers have so generously allocated year after year

The spending in 2022-23, the last full year of Chandrasekhar Rao's second term, exemplifies this stinginess like none other. Even when he knew he would soon face re-election, the former CM did not have the heart to spend the amount his finance minister allocated. His nephew, Finance Minister

KISHORE POREDDY

Harish Rao, budgeted 2,45,257 crore, excluding debt repayments for the year. Chandrasekhar Rao only spent 1,92,536 that year - 52,721 crore and 21% less than allocated. It's not that there were no programs to spend on. Harish generously allocated 17,700 crore that year, too, like the prior year, for the Dalit Bandhu scheme. Yet the then CM did not spend a single rupee on the scheme. He let the money his nephew allocated go to waste but could not bring himself to give it to the Dalits - the most disadvantaged section of our society. Over seven years, from 2015-16 to 2022-23, Chandrasekhar Rao, on average, let 17% of the budget allocated by his finance ministers go to waste by not spending the amount.

Current Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is no less miserly. Like Chandrasekhar Rao of the BRS, the current Congress Chief Minister could not get himself to spend money, especially for the socially disadvantaged sections of the Telangana society. Bhatti Vikramarka had allocated 8,424 crores to fulfil the promise of a pucca house to the poorest of the poor in the state. Revanth, despite the central government pitching in by agreeing to modify its Prime Minister Awas Yojana so that Congress can keep its promise under the "Indiramma Indlu" scheme, let the allocated monies go down the drain. That is just one example. Similar was the fate of allocations made by his finance minister for Revanth's dream projects like Musi rejuvenation and Metro to the airport.

Going a step further than Chandrasekhar Rao, Revanth not only underspent the allocated budget but even tried to rationalise his underspending. He claimed the Telangana treasury was empty. He declared that the state only received monthly revenue of 18,000 and 18,500 crore. He claimed the banks automatically deducted 13,000 crore for salaries and pensions and servicing the humongous debt the previous BRS government had mindlessly incurred, leaving him to spend less than 5,500 crore monthly. If the government's revenues, as Revanth claimed, were so low, wouldn't this year's budget reflect that reality? Why would the new budget allocate 14,000 crore more than last year? Is he accusing Bhatti Vikramarka of deception?

Given that the current Chief Minister is as stingy as the previous one, he will again leave unspent tens of thousands of crores his finance minister has allocated for the upcoming year. Unfortunately, once again, the state's development and welfare will suffer.

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

TG govt faces backlash over statue installation spree

NAVEENA GHANATE
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HYDERABAD

In its first 15 months in office, the Congress Government of Telangana unveiled more statues than schemes, and the public isn't holding back.

What began as symbolic gestures of honour is now drawing a steady stream of criticism, especially from netizens who are questioning the government's obsession with "statue politics."

Inaugurations have come one after another: a Telangana Talli statue, two separate Rajiv Gandhi statues – one inside the new secretariat and another at the Uppal Stadium, Jaipal Reddy's statue in Kalwakurthy, and recently, a statue of revolutionary balladeer Gaddar in Tellapur. On Friday, Minister Sridhar Babu inaugurated Rajiv Gandhi's statue at Uppal Stadium. But what's raised more eyebrows is not what's

been built, but what's been announced.

The government has proposed installing Telangana Talli statues at all district collectorates. At Bapu Ghat, it promised the country's tallest Gandhi statue. On the ORR, a 100-foot statue of former United AP Chief Minister NT Rama Rao is on the cards.

The CM proposed installing the statues of former CM K. Rosaiah at the Nature Cure Hospital, former PM Manmohan Singh at the Financial District, industrialist Ratan Tata at Adibatla, and statues of several leaders at the iconic Tank Bund stretch.

A statue of Chakali Ailamma has been proposed at Koti Women's College. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's own earlier statement, where he said that Telangana's historic personalities deserve their space on Tank Bund. "Even I'm thinking about it," he had said, naming Komaram Bheem, Ramji Gond, Chakali Ailamma, Sardar Sarvai Papanna Goud, Jaipal Reddy and Sripada Rao as examples. A cabinet sub-committee was even set up to look into the statue plan at Tank Bund.

This move of setting up statues is facing backlash from Netizens. "They are keeping statues wherever they like as if it's a tea stall," said a Raju from Warangal.

Public reactions suggest that the issue isn't with the personalities being honoured, but the sheer frequency and optics of it. "This obsession with the Statues of Nehru's family is what caused the absolute downfall of the Congress in India and fell flat in front of Modi's camp," Lalith Kumar Akula said.

A BJP person Sagar termed it as "madness." One Raja said, "It's a waste of public funds. Hope any next government that forms in 2028 ignores the changes to these statues and keeps moving ahead will be the winner for the next term."

Mohd Khaleel said, "Instead of statues the govt should go for some kind of classic university. Statues don't serve any purpose, rather it's symbolic". A. Majid said, "We elected you for development, and you people fight over statues."

Kiran asks Centre to waive loans of small farmers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, demanded that the Centre should implement the farm loan waiver scheme all over the nation.

He asked the Centre to implement a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) scheme for all crops and added that the Centre is a 'corporate-friendly' government while the Telangana Government is a 'farmer-friendly' government.

Speaking on agriculture grants in the Lok Sabha on Friday, Kiran said the Centre should make massive investments to promote climate-resilient crops.

He also asked the Centre to extend help to the state, which is encouraging oil palm cultivation under the National Mission for Edible Oil (NMEO) and added that the Telangana Agriculture Minister is in constant touch with the Centre. The MP also asked the Centre to ensure that insurance claims are paid to farmers in a transparent manner.

He said the Centre is a corporate-friendly government as it had written off loans amounting to Rs 3.8 lakh crore owed by private companies. "What has the Centre done for farmers in the last 10 years?" he asked. Kiran said the Centre allocated just 3.8 per cent of the budget for agriculture. He said the Centre is giving a mere Rs 6,000 per year to farmers and demanded that it rethink this.

He said the Telangana Government is giving Rs 12,000 per acre per year to farmers as per the Rythu Bharosa Scheme and Rs 12,000 each to farm labourers as per the Indiramma Athmeeya Bharosa scheme.

Harish meets CM in Assembly chamber for funds

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLA Harish Rao revealed that he and senior BRS leader Padma Rao Goud met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in his chamber on Friday to request the release of pending SDF funds for Seethaphalmandi. The meeting lasted for about 15 minutes.

"During BRS rule, we sanctioned Rs 32 crore for constructing a high school, junior college and degree college in one integrated campus at Seethaphalmandi. The funds got stuck due to the election code. Padma Rao took me to Revanth, and we submitted a formal representation seeking early release of the SDF amount," he explained.

A candid chat by former minister Harish Rao in the Assembly lobby on Friday has stirred the political pot, as he pointed out the growing proximity between Speaker Bhatti Vikramarka and the BJP, while highlighting the Congress government's silence on the Centre's injustice to Telangana.

"Despite the Centre denying funds to Telangana, Bhatti didn't utter a single word about it in his Budget speech. Yet, he made sure to showcase his bond with Bade Bhai (the BJP), right here in the Assembly," Harish said, in a conversation that drew considerable attention from fellow legislators.

He made it clear that the BRS stands equidistant from both the BJP and the Congress, and continues to fight both on behalf of the people of Telangana.

"Today, the BJP has done a grave injustice to Telangana, but Revanth couldn't say a word against them," he said.

KTR slams delimitation proposal, calls it a grave injustice to South India

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chennai: The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) Working President K.T. Rama Rao (KTR) has strongly condemned the central government's proposed delimitation exercise, calling it an unjust move that will significantly reduce political representation for the southern states. Arriving in Chennai to attend a crucial meeting of southern regional parties, KTR warned that if this issue is not addressed immediately, it will have long-term consequences, and future generations will not forgive the present leadership for its silence.

Speaking to the media in Chennai, KTR reiterated that the BRS strongly opposes the delimitation proposal. He emphasized that this move would create severe regional disparities, weaken the voice of South Indian states in national policy-making, and reduce their access to central funds. He called upon all regional parties to come together and wage a united battle against this unfair proposal.

KTR argued that the proposed delimitation is not merely a technical adjustment but a politically motivated decision that will disproportionately benefit northern states while disadvantaging the southern region. "The primary impact of this delimitation will be the reduction of political representation for South India. This will deepen the existing regional imbalances and push southern states further away from decision-making in national affairs," he warned.

He pointed out that states like Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh have been at the forefront of economic growth, industrialization, and social development. "Despite contributing significantly to the nation's GDP, these states are now being targeted through this political maneuver. It is clear that the central government is trying to weaken South India's voice in Parliament and governance," KTR remarked.

A key issue highlighted by KTR was that South Indian states have implemented effective population control policies over the years, following national and global recommendations on sustainable development.

Don't give me ...

Continued from page 1

give her bouquets. "Our culture and traditions are deeply rooted in protecting trees. 'Vriksho Rakshati Rakshitaha'—if we save a tree, it saves us. This is a universal truth," said Surekha, addressing a gathering of forest officials, volunteers and civil society members. The United Nations observes March 21 as World Forest Day every year to spread awareness about the importance of forests, she added.

Stating that forests are the backbone of biodiversity and environmental protection, she said, "There is an inseparable connection between flora, fauna, and forests. Unfortunately, humans are destroying forests for selfish reasons, thereby endangering their own existence."

She warned that if people fail to realise that only nature is eternal, the crisis will deepen. "The survival of forests is essential for our survival. Let's not forget that meaningfully living with nature is the only way forward," the minister said.

Kalvakuntla family shamed Telangana: Seethakka

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Panchayati Raj Minister Seethakka said that it was the Kalvakuntla family that brought shame to Telangana.

Reacting to BRS MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha's allegation in the Legislative Council on Friday that the Congress Government is defaming the state, Seethakka replied that it was the Kalvakuntla family who defamed the state.

"We don't know Delhi businesses. It was your family who defamed the state by striking deals with Delhi businesses. The BRS is the care of address for corruption. The BRS is the party that did injustice to women. There were no lady Ministers in the first five years of BRS rule. There were no members in the Women's Commission. The BRS government did not give Rs 1,800 crore Abhaya Hastham and Pavala Vaddi funds. The BRS admin did not pay the Rs 3,700 crore interest due to women's groups," she said.

CM asks NABARD ...

Continued from page 1

to make use of all schemes sponsored by NABARD in the next financial year.

The Chief Minister suggested linking solar power generation plants sanctioned to women's SHGs to NABARD and appealed to the Chairman to increase rural connectivity in newly created panchayats. The NABARD Chairman asked the Chief Minister to constitute DCCBs in the new districts. Tandur MLA Manohar Reddy and NABARD representatives were also present at the meeting.

BRS stages protest in Council premises, demands white paper on borrowings

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLCs on Thursday slammed the Congress government for cancelling the Question Hour in the Legislative Council, accusing it of evading scrutiny and denying the opposition a chance to raise public issues. Addressing a media conference in the Council premises, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, Madhusudhana Chary, said the government was bulldozing bills without allowing any meaningful debate.

"Question Hour was the only window through which the issues of the people could be brought to the notice of the government. Now even that has been shut. This reflects the government's lack of sincerity in addressing public concerns," he said. Madhusudhana Chary also pointed out that the duration of Assembly and Council sessions had been curtailed drastically. "The

government is conducting the House in a perfunctory manner," he added.

MLC K Kavitha criticised the government for misrepresenting facts and misleading the public. "In just 15 months, this Congress government has borrowed Rs. 1.58 lakh crore. In contrast, the BRS government took Rs. 4.17 lakh crore in loans over nine years," she said.

Kavitha alleged that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy was trying to repeatedly blame K Chandrashekar Rao to divert attention from his own failures.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	
Ashtami:	Mar 22 04:24 AM to Mar 23 05:23 AM
Navami:	Mar 23 05:23 AM to Mar 24 05:38 AM
Nakshatram:	
Moola:	Mar 22 01:45 AM to Mar 23 03:23 AM
Purva Ashadha:	Mar 23 03:23 AM to Mar 24 04:18 AM
Rahukalam:	09:22 AM to 10:52 AM
Yamagandam:	01:53 PM to 03:23 PM
Varjyam:	01:21 PM to 03:01 PM
Gulika:	06:22 AM to 07:52 AM
Amritakalam:	08:38 PM to 10:21 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:58 AM to 12:47 PM

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Sunny
Temp: 34°C
Humidity: 60%
Sunrise: 6:22 AM
Sunset: 6:23 PM

Updated: March 21, 2025 5:00 PM

CM Revanth, KTR ...

Continued from page 1

impacting these states that play a crucial role in the country's economic development. The BRS, which has consistently opposed this policy from the outset, will elaborate on its stance during tomorrow's meeting.

KTR emphasized that the BRS has been at the forefront of identifying and raising awareness about the injustice faced by southern states, consistently informing the public and leading the fight on this issue. He expressed hope that, following tomorrow's conference, all southern states would unite and stand together for the future of their people, who have paved the way for the nation's progress. The BRS leadership believes that this conference will strengthen the unity of southern states and send a strong message of opposition to the central government regarding the proposed delimitation policy.

Sanction funds...

Continued from page 1

cities in Telangana which is my constituency. This constituency has become a major urban centre where people from different cities and states come for livelihood. The rapidly growing population has put immense pressure on existing infrastructure, making it difficult for local authorities to meet the increasing demand. I urge the Ministry to allocate special funds for sanitation projects and drinking water projects," Eatala said.

"I would like to bring to your attention the environmental crisis that the city is facing due to the pollution of lakes in Hyderabad with sewage. The city was once known as the city of lakes. Its water bodies like Hussain Sagar have become polluted due to sewage discharge. This has led to pollution that has destroyed aquatic ecosystems and killed fish and other biodiversity. The contaminated water is coming out, polluting groundwater, causing waterborne diseases and air pollution," he added.

Eatala requested the Union Jal Shakti Minister to allocate funds for the revitalization of these lakes, diversion of sewage, development of sewage treatment infrastructure and increasing the capacity of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) so that only treated water enters lakes. There is also a need to divert untreated sewage away from the lakes through modern sewage management systems, he said.

Cong: Budget ...

Continued from page 1

assurances that were not possible to implement, he said.

He said the BRS government destroyed a full generation by not filling up vacant posts. He said the departments were severely affected due to the non-filling of jobs caused by a lack of manpower and unemployment. He said the government tried vote bank politics.

"The budget could be Rs 4.18 lakh crore this time if enhanced like the BRS government. We introduced a budget based on reality, unlike the BRS government. The BRS government increased the budget whether there is revenue or not. We are not like you. We introduced the budget after reducing it. We kept in our budget what we would do. The BRS government had no discipline and so they spent as they liked," Bhatti said.

Targeting Harish, Bhatti said that Harish said the GST growth is less than the nation's growth. However, the GST during the BRS regime was 8.4 per cent. However, the present GST is 12.3 per cent, Bhatti said.

"We spent Rs 2.80 lakh crore after coming to power. Rs 77,362 crore for salaries and Rs 8,80,09 crore for debts and Rs 1.34 lakh crore spent for schemes. The revenue is Rs 2,80,603 crore and the expenditure is Rs 2,99,421 crore," Aditya said.

TG GST growth ...

Continued from page 1

If there's no slowdown in other states, why only here?" he asked.

He claimed the stamps and registration revenue missed its targets by nearly Rs 4,000 crore, while vehicle sales growth turned negative for the first time. "Your anti-people policies, HYDRA demolitions, real estate scare-mongering, and revenue-centric governance have choked the economy," he said.

He termed the 2025-26 budget "as most disappointing and disastrous" and said that it was built entirely on "unrealistic revenue assumptions and failed priorities."

Harish began his fiery speech by congratulating Speaker Bhatti Vikramarka for presenting three budgets, including the vote-on-account, and also extended compliments to K. Ramakrishna Rao for crafting a record 14 budgets. However, he quickly moved into an intense critique tearing apart the government's previous and current budget claims.

"Last year they called it a realistic budget. Now, the CM himself admits it fell short by Rs 60,000 crore to Rs 70,000 crore. If that's not proof of faulty estimations, what is?" he asked.

Slamming the Congress' flagship promises, Harish said not a single guarantee had been honoured.

"Where is the Rs 2,500 Mahalakshmi pension? What happened to the Rs 4,000 monthly pension promise? The Rs 15,000 Rythu Bharosa became Rs 12,000, and even that hasn't reached half the farmers," he said.

He questioned the fate of free scooties for girls scheme, the Rs 5 lakh education cards, 2 lakh jobs a year, unemployment dole, gold with Kalyana Lakshmi and all-crop bonuses. "These are not just broken promises. These are betrayals," he said.

Harish accused the government of letting lakhs of acres go dry by failing to release water on time and not paying O&M bills. "This is not a natural drought but a Congress made drought," he thundered, citing how the delay in starting motors at the Devadula Project resulted in a losing crops worth Rs 600 crore in Warangal.

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City Pioneer

The Pioneer

HYDERABAD | SATURDAY | MARCH 22, 2025

CITY EVENTS

Cultural Programmes
By Sri Mayuri Arts
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
22-Mar-25 (9 am)

Rangapravesam
By Abhinetri Arts Academy
Venue
Ravindra Bharathi
22-Mar-25 (1:30 pm)

Saturdays Brunch Buffet
Venue
The Park Hyderabad
22-Mar-25
(12:30 pm to 4 pm)

Farm Animal Coalition Regional Event
(Keynote Speeches, Panel Discissions)
Venue
Lamakaan
22-Mar-25 (11 am)

Know Your Why: Speech
By Akarsh Sriramoju
Venue
Lamakaan
22-Mar-25 (11 am)

Kay Zala Bal Radat Hota
A Marati Play
Venue
Lamakaan
22-Mar-25 (8 pm)

USGCI Global Business summit to be held in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The United States Global Business Summit 2025 (USGCI) is set to take place in the city on March 22 at The Leela Palace.

Industry leaders will gather for this premier event under the theme "Driving Global Growth through Social Investments and Bilateral Partnerships," aiming to redefine international business collaboration.

Minister for Information Technology and Electronics, D Sridhar Babu, will attend as the Chief Guest, alongside Dr. Mark Burns, Advisor to U.S. President Donald Trump, as the Guest of Honor. Jayesh Ranjan, IT Department Special Chief Secretary, will also lead discussions on U.S.-India trade relations, economic progress, and global investment opportunities.

Technologies to be integrated in farming to boost profitability

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Information Technology and Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu announced that emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), are being integrated into agriculture to enhance profitability.

On Friday, a delegation from the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, along with representatives from various research institutes, met with the minister at the Assembly.

During the meeting, the Minister elaborated on the government's efforts to introduce advanced technologies across different industries.

He highlighted that agriculture and agro-based industries employ around 55 per cent to 60 per cent of the state's population.

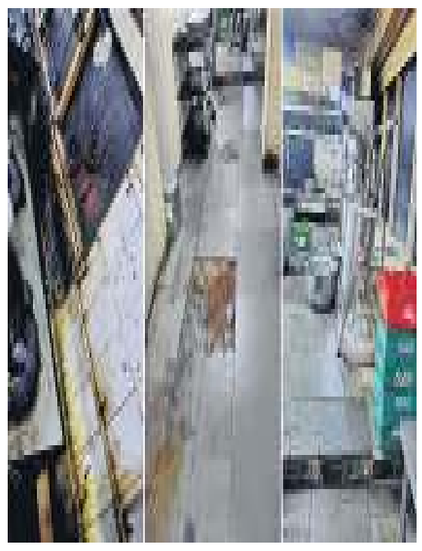
The Minister stressed that technology has the potential to tackle several challenges faced by farmers and that continued innovation is essential for their benefit.

Information Technology Minister D Sridhar Babu with representatives of the German government in Hyderabad on Friday

Minister Sridhar Babu also mentioned that, similar to global advancements, "Agri Robots" capable of performing farming tasks with minimal human input would soon become a reality in India. Research and development in this area has already begun, he revealed. Additionally, the minister assured that the government would support individuals and companies introducing innovative solutions to reduce farming costs and increase benefits for farmers.

Emphasising international cooperation, the Minister discussed collaborations with the German government to further promote technological advancements in agriculture.

The meeting was attended by Dr Sebastian Bose, Martin, Sven, Dr Raghu Chaliganti, Professor Janayya (Vice Chancellor of Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University), Dr. Balaram (Research Director), Dr. Ramulu (Director of International Programs), and Dr. Balaji Naik (Director of Digital Agriculture), among others.



Patchy and broken flooring and unclean walls of the kitchen and clogged and overflowing drains in Subbayya Gari hotel in Hyderabad

Hygiene violations flagged at Subbayya Gari Hotel

SAMUEL JOSHUA
samuelmjoshuamjmc@gmail.com
■ HYDERABAD

The Task Force Team of Telangana's Commissioner of Food Safety found highly unclean utensils and unhygienic storerooms with housefly infestations during an inspection at Subbayya Gari Hotel at Gachibowli in city.

The Task Force team reported that the kitchen was in poor condition, with the FSSAI license not displayed. The flooring was patchy and broken, walls were unclean, and drains were clogged and overflowing.

Food waste was not removed regularly. Food handlers were found unclean, without headcaps or gloves. Oil was dripping from the exhaust, and stoves and utensils were extremely dirty. Vegetables were stored improperly, leading to spoilage. The storeroom was poorly maintained.

Additionally, water analysis reports, pest control records, and medical fitness certificates of food handlers were missing. Used oil was not being checked for total polar compounds (TPC) formation. Samples were collected for lab analysis.

The Task Force also inspected Yashoda Dairy Products in Jeedimetla and found a housefly infestation.

Doors were not properly sealed to prevent pests, and the unit had open areas without insect-proof meshes. The floor was wet and patchy, with water stagnation and poor drainage.

Employees, though wearing hairnets, handled food with bare hands. Milk powder was stored on the ground instead of pallets. The cold room was unclean.

FSSAI licenses were not displayed, and essential records, including pest control, employee health, and temperature monitoring, were missing.

The Task Force team stated that a notice will be issued, and further action will be taken accordingly.

Hyd NIAB director's jewellery stolen from Gurugram hotel

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The director of Hyderabad-based National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (NIAB), has alleged that her jewellery worth Rs 50 lakh was stolen from a hotel room here, police said on Friday.

A news agency also reported the incident from Gurugram, Director of NIAB and Co-chair of the PAG-ASIA 2025 meeting, Dr G Taru Sharma, had checked into the hotel in Gurugram on Tuesday to attend the conference, which was held from March 18 to March 20 at Westin, Gurugram, Sector 29, they said.

The jewellery was allegedly stolen from her room number 240 the same day, and she filed a complaint on Wednesday, a police officer said.

"Despite multiple requests, the hotel staff has not been of much help. I was busy with the conference and did not step out of the hotel at any time. My jewellery, worth Rs 45-50 lakh, was stolen from my room," Sharma said in her complaint.

Based on her complaint, an FIR was registered against unidentified persons under Section 305 (theft) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) at Sector 29 police station on Wednesday, the officer said.

Police have collected CCTV footage and are questioning suspect hotel staff, but no clues have emerged so far. Further investigation in the matter is underway, Station House Officer (SHO) Ravi Kumar said.

Despite multiple attempts, the hotel authorities could not be reached for comment.

International Day of Forests celebrated at Nehru Zoo Park

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The International Day of Forests 2025 was celebrated at Nehru Zoological Park on Friday with a mega plantation programme.

J Vasantha, Curator of NZP-Hyderabad, along with Deputy Curators, Assistant Curators, Deputy Range Officers, Forest Section Officers, the Public Relations Officer, and the Zoo Education Officer, planted saplings of native Indian plants like Ficus, Peepal, Jamun, Juvvi, and Maddi at the children's park.

Speaking on the occasion, J Vasantha highlighted that Nehru Zoological Park is one of the country's leading zoos, playing a key role in wildlife education and conservation.

She emphasised raising awareness among visitors about the importance of native Indian flora and fauna and the harmful effects of invasive species on the Indian ecosystem

IMD issues orange, yellow alerts for T'gana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued orange and yellow alerts for several districts in Telangana on Friday, warning of thunderstorms, lightning, hailstorms, and gusty winds until the morning of March 24.

The IMD also predicted light to moderate rain or thundershowers at isolated locations across Telangana between 5:30 PM on Friday and 8:30 AM on March 24.

In response, Telangana Chief Minister K Revanth Reddy instructed officials to stay vigilant and take necessary precautions to prevent any loss of life and property, according to a release from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

He further directed Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari to hold tele-conference with district collectors concerned in this regard.

As per the weather bulletin, an orange alert was issued forecasting thunderstorm accompanied by lightning, gusty winds (40-50 kmph) and hailstorm at isolated places in Komaram Bheem Asifabad, Mancherial, Jagtial, Peddapalli, Jayashankar Bhupalapally districts between 1730 hours of Friday till 0830 hours of March 22.

It said an organe alert has been issued predicting thunderstorm accompanied by lightning and gusty winds (40-50 kmph) and hailstorm at isolated places in Mancherial, Jagtial, Peddapalli, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Warangal, Hanamkonda, Jangaon districts between 0830 hours of March 22 to 0830 hours of March 23.

2,700 police personnel deployed for IPL matches in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The 18th edition of TATA IPL 2025 is all set to take place at Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal here from March 23 to May 10, 2025, with an additional Qualifier-1 on May 20 and an Eliminator on May 21. The first match on March 23 will be a day game, while the remaining matches will be played at night, said G Sudheer Babu, Rachakonda Commissioner of Police.

To ensure smooth conduct and public safety, the Rachakonda Police have put in place strict security measures at the stadium, which has a seating capacity of approximately 39,000. A force of 2,700 police personnel from various units, including law and order, traffic, TSSP, Octopus teams, Mounted Police, Vajra units, CCS, and SHE Teams will be deployed for security, he added.

Rachakonda Police Commissioner G Sudheer Babu addressing the media at Uppal Stadium in Hyderabad on Friday

A network of 450 CCTV cameras will monitor the stadium, parking areas, and vehicle checkpoints, with a Joint Command and Control Room overseeing the footage. Anti-sabotage checks, bomb disposal squads, and sniffer dogs will operate round the clock. Mounted police personnel will be stationed at gates 1, 3, 4, 7, and 8 for crowd control.

Items i.e. laptops, banners, water bottles, cameras, cigarettes, umbrella, electronic items, matchbox, lighters, sharp metal/plastic objects, binoculars, writing pens, batteries, helmets, perfumes, bags and outside eatables are not allowed into the stadium.

To prevent disruptions, a dedicated team will monitor anti-social elements, and mobile technicians will inspect spectators' mobile devices at each gate.

Traffic restrictions will be in effect around the stadium, and spectators will not be allowed to park vehicles on main roads. Designated parking zones have been identified at multiple locations, including Build Brick Builders Open Area, Modern Bakery Open Area, Zahause Properties Open Area, and DSL Virtue Mall Cellar.

Car pass holders will have designated entry points, while physically challenged spectators will have exclusive access through Outer Gate No. 3. Traffic diversions will be implemented, particularly for heavy goods vehicles from LB Nagar, Warangal, ECIL, and other routes to ease congestion.

Gates will open three hours before match time, allowing an orderly entry. Five patrolling teams will oversee crowd movement, ensuring smooth access to and from the stadium.

SSC exams gets off to smart start in TG

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The SSC Public Examinations for 2025 began smoothly across Telangana on Friday with 4.95 lakh students (99.67 percent) appearing at 2,650 examination centers.

However, a mix-up occurred in Mancherial district where Hindi question papers were mistakenly dispatched to the examination centre instead of Telugu ones.

The District Collector took immediate action to resolve the issue.

In the meantime, the School Education Department issued a stern warning about the circulation of question paper images on WhatsApp, describing it as a deliberate attempt to disrupt the examination process. Officials emphasized that any efforts to spread rumors would be taken very seriously.

The School Education Director reassured the public, stating, "The exams are proceeding without any major disruptions. We urge students and the public to refrain from believing or spreading misinformation." Students arrived at the exam centres an hour before the exam began, and they were given a five-minute grace period to enter the examination hall.

SSC student at an examination centre in Hyderabad on Friday

A total of 5,09,403 students have registered for the examinations, including 2,58,895 boys and 2,50,508 girls. The exams are being held at 2,650 centres across the State.

To oversee the exams, 28,100 invigilators, along with 2,650 chief superintendents and departmental officers, have been assigned to examination duties.

Rs1000 crore approved for court buildings in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Information Technology and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu announced that the government has granted administrative approval for the release of Rs 1,000 crore for the construction of new court buildings.

These court complexes will be constructed across the newly formed 13 districts, he stated in the Legislative Council on Friday.Responding to members' concerns during the introduction of the Advocates and Clerks Welfare (Amendment) Bill, 2025, the minister provided key clarifications.

He reminded the House that Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has allocated 100 acres for the construction of the new High Court building.

The total estimated expenditure for the High Court building and residential quarters for judges is Rs 2,600 crore, he added.

The government will issue health cards with a coverage of Rs 2 lakh to 19,830 advocates and their 55,000 family members. Additionally, a Rs 10 lakh accident insurance policy is being introduced.

Minister Sridhar Babu also assured that a new law will be introduced to ensure the safety of advocates. Referring to the brutal murders of advocate Vaman Rao and his wife, he emphasized the urgent need for enhanced protection for lawyers.

Plans afoot to modernise ITIs in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Department of Employment and Training (DET) is working on the Center's plan to modernise Industrial training institutes (ITIs) with complete handling by private sector partners like T-Works and T-Hub, said Sanjay Kumar, Telangana Special Chief Secretary of the LET&F Department, at the Manufacturing Sector Roundtable Conference on Friday.

Speaking as the Chief Guest, Sanjay said five roundtable meetings had been held on different topics, emphasising that manufacturing is the backbone of India's industry. He noted that while Telangana has 65 ITIs, their courses have remained unchanged since the 1960s, despite evolving industry needs. The government is now focusing on youth skill development. He announced that six industry-focused and four general courses have been introduced in partnership with Tata Technologies, upgrading all 65 ITIs into Advanced Training Centers (ATCs).

Special Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar at the manufacturing sector roundtable conference in Hyderabad on Friday

Sanjay said Rs.3,500 crore had been invested in 70 ITIs to align youth aspirations with industry demands. He noted that authorities analyzed enrollment trends and identified courses in which students are not interested. He urged the manufacturing sector to suggest new courses.

Meanwhile, CII Telangana President RS Reddy said there is a skills gap despite a large workforce. He emphasised the need for teacher training, better inspection services, and testing courses to improve quality assurance and boost the manufacturing sector over services. The Principal Director from the Central Institute of Tool Design (CITD), Vijay Krishna stressed the importance of tool engineering and urged ITIs to introduce courses in lithium battery recycling, aerospace maintenance, spot welding, packaging, and logistics. As Hyderabad emerges as an aerospace hub, he emphasized the need for Level 2 testing skills in Industry 4.0.

Fishermen threaten to lay siege to Assembly

Arrests of Fishermen Associations in Rangareddy district condemned

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Fishermen across Telangana have decided to lay siege to the State Legislative Assembly, demanding adequate budget allocations for their welfare. In response, police have made preventive arrests in various parts of Ranga Reddy district.

Fishermen leaders have urged the Central and State governments to allocate sufficient funds in the budget and ensure that officials utilise them effectively for the benefit of the fishing community.

Speaking on the issue, Gundu Suresh Mudiraj stated that all fishermen must work together for their development and urged the government to prioritise their welfare in the 2025-26 budget.

Condemning the preventive arrests, Masula Ramakrishna Mudiraj, president of Kothur Mudiraj Association, along with Kothur Municipality Vice Chairman Doli Ravinder Gangaputra, Mandal Vice President Godugu Ravi Mudiraj, Gaddam Ramesh, and Gudur Fishermen Association President Gundu Suresh Mudiraj, were detained and taken to Kothur Police Station.

They argued that preventive arrests are not the right approach and demanded that the government address their concerns through proper discussions.

Youth loses both legs in landmine blast

PNS ■ MULUGU

Boggula Krishna Murthy

A young man named Boggula Krishna Murthy from Ippagudem village lost both his legs when a landmine planted allegedly by Maoists exploded near Mutyala Dhara Waterfalls, close to Venkatapuram Veerabhadravaram village in Mulugu district.

The incident happened while four villagers went to the forest in search of wild boar. They were returning when the explosion happened.

Tribal people, who frequently go into the forest for collecting forest produce, often fall victim to landmines planted by Maoists.

These mines are typically set up by Maoists with the aim of targeting the police. However, innocent villagers are the ones who end up losing their lives in the process.

In the ongoing conflict between Maoists and the police, tribal people continue to suffer and die. The areas around Venkatapuram, Wajedu, and Cherla mandals in the Mulugu district are part of the agency region, bordering Chhattisgarh.

These areas are home to people who engage in activities like collecting firewood and raising cattle for sustenance. Many people, including those who go hunting, frequently fall victim to landmines. There have been several incidents where people have lost their limbs or even their lives.

RTA cracks whip on defaulters

PNS ■ JANGAON

The Transport Department is intensifying efforts to recover 100 per cent of the Motor Vehicle (MV) tax from vehicle owners. Over 6,000 vehicle owners in the district have yet to pay their tax dues. To address this, officials are issuing notices and warning vehicle owners of severe consequences, including the suspension of vehicle registrations.

The district aimed to collect Rs 6.96 crore annually in MV tax but has managed to recover Rs 6.04 crore so far. There are over 12,000 vehicles in the district, and vehicle owners are required to pay their tax quarterly. However, some have been negligent in making payments.

Currently, 2,350 vehicle owners have outstanding tax dues and have been warned of departmental action if they fail to clear their dues by the end of the month.

Among the vehicles, 1,300 cabs are registered in the district, with 317 still owing tax. The district also has more than 197 school buses, six of which have not yet paid their tax, primarily due to the buses being in scrap condition, according to officials. There are 810 harvesters in the district, and 201 of their owners have not yet cleared their tax dues. Additionally, of the 5,002 tractor trolleys, 1,210 owners are yet to make payments.

The Transport Department has been extending the validity of vehicles older than 15 years by collecting a green tax, allowing these vehicles to remain in use for an additional five years upon payment of the tax. Vehicles with a yellow number plate are required to pay the green tax after seven years of operation. The tax rates are Rs 2,500 for two-wheelers and Rs 5,000 for cars. If the tax is not paid by the due date, the vehicle owners face fines of Rs 300 per month for two-wheelers and Rs 500 per month for cars.

There are over 5,518 vehicles in the district whose validity has expired and thus owe a total of Rs 48 lakh in green tax. The breakdown of unpaid green tax is as follows: two-wheelers: 3,362, cars: 736, tractors: 694, tractor trolleys: 567, harvesters: 77 and omni vans: 59.

Additionally, nine jeeps and five mopeds are yet to pay the green tax.

According to officails, the district transport officer, the department is focusing on recovering these tax dues and will conduct a special drive until the end of the month. He advised owners of vehicles with expired validity periods to be extra cautious regarding tax payments. Vehicles found on the road without paying the required green tax will be seized.

BJP RR rural dist unit president felicitated

PNS ■ RANGAREDDY

Raj Bhupal Goud, who was recently appointed as the president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rural Rangareddy district, was honoured by BJP State executive committee member Palamuru Vishnuvardhan Reddy. The felicitation event was attended by several senior BJP leaders and party members.

BJP Handloom Wing State Convener Maccha Sudhakar Rao, senior leaders Isnathi Srinivas, Mohan Singh, Chegu Sudhakar, Kothur Mandal President Attapuram Mahender Reddy, and District Council Members Midde Ganesh and Nallavolu Pratap Reddy were present on the occasion. Other prominent leaders, including Govardhan Goud, Bal Reddy, Karedla Narender Reddy, Ashok Goud, Ranganna, Indrasena Reddy, Rodla Prashanth Goud, Anjaneyulu, Jetturi Gopal Goud, Venkatesh Goud, Vanam Srinivas, Anand Reddy, Shravan, Suresh Naik, Sridhar Chari, Hanmanth Naik, and Srikanth Naik, also participated in the program.

Zilla Parishad Boys High School

District Collector Deepak Kumar

Testing times for students as SSC exam delayed by two hours

Axe falls on two offices for bungling in dispatching wrong question paper bundle

PNS ■ MANCHERIAL

On the very first day of the 10th class examinations, the negligence of the authorities came to light. The question paper was given to the students two hours late, causing inconvenience. As a result, the examination started two hours late.

Meanwhile, District Educational Officer S. Yadaiah issued an order on Friday suspending the superintendent of the Examination Center and the custodian officer for their negligence in dispatching the Hindi language question paper instead of the Telugu question paper.

The Zilla Parishad Boys' School (ZPHS) in Mancherial is one of the examination centres. On the first day, instead of the Telugu question paper, a different bundle arrived. When the authorities noticed this, they did not give that paper to the students and, after two hours, the officials provided the correct Telugu question papers. This caused distress among the students and their parents.

Realising the issue, the District Education Officer (DEO) informed the District Collector. Immediately, the officials rushed to the examination centre and made available the correct question papers to studetns.

The exam, which was supposed to start at 9:30 am, began at 11:30 am.

District Collector Deepak Kumar expressed his anger, especially regarding the mix-up of the question papers. He took the issue seriously and showed his displeasure regarding the negligence of the staff and the delay in the examination.

The Collector ordered the District Education Officer (DEO) to investigate the matter and submit a report. The negligence in the handling of the 10th class examination question papers led to widespread criticism.

Reports suggested that the examination centre had received a bundle containing question papers for Hindi language instead of Telugu. The bundle containing the question papers was, however, not opened, the officials explained.

TGNPDCL secures 5th rank in consumer service rating

PNS ■ HANAMKONDA

Northern Power Distribution Company of Telangana Limited has secured the fifth rank nationally with an "A" rating in the Consumer Service Rating of Discoms (CSRD) Report 2023-24 released by the Ministry of Power.

As part of providing better service to consumers, CMD Karnati Varun Reddy mentioned that thr fifth rank was achieved due to quick processing of service requests, other services, accelerated metering and billing processes, accountability in complaint resolution, and proactive operations.

It was stated that NPDCL is providing better electricity supply to the electricity consumers within its jurisdiction, with 23.90 hours of supply in urban areas and 22.83 hours in rural areas. Compared to the national average, the urban area supply is 23.53 hours, while the rural area supply is only 21.57 hours.

This ranking was attained due to the implementation of 100 per cent online application processes and achieving 100% in billing issuance.

He emphasised that in accordance with changing times, the employees would continue to work with commitment to improve the services provided to consumers, adopting technology in electricity supply and moving forward with the same enthusiasm.

Free medical camp in Karimnagar today

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

A free mega medical camp, to be organised by Medicity Hospital and led by Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar, will be held on Saturday in Chamanpalli, Karimnagar. The camp will be held at Gande Rama Rao Kalyana Mandapam, starting at 8 am, and will be inaugurated by Bandi Sanjay.

The camp will run throughout the day, offering a wide range of medical services. General surgeons, ENT specialists, ophthalmologists, gynecologists, and dermatologists will be available, and various tests such as blood sugar and blood pressure checkups will be conducted.

Patients are requested to bring their white ration cards, Aarogyasri Cards, and Aadhaar Cards for verification.

Illegally stored biopesticides seized in Mulugu dist

PNS ■ MULUGU

Biopesticides seized at Eturnagaram in Mulgu district on Friday

In the Eturunagaram mandal of Mulugu district, Agriculture Department officials seized biopesticides stored and sold in a house without any permits. Agriculture officer Vengopal revealed it at a media conference here on Friday.

For the past few days, Raghavuri Venkateshwar Rao from Kandicherla village under NTR district in Andhra Pradesh had been storing biopesticides in a house located in Akkulavari Ghanapuram Colony under Eturunagaram Mandal without any required permits.

The individual was also selling these biopesticides in Nugguru Venkatapuram and Charla mandals. Based on credible information, a joint inspection was conducted on Thursday night by the police and Agriculture Department officials, where biopesticides worth approximately Rs 8 lakh were seized.

The vehicle used for transporting these products was also confiscated. The seized bio-products and the vehicle were taken into possession in the presence of witnesses, and further departmental action would be taken in due course, Agriculture Officer Venugopal said.

The individual had been involved in selling these bio-products illegally without permits for the past two years. The local community has raised concerns about the inaction of the concerned authorities in taking action against a trader for such a long period.

When questioned about this, Agriculture Officer Vengopal responded that they can only take action if a formal complaint is filed. The police took action against those selling fake seeds and biopesticides in Mulugu district.

As per the instructions of Mulugu district Superintendent of Police Shabirish P, a raid was conducted in Eturnagaram and biopesticides were seized.

On Friday, Assistant Superintendent of Police Shivam Upadhyaya at a media conference at the Aeturunagaram, revealed that 419 litres of biopesticides were seized.

Three-year-old girl injured in stray dogs attack

PNS ■ MAHABUBABAD

In a distressing incident in Mahabubabad district, a three-year-old girl, Nandini, was severely injured in a stray dog attack. The young girl, daughter of Chiluka Vennela and Mahesh from Pedda Wangara, was on her way to a relative's house after visiting the Anganwadi centre on Thursday when the attack occurred.

Suddenly, a group of stray dogs pounced on her, causing severe injuries to her face and head. The dogs bit her mouth and attacked her relentlessly. Upon hearing her cries, locals rushed to her aid, chasing the dogs away. Immediate first aid was provided, and emergency services were notified. Nandini was promptly transported to Warangal MGM Hospital for further treatment.

This incident is part of a growing concern in Pedda Wangara, where stray dog attacks have become increasingly common. Just a week prior, five people were also injured in separate dog attacks and had to be rushed to hospitals. The rising frequency of these attacks has left local residents fearful, particularly parents who are reluctant to send their children outside.

Community members are voicing their frustration over the lack of action from authorities. They are calling for immediate and effective measures to control the stray dog population and prevent further attacks. Locals demand that the authorities take swift and comprehensive action to address the growing menace of stray dogs in the area.

Officials told to speed up construction of Reddy Edn institutions

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Rangareddy District Collector C Narayana Reddy Inspecting Reddy Hostel and Educational Complex works at Budvel in Rangareddy district on Friday

Rangareddy District Collector C Narayana Reddy has directed officials to speed up the construction of the Reddy Hostel and Educational Institutions building complexes being developed under the Raja Bahadur Venkatrami Reddy Educational Society at Budvel village.

The project is being constructed on 15 acres of land allotted for the purpose.

On Friday, the Collector inspected the ongoing works, which are being executed with an investment of Rs 13.63 crore.

He stated that Rs 10 crore had been sanctioned under ODF funds, while the remaining Rs 3.63 crore was contributed by the educational society.

Expressing concern over delays, he questioned the contractor about the reasons for the temporary halt in construction.

He also emphasized that future contractors should be informed of the reasons behind any project interruptions and instructed them to accelerate the remaining work.

Raja Bahadur Venkatrami Reddy Educational Society president Venkat Rangareddy, secretary Mohan Reddy, Executive Engineer of Panchayat Raj Ramakrishna, Divisional Engineer Khalimuddin, along with other Reddy Sangha members, Rajendranagar MRO Ramulu, and several officials were present.

GWMC budget earmarks Rs 100 cr for salaries to staff

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) has proposed a budget of Rs 1,071.41 crore for the fiscal year 2025-26, a significant increase from last year's Rs. 650.12 crore. This budget was approved during a meeting held on Thursday at Hanamkonda, chaired by GWMC Mayor Gundu Sudharani, with the presence of key officials such as Endowments Minister Konda Surekha, MLAs Revuri Prakash Reddy and K.R. Nagaraju, and KUDA Chairman Enagala Venkatram Reddy.

The proposed budget outlines various financial sources, including Rs. 337.38 crore from general taxes, Rs 728.10 crore from grants, and Rs 600 crore from deposits and advances. The budget will focus on several key areas of urban development and civic improvements, with substantial allocations for the city's infrastructure, sanitation, and welfare programs. Among the highlights, Rs 100 crore is earmarked for the salaries and allowances of GWMC staff, Rs 29.92 crore for sanitation maintenance, Rs. 34.74 crore for green initiatives, and Rs. 41.05 crore for engineering projects. Additionally, Rs 24.77 crore has been set aside for the development of slum areas and merged villages, while Rs. 39.15 crore will be used for urgent development works in various wards.

The budget also reflects a focus on improving living conditions for citizens, with increased salaries for sanitation and electrical workers, alongside a dedicated effort to enhance urban services and governance. The Chief Minister's sanction of Rs 187 crore in pending stamp duty funds further strengthens the municipality's financial position. With this ambitious budget, GWMC aims to advance urban development, bolster civic amenities, and ensure better services for Warangal residents. The proposed budget underscores a commitment to efficient waste management, well-maintained infrastructure, and inclusive community development.

'Harassment' by Sub-Inspector : Panchayat employee ends life

PNS ■ KUMRAM BHEEM ASIFABAD

Purported suicide letter

A panachyat employees took his own life on Thursday in Gangapur village under Rebbena mandal, allegedly due to harassment by a Sub-Inspector. The tragic incident came to light on Friday. In a purported suicide, he alleged that he had decided to the extreme step due to harassment by the sub-inspector.

Gundla Prakash, aged 50, from Gangapur, ended his life by consuming pesticide. In the suicide note, purportedly written by him, he said that he had borrowed Rs 1 lakh Ankia Soni of Gangapur. He was warned of being implicated in an SC and ST atrocity case and Rebenna sub-inspector too issued a threat to him.

He Prakash also accused Madhunaiah and Laxminarayana of pressuring him into taking this extreme step. He urged Superintendent of Police to take action against the three individuals involved.

Sub-Registrar in ACB net

PNS ■ JANGAON

In a raid by the Anti-Corruption Bueau (ACB) at the Sub-Registrar office at Station Ghanpur in Jangaon district Thursday, the Sub-Registrar was caught accepting a bribe of Rs 20,000.

The Sub-Registrar, Ramakrishna, had demanded Rs 22,000 from Battu Meka Shiva Ram Yadav and Battu Meka Dharma Raju, two brothers from Venkateswarapalle village for registering 558 square yards of land in both of their names. At around 4 pm on Thursday, the ACB officials caught Sub-Registrar Ramakrishna while he was allegedly accepting the bribe from Shiva Ram Yadav at the registrar office.

The ACB officials, including DSP Sambayya, Inspectors L Raju, and S Raju, arrested the officer.

'India's strong concerns with US on treatment to deportees'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has "strongly registered" its concerns with the US authorities on the treatment meted out to deportees on a flight that landed on February 5, particularly with respect to use of shackles, especially on women, the Centre informed Parliament on Friday.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in a written response to a query in the Lok Sabha also said the "US side has conveyed" to the MEA that detainees on the three deportation flights (that landed on February 5, 15 and 16 respectively) were "not instructed to remove any religious head coverings and that the detainees did not request any religious accommodations during the flights aside from requesting for vegetarian meals".

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its response said that it had also registered its concerns regarding the need to accommodate the religious sensitivities and food preferences of the deportees.

The MEA was asked whether the government has taken cognisance of reports regarding the Indian deportees being shackled during repatriation by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and if it has raised any formal diplomatic objections with the United States regarding the treatment of the Indian deportees.

The government was also asked whether the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for deportation by aircraft effective since 2012 has "allowed the use of restraints", if so, whether India has sought any modifications for its nationals.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its response said that it had also registered its concerns regarding the need to accommodate the religious sensitivities and food preferences of the deportees

The MEA remains engaged with the US side regarding humane treatment of the deportees during deportation operations, Singh said.

"The ministry has strongly registered its concerns with the US authorities on the treatment meted out to deportees on the flight that landed on 5th February, 2025 particularly with respect to use of shackles, especially on women," he said.

A batch of 104 illegal Indian immigrants were deported by the US in a C-17 Globemaster aircraft of the US Air Force that had landed at the Amritsar airport in Punjab on February 5. This was the first such batch of Indians deported by the Donald Trump administration as part of a crackdown against illegal immigrants.

The treatment meted out to these deportees had kicked a nationwide outcry.

Two more batches of illegal Indian immigrants were subsequently deported by the US on February 15 and 16.

Earlier on February 6, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had said in his statement in the Rajya Sabha that the government is engaging with the US to ensure the deported Indians are not mistreated, underlining the focus should be on strong crackdown on the illegal migration industry.

In the query in the Lok Sabha, the MEA was also asked whether the ministry has received any complaints from deported individuals regarding mistreatment during repatriation, if so, the details of the reports along with the action taken reports against the same.

No one can dare carry out blasts now: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

No one can now dare carry out blasts and escape, unlike in the past, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Friday and asserted that the country was safe under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

Noting that blasts occurred frequently in the past, Shah also attacked previous governments for not taking action against terrorists, citing the 2008 Mumbai terror attack.

"There was a time when bomb blasts were routine. I want to tell the people of the country that, for the last 10 years, the series of bomb blasts have stopped. No one can now dare carry out bomb blasts. The country is safe under Narendra Modi. We are committed to uprooting terrorism," he said in the Rajya Sabha.

Shah was replying to a discussion in the Upper House on the workings of the Union home ministry.

He also assured the Upper House that India would be free from Naxal terrorism (Leftwing extremism) by March 31, 2026.

'Enough divisions in nation over language'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"There have been enough divisions in the nation in the name of language, and it should not happen anymore," Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Friday amid the escalating row over the three-language formula implementation outlined in the National Education Policy.

The Tamil Nadu government and Centre have been at loggerheads over the implementation of the new National Education Policy and the three-language formula proposed under it.

ACROSS THE STATES

Odisha govt gave Rs 20.34 cr to SC/ST atrocity victims

The Odisha government has given Rs 20.34 crore in compensation to 2,116 SC/ST atrocity victims from June until now, a minister said in the Assembly on Friday. In response to Congress MLA Sofia Firdous' query, Nityanada Gond, the minister for ST & SC Development, Minorities & Backward Classes Welfare, said the assistance follows the guidelines of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Rules, 1995. The minister also mentioned that the 'SAACAR' online portal (Single Window Application Atrocity Compensation Assistance & Relief) is operational to ensure timely disbursement of aid to victims. According to the minister, 281 victims from Bolangir district received compensation, followed by 211 from Jajpur district. Other districts with significant numbers include Puri (207), Cuttack (202), Dhenkanal (130), Ganjam (129), and Bargarh (107). However, no victims received assistance from Malkangiri and Nabarangpur districts.

Assam BJP MLA lunges at opposition in House

The Assam Assembly on Friday witnessed uproarious scenes when a ruling BJP MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi lunged at the opposition members while hurling verbal abuses. The opposition parties staged a walkout as a mark of protest, as the deputy speaker adjourned the proceedings for 10 minutes. Kurmi, who was participating in a discussion on a cut motion on demand for grant of Public Works Department (PWD), was interjected by opposition MLAs Akhil Gogoi and Sherman Ali Ahmed. Angered at the remarks being made by Independent MLA Gogoi initially, Kurmi started abusing the opposition legislator. When Ahmed objected to the BJP MLA's abusive words towards Gogoi, Kurmi trained his guns at the entire opposition bench. Leader of the opposition Debabrata Saikia of the Congress also took exception to Kurmi's language and urged Deputy Speaker Numol Momin to take note.

Bhika Behram Well in Mumbai completes 300 yrs

The Bhika Behram Well, a landmark heritage site for the Zoroastrian community near Churchgate station in south Mumbai, completed 300 years on Friday. This well is a sacred space for Mumbai's Parsis. Arguably the oldest sweet water well in the city, it was built in 1725 by Bhikaji Behram Pandey, a businessman who was moved by the plight of thirsty travellers and locals. He undertook the task of digging a well that would provide a perennial source of water. While the canopied premises of the well can be accessed only by Parsis, the well water, available via taps located on the rear side, can be used by all communities. Its original function, to provide water to people, continues, 300 years later. The tercentenary celebrations began on Friday with a jashan, a religious ceremony attended by members of the Parsi-Zoroastrian community. On Saturday, which is Ava Roj or the day dedicated to the guardian angel for water, there will be prayers at the well. The tercentenary function on Friday on the Iranian New Year or Jamshedi Navroz, also featured the launch of a commemorative volume titled 'Waternamah: 300 years of Mumbai's Bhikha Behram Well', edited by Bachi Karkaria.

RSS chief inaugurates meet to discuss Manipur situation

PNS ■ BENGALURU

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday inaugurated the three-day meeting of Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS), Sangh's top decision-making body, that will hold "intense discussions on some of the contemporary and burning issues", including Manipur situation and attempts to create the 'North-South divide' in the country.

When asked about the three-language row during a press conference, RSS joint general secretary C R Mukunda said the Sangh would not pass any resolution and maintained that the organisation prefers the mother tongue to be a mode of education and day-to-day communication.

On the delimitation debate, he said it was "politically motivated", and the the RSS has no say on the number of seats but made a veiled attack against DMK, asserting that forces challenging national unity were a matter of worry.

"As an organisation, we are concerned about the forces which are challenging national unity, especially raising the North-South divide, whether it is about delimitation or languages," Mukunda said.

'DISRESPECTING' SPEAKER

18 BJP MLAs suspended from K'taka Assembly for 6 months

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Eighteen BJP MLAs were suspended for six months from the Karnataka Legislative Assembly on Friday for "disrespecting" Speaker U T Khader.

The suspension resolution, moved by state Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil, was adopted by the Assembly. The incident occurred on the last day of the assembly's budget session, when the opposition BJP MLAs staged a massive protest.

The legislators climbed onto the podium where Speaker Khader's chair is situated and threw papers at him.

The protest was sparked by opposition anger over the allocation of a four percent reservation to Muslims in public contracts.

Earlier, the BJP members had protested from the well of the house, accusing the government of attempting to "honey trap" a minister and demanding a judicial probe into the matter, even as the Chief Minister addressed the budget discussion.

Those who were suspended are the BJP chief whip Doddanna Gouda Patil, C N Ashwath Narayan, S R Vishwanath, B A Basavaraju, M R Patil, Channabasappa, B Suresh Gowda, Umanath Kotyan, Sharanu Salagar, Dr Shailendra Beldale, C K Ramamurthy, Yashpal Suvarna, B P Harish, Bharath Shetty, Dheeraj Muniraju, Chandru Lamani, Muniratna and Basavaraj Mattimood.

While reading out the suspension order, Khader said, "The incident has hurt us a lot and it's painful. This seat is not just a chair. This is the symbol of democracy, truth and justice. To speak from this chair is a matter of pride.

Every member should protect the dignity and sanctity of this chair. None of us are above the chair.

'CASH DISCOVERY' AT JUDGE'S HOME

Lawyers question transfer, demand resignation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The matter of Delhi High Court's Justice Yashwant Varma, who finds himself amidst a growing controversy after the alleged cash discovery from his official home, elicited strong reactions from legal experts who on Friday questioned the collegium decision on his reported transfer and demanded his resignation.

Senior advocate Vikas Singh called the matter "very serious" and said the judge should be asked to resign. He said a judge was expected to be "completely above the board" and it was one profession where there should be zero tolerance.

"I think transfer is no solution in such a matter. He has to be asked to resign," he said.

Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi said the apex court should hold an in-house inquiry and ascertain all facts after opportunity to the judge to have his say.

"The judge otherwise enjoyed good reputation, so he must explain the recovery. This is not a matter to be swept under the carpet," he said. While refusing to comment on Justice Varma's matter, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who is also the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said the "issue of corruption within the judiciary was very serious".

He said this was not something articulated by senior advocates and lawyers in the country for the first time.

"So, I think that it is time for the Supreme Court to start looking at issues of how the appointment process should take place. That it should be more transparent, appointments should be more carefully done," Sibal said.

Senior advocate Indira Jaising said the Supreme Court collegium should make a "full, free and frank" disclosure of the facts.

Only Army left to protect Aurangzeb's tomb: Sena (UBT) leader

PNS ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Ambadas Danve on Friday criticised the shielding of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in the district by metal sheets, saying only the army was left to be brought in to guard the ASI site now.

Danve, leader of opposition in the state legislative council, posted a picture of metal sheets covering the site at Khultabad near here.

Amid demands that the tomb be removed, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) put up metal sheets on two sides of the 18th century monument two days ago.

Those who came to power seeking blessings of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj have "built a fort" around the tomb of Aurangzeb who killed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, the Sena (UBT) leader said.

Two men shot dead in UP's Ghazipur

PNS ■ GHAZIPUR

Two men were shot dead in broad daylight on Friday in Uchauri Bhairospur village, under the Khanpur police station area here, police said.

The victims have been identified as Aman Chauhan (20) and Anurag Singh, alias Monu (27), both residents of Sidhauna village.

Superintendent of Police Iraj Raja stated that authorities received information about two bodies lying at the scene this afternoon. "It appears that both were shot dead. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem," he said.

The police have formed four teams to track down the perpetrators. Security has been deployed in the area, and an investigation is underway to determine the motive behind the killings, he added.

India, Pak going through one of worst periods: ex-Pak foreign minister

PNS ■ LAHORE

Former Pakistan foreign minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri has described the current period as one of the worst in history between India and Pakistan barring times of actual war, but said bilateral relations are subject to sudden positive shifts.

Speaking at an event, 'Pakistan-India Relations - Current Situation and the Way Forward', organised by the Institute of Peace and Connectivity (IPAC) here on Thursday, Kasuri said that dialogue is the only solution for both the countries to resolve their outstanding issues.

Describing the current period as one of the worst in history between the two countries, barring times of actual war, Kasuri said even after the wars, Pakistan and India quickly came to the table to restart the peace process.

It would be a pity if both countries miss the opportunity to resolve their disputes peacefully since they already possess an agreed template for a possible solution of the Jammu and Kashmir issue in the form of a four-point formula, Kasuri said.

He was apparently referring to a "solution" reportedly proposed by former president Pervez Musharraf to the Indian leadership.

Goa tourism dept orders closure of 23 beach shacks

PNS ■ PANAJI

"A total of 110 show-cause notices were issued and proceedings in 54 cases were completed. 31 notices were disposed of as no violations were found, while 23 operators were directed to close their shacks"

Goa Tourism Department has directed 23 beach shack operators to shut their facilities for illegally subletting them to non-allottees and violating provisions of the state's shack policy.

Goa Tourism Director Kedar Naik told PTI that these violations were detected during surprise checks carried out by officials across the coastal state.

"A total of 110 show-cause notices were issued and proceedings in 54 cases were completed. 31 notices were disposed of as no violations were found, while 23 operators were directed to close their shacks," he said.

Beach shacks, built from bamboo, wooden poles, and thatched palm leaves, are a popular attraction for domestic and international tourists visiting the coastal state.

As per the Goa State Shack Policy 2023-2026, 361 shacks – 263 in North Goa and 98 in South Goa – were allotted on nominated beach stretches in 2023 for the next three tourist seasons.

The licences for operating these shacks are allotted based on categories of experience by draw of lots.

Editor's TAKE

Countdown to reciprocal tariffs

India braces for the impact of Trump's tariffs, set to take effect on April 2

As April 2 approaches, India braces for the implementation of US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs, a move poised to reshape the economic landscape between the two nations. These tariffs aim to equalise the duties imposed by countries on US exports, targeting nations with higher tariffs on American goods.

President Trump has criticised countries like India for imposing substantial tariffs on US products. He made it clear recently when he said that he believed they (India and others) are probably going to be lowering those tariffs substantially, but on April 2, and that he would be charging them the same tariffs they charge US. The reciprocal tariffs are designed to pressure countries into reducing their tariffs to match those of the United States.

The introduction of these tariffs could have several implications for India. Firstly it is going to affect India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in a big way. Analysts predict a potential reduction in India's GDP growth by 5 to 10 basis points from the current estimate of 6.6 per cent. The key industries such as gems and jewelry, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles, which have significant export volumes to the US, may face increased duties, affecting their competitiveness and profitability. Moreover, the Indian steel sector is particularly vulnerable. With the US imposing a 25 per cent tariff on steel imports and if India lowers its steel import duties there are genuine concerns about cheaper Chinese steel flooding the Indian market and damaging the Indian steel industries.

Indian government is yet to figure out how to reciprocate as the Trump's deadline is just ten days away. The best bet is diplomatic negotiations but at the moment the US President is adamant on going ahead with his plans to wage the trade war on nations who do not comply with his dictums. Indian officials have been in talks with their US counterparts to negotiate and potentially mitigate the impact of the tariffs. India has proactively reduced tariffs on certain US goods, such as motorcycles and bourbon whiskey, to address US concerns and foster goodwill. However, lowering the import duties across the sectors would be disastrous for Indian industry.

The best bet in this scenario, as other countries are also exploring and experimenting is to find alternative markets and increase South South Cooperation (SSC). Efforts are underway to explore alternative markets for Indian exports to reduce dependence on the US and mitigate potential revenue losses. But the problem is far grave as the ripple effects of the tariffs extend beyond direct trade. Increased US tariffs could lead to uncertainty, affecting foreign direct investment inflows as investors may adopt a cautious approach.

Trade tensions can lead to volatility in currency markets, impacting the Indian rupee's value against major currencies. Higher tariffs on imported goods could lead to increased prices for consumers, affecting purchasing power and overall consumption. As the deadline approaches, India's preparedness and strategic responses will be crucial in navigating the challenges posed by the US reciprocal tariffs.

India has a strong economic foundation, and while the impact of these tariffs may be challenging, the country is well-positioned to weather this unprecedented situation.

Moreover, as other affected nations like China and Canada devise strategies to mitigate the impact, India can draw valuable lessons from their responses to navigate the evolving trade scenario.

Leaderspeak

"The delimitation exercise, if carried out, will strike at the very foundation of federalism in India. It will erode the essence of democracy. Our voices in parliament will be silenced. Our rights will be compromised. This is nothing but a deliberate attempt to undermine certain states. States that have controlled their population growth, governed efficiently and contributed significantly to national progress must not be punished by the union government."

MK STALIN, CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

AI is transforming healthcare

From AI-driven diagnostic software aiding rural healthcare centers to machine-learning models enhancing radiology and pathology, technology is automating tasks once solely performed by doctors

Medical practice is based on protocols that help doctors diagnose conditions. A protocol is an algorithm and it appears that machines might be gaining an advantage in diagnosing conditions efficiently and quickly. It is increasingly being recognised that a digitally connected healthcare ecosystem can improve treatment outcomes, especially in large parts of rural India where the lack of specialists often comes in the way of timely diagnosis and medication. Software, developed by doctors and technicians at AIIMS Delhi, is a significant initiative in this respect.

The software can extend specialised diabetes consultation to primary healthcare centres (PHCs) in rural areas. Studies have suggested that India's diabetes burden, already the second highest in the world, is underreported because half the patients, even in urban areas, are not even aware of their condition. The AIIMS software is one step towards addressing these deficits. It requires the local level healthcare professional to feed in patient data on risk factors like blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. It then uses AI to process the information to suggest the treatment or further consultation, as the case may be. All this, however, does not attenuate the significance of the attending physician. The doctor will be required to adapt the software's advice. The digital intervention's potency, therefore, is dependent on the quality of analogue care.

The country's healthcare system requires accessible PHCs run by quality professionals, empowered by digital resources. With this statement, I will talk about the shape of jobs in the field of medicine in this era of AI and GenAI. The advent of AI is posing serious concerns about jobs in future. Some people will become more productive and some roles will be replaced. I have a different take on this.

I hypothesise that AI is automating tasks, not jobs. Let us take the example of a Radiologist—he reads X-rays, sees patients, maintains machines, and mentors younger doctors. Computers analyse X-rays and other medical diagnostics more efficiently and accurately than human experts. The task of reading x-rays can be done by AI, but not the other parts of a radiologist's job. So I suggest that while identifying areas that will be impacted by AI, we need to break down a job into tasks.

We have to accept that most jobs will likely have at least some of their tasks affected by LLMs.Pathologists are receiving scanned slides of biopsies accompanied by critical data. Then the pathologist only has to focus on the more complex issues to generate a diagnosis. The positive side of this is that speed and accuracy will increase. The downside is that if pathologists are no longer required to evaluate the basic histology elements themselves, the skill to do so will gradually be lost and ultimately they will become dependent on machines, the output of which they will not be able to even corroborate. In this context, there is a need to redefine the job profiles, and we will have to give opportunity to health workers to develop new skill sets relevant to shifting economies and labour markets. Emerging market realities call for major changes to the medical college curriculum. The advent of AI threatens to alter not only how subjects are taught but also what is taught. A recent survey reveals that 60 per cent of medical students are already using AI. However, they need to appreciate that all information given by AI is not accurate; AI and GenAI also suffer from the GIGO rule (Garbage In Garbage Out). Doctors also need to be taught where and how they should use AI and GenAI tools and apps.

There is an urgent need to revamp the medical educational architecture of our country, integrating it with modern technologies and national priorities.Software like the one developed by AIIMS can become more potent if synced with the electronic repository of the National Health Programme for Diseases. Data portability is in line with the Digital Health Mission's objective of facilitating seamless interaction between medical experts.

A second caveat: Given the asymmetrical relationship between patients and health service providers, the system should be insulated against data confidentiality breaches. Data is crucial for AI to evolve. Machine learning is the field that trains computers through analysis of large quantities of data. There is plenty of data available in our country. This data is being acquired by seducing the public to part with it voluntarily, people are tantalised with online carrots and free to use apps and their responses are monitored, tracked and recorded. Most people happily and voluntarily give up their private data, often without realising it. The digital capitalists use several pretexts and constantly reassure the public that data collection is for their good.

MONIKA S GARG

For instance, in the name of developing custom diets, lots of personal medical information is being captured. Genetic data from a country's immense biodiversity is being collected as part of studies and medical collaborations with foreign organisations.

Another interesting development, COVID-19 forced physicians and their patients to use telemedicine, and the response has been universally appreciated. It might trigger your thoughts when I say that telemedicine can capture new kinds of patient data such as facial expressions, emotional states, etc. The pandemic also accelerated the commercial availability of health and fitness wearables which facilitated doctors—supervised health monitoring, remote diagnostics, and even certain treatments. With these new kinds of devices, there will be new kinds of data captured as well. A word of caution here—we need a techno-legal approach to unlocking data. We need to work out modalities of Confidential Data Clean Room—Sangam of data and model where secrecy is maintained.The cause of concern is that in this game one player is largely ignorant. The suppliers of digital services understand the game and play it skillfully, while most doctors are not even aware that the interests of patient may be at odds with those of the digital and pharma companies. AI has entered the medical field so rapidly and unknowingly that it seems that doctors have accepted interactions with it without due diligence or in depth consideration. They are giving away their knowledge, research and data to AI apps voluntarily. AI may be capable of outstanding performance in terms of speed and accuracy, but all of its operations are built on data, ie, knowledge derived from experts in the field ie the doctors. We should realise that while AI is essential for meaningful progress in diagnosis and understanding of disease mechanisms, keeping AI within boundaries is essential for the survival of ethics in medical profession.

(The writer is UP's Agriculture Production Commissioner. Views expressed are personal)

Starliner Mission redefines space exploration

SECOND Opinion

BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The recent record-breaking mission by NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams has captured global attention, not only for its remarkable duration but also for its implications on the future of space exploration. The mission of NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams aboard Boeing's Starliner spacecraft in July 2023 was intended to be an eight-day demonstration flight. Rather, their duration aboard the International Space Station (ISS) was extended by an extraordinary 286 days due to technical malfunctions. Even though this unanticipated mission demonstrates human resilience, it also emphasises the precarious equilibrium between ambition and preparedness in the field of space exploration.

The Starliner's propulsion system failures, including helium leaks and thruster malfunctions, exposed the dangers of deploying inadequately tested technology in the harsh space environment. While challenges are inherent in space exploration, this incident highlights a troubling trend: the rush to privatise and commercialise space travel may prioritise speed over reliability. Boeing's struggles with Starliner reflect broader concerns within the industry, where cutting corners to meet deadlines can jeopardise astronaut safety. Future space colonisation efforts demand rigorous redundancy systems and fail-safes to ensure that no single malfunction can endanger lives millions of miles from Earth.

NASA has accumulated decades of data on long-duration missions, however, risks are exacerbated by unanticipated extensions. Over time, muscle atrophy, bone density loss, and radiation exposure accumulate, while mental health strains-such as isolation, confinement, and the stress of uncertainty-are exacerbated. Solving these issues at a large scale is necessary for the colonisation of Mars or the establishment of lunar bases. Is it possible to create artificial gravity? Protecting oneself from cosmic radiation? Psychological support systems that are reliable? The astronauts' ordeal is a living experiment, but it is one that we cannot afford to replicate indiscriminately.

The extended stay of Wilmore and Sunitha Williams has yielded valuable insights into the long-term physical and psychological consequences of space travel. Although previous expeditions, such as Scott Kelly's year-long ISS stay, have provided critical data, this extended mission has significantly enhanced our comprehension. The effects of microgravity on muscles, bones, and cardiovascular systems, as well as the strains of protracted isolation, emphasise the necessity for improved medical protocols, exercise regimens, and mental health support systems for future astronauts. Colonising Mars or establishing lunar bases will require innovative solutions-from developing artificial gravity systems to improved radiation shielding. The current ordeal has created an opportunity to refine these strategies, ensuring astronauts are better prepared for extended deep-space missions. The ISS served as a critical lifeline during the astronauts' extended mission, reinforcing the importance of private collaboration.

SpaceX's partnership with NASA has been pivotal in advancing spacecraft reliability. The Crew Dragon spacecraft's advanced life-support systems and automation capabilities played a key role in sustaining the crew. This highlights how public-private partnerships are essential for building resilient space infrastructure. As we expand our cosmic ambitions, maintaining cooperation in space exploration will be vital. Future colonies on Mars or the Moon will require shared resources, international rescue protocols, and diversified expertise. Yet rising geopolitical tensions threaten this cooperative spirit. For sustainable colonisation, global collaboration must become the foundation of our extraterrestrial endeavours. The prolonged mission of Wilmore and Sunitha Williams exemplifies human creativity, adaptation, and perseverance. Their experience provides essential insights into spaceship design, astronaut welfare, and mission strategising. As mankind approaches interplanetary flight, these insights will ensure that future explorers are prepared to confront the challenges that await.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Saliva ban lifted, spinners get a boost

Madam—Apropos to "BCCI lifts saliva ban in IPL" published on March 21, here is my response. The saliva ban was enforced during Covid pandemic because of obvious reasons and it has been five years since this ban has been in existence in international cricket.

Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) latest decision to lift the saliva ban ahead of IPL 2025 is a welcome move because it will aid fast bowlers in reverse swinging the ball.

And it will also bring some sort of equality into the context which is otherwise heavily tilted towards the batsman. Hope it will also trigger discussion at ICC level to bring this change in international cricket as well.

BCCI has also made another change of introducing two balls in second innings in night matches which is also praiseworthy because it will counter dew.

As the dew sets in it becomes really difficult for spinners to turn the ball as seams gets wet and becomes a bit grassy hence comes nicely on the bat so this change in the rule will help spinners make better grip over the ball.

Both these measures will significantly help bowlers and it is good for the game of cricket to bring some balance and hopefully fans will get to see some evenly contested matches in this IPL.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Respect, care for parents now legal necessity

Madam—A historic decision by the Tamil Nadu High Court has empowered the dignity and rights of the elderly. The court has made it clear that if children or heirs fail to properly care for and serve their elderly parents, the elderly have the full legal right to reclaim the property they had gifted. This decision gives a new direction to the sense of duty and sensitivity towards the elderly in society.

This case involved an elderly woman who, out of love and trust for her son, transferred her property to him through a gift deed. However, after her son's death, her daughter-in-law began mistreating her and showed a neglectful attitude. Unable to bear the situation, the elderly woman approached the court. The court ruled in her favour, stating that if the children or heirs fail to fulfil their duties, the elderly have the legal right to reclaim the gifted property.

This verdict has not only provided legal protection to the elderly but also sent a strong message to society that serving and respecting parents is not only a moral obligation but also a legal duty. If love and care from children are lacking, the existence of the gift deed can be nullified. This decision will serve as a milestone in protecting the dignity and self-respect of the elderly. It reminds every individual in society that respecting and caring for parents is not just a duty but a fundamental value of life.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Devotees' trust at stake

Madam—Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's recent allegations against the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) are purely politically motivated. These accusations, based on false information, seem to be a deliberate attempt to mislead devotees and tarnish Hindu sentiments.
The comments were made with the intention of disregarding the services provided by TTD and spreading misinformation.

TTD has always been committed to serving devotees without any regional discrimination. The institution ensures that devotees from all states receive equal treatment, and there is no scope for favoritism.

The ₹300 special entry darshan and VIP darshan tickets are made available transparently through an online booking system, ensuring that every devotee gets a fair opportunity to have darshan of Lord Venkateswara. Every day, thousands of devotees from Telangana successfully book their tickets online and visit the temple without any hindrance.

Recommendation letters from public representatives are considered only for the VIP break darshan.

However, due to limited slots, not all recommendations can be approved. The claim that TTD has rejected Telangana leaders' recommendation letters is entirely false.

APPANNA GONAPA | VISAKHAPATNAM

ECONOMIC GROWTH ALONE IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF HAPPINESS

The 'World Happiness Report 2025' has shown a slight improvement in India's ranking, yet it remains unsatisfactory. India stands at 118th position among 147 countries, while Pakistan, despite its economic instability, is ranked 109th. Finland has secured the top spot for the eighth consecutive year, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. This report highlights that economic prosperity alone does not ensure national happiness, rather, a combination of social, cultural, administrative, and psychological factors shapes a truly content society.

India is one of the fastest-growing economies, but the extent to which this growth benefits its citizens remains debatable. The wealth gap continues to widen, leading to dissatisfaction and despair. In contrast, smaller European nations with limited resources offer better social security and fair economic distribution, ensuring greater happiness. India must focus on redistributing its economic resources to make prosperity accessible to all. Social cohesion and community support play a vital role in happiness. While India has traditionally had strong family and social ties, modernisation and digitalisation have weakened these bonds, increasing isolation, stress, and depression.

Western countries emphasise mental health services, providing free counselling, community interactions, and a supportive environment. India must prioritise mental well-being through robust policies that encourage social cooperation and emotional resilience.

Healthcare accessibility and life expectancy are also crucial determinants of happiness. Despite improvements, India's healthcare system remains inaccessible to the general public. Government hospitals require urgent reform, while private healthcare remains unaffordable.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

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

Humanism and the world

FIRST Column

The human race stands at a critical juncture, where its unchecked expansion and relentless exploitation of the natural world threaten its own survival. The pressing need to amend Protagoras' aphorism "Man is the measure of all things" has never been more urgent

HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Is humanism as a philosophy leading to human extinction? The search for an answer must begin with the Greek sophist Protagoras' frequently-qouted aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things." It is generally considered to be the best encapsulation of the central message of humanism which asserts the centrality of humankind's place in the cosmic order of things, including both the quotidian and historic flows of time. The value of everything, according to the Humanist weltanschauung has to be judged by its impact on the well-being of humans. It, however, does not refer to half of humankind-women. This was obviously because gender had not become an issue in public discourse in Protagoras' time. He lived from 490 to 420 BCE. As things have changed vastly since then and the first amendment to his aphorism should make it read as. "Humankind is the measure of all things."

The need for the second amendment arises from the nature of humankind's relationship with other living beings-animals, birds, fish and plants-the essence of which is relentless exploitation of these by people, which is driving them to extinction. Significantly, the theme of Earth Day, 2019, observed, as in every year, on April 22, was "Protect our Species." Elizabeth Kolbert writes in *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (first published in 2014), "Very, very occasionally in the distant past, the planet has undergone change so wrenching that the diversity of life has plummeted. Five of these ancient events were catastrophic enough that they're put in their own category: the so-called Big Five. In what seems like a fantastic coincidence, but is probably no coincidence at all, the history of these events is recovered just as people come to realise that they are causing another one."

It has become increasingly clear since the book first came out in 2014 that the sixth extinction is around the corner. The causes are well-known. Seabed mining is destroying unique ecosystems besides taking pollution to the deep sea. Rivers bring toxic industrial waste from hinterlands and, as in the case of stretches of Yamuna close to Delhi, make it impossible for fish to survive in their waters. Oil spills pollute hundreds of square miles. Increasing carbon emission is making sea water acidic and hence inhospitable to marine life. The consumption of plastic bags, hunting, poaching, the arrival of invasive species, have disastrous effects.

Container ships are killing a growing number of whales through accidents. Japan's murderous whaling expeditions are killing hundreds of whales. Global warming has worsened matters.

All this is the result of human activity, which has increased sharply as a result of growing human population, which, currently around 8.2 Billion, is, pace UN projections, set to peak at 10.3 Billion by the mid-1980s. According to another estimate, it is expected to exceed 10 Billion by 2060. It is not just their sustenance demands that are increasing with their numbers. Market capitalism, with advertising as its cutting edge, is manufacturing demands for ever new consumer goods and leisure activity.

The result is pressure on nature, resources and space. Animal habitats and forests, for example, are destroyed to make room for townships, factories and roads, and rail lines linking them. Trees are cut en masse to provide for lumber for construction, firewood and the furniture industry.

Not surprisingly, Ian Johnston's report in The Independent of the United Kingdom of 31 May, 2017, cited scientists writing in a special edition of the magazine, Nature, that humans were causing the sixth mass extinction of life on earth. Chris Jasurek's piece in The Epoch Times of October 31, 2018, cites a World Wildlife Fund report as stating that humans have killed about 60 per cent of animals on the planet since 1970.

> THE RESULT IS PRESSURE ON NATURE, RESOURCES AND SPACE. ANIMAL HABITATS AND FORESTS, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE DESTROYED TO MAKE ROOM FOR TOWNSHIPS, FACTORIES AND ROADS, AND RAIL LINES LINKING THEM. TREES ARE CUT EN MASSE TO PROVIDE FOR LUMBER FOR CONSTRUCTION, FIREWOOD AND THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

The future of humans themselves is at stake. Population increase is an important cause of accelerating human activity. Referring to the soaring increase in global population under way, Desmond Morris predicts in *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal*, that time will come when "the densities we are now experiencing in our major cities would exist in every corner of the globe. The consequences of all this for all forms of wild animals is obvious. The effect it would have on our own species is equally depressing."

Morris adds shortly thereafter, "Long before our populations reach the levels envisaged above we shall have broken so many of the rules that govern our biological nature, that we shall have collapsed as a dominant species. Many exciting species have become extinct in the past and we are no exception." Those dismissing Morris' prediction as alarmist can argue that the human mind, which accounts not only for the survival of the species but its dominance over nature through technology, will find a way of preventing this. Nothing of the sort. Technology would remain a formulation on paper if the environment in which it has to be applied disappears.

More important, the devising and application of technologies would require continued and serious application of the mind. Paul Shepard writes in Thinking Animals: Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence, "the mind and its organ, the brain, are in reality that part of us most dependent on the survival of animals. We are connected to animals by sinews that link speech to rationality, insight, intuition, and consciousness." He states that people everywhere had "a profound, inescapable need for animals" which "are used in the growth and development of the human person, in those most priceless qualities which we lump together as 'mind.' Animal images and forms play a critical role in the shaping of personality, identity, and social consciousness. Animals are among the first inhabitants of the mind's eye. They are "basic to the development of speech and thought."

The progressive extinction of species will have a devastating effect on the human mind, and a progressive decline of the mind will have its own disastrous consequences. The mind is the home of reason and consciousness. As the basis of analytical thought, reason is the cutting edge of the mind.

Its possession has enabled humankind to create a civilisation tailored to cater to its needs, fancies and craving for luxuries, and based on the exploitation of all other species, who are considered inferior as they do not have the ability to reason. The argument will, of course, be that reason would enable people to recognise the deadly consequence of their way of life and retreat from the brink of the precipice.

Such optimism is unwarranted. Reason is an instrument, and not humankind's defining attribute, and is often overpowered by passion and the urge for self-indulgence. The consequences of global warming and what is to be done to combat it are well known. Yet people are unable to overcome the growing desire for creature comforts, which is so overwhelming that they are incapable of jettisoning it. Many now join the Taliban or other groups whose obscurantist doctrines do not stand rational interrogation—as many in Nazi Germany joined the Sturm Abteilung (SA) and the Schultz Staffein (SS) steeped in Hitler's racist doctrine. If the first instance reflects the failure of rationality, the second indicates the triumph of hatred over reason, Not many today realise that their human supremacist worldview and ruthless exploitation of non-human living beings is facilitating their own extinction. Instead of killing, they need to nurture and cherish all animals, birds, fish and plants. The second amendment to Protagoras' aphorism should transform it to read, "Humankind is the preserver and protector of all beings."

(The author is Consulting Editor, *The Pioneer*. Views expressed are personal)

Himachal factors in growth aspirations amid fiscal challenges

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, who also oversees the finance portfolio, recently presented the 2025-26 state budget, aiming to balance fiscal prudence with developmental aspirations. The budget emphasises tourism expansion, green energy, and rural upliftment as key growth drivers. However, persistent financial challenges-including declining central grants, rising debt, and increasing revenue expenditure-continue to pose significant hurdles to fiscal management.

Plummeting central grants

Himachal Pradesh's fiscal distress stems from policy shifts and structural financial limitations. A major setback has been the sharp reduction in central grants, particularly the Revenue Deficit Grant (RDG), which dropped from ₹10,949 Crore in 2021-22 to ₹3,257 Crore in 2025-26. Additionally, the withdrawal of GST compensation has led to a cumulative revenue shortfall of ₹9,478 Crore, further exacerbating the fiscal deficit.

The state's debt burden has surged to ₹1,04,729 Crore, including ₹29,046 Crore in liabilities inherited from the previous BJP-led administration. Capital expenditure has also taken a significant hit, declining by 46.58 per cent from ₹8,485.83 Crore in 2024-25 to ₹3,941.85 Crore in 2025-26. This substantial reduction restricts long-term infrastructure investments, raising concerns about future economic expansion.

The revenue deficit stands at ₹361 Crore (0.83 per cent of GSDP), while the overall fiscal deficit remains high at ₹10,338 Crore (4.04 per cent of GSDP), reflecting ongoing financial strain despite expenditure control efforts. The slight reduction in the overall revenue deficit-from ₹6,486 Crore to ₹6,390 Crore-offers little relief, as fiscal imbalances continue to hinder development prospects.

In contrast, the Union Budget 2025-26 has allocated ₹11.21 Lakh Crore for capital expenditure, constituting 3.1 per cent of the national GDP, a 10.1 per cent increase over the previous year's revised estimate. This disparity in resource allocation leaves states like Himachal Pradesh struggling to secure adequate fiscal support.

Pathways to financial stability

Himachal Pradesh's fiscal crisis calls for a multi-pronged approach to revenue generation, ensuring financial stability while maintaining developmental momentum. Given the state's heavy reliance on central grants and borrowings, the government must diversify its revenue streams through effective taxation policies, asset monetisation, tourism expansion, and private sector participation. Below are key areas requiring focused action:

Enhancing tax compliance

Improving tax compliance and minimising revenue leakages are crucial for fiscal recovery. The state must focus on:

Expanding the tax base*:* Increasing the number of taxpayers through effective registration drives and stricter enforcement of tax laws.

Digital tax governance: Implementing advanced digital tracking systems to monitor tax collections, curb evasion, and streamline compliance.

Rationalising tax incentives: Reviewing and eliminating unnecessary tax exemptions that lead to revenue losses.

Strengthening enforcement: Enhancing audit mechanisms to detect tax evasion while promoting voluntary compliance.

Rationalising subsidies

Himachal Pradesh bears a high subsidy burden, which, while essential for social welfare, often leads to fiscal strain when not managed effectively. A targeted subsidy framework is necessary to balance welfare with financial sustainability. Key measures include:

KS TOMAR

Identifying non-essential subsidies: Phasing out benefits that primarily aid economically well-off sections while protecting critical subsidies for healthcare, education, and agriculture.

1. Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT): Ensuring subsidies reach intended beneficiaries directly, reducing middlemen and leakages.

2. Performance-based subsidies: Linking benefits to efficiency and sustainability, particularly in the power sector, where leakages are common.

3. Encouraging alternative funding models: Exploring Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partnerships to support social welfare initiatives.

By curbing wasteful subsidies, the government can reallocate resources to productive investments, fostering long-term economic stability.

Monetising state assets

Himachal Pradesh possesses vast underutilised assets in land, tourism, hydroelectricity, and public infrastructure. Monetising these resources can generate substantial revenue.

a) Land monetisation*:* Leasing state-owned land for commercial and industrial use while ensuring sustainable development.

b) Maximising hydroelectric revenue*:* Enhancing revenue-sharing agreements with power producers and improving efficiency in the hydropower sector.

c) Revamping state properties*:* Converting unused government buildings into revenue-generating assets like hotels, business centers, or cultural hubs.

d) Auctioning mineral resources: Regulating and monetising mineral deposits through transparent and competitive bidding processes.

Effectively utilising state assets can reduce fiscal dependence on external sources and create sustainable revenue streams.

Seeking ecological compensation

As a major ecological contributor, Himachal Pradesh provides critical environmental services, including carbon sequestration and water conservation. However, these contributions often go uncompensated in national financial allocations. The state must aggressively advocate for ecological compensation, estimated at ₹90,000 Crore annually, through:

Financial incentives for forest conservation*:* Seeking compensatory grants from the central government.

i) Monetising carbon credits*:* Participating in national and international carbon trading markets.

ii) Eco-taxation*:* Imposing green taxes on businesses impacting the environment, with revenues directed toward conservation efforts.

iii) Securing environmental compensation will provide much-needed fiscal support while reinforcing Himachal's commitment to sustainability.

Boosting tourism revenue

Tourism is a cornerstone of Himachal Pradesh's economy, yet its revenue potential remains underutilised. The government must focus on:

i) Eco-tourism and adventure tourism: Developing sustainable resorts, trekking trails, and adventure sports facilities.

ii) Religious tourism infrastructure*:* Enhancing connectivity and amenities around pilgrimage sites.

iii) Cultural and heritage tourism: Restoring historical sites and promoting Himachal's unique culture and handicrafts.

iv) Better taxation and regulation: Ensuring proper taxation of tourism-related businesses to minimise revenue leakages.

v) With strategic investments and promotional efforts, tourism-driven revenue can significantly reduce dependence on external grants.

vi) Himachal Pradesh stands at a critical economic juncture where strategic action is essential to overcome fiscal distress.

By diversifying revenue streams, strengthening tax governance, optimising state resources, and fostering private sector collaboration, the state can navigate financial challenges while sustaining economic growth.

A well-implemented, multi-sectoral strategy will not only bridge fiscal deficits but also position Himachal Pradesh as a model of financial resilience.

(The writer is a strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Phishing scams: Protect yourself from cyber threats!

Imagine waking up to an urgent email with the subject line "immediate action required: your bank account has been suspended!" or "your streaming subscription has been terminated—update your payment details now!" The message no doubt looks official, with the bank's or the streaming service's logo and a professional tone, warning that your account has been compromised or your payment details need to be updated immediately.

Panic sets in. You don't want to lose access to your hard-earned money or favourite shows. Without thinking twice, you click the link in the email, which takes you to what appears to be the official website. It prompts you to enter your login credentials, bank details, or social security number. The urgency of the message makes you act fast until you realise, too late, that you have just handed over your sensitive information to cybercriminals.

This is a classic phishing scam, a deceptive tactic that is used by hackers to trick people into revealing personal and financial information by pretending to be a trusted entity. With a single click, all your accounts, confidentiality and finances could be at risk. Phishing is a cyber-attack technique where malicious actors or hackers attempt to trick people into sharing sensitive information, such as usernames, passwords, and financial details by using fake websites, emails, or messages to steal data such as credit or debit card details and login credentials. This form of social engineering exploits human psychology rather than technical vulnerabilities, making it a persistent and evolving threat in the digital age. There are numerous types of Phishing Attacks, such as:

SHAINY SHARMA

1. Whaling*:* A specialised type of spear phishing aimed at high-profile individuals like CEOs or government officials, often involving sophisticated social engineering tactics.

2. E-mail phishing: The most common form, where attackers send fraudulent emails pretending to be reputable entities, such as banks or online services, urging recipients to click on malicious links or download harmful attachments.

3. Spear phishing*:* A targeted attack where hackers gather personal information about their victims to create personalised, convincing messages that appear legitimate.

4. Smishing and vishing*:* Smishing (SMS phishing) uses fraudulent text messages to lure victims, while vishing (voice phishing) involves phone calls from attackers impersonating trustworthy organisations.

5. Clone Phishing*:* Attackers replicate legitimate emails, replacing attachments or links with malicious versions to deceive recipients.

6. Website Spoofing*:* Fraudsters create fake websites that closely resemble legitimate ones to trick users into entering sensitive credentials.

The first and foremost way to prevent yourself from being a victim is to enable multi-factor authentication (MFA), even if credentials are compromised for it adds an extra layer of security. Organisations should conduct regular cybersecurity training to raise awareness about phishing tactics for their employees. Even, the Indian government has taken several initiatives such as the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative, Digital India Campaign and many more to raise awareness about phishing and enhance cybersecurity among citizens, businesses and government institutions. The Indian Government regularly posts cybersecurity tips and scam alerts through platforms like Twitter (@Cyberdost) and Facebook and the Cyber Crime Helpline 1930 allows victims to report phishing attacks quickly are a few initiatives that aim to guide how to detect and avoid phishing attacks and educates users about common phishing tactics used especially in digital payments, banking frauds and fake emails.

As a safety concern, it would be beneficial to install and update antivirus and anti-phishing tools to detect malicious content. Before entering any personal information, one must ensure the website's URL begins with "https://" and is authentic, as attackers often use slight variations of legitimate domains. It is crucial to look for red flags such as poor grammar, urgent requests and generic greetings that indicate phishing attempts.

If you fall victim to a phishing scam, act quickly to minimise damage and protect your personal and financial information. You may:

i) Immediately turn off your Wi-Fi or unplug your internet connection to prevent malware from spreading or further data theft. Report the attack to the relevant authorities or IT departments.

ii) If you entered your login credentials on a phishing site, then change the password of the compromised account immediately, followed by updating other accounts that use the same or similar passwords.

iii) If you entered banking details or made a payment, then call your bank or credit card provider immediately explain the situation, and Request to block or freeze your account if necessary.

There is no denying that phishing remains a prevalent cybersecurity threat, but with vigilance and proactive measures, individuals and organisations can mitigate risks. As cybercriminals refine their techniques, staying informed and implementing robust security practices is essential to safeguard personal and professional data from phishing attacks. Taking the mentioned steps immediately after falling victim to a phishing scam can help minimise financial and data loss while preventing further damage.

(The writer is a political analyst. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF

NMDC ops resume as workers resume work

State-run iron ore miner NMDC on Friday said that normal operations have resumed at its all projects after protesting workers returned to work after an over two-week stir. The employees have resumed duties and normal operations have resumed at all the projects, NMDC said in a statement, adding "Resumption of operations at this crucial junction will certainly help to accelerate production." The miner said it is hopeful of achieving 45 million tonnes of production in FY25 as workers have returned to work ending their two-week protest. NMDC shares rose by 1.47 per cent to close at Rs 67.49 per share on BSE on Friday. NMDC said the Federation of the Unions asked their members to resume duties fully from the first shift of March 20 onwards and extend their support and commitment to give the best results. The worker unions had resorted to a "willful" slowdown of work and work-to-rule with effect from March 6. On March 9, NMDC said worker unions are staging protests despite negotiations underway over the wage revision.

Godrej Properties buys land in Bengaluru for housing project

Real estate company Godrej Properties has acquired a 10-acre land parcel in Bengaluru to develop a housing project with an estimated revenue potential of about Rs 2,500 crore. In a regulatory filing on Friday, Godrej Properties informed that it has acquired around 10 acres of land in Yelahanka, Bengaluru. "This project is estimated to have a developable potential of around 1.5 million (15 lakh) square feet of saleable area, comprising primarily of premium residential development of various configurations and high street retail, with an estimated revenue potential of around Rs 2,500 crore," the company said.
Godrej Properties is one of the leading real estate developers in the country.

Electric scooter maker River to open 12 more stores

Electric scooter maker River aims to open 12 more stores by the end of this month, bringing its total presence to 25 stores across India, the company said on Friday. The Bengaluru-headquartered company, expanding its footprint, inaugurated the River Store Sathuvachari in Vellore, a 1,900 sq ft facility, in partnership with Mahalakshmi Motors.
Currently, River operates 13 stores in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Hubballi, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Coimbatore, Mysuru, and Tirupati. "In the coming weeks, the company will expand its presence to Thiruvananthapuram, Tirupur, Belgaum, and Pune. By the end of March 2025, River aims to have 25 stores across India," a company statement said. On the occasion, the company launched its scooter Indie, priced at Rs 1,42,999 (ex-showroom) in Vellore. River is backed by marquee investors, including Japan-based Yamaha Motor Corporation, Mitsui & Co Ltd, and Marubeni Corporation, among others.

PM MODI SAYS PROUD MOMENT

India crosses 1 bn tonnes coal output

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India crossed a record milestone of 1 billion tonnes of coal production in the current fiscal, a landmark, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi described as a proud moment for the country, showing its commitment to energy security and self-reliance.

Coal, which is predominately used to produce electricity as well as fuel in several industries, is the mainstay energy source for the world's fifth largest economy.

In a statement, the Coal Ministry said the momentous milestone was achieved on March 20, 11 days ahead of overall 997.83 million tonnes (MT) of coal production in the last financial year.

In a social media post on X, Modi described the achievement as "A Proud Moment for India!"

He said, "Crossing the monumental milestone of 1 Billion tonnes of coal production is a remarkable achievement, highlighting our commitment to energy security, economic growth and self-reliance."

Modi said the feat also reflects the dedication and hardwork of all those associated with the sector.

Union Minister of Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy in a social media post said India has not only increased production but also ensured sustainable and responsible mining.

"This achievement will fuel our increasing power demands, drive economic growth, and ensure a brighter future for every Indian," Reddy said.

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India is on its path to become a global energy leader, he said.

Reddy lauded the efforts of the workforce of the coal sector in achieving this milestone.

As per the Ministry of Coal Action Plan FY 2024-25, the coal production / offtake target for current fiscal is 1,080 million tonnes.

The coal ministry said the record coal output is the result of tireless efforts of Coal Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), private players, and the dedicated workforce of around 5 lakh mine workers across more than 350 coal mines.

These coal miners, who have defied numerous challenges with unmatched dedication, have played a pivotal role in achieving this historic milestone.

India relies on coal for approximately 55 per cent of its energy mix, and around 74 per cent of the country's electricity is generated by coal-based power plants.

Various government initiatives, including amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, have led to a marked increase in the availability of domestic coal, progressively substituting imports and significantly contributing to foreign exchange savings.

From April to December 2024, India's coal imports declined by 8.4 per cent, resulting in forex savings of around USD 5.43 billion (Rs 42,315.7 crore), as compared to the same period of last year.

Sebi mulls allowing brokers to carry securities mkt via separate biz unit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Friday proposed to abolish the requirement for stock brokers to seek its approval for floating a subsidiary or joint venture to undertake securities market-related activities in Gujarat International Finance Tec-city – International Financial Services Centre (GIFT-IFSC).

Moreover, stock brokers proposing to undertake securities market related activities in GIFT-IFSC can do so under a Separate Business Unit (SBU) of the stock broking entity itself on an arm's-length basis, Sebi said in its consultation paper.

At present, Sebi-registered stock brokers are required to obtain approval from it in the form of NOC to float subsidiaries or to enter into joint ventures to undertake securities market-related activities in GIFT-IFSC.

Further, stock brokers are required to maintain an arms-length relationship between their activities and that of their subsidiary/joint venture in GIFT-IFSC. Such a relationship is required to be maintained in terms of key personnel, infrastructure, segregation of books and records, independent regulatory control and supervisory mechanism, etc.

"In order to facilitate Sebi registered stock brokers to undertake securities market related activities in GIFT-IFSC, it has been decided to do away with the requirement of obtaining specific approval from Sebi. Stock brokers proposing to undertake securities market related activities in GIFT-IFSC may do so under a Separate Business Unit (SBU) of the stock broking entity itself," the regulator said in its consultation paper.

The matters related to policy, eligibility criteria, risk management, investor grievances, inspection, enforcement, claims among others for the separate business unit in GIFT-IFSC would be specified under the regulatory framework issued by the respective regulatory authority. All activities of the such SBU in GIFT-IFSC should be under the jurisdiction of that regulatory authority.

Domestic air passenger traffic rises 11 pc in Feb: DGCA

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's domestic air passenger traffic increased 11.04 per cent to 140.44 lakh in February over the same month last year, according to monthly traffic data by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

The number of domestic passengers flown by the Indian airline in February 2024 was recorded at 126.48 lakh, data show. During the month under review, IndiGo flew a total of 89.40-lakh passengers with a market share of 63.7 per cent, followed by the Air India Group, which transported 38.30 lakh passengers and chipped away with 27.3 per cent market share.

Air India last year completed consolidation of its airlines business with AIX Connect merging into Air India Express in October and Vistara's merger with Air India on November 11.

The two other major carriers SpiceJet and Akasa Air transported 6.59 lakh and 4.54 lakh passengers, respectively, during the month under review.

Sensex, Nifty climb 1 pc on fresh foreign fund inflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 1 per cent on Friday, marking their fifth day of rise on the back of fresh foreign fund inflows and gains in bank stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 557.45 points or 0.73 per cent to settle at 76,905.51. During the day, it surged 693.88 points or 0.90 per cent to 77,041.94.

The NSE Nifty climbed 159.75 points or 0.69 per cent to 23,350.40.

Experts said the US Fed has suggested the possibility of two rate cuts this year reigniting the optimism in the domestic market.

From the Sensex pack, NTPC, Bajaj Finance, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, Nestle, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, ICICI Bank, Power Grid and Zomato were among the gainers.

However, Infosys, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards.

"The domestic market has concluded the week with consistent recovery. The anticipated reduction in risk-free rates, coupled with a correction in the dollar index, is facilitating fund flows back to EMs.

"FIIs, whose selling activity has been waning, are becoming net buyers, driven by dovish signals from the US Fed, which suggest the possibility of two rate cuts this year. This has reignited optimism in the domestic market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,239.14 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

"Markets extended their winning streak for the fifth consecutive session, gaining over half a per cent. The positive sentiment prevailed from the start and strengthened further with broad-based participation.

Delhi court dismisses Engineer Rashid's bail plea in terror funding case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday dismissed the bail application of Lok Sabha MP from Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla, Engineer Rashid, in a terror funding case.

"The bail plea dismissed," Additional Sessions Judge Chander Jit Singh said.

Rashid has been lodged in Tihar jail since 2019 after he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the 2017 terror funding case.

During a hearing this week, Rashid had challenged a March 10 order of the trial court, refusing him custody parole or interim bail to attend Lok Sabha proceedings till April 4.

In the reply filed to the appeal on March 17, the NIA said Rashid couldn't be allowed to use his status as an MP to "get away from rigours of imprisonment".

The NIA had argued that Rashid could neither be granted interim bail nor allowed custody parole as he had no enforceable right to attend the Parliament session while in lawful custody.

Clinic Dermatech wins award for India's Best Clinic

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Clinic Dermatech, a leader in skincare and hair restoration, has been honored as India's Best Skin & Hair Clinic at the Asia's Business Leadership Awards 2025. This prestigious recognition underscores Clinic Dermatech's commitment to delivering top-quality skin and hair care treatments, solidifying its position as one of India's premier skin & hair care clinics.

Asia's Business Leadership Awards is a prestigious platform that recognizes excellence across various industries. Clinic Dermatech's commitment to innovation, customer satisfaction, and advanced treatments has distinguished it as a trusted skin & hair care clinic in India.

Two Decades of Excellence in Skincare and Hair Care

For over 18 years, Clinic Dermatech has been at the forefront of the skincare and aesthetics industry, offering cutting-edge solutions. From laser hair reduction to anti-aging treatments and hair restoration therapies, the clinic has earned a reputation for excellence. With state-of-the-art technology and a personalized approach, Clinic Dermatech has become the go-to skincare clinic in India for those seeking premium, results-driven solutions.

Crompton reimagines lighting with launch of INFINIA

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Bringing in a new range of decorative and aesthetically superior lighting, Crompton Greaves Consumer Electricals Ltd., has expanded its range of Batten Lights portfolio with the launch of two new products - Infinia 24W a unique designed indirect lighting product with Pristech technology. Infinia 24W comes with a unique design with decorative endcaps giving brighter illumination with an aesthetically appealing finish. Also launching SlimO 20W - 15% Slimmer batten with Decorative endcaps, designed to complement modern living spaces. These LED lights combine advanced lighting technology and sleek aesthetics, to create the perfect ambience for both homes and offices. By enhancing decor, these new fixtures not only brighten spaces but also add a contemporary and sophisticated touch. Ideal for transforming interiors, these lights seamlessly blend functionality and elegance, turning environments into inviting and visually captivating settings.

Lighting has transitioned from a basic need to a vital design element that defines ambience and personal style. Modern consumers increasingly want to transform their living spaces with lighting solutions that enhance decor while ensuring optimal illumination. Recognizing this, Crompton introduces its latest range of products designed to strike the perfect balance between functionality and aesthetics. These stylish and efficient lighting fixtures are tailored to elevate living rooms—the heart of home transformations—by seamlessly blending illumination with modern design.

With this launch, Crompton redefines home lighting, offering solutions that not only brighten but also beautify spaces.

CLASSIC ELEGANCE, MODERN INNOVATION

Meet the limited-edition Samsonite's New Streamlite Samsonite

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Samsonite, a global leader in travel gear, has a long-standing tradition of blending innovation with elegance, superior craftsmanship, and distinctive flair. In celebration of its 115th anniversary, the brand's latest offering, New Streamlite, is truly noteworthy. This collection not only revisits the company's origins but also underscores its commitment to spearheading the future of travel. The New Streamlite is a modern take on Samsonite's iconic Streamlite from the 1940s.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
PANCHYATH RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
TENDER NOTICE
No.T3/14/DPRE/PDPL/2024-25 Dt: 20.03.2025
No of Works (42), Total Estt. Cost Rs. 316.50 Lakhs, Name of the works: 1) Building & Repairs (22 No's) **Estt. Cost. Rs. 194.50 Lakhs,** 2) CC Road & Drain works (20Nos), **Estt Cost Rs. 122.00 lakhs** of Peddapally District works onwards last date of application for issue of tender schedules **29.03.2025.** Tender scheduled issued on **03.04.2025.** Last date Receipt of tenders on **04.04.2025 up to 3.00 P.M.** Opening of tenders on **04.04.2025 at 3.30 P.M.**
Sd/- District Panchayath Raj Engineer, Peddapally
DIPR R.O. No.: 11984-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2024-25, Dt. 21-03-2025

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
'E' PROCUREMENT SHORT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. No: 79/SE (KZ)/GHMC/TA/2024-2025. Dt: 21.03.2025
No. of Works: Procument of (148) items of sports material required for GHMC Summer coaching camp-2025, **Bid Submission Start Date:** 22.03.2025 @ 03.00 P.M, **Bid Submission Closing Date:** 02.04.2025 @ 03.00 P.M., **Address of Officer Cell No.:** SE (KZ), GHMC, Phone No. 8790522144. Further details can be seen at e-procurement @ **www.eprocurement.gov.in**
Sd/- Superintending Engineer (KZ) GHMC
DIPR R.O.No: 11971-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2024-25, Dt. 21-03-2025

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION
'E' PROCUREMENT SHORT TENDER NOTICE
NIT No. 41/EE-6/CRZ /GHMC/2024-25 Dt: 20.03.2025
Nature of the Work: CC roads and Community Hall works, **Estt. Cost: Rs. 55.70 Lakhs. Download Start Date & Time:** 22.03.2025 at 02.00 P.M., **Last Date & Time for Receipt of Bids:** 27.03.2025 at 02.00 P.M., **Name & Address Officer, Cell No:** Sri. M. Peersingh, EE, Div-6, CRZ, GHMC, Hyderabad. Ph. No. 9154960551. For further details can be seen at e-procurement @ **www.tender.eprocurement.gov.in. Note: 1% EMD should be obtained after the date of tender notice.**
Sd/- Executive Engineer, Circle No.6, Charminar Zone, GHMC
DIPR R.O.No: 11983-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2024-25, Dt. 21-03-2025

OCEAN DUMPING – OR CLIMATE SOLUTION?

Growing industry bets on ocean to capture carbon

PNS ■ HALIFAX (NOVA SCOTIA)

From the grounds of a gas-fired power plant on the eastern shores of Canada, a little-known company is pumping a slurry of minerals into the ocean in the name of stopping climate change.

Whether it's pollution or a silver bullet that will save the planet may depend on whom you ask. From shore, a pipe releases a mixture of water and magnesium oxide — a powdery white mineral used in everything from construction to heartburn pills that Planetary Technologies, based in Nova Scotia, is betting will absorb more planet-warming gases into the sea.

"Restore the climate. Heal the ocean," reads the motto stamped on a shipping container nearby.

Planetary is part of a growing industry racing to engineer a solution to global warming using the absorbent power of the oceans. It is backed by USD 1 million from Elon Musk's foundation and competing for a prize of USD 50 million more.

Dozens of other companies and academic groups are pitching the same theory: that sinking rocks, nutrients, crop waste or seaweed in the ocean could lock away climate-warming carbon dioxide for centuries or more. Nearly 50 field trials have taken place in the past four years, with startups raising hundreds of millions in early funds.

But the field remains rife with debate over the consequences for the oceans if the strategies are deployed at large scale, and over the exact benefits for the climate. Critics say the efforts are moving too quickly and with too few guardrails.

"It's like the Wild West. Everybody is on the bandwagon, everybody wants to do something," said Adina Paytan, who teaches earth and ocean science at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Planetary, like most of the ocean startups, is financing its work by selling carbon credits — or tokens representing one metric ton of carbon dioxide removed from the air. Largely unregulated and widely debated, carbon credits have become popular this century as a way for companies to purchase offsets rather than reduce emissions themselves. Most credits are priced at several hundred dollars apiece.

The industry sold more than 340,000 marine carbon credits last year, up from just 2,000 credits four years ago, according to the tracking site CDR.fyi.

The Pioneer
Hyderabad

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Saturday
March 22, 2025

HAND-DRAWN, HEARTFELT

Forget AI—Atul Kabra's hand-drawn doodles are keeping storytelling human

From illustrating personal milestones to crafting brand narratives, Atul Kabra, the artist behind Doodle Kabra, delves into how his passion for doodling transformed into a storytelling movement embraced by global brands. He discusses the emotional depth of doodling, its role in mindfulness and why—despite AI's rise—authentic, handmade storytelling will always have a place in the world

TEJAL SINHA
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For most, doodling is a mindless pastime—something done absentmindedly in notebooks or on the edges of meeting notes. But for Atul Kabra, doodling became a language, a storytelling tool that has connected with thousands across the world. What started as a personal creative escape during the pandemic soon transformed into Doodle Kabra that has collaborated with giants like Samsung, IKEA and Titan.

What sets Kabra's work apart is its ability to preserve emotions, memories, and legacies in a way that words often cannot. Whether he's illustrating a brand's journey or capturing deeply personal milestones, his hand-drawn doodles serve as time capsules, bridging the gap between nostalgia and modern storytelling. In this conversation with ***The Pioneer***, he reflects on his journey from sketching in solitude to creating a movement, the emotional depth of handmade art and why, even in an AI-driven world, the human touch remains irreplaceable.

Doodle Kabra was born during the pandemic—a time of uncertainty when art became Kabra's voice and storytelling his escape. What started as a passion for doodling soon evolved into a language that resonated with people beyond social media. The turning point came when global brands like Samsung, IKEA and Titan reached out, recognizing his doodles not just as illustrations, but as powerful storytelling tools.

"When a Fortune 500 company trusted hand-drawn storytelling over digital graphics to represent its legacy, I knew this was more than a creative pursuit—it was a movement waiting to be scaled," he shares. That realisation transformed Doodle Kabra from a personal art journey into a brand that helps individuals and businesses visually tell their stories.

Kabra's doodles serve as deeply personal time capsules, preserving emotions and memories in ways that words often cannot. He believes the reason hand-drawn art resonates so deeply with people in an increasingly digital world is its raw authenticity.

"Because hand-drawn art is human. Every stroke, every imperfection and every thoughtful detail carries emotion in a way that digital designs never can. In an age where AI can generate images in seconds, people crave authenticity. They want to see the personal touch, the organic flow of ink, the time and effort that goes into something made just for them."

This personal touch is why celebrities like Rana Daggubati, Kareena Kapoor and Allu Arjun have cherished their custom doodles. "These aren't just artworks; they are visual legacies. Whether it's a brand's journey or a personal milestone, a hand-drawn doodle is a time capsule, preserving not just an event, but the emotions that came with it." With AI-generated art becoming more prevalent, the future of hand-drawn creativity is a topic of discussion. Kabra is firm in his belief that while AI can generate, it cannot create.

"True creativity is born from lived experiences, emotions, and human imagination. AI can assist, but it can never replace the soul of hand-drawn storytelling," he asserts.

This belief is what drives his initiative to introduce doodling into schools, encouraging children to embrace creativity. Through programs at institutions like Hyderabad Public School and Gitanjali Senior School, Doodle Kabra has trained over 5,000 students in creative thinking.

"More than an art form, doodling teaches children how to express freely, think visually, and find their own creative voice," Kabra explains. "The future isn't about choosing between AI and hand-drawn creativity—it's about knowing where they serve different purposes. AI may create fast, but a hand-drawn doodle is timeless."

Kabra's work spans both global brands and individuals looking for personalized keepsakes, and the creative process differs significantly for each.

"For brands like Samsung, IKEA and Fortune 500 companies, doodles serve as a visual storytelling tool—translating their identity, values and mission into a compelling visual narrative. The focus is strategic—creating a piece that speaks to a wide audience," he explains. On the other hand, personal doodles carry deep emotions. Having illustrated over 2,000 personal stories, Kabra has witnessed the impact his art has on individuals.

"One farewell doodle, in particular, still stays with me—it was for a daughter whose father had passed away. Every detail in the illustration held meaning—their favorite Sunday routine, the way he'd tie her shoelaces as a child. When she saw it, she held it in silence before breaking down. That moment reminded me that doodling is not just an art form—it's a vessel for emotions."

In a fast-paced, high-stress world, creative practices like doodling have been linked to mindfulness and emotional well-being. For Kabra, doodling is more than an art—it is a form of meditation.

"Doodling is my therapy. It's the one time when I lose track of time, where my thoughts quiet down and my hands take over. It's like a flow state—a creative meditation," he says.

This connection to mindfulness has contributed to doodling's growing popularity in workshops, schools and corporate environments. "It's a way to decompress, express and tap into creativity without pressure. More than ever, people need an outlet to slow down—and doodling gives them that space," Kabra adds.

Having worked with clients across different backgrounds, Kabra has observed distinct cultural patterns in how people want their stories represented through doodles.

"In India, there's a deep connection to heritage, nostalgia and symbolism. Many of my Indian clients want mythology, traditions, and family history reflected in their doodles," he notes. Western clients, however, often focus on abstract emotions and minimal storytelling—using doodles to capture a feeling rather than specific cultural elements. "But the core remains the same—everyone wants their story to be seen, valued and preserved," he emphasizes.

Reflecting on his journey from sketching alone to delivering a TED Talk about the power of art, Kabra distills his experience into one key lesson:

"Your passion is valid. Your story is valid," he states.

What began as late-night sketches has grown into a brand that has trained over 5,000 students, doodled more than 2,000 stories, and collaborated with global brands. "The moment I stood on the TEDx stage, I realised—this wasn't just about art. It was about giving people a voice through visuals," Kabra says. Handcrafted, deeply personal art is difficult to scale without losing its essence, but Kabra ensures that storytelling remains at the core of Doodle Kabra.

"Scaling doesn't mean mass-producing—it means impacting more lives while keeping the doodles deeply personal," he says. "Every project still starts with a conversation, with a story, with human connection."

Kabra is optimistic about the future of handmade art, believing that a renaissance is already underway.

"We're already seeing a revival of handmade storytelling. The return of handwritten letters, vinyl records, and handcrafted gifts proves that people crave authenticity," he explains.

As for Doodle Kabra, the brand isn't just following this movement—it's leading it. "As long as people have stories to tell, hand-drawn doodles will always have a place in the world," Kabra affirms.

Emerging stronger after a tough fight with GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) has recently made a mark in India with alerts being issued in states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka over this rare yet potentially serious disorder of the nervous system. Triggered by an autoimmune response to certain infections, G.B.S. causes the body to attack its own peripheral nerves, resulting in progressive muscle weakness and paralysis as well as — in serious cases — respiratory failure. Although for some people the recovery is a matter of weeks, for many, it is a long, hard slog, often needing intensive medical treatment and rehabilitation.

Fighting a rare form of GBS, a mother's battle

Supriya (name changed), a 42-year-old mother, living an ordinary life in Mumbai when she suddenly started developing double vision that made swallowing difficult — very unlike the way GBS usually starts, where weakness in the legs is the first sign of trouble. They were diagnosed with a rare variant called Miller Fisher Syndrome (MFS) that crossed over with Acute Motor Axonal Neuropathy (AMAN). Her condition worsened quickly. Within days, she was unable to move her face, open her eyes, or breathe on her own. She was completely paralysed, though fully conscious. She required immediate treatment by a physician and support by mechanical ventilation and other specialised therapies to slow the amount of tissue damage in her lungs.

Supriya went through aggressive therapy over the next 2.5 months, including immunoglobulin and extensive physiotherapy. Little by little, she built up her strength. In February 2025, she was finally able to breathe on her own. While the path in front of her is still an uphill bout, her recovery is a testament to both resilience and medical advancement.

A young student's struggle to survive

On New Year's Day in 2024, Arun (name changed), a 22-year-old student from Bangalore, felt his hands go numb. What started as a routine illness was initially dismissed but very quickly turned into a life-and-death situation. He had contracted a bacterial infection that had led to GBS and was attacking his nerves and disrupting his ability to breathe. His condition deteriorated, and he was put on a ventilator. The extended use of mechanical ventilation was fraught with its own hazards, such as infection and muscle wasting.

Recovery was difficult, needing a multidisciplinary approach including respiratory care, physiotherapy and mental rehabilitation. Improvements came slowly through weeks of treatment and therapy. Stints at a tracheostomy assisted his breathing, and gradually, as his strength returned, he moved from intensive care to rehabilitation. By early March, Arun was breathing on his own and regaining mobility. His recovery is ongoing but gradual, a testament to the power of determination and early medical intervention.

GBS: Challenge in understanding and prevention

GBS is a rare condition, occurring in 1–2 people per 100,000 people each year, but it can be life-threatening. Taking precautions such as regular handwashing, avoiding unsanitary food and water, and preserving overall immunity will help reduce the risk of infections that eventually lead to the syndrome. Rehabilitation is not just a physical healing process. The continued inability to move can have psychological effects too and lead to being emotionally scared, so providing mental well-being comes into play as a significant part of rehabilitation.

Timely medical treatment and long-term physiotherapy are key to restoring quality of life for the patients, the spokesperson added. Not all cases need venting, but any sudden weakness or numbness in the limbs should be considered serious and looked at quickly. The experiences of those who have survived GBS are a testament to the power of resilience and the importance of timely medical intervention in the recovery process.

(The authors, Dr. Srinivas Raju, is a Consultant Neurologist and Dr. Hirennappa B Udnur, is a Consultant Pulmonologist at Manipal Hospitals, Varthur Road and Whitefield.)

CONSTRUCTING A BETTER TOMORROW

PNS|HYDERABAD

One professional is driving innovation in the constantly changing field of construction! Ashutosh Katyal, Capacite's Chief Technology Officer, is the driving force behind the integration of infrastructure and technology. As a visionary leader, he leads technological innovations that transform the building industry, arranging the symphony of innovation. In order to make the construction process smooth, effective and sustainable, he incorporates state-of-the-art technologies like automation, artificial intelligence and building information modeling while keeping a close watch on market trends. Let's read to an exclusive conversation with him!

How is the labour supply-demand gap addressed by eFORCE?

Because of the high demand and frequent labour shortages, the construction industry continues to struggle to retain a qualified and dependable workforce. This problem is directly addressed by it, a comprehensive digital platform that enables General Contractors to effectively communicate with Labour Contractors. The platform greatly cuts down on time and effort spent on workforce mobilisation by allowing general contractors to upload project requirements and look for qualified contractors from a pre-verified pool. Additionally, labour contractors can browse ongoing projects in real time and offer available labour. By ensuring that skilled labour is distributed quickly and effectively, this streamlined approach helps to close the gap between supply and demand. Furthermore, by evaluating contractors' competencies, the digital contractor evaluation system makes sure that only capable and trustworthy teams are sent out. Consequently, it helps to ensure more consistent worker availability, which promotes more efficient project management.

It has undergone successful testing on Capacit'e Infraprojects projects. How would this help the infrastructure and construction sector as a whole?

Its successful deployment has demonstrated the capacity to streamline labour management and improve project efficiency. The platform's scalability and demonstrated efficacy will benefit the entire industry. Construction and infrastructure firms can simplify worker management and contractor collaboration by implementing it. Project delays and inefficiencies are decreased by the platform's digital evaluation and reporting features, which allow for transparent assessments and real-time labour performance tracking. Additionally, it reduces labour shortages by building a robust and dynamic network of contractors. Large-scale construction projects' operational difficulties are greatly lessened by its capacity to provide quick onboarding and precise workforce availability projections.

What's its speciality?

The distinctive method that it uses to close the communication gap between labour contractors and general contractors makes it stand out. With just a few clicks, it provides a digital, data-driven solution that simplifies labour management in contrast to conventional manual operations. The app's user-friendly interface and effective features, such as real-time project searches and smooth communication tools, have won praise from users. For many contractors, workforce planning has been greatly enhanced by the ability to establish a contractor pool and receive real-time labor reports. Over 10,000 downloads demonstrate the favourable user response, which highlights the platform's potential to improve productivity and teamwork in the construction sector. A seamless and fulfilling user experience is further ensured by frequent updates and enhancements.

How has it helped general contractors and labour contractors communicate and work together more effectively, particularly on large-scale projects?

For a project to be completed successfully, communication and teamwork are essential, particularly on large construction sites. Through the provision of an integrated digital platform, it has revolutionised the interactions between GCs and LCs. GCs may save onboarding time by uploading project specifications and promptly sharing comprehensive overviews with contractors. Real-time updates are made possible by the platform's communication features, which guarantee that everyone is always in agreement regarding the requirements of the project and the availability of personnel. Contrarily, labour contractors are able to quickly respond to project requirements and update manpower availability. Delays and misunderstandings are decreased by this two-way exchange, which promotes efficiency and transparency. Additionally, by tracking performance and providing instant feedback, the digital contractor assessment and reporting tools simplify project management and uphold accountability.

All things considered, it builds a unified ecosystem where stakeholder participation is easy and effective.

Packed with cutting-edge technologies, it was created to tackle the major issues facing the construction sector! Because of these features, it is a game-changer that helps contractors reduce project disruptions and effectively manage large-scale operations. Among its best attributes are:

Contractor pool creation: Maintain a database of contractors with compliance details for easy access.

Project overview sharing: Share comprehensive project details with contractors to speed up the onboarding process.

Real-time labour reports: Access up-to-date labor data to monitor workforce performance and project progress.

Digital contractor evaluation: Evaluate contractor performance digitally, fostering accountability and transparency.

Labour availability management: Labour Contractors can upload available labor for various projects and activities.

Project search for labour contractors: Find ongoing or upcoming projects based on availability and expertise.

Seamless communication: Integrated communication tools keep contractors and GCs connected throughout the project lifecycle.

The Pioneer
HYDERABAD | SATURDAY | MARCH 22, 2025

PARTY

Sankalchand Patel University (SPU) from Gujarat has expanded its reach by inaugurating its South Indian Regional Office located on Road No. 36, Jubilee Hills, in Hyderabad. The office was officially opened by Prakashbhai Patel, President of SPU, with the presence of key officials including Praful Kumar Udani, Provost of SPU, Dr. Parimal Trivedi, Registrar and Dr. P.J. Patel, Principal of SPCE.

Aswini

Gayatree

Leela

Naviya

Nazia

Swetha

Photos by- SV Chary

Ridhi Jain

Pallavi Jain

Prathibha kunda

The annual session and change of guard ceremony of FLO (FICCI Ladies Organisation) and YFLO (Young FICCI Ladies Organisation) took place on Thursday evening at Hotel Radisson Blue in Banjara Hills, with Reema Gupta gracing the event as the Chief Guest. During the ceremony, Prathibha Kunda and Pallavi Jain succeeded Priya Gazdar and Ridhi Jain as the Chairpersons of FLO and YFLO for the year 2025-26, respectively. The two new Chairpersons exchanged ceremonial medals and signed charters, symbolizing the formal transition of leadership.

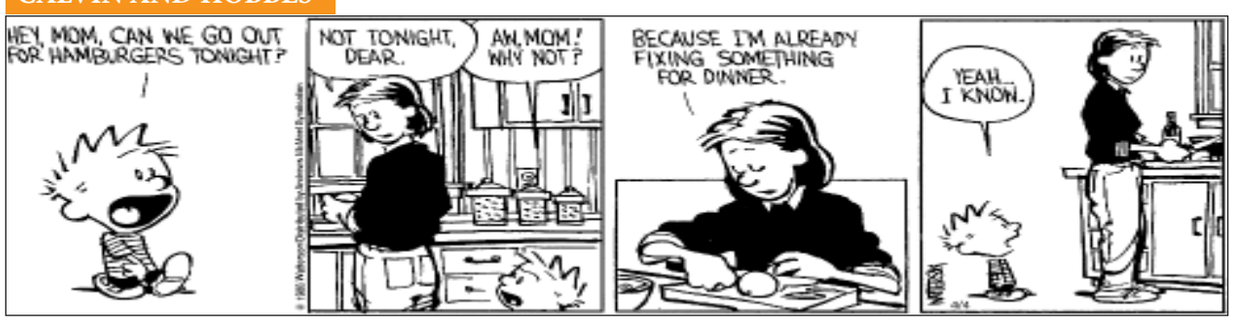
The Breitling Heritage Exhibition, which highlights the most significant timepieces from the brand's illustrious 140-year history, is currently on tour with 55 planned stops across four continents. After traveling through various locations worldwide, the exhibit has now arrived in Hyderabad, India. The exhibition in Hyderabad is available till March 25, 2025, and it is being hosted at the Breitling Boutique in the city, offering local enthusiasts the chance to experience the brand's rich legacy firsthand.

Johnson's Baby hosted ONEder Labs, which brought together over 2000 mothers for an experiential event to understand the science behind baby skincare as well as showcased its innovative and scientifically backed formulations that help protect a baby's skin from Day 1.

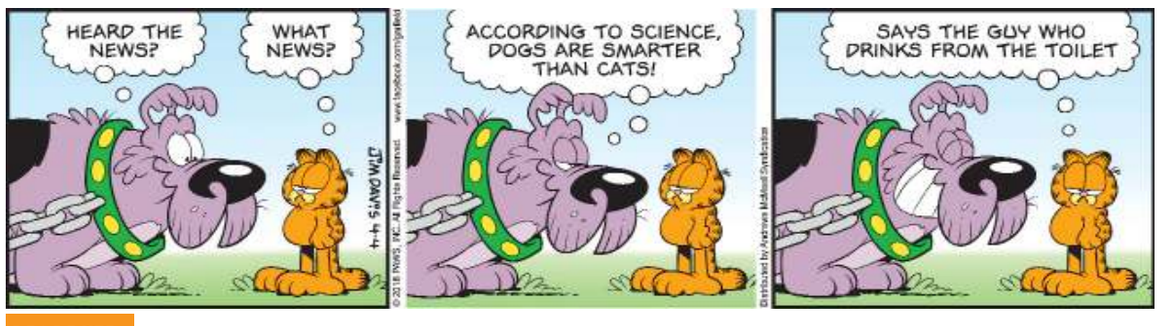
FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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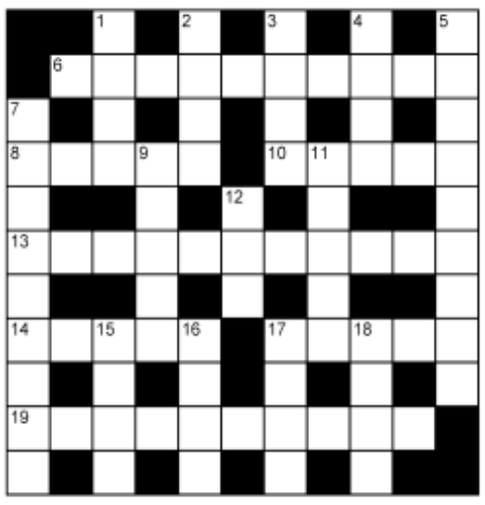
5	7	8	1	6	9	4	2	3
4	8	2	6	9	3	5	1	7
7	1	9	5	8	2	3	4	6
6	3	5	4	7	1	2	8	9

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.

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

6 A maker of horseshoes
8 Wanders
10 Office tables
13 He wrote the play "Romeo and Juliet"
14 Gets closer to
17 Go by bike
19 Somewhere to go out to for a meal

DOWN

1 This bites a dog
2 Divisions in a play
3 Second-hand
4 Comes first in a race
5 Spoke very quietly
7 People in jail
9 Manufacturer
11 The other side in a war
12 Something left after a fire
15 As well
16 Male deer
17 Be concerned
18 Metal containers for drink, food

SOLUTION

SHANMUKHA: A BIZARRE PLOT THAT MAKES NO SENSE

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

Aadhi Saikumar, son of popular character artiste Saikumar, needs a good break and has been looking for it for a long time. Though he is getting some films, they are not doing well at the box office. After a two-year break, Aadhi has now come up with a film titled *Shanmukha*. According to the director, the film has some supernatural and devotional touch. Shanmugam Sappani is the director, also one of the producers, and has also played a key role in this film. Avika Gor is the female lead, while Ravi Basrur of *KGF* and *Salaar* fame is providing the music and background score. Here is the story and how it fares.

Story

In a small village, Viganda's (Chirag Jani) wife gives birth to a boy with six faces. He looks ugly, and in order to make him look normal, a mantrik tells Viganda to kidnap and sacrifice women who are born under different zodiac signs. With the help of his brother-in-law, Viganda begins kidnapping young women and sacrificing them to God.

Sara (Avika Gor) is researching these missing women and wants to dig deeper into the case. She seeks help from police inspector Karthik (Aadhi Saikumar). Both Sara and Karthik knew each other from their college days and fell in love, but due to some differences, they broke up. Initially, Karthik refuses to help Sara, but later, he studies the case and starts investigating the missing girls. Strangely, while these girls are going missing, their boyfriends are committing suicide.

Karthik's investigation leads to a surprising revelation. Does he catch Viganda? What happens to the ugly boy? Will he become normal? The answers to these questions form the crux of the story.

Analysis

Every year, hundreds of films are released, but the success rate is only 7 to 10 percent. The reason the success rate does not increase is that filmmakers fail to come up with a good story, screenplay, or engaging elements. If you look at *Shanmukha*, this film makes no proper sense. Before the release, the makers promoted the film, claiming it had some devotional elements and thrilling moments. However, this film is a complete disaster, with neither devotion nor thrill.

From the beginning, the director fails to present a serious or engaging story. The police do not investigate the missing women properly, but a mass communication student like Sara manages to gather a lot of information through her research. Moreover, the story is full of confusion. At times, it is unclear what timeline the film is following. When Aadhi and Avika Gor are on screen, the story appears to be set in the present, but when Viganda is shown performing black magic and tantra pujas, it feels like a period drama.

Even if you ignore all this, the core concept itself is absurd. A powerful mantrik tells Viganda that to make his ugly son normal, he must sacrifice women. On top of that, he also uses black magic to kill the boyfriends of these women—without any logical reason. From the first scene to the last, the film is a test of patience. Not a single scene is engaging and director Shanmugam Sappani completely fails to narrate a coherent story. The screenplay is one of the worst in recent times.

One wonders how a producer invests so much money in making such mindless movies. Of course, since the director is also one of the producers, it seems like he had complete creative control—but unfortunately, he had no idea what he was doing. The team used the name of popular music director Ravi Basrur to generate publicity, but even he couldn't do anything to salvage this film due to its lack of a compelling narrative.

Performances

Aadhi Saikumar is just okay as a cop. The role doesn't require much effort; he appears in some action sequences, and that's about it. Avika Gor fails to impress. It looks like the film was shot over a long period, with some scenes added later, as her appearance changes in different parts of the movie. Her role is a complete waste.

Krishnudu, who plays Aadhi's assistant, delivers a decent performance. Director Shanmugam Sappani plays Bullet, a negative role, but his performance is dull and unconvincing. Aditya Om, who has played lead roles in several films, appears as a villain but fails to make an impact. Chirag Jani plays the main antagonist but only appears in bits and pieces.

Other actors, including Madhumani, Manoj Nandam, Chitram Sreenu, CVL, Ariyana and Veerashankar, appear in minor roles with little to no significance.

Technical Aspects

The film is not technically sound. The cinematography by RR Vishnu is below average, making the visuals dull and uninspiring. The production values are mediocre at best. Ravi Basrur's music does nothing to elevate the film. In the end, they insert a devotional song created using AI (Artificial Intelligence), which is the only passable aspect of the film.

Final Verdict

Finally, *Shanmukha* is not a film worth watching in theatres, as it tests patience from beginning to end. There is no devotional or supernatural essence in the film; instead, it is a completely mindless movie with a boring and illogical storyline.

You can ignore it without a second thought. Sadly, Aadhi Saikumar's search for a successful film continues, as Shanmukha is another addition to his list of box-office failures.

REVIEW

Outdated story, forced comedy—*Pelli Kani Prasad* is a big miss

Actor Saptagiri started his career as a comedian and has appeared in numerous films. Later, he transitioned into lead roles with films like *Saptagiri Express* and *Saptagiri LLB*, along with playing second leads in a few projects. After a hiatus, he returns as the lead in *Pelli Kani Prasad*, which hit screens this Friday. Priyanka Sharma plays the female lead, while Abhilash Reddy directs. The phrase Pellikani Prasad (meaning "unmarried Prasad") gained popularity from Venkatesh's character in Malliswari. Let's see how this film fares.

Story

Prasad (Saptagiri) works in Malaysia and remains single even after crossing 35. His father (Muralidhar Goud) has one condition for his marriage—whoever brings a dowry of Rs 2 crore will be the chosen bride. Meanwhile, Priya (Priyanka Sharma) dreams of settling abroad with her family and rejects alliances that don't align with her ambition. When she learns about Prasad, she cleverly manipulates him into marriage without giving dowry. However, after marriage, Prasad decides to settle in India, shattering Priya's dreams. What does Priya do to Prasad and his family? Why is Prasad's father so insistent on dowry? How does Prasad handle the situation? The film revolves around answering these questions.

Analysis

The moment *Pelli Kani Prasad* is mentioned, it immediately brings to mind Malliswari, where Venkatesh's character was humorously referred to by the same name. That film, written by Trivikram Srinivas and directed by Vijay Bhaskar, was a classic. However, *Pelli Kani Prasad*—as a standalone film—fails to live up to even basic expectations.

The story revolves around a family's jealousy over another family's decision to settle abroad, leading them to do the same. Typically, in movies, an individual aspires to move abroad for a better future, but here, an entire family wants to relocate. The female lead tricks Prasad into marriage to achieve this goal, assuming it will help her family settle abroad. But once Prasad chooses to stay in India, conflicts arise.

The film's first half is as dull as a below-average TV serial, while the second half is a complete mess with outdated and forced comedy. Director Abhilash Reddy presents an old-fashioned story, and the narrative is even more problematic. The second half is riddled with unnecessary twists, and the climax feels rushed and sloppy. As a supposed comedy, the film barely delivers any humor, even with a comedian-turned-hero in the lead.

Performances

Saptagiri, a senior comedian, plays the role of Prasad with ease, but his character lacks depth. Priyanka Sharma performs well in a few scenes, but overall, her role is underwhelming. Muralidhar Goud is the only actor who provides a few laughs. The supporting cast, including Pramodini, Vadlamani Srinivas and Annapurna, tend to overact, making their scenes unbearable. There is even a song featuring them, which only adds to the boredom.

Technical Aspects

Sekhar Chandra's music is forgettable and, at times, too loud. The cinematography is mediocre, with no standout visuals. Dialogues are unimpressive, failing to add any weight to the film. Overall, the film lacks technical finesse.

Final Verdict

Pelli Kani Prasad is an outdated film filled with weak storytelling, forced humor, and predictable sequences. Director Abhilash Reddy fails to deliver the entertainer he set out to make. The film offers nothing fresh and instead tests the audience's patience. You can easily skip this one and wait for its OTT release—if you still feel like watching it. Unfortunately, Saptagiri's attempt to lead another film results in yet another flop.

Cast: Saptagiri, Priyanka Sharma, Muralidhar Goud, Annapurna, Pramodini, Lakshman Meesala, Basha, Rohin, Ramprasad and others
Music Director: Sekhar Chandra
Cinematographer: Sujatha Siddharth
Producers: K.Y. Babu, Bhanu Prakash Goud, Sukka Venkateswar Goud, Vaibhav Reddy Muthiyala
Director: Abhilash Reddy Gopidi
Release Date: March 21, 2025
Rating: 1/5

Tuk Tuk: A fresh concept ruined by slow narration

Director Supreeth C. Krishna presents *Tuk Tuk*, a supernatural drama set in a Rayalaseema village. The film features three young actors—Harsh Roshan of Court fame, Karthikeya Dev from Salaar, and social media influencer Steven Madhu. Saanvee Megghana and Nihal Kodhaty play the lead roles. Here's how the story unfolds.

Story

The film is set in a village in Rayalaseema and revolves around three mischievous teenage boys (Harsh Roshan, Karthikeya Dev, and Steven Madhu). One day, they decide to buy a camera and seek advice from one of their fathers, who suggests organising the Vinayaka Chavithi festival on a grand scale to raise funds. Following his advice, they buy a Ganesh idol, but when it comes time for immersion, they realise they need a vehicle. They discover an old scooter in their backyard, repair it, and modify it into a rickshaw, naming it *Tuk Tuk*. During the festival, something strange happens—*Tuk Tuk* starts responding to their questions. At first, they believe it's divine intervention, but soon, they realise that a spirit is attached to the vehicle. Their curiosity leads them to uncover the identity of the spirit and the mystery surrounding it. What happened to the spirit? Who was she? The answers to these questions form the crux of the story.

Analysis

Director Supreeth C. Krishna introduces an interesting concept, but the execution is slow and often tedious. The first half is stretched unnecessarily, focusing on the three boys and their antics without advancing the story. Scenes feel repetitive, making it a test of patience.

The second half attempts to unravel the mystery behind *Tuk Tuk* and the spirit inhabiting it, but the pacing remains sluggish. The real plot unfolds only midway through the second half, which feels too late. While some romantic and emotional moments work well, the film lacks a strong conflict to hold the audience's attention. On the brighter side, the cinematography is excellent, capturing the lush green landscapes, village atmosphere and monsoon settings beautifully. The background score and songs by Santhu Omkar are also noteworthy, adding to the film's visual appeal. The director aims to highlight how a village girl defies outdated traditions to pursue her dreams, which is a commendable element, though the execution could have been stronger. However, several scenes in the latter half are unnecessarily stretched, affecting the overall impact.

Performances

The young actors—Harsh Roshan, Karthikeya Dev and Steven Madhu—deliver natural and commendable performances, proving they have a promising future. Saanvee Megghana and Nihal Kodhaty appear in the second half and deliver solid performances. The supporting cast does a decent job, complementing the lead actors well.

Dialogues are well-written and the technical aspects, particularly cinematography and music, stand out. The songs are visually appealing and blend well with the rural backdrop.

Final Verdict

Tuk Tuk falls short of expectations due to its slow narration and a weak first half. Although the core story picks up in the second half, by then, it's too late to make a lasting impact. While the film does offer a fresh setting with its village backdrop and aesthetic visuals, it lacks the engaging storytelling needed to make it a must-watch. Among today's releases, *Tuk Tuk* is the better one, but only because of its unique atmosphere. Otherwise, it remains an average supernatural drama that could have been much better with tighter narration.

Chiranjeevi calls out unauthorised fan meeting charges in UK

Megastar Chiranjeevi recently received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Team Bridge India, an organisation that honoured him at the House of Commons in the UK. The event was attended by several UK Ministers, Parliamentarians and Under-Secretaries. However, reports have emerged that some individuals attempted to charge fans a fee to meet the actor—a move that was done without his knowledge. It remains unclear whether the event organizers were responsible for this or if others misused the occasion for personal gain.

Upon learning about the issue, Chiranjeevi immediately condemned the act, making it clear that he never supported such commercialisation.

"I am deeply touched by all your love and affection in wanting to meet me in the UK. However, I've been informed that some individuals are attempting to charge a fee for the fan meetings. I strongly condemn this behavior," Chiranjeevi stated on his social media. The actor further demanded that any money collected for fan meetings be refunded immediately and urged fans to remain cautious.

"Any fee collected by anyone will be refunded immediately. Please be cautious and know that I will NEVER support these actions, anywhere. The bond of love and affection we share is priceless. It cannot be commercialised by anyone in any manner. Let's keep our interactions genuine and free from any kind of exploitation," he added.

Chiranjeevi's firm stance reassured his fans that their connection with him is based on love and not monetary transactions. His statement has been widely appreciated by fans and well-wishers.

Rana to produce a film with Manoj Bajpyee with American director

Prominent Telugu actor Rana Daggubati has offlate focused more on production than acting. He is already involved as a presenter for several small films and is also producing a major project titled *Kaanthaa*, starring Dulquer Salmaan. A few years ago, Rana collaborated with Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar to produce *Poster Boyz*.

Now, reports suggest that Rana Daggubati is producing a film with Bollywood actor Manoj Bajpayee. For this project, he has roped in American director Ben Rekhi. The untitled film is a Hindi social drama and marks Rana's debut as a producer in the Hindi film industry. It is still unclear whether he is handling the production on his own or if his good friend Akshay Kumar will be joining him once again.

The upcoming film promises to be a thought-provoking exploration of social issues. Rekhi, who has written the story, has crafted a role that is expected to suit Bajpayee perfectly, known for his ability to portray diverse and complex characters with ease.

In addition to his feature films, Manoj Bajpayee has received widespread praise for his roles in web films and the popular web series *The Family Man*, with the third season set to release soon.

New rules, saliva ban reversal as IPL kicks off

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off here on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain.

There is plenty to look forward in the league. Among the most prominent rule changes is the lifting of saliva ban. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, bowlers will be allowed to use it to shine the ball.

The BCCI lifted the ban after receiving a majority consensus from IPL captains in a landmark decision taken at the captains' meeting in Mumbai.

The International Cricket Council had made the saliva ban permanent in 2022, but the IPL operates under its own regulations and the latest move could set a precedent for the global game.

The 18th season will also witness tactical innovations, including a major change to counter dew's impact.

The second innings of evening matches will see a fresh ball introduced from the 11th over, provided the on-field umpires deem the dew factor significant as the trend of high-scoring games is likely to continue.

However, this rule will not apply to afternoon games.

Additionally, the Decision Review System has been expanded to include height wides and off-side wides, ensuring a fairer adjudication of deliveries. Despite debates about its influence on the game, the Impact Player rule remains in place.

Captain's corner

As many as seven teams will start IPL 2025 under new leadership, although some of them will be a stop-gap arrangement due to varied reasons.

The most surprising of them all is Rajat Patidar, who is yet to play a T20I for India, leading the RCB team that features megastar Virat Kohli.

Axar Patel takes charge of Delhi Capitals to lead, among others, his Team India senior KL Rahul, who would be aiming to shake off the disappointment of a turbulent stint with Lucknow Super Giants in 2024.

Shreyas Iyer, fresh off leading KKR to glory in 2024, will don the captain's armband for Punjab Kings with Ajinkya Rahane replacing him in the Kolkata team.

Rajasthan Royals will start the season with Riyan Parag as interim captain for the first three matches due to Sanju Samson's recovery from a finger injury taking longer than expected.

Mumbai Indians will be led by Suryakumar Yadav in their away opener against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday, as Hardik Pandya serves a suspension for an over-rate violation from last season.

Pant's redemption arc

Rishabh Pant is set to begin a crucial new chapter in his career after his resolute comeback from a life-threatening accident

became part of cricketing lore.

The IPL's most expensive player in history — acquired by Lucknow Super Giants for a record INR 27 crore — will be eager to silence his critics.

Despite making the squads for the Champions Trophy and the T20I series against England, he was not given a single match.

Now, he has a point to prove, particularly in the T20 format, where he has struggled to cement his place in the Indian team.

Pant's explosive batting style and leadership skills have long been debated, and this season presents an opportunity for him to not only justify his hefty price tag but also send a strong message to the selectors ahead of future international assignments.

There are changes in the support staff line-ups too. Ricky Ponting has moved from Delhi Capitals to Punjab Kings as head coach. Hemang Badani has replaced Ponting as Delhi Capitals' head coach.

Kevin Pietersen has joined Delhi Capitals as mentor, while Rahul Dravid returns to Rajasthan Royals as head coach, his first IPL coaching stint after leading India to the T20 World Cup title last year.

CSK veteran Dwayne Bravo will be KKR mentor, replacing Gautam Gambhir, who is now India's head coach.

Bumrah's fitness

A major question mark hangs over Jasprit Bumrah's fitness.

The pacer, back at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, is undergoing assessments to determine his readiness for the IPL. Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene remains optimistic but cautious, given that Bumrah's availability crucial not only for MI but also for India's upcoming tour of England.

The Dhoni question

As the IPL returns, so does the never-ending speculation: Is this Mahendra Singh Dhoni's last season?

The 43-year-old, who retired from international cricket in 2020, remains an enigma, gracing the field only during the IPL.

While he may not be the consistent match-winner of old, his presence alone bolsters Chennai Super Kings.

His sharp cricketing brain, field placements, and ability to finish games with quick cameos make him an invaluable asset.

Exactly 30 years his junior is Vaibhav Suryavanshi, a prodigal batting talent acquired by Rajasthan Royals but it remains to be seen how many games he manages to get.

Ro-Ko in T20 again

Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retired from T20Is after India's triumphant World Cup campaign last year, making IPL 2025 their first major outing in the shortest format post-retirement.

Kohli, the highest run-getter in IPL 2024 with 741 runs, remains the linchpin for RCB, while Rohit, after a lean patch, will look to rediscover his magic for Mumbai Indians.

Novak Djokovic wanted players to add names to antitrust lawsuit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens (US)

Novak Djokovic doesn't want the antitrust lawsuit filed by the players' association he co-founded to create a rift in tennis, but he also said that the athletes' share of revenues and their influence both need to increase.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion, speaking at a pre-tournament news conference at the Miami Open on Thursday, explained that he was not listed among the plaintiffs on the case filed Tuesday in federal court in New York — along with actions in Brussels and London — "because I want other players to step up."

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association (PTPA) against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency said the organizations hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions," calling them a "cartel." "I've never been a fan and supporter of division in our sport, but I've always fought for better representation and influence of and positioning of the players globally in our sport, which I think is still not where I think it should be," Djokovic said, "and where most of the players think it should be, not just in terms of prize money, but in terms of many other points that have been also stated in that document."

The PTPA said it had spoken with more than 250 players — women and men — and gotten backing for the class-action suit. Players whose names are attached to the US lawsuit include 2022 Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios, Sorana Cirstea, Varvara Gracheva, Reilly Opelka, Tennys Sandgren and Nicole Melichar-Martinez.

But four-time major champion Carlos Alcaraz said Wednesday at the Miami Open that he wasn't a fan — in part because he wasn't aware he'd be quoted in the filing, hadn't been told it was happening and didn't agree with everything stated by the attorneys.

Djokovic echoed that last sentiment.

"I really hope that all the governing bodies, including PTPA, will come together and solve these issues," he said.

"This is a classic lawsuit, so lawyers to lawyers, type of situation. So to be quite frank with you, there are things that I agree with in the lawsuit, and then there are also things that I don't agree with. And I found that maybe some wording was quite strong in there, but I guess the legal team knows what they are doing and what kind of terminology they're supposed to use in order to get the right effect.

Parry, Hillier to participate in Hero Indian Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

England's John Parry and New Zealand's Daniel Hillier, both in outstanding form, have confirmed their participation in the 2025 Hero Indian Open, scheduled to be held at the DLF Golf and Country Club here from March 27 to 30.

The tournament, sanctioned by the DP World Tour and the Indian Golf Union, will feature 138 players from nearly 30 countries competing for a prize purse of $2.25 Million.

Both Parry and Hillier are currently in Top-5 of the Race to Dubai rankings on the DP World Tour.

Parry, ranked third in the Race to Dubai, is no stranger to success in India, having won the Delhi Challenge on the Hotelplanner Tour last year. He followed up this victory with two more wins on the Hotelplanner Tour and secured his first DPWT win in 14 years at the AfrAsia Bank Mauritius Open.

Parry has continued his strong form in 2025, finishing T-8 at the Australian PGA, T-2 at the Alfred Dunhill Championship in South Africa, and clinched a win at Mauritius, followed by a runner-up finish in Kenya.

Hillier, 25, is also in impressive form, having finished runner-up at the 2025 Hero Dubai Desert Classic. He has posted consistent Top-20 finishes across Australia, South Africa, Bahrain, and Qatar and is currently ranked fifth in the Race to Dubai standings.

Among other top players in the Race to Dubai standings, three winners from the ongoing season will also be competing. They are Johannes Veerman (No. 8), winner of the Nedbank Golf Challenge; Callum Hill (No. 11), winner of the Joburg Open; and Ryggs Johnston (No. 14), winner of the ISPS Handa Australian Open. Additionally, Jayden Schaper, ranked 15th, will also take part.

The tournament is part of the Asian Swing, which began in Singapore and will conclude with two events in China. The winner of the 'Asian Swing' will earn an exemption into the next Rolex event, the Genesis Scottish Open, co-sanctioned with the PGA Tour.

Another major incentive for all DPWT players is the opportunity to earn points towards the Race to Dubai. At the end of the season, the Top-10 players who are not already exempt from the PGA Tour will earn dual PGA Tour membership for the following year.

As many as 16 winners from both the current and previous DP World Tour seasons are set to compete. This includes 12 champions from the 2024 season and four winners from the 2025 schedule, all of whom will be serious contenders to lift the trophy on March 30.

Pakistan beat New Zealand by 9 wickets in third T20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auckland

Hasan Nawaz made an unbeaten 105 from 45 balls as Pakistan beat New Zealand by nine wickets in the third Twenty20 international on Friday to keep alive the five-match series. Pakistan won the toss and was able to bowl first, reversing the trend of the first two matches which New Zealand won by nine and five wickets. Nawaz was supported in his first century by captain Salman Ali Agha, who made 51 from 31 balls in an unbroken partnership of 133 for the second wicket. Pakistan finished at 207-1, running down the home team's total of 204 with four full overs to spare to inflict New Zealand's heaviest T20 loss in terms of wickets.

"I failed in the first two games and I thank the team for backing me," he said through an interpreter. "When I went out to bat I wanted to score my first international run. "After I scored the first run the pressure was released and I wanted to win the game." Mark Chapman made 94 from 44 balls before New Zealand was bowled out with one ball remaining in their 20 overs. Chapman hit 11 fours and four sixes but lacked support. Captain Michael Bracewell's 31 was the next-best effort by the Kiwis, who lost wickets regularly. Tim Seifert made 19, including 16 runs from the second over.

AIU bans two more Indian athletes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian long distance runners Pradhan Kirulkar and Vivek More have been banned for three and five years by the Athletics Integrity Unit after they tested positive for prohibited substances

Indian long distance runners Pradhan Kirulkar and Vivek More have been banned for three and five years respectively by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after they tested positive for prohibited substances.

Both athletes' positive results were from in-competition tests conducted during the Pune Half Marathon on December 15, 2024, adding to a recent surge in doping cases involving Indian athletes.

On Tuesday, Archana Jadhav also tested positive for a banned substance from a urine sample collected during the same event. She has been banned for four years.

Kirulkar's urine sample collected during Pune Half Marathon in December last year, which he had won with a time of 1:04:22, was found to contain Meldonium when tested at the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi.

His ban period was to be four years but it was reduced by one year following his early admission of the doping offence and acceptance of sanction.

His ban period has already started from February 19 and his results from December 15, 2024 — the date of sample collection — onwards will be disqualified.

The 24-year-old More's sample was also collected at the same event in December last year and it returned positive for Mephentermine, Meldonium and dEPO.

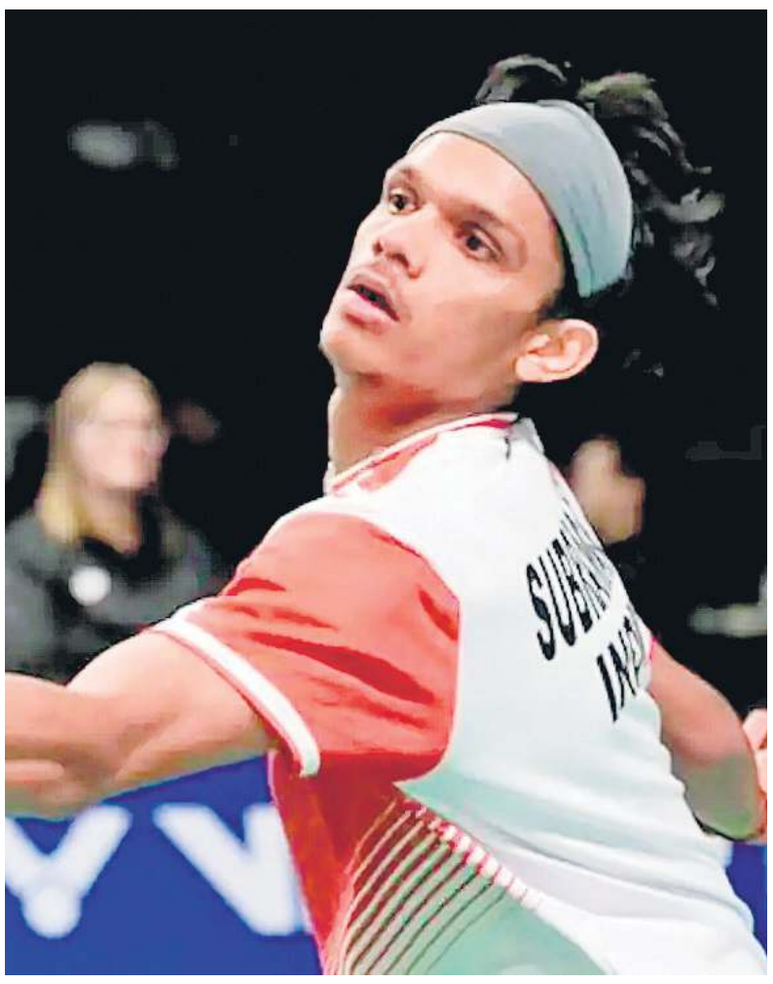
More was to be suspended for six years for testing positive for multiple prohibited substances but he was given one year reduction in the ban period due to his early admission of the doping offence and acceptance of sanction.

His ban period began Friday and his results from December 15, 2024 onwards disqualified.

Jadhav's sample, meanwhile, was found to contain prohibited substance Oxandrolone.

This synthetic anabolic steroid promotes protein production and muscle building in the body.

The ban came into effect from January 7. Jadhav has been under provisional suspension for the duration.



Sankar stuns world no 2 Antonsen in Swiss Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Basel

India's Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian caused a major upset by knocking out world no 2 Anders Antonsen of Denmark in a thrilling three-game contest to reach the men's singles quarterfinals of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament here.

The 21-year-old from Tamil Nadu, a silver medallist at the 2022 World Junior Championships and currently ranked 64th in the world, put up an impressive display of defense to defeat the three-time World Championships medallist 18-21 21-12 21-5 in a 66-minute contest.

This win marks one of the biggest victories of Subramanian's career, which will boost his confidence as he continues his transition into the senior ranks.

Next, the Indian will face world no 31 Christo Popov of France, a 2019 World Junior Championships silver medallist. Popov had a strong 2024 campaign, claiming titles at the German and Hylo Opens. He was the runner-up at this year's German Open.

Subramanian is the sole Indian singles player remaining in the tournament, while the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also advanced to the quarterfinals. The world no. 9 pair defeated Germany's Amelie Lehmann and Selin Hubsch 21-12 21-8 on Thursday.

Among other Indians, Isharani Baruah put up a valiant fight but lost 19-21 21-18 18-21 to China's Han Qian Xi in 63 minutes.

Anupama Upadhyaya was ousted by Indonesia's world no. 11 Putri Kusuma Wardani as she lost 17-21 19-21 in another women's singles match.

The mixed doubles pair of Sathish Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath had a tough outing, going down 14-21 16-21 to Liu Kuang Heng and Jheng Yu Chieh.

Subramanian vs Antonsen

Subramanian was more precise, while Antonsen struggled with his control at St Jakobshalle, often sending his shots wide and long.

In the opening game, the two engaged in a tough battle, with leads changing frequently. Antonsen managed just a one-point lead at the break. The left-handed Subramanian made it 16-14 but couldn't sustain the pressure as the Dane took the first game.

However, the momentum shifted completely in the second game, with Subramanian giving no chance to his illustrious opponent.

After Antonsen sent another shot wide and kicked his racquet in frustration, Subramanian moved from 8-4 to 11-6. He then surged to 18-9 as Antonsen continued his errors.

Subramanian soon sealed the game, taking it 21-12, with Antonsen sending another shot long.

The third game started with the score tied at 3-3 before Antonsen completely lost control, committing a series of unforced errors as the Indian raced to an 11-3 lead at the break.

The Dane continued to send his net shots, cross-court shots, and tosses out, and Subramanian emerged victorious without much ado.

New Zealand, New Caledonia to meet in Oceania qualifying final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Wellington

Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood scored a hat trick of headed goals as New Zealand beat Fiji 7-0 on Friday to join New Caledonia in the Oceania qualifying final for the 2026 World Cup.

New Caledonia earlier beat Tahiti 3-0 in the first semifinal in FIFA's smallest confederation. The winner of the Oceania qualifying series will gain direct entry to the World Cup for the first time. That means the victor in Monday's final in Auckland, New Zealand will join hosts Canada, the United States and Mexico and Japan, which on Thursday became the first nation to qualify for the 48-team tournament.

New Zealand captain Wood headed Sarpreet Singh's cross home to open New Zealand's scoring in the sixth minute as it led 4-0 halftime. He then scored off Tim Payne crosses in the 56th and 59th minutes for his 43rd and 44th goals in 81 internationals before being substituted in the 61st minute. Wood received a yellow card when climbed into the grandstand to finish the game among the crowd, surrounded by fans and signing autographs for eager children.

Singh and Payne also scored in the first half along with an own goal by Fiji. Payne's goal was his first for New Zealand since 2013. Kosta Barbarouses scored the final goal in the 73rd minute while Ben Waine missed an 87th-minute penalty.

"It's all about team," Wood said. "We had a pretty dominant first half and we wanted to keep it going into the second half. I think the team did really well in that sense."

Earlier, New Caledonia's 36-year-old striker Georges Gope-Fenepej scored twice in his team's win over Tahiti. The 14-year international veteran collected the rebound from captain Cesar Zeoula's saved shot in the 50th minute and delicately chipped the ball into the Tahiti goal from close range. In the 75th minute, he launched a spectacular left-foot shot from 30 meters, catching the goalkeeper off his line. Substitute Lues Waya added to the scoring in stoppage time. "We're all obviously football fans so to see someone like Georges play and the display he put on today is absolutely magnifique and wonderful," New Caledonia coach Johann Sidaner said.

The loser of the Oceania final will still have a chance to qualify through an intercontinental playoff.

The decision to award direct entry to Oceania offers an historic opportunity to some of soccer's smallest nations.

New Zealand with a population of 5 million, ranked 89, is the largest and highest-ranked of the Oceania nations and has qualified twice before, in Spain in 1982 and South Africa in 2010.

New Caledonia had to overcome political unrest in its homeland to qualify for Friday's match. Violent protests against voting reforms broke out last year, leaving 13 dead before the French army was deployed to restore order.