VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY, MARCH 14, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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RNI No.APENG/2018/76468
*LATE CITY VOL. 7 ISSUE 130 | *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

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

India announces USD 1 billion fund for creators' economy 5

RBI TO SET UP 'ON TAP' COHORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS: GUV 8

Aparneet Mann's Artistic Call to Rethink Urbanisation and FEMININITY P10

QUOTE OF THE DAY
The Pioneer

The Congress gave a top post in the Assembly to a Dalit and made him the Speaker. It is shameful that BRS leaders acted in a way that humiliated the Speaker. Looking down on Dalits has become a habit for BRS leaders like KCR. KCR deceived Dalits by saying that he would make a Dalit the Chief Minister. BRS leaders are following in his footsteps

P4

- B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC Chief

DON'T MISS...

Govt revives barrage project

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu reaffirmed that the coalition government will take responsibility for constructing the Vaikuntapuram Barrage, emphasizing its multiple benefits. Addressing the Assembly on Thursday, he outlined the project's background and its necessity. He pointed out that Amaravati's population is projected to reach 3.5 million by 2050, increasing the demand for drinking water in Amaravati, Guntur, and Vijayawada. To address this, the then-Telugu Desam government initiated the ...

-PAGE: 3

MP to have an airport every 200 km

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Thursday that the government would construct an airport every 200 km, an airstrip every 150 km and a helipad-cum-sports stadium in each assembly constituency. Replying to the Thanksgiving Motion on the Governor's reply in the legislative assembly, he also highlighted upcoming expressway projects in the state. Under the state's new aviation policy, the BJP government is making efforts to boost the sector and improve air connectivity ...

-PAGE: 5

India to be third largest economy

India will be the world's third-largest economy by 2028 as it becomes the world's most sought-after consumer market and gains share in global output, driven by macro stability influenced policy and better infrastructure, Morgan Stanley said. From a USD 3.5 trillion economy in 2023, the Indian economy is projected to expand to USD 4.7 trillion in 2026, which will make it the fourth largest in the world behind the US, China and Germany. In 2028, India will overtake Germany as its economy will ...

-PAGE: 8

Sport ministry updates draft NCAAFS

Uniform penalties, amnesty scheme, and a whistle-blower mechanism are some of the key features of the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) which was released for public consultation by the Sports Ministry on Thursday. The Draft NCAAFS 2025, which is a significant update to the existing framework, invites suggestions and comments from the general public till March 31. "The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has put in the public domain the Draft National Code ...

-SPORTS

Power sector back on track

CM announces 10,000 solar installations in every segment under PM-KUSUM scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced a significant turnaround in the State's power sector under the TDP-led NDA government, attributing the rapid progress to strategic reforms and investments. Addressing the Legislative Assembly, Naidu stated that in just nine months, the government had restored the power sector, which had suffered from mismanagement between 2019 and 2024.

Naidu criticised the previous administration for leaving the power sector in disarray, emphasising that his government had swiftly revived it. He outlined ambitious investment targets, revealing that the state aims to attract Rs 10 lakh crore in energy sector investments, with Rs 5.19 lakh crore already secured. This has resulted in the creation of 3.66 lakh jobs across the state.

Rs 10 lakh crore investment target in the energy sector, with Rs 5.19 lakh crore already secured, creating 3.66 lakh jobs.

- Efforts to reduce per-unit purchase cost from Rs 5.16 to Rs 4.80.
- Nine hours of daytime power for farmers, the introduction of the slab-rate system and spot billing for transparency.
- Rs 9,000 crore penalty due to cancellation of power purchase agreements by the previous government.
- 5,000 EV charging stations and Rs 1.12 lakh crore investment in 26.26 GW of renewable energy projects.

- Additional Rs 20,000 subsidy for BCs under PM Surya Ghar scheme, reducing solar rooftop installation costs.

The Chief Minister assured that electricity tariffs would not be increased for the next four years and that efforts were underway to reduce the per-unit electricity purchase price from Rs 5.16 to Rs 4.80. He also highlighted reforms aimed at democratizing power generation, allowing households to generate and sell solar power, turning energy production into a viable income source.

As part of efforts to support farmers, Naidu reaffirmed the commitment to provide nine hours of daytime power, addressing longstanding issues of unreliable supply. The government has also introduced a slab-rate system and spot billing to enhance transparency and reduce financial burdens on consumers. A major initiative under this plan includes installing 10,000 rooftop solar systems per constituency, with a target of 4 lakh solar pump sets under the PM-KUSUM scheme.

Reflecting on past power sector reforms, Naidu recalled TDP's pioneering initiatives in 1998, which brought stability to the industry through energy auditing and restructuring. However, he pointed out that mismanagement between 2019 and 2024 led to setbacks, including legal disputes and financial penalties. He cited a Rs 9,000 crore penalty imposed by the High Court due to the cancellation of power purchase agreements (PPAs), stressing that honoring the agreements could have prevented these issues.

In line with the state's push for renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, Naidu announced plans to establish 5,000 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. Additionally, investment proposals worth Rs 1.12 lakh crore have been received for generating 26.26 GW of renewable energy, marking a substantial step toward a greener future.

To further promote solar energy adoption, the Chief Minister announced an additional subsidy of Rs 20,000 for Backward Classes (BCs) opting to install solar rooftops under the PM Surya Ghar scheme. Under this scheme, the total installation cost of a 2-kilowatt solar rooftop is approximately Rs 1.20 lakh. With the central government providing a subsidy of Rs 60,000, the state's additional Rs 20,000 subsidy will bring the total benefit to Rs 80,000, significantly reducing the financial burden on BC beneficiaries.

Naidu affirmed that these initiatives are designed to ensure that every household benefits from clean and affordable energy while fostering economic opportunities through decentralized power generation.

The Pioneer wishes its readers, advertisers, suppliers and agents a colourful Holi As our offices will remain closed today (14-03-2025), there will be no issue of the paper tomorrow (15-03-2025)

— RESIDENT EDITOR

SIPB clears 10 projects worth Rs 1.22L crore

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) has approved investment proposals worth Rs 1,21,656 crore across 10 projects spanning industries, power, and tourism. These ventures are expected to generate 80,104 jobs.

At the fourth SIPB meeting held at the State Secretariat on Thursday, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu directed officials to ensure the immediate grounding of projects that have signed agreements with the state. He emphasized the need for a dedicated tracking system to monitor their progress.

Reviewing earlier SIPB-approved projects, the Chief Minister instructed officials to expedite clearances and maintain close follow-ups with investors until the funds are materialized. He also ordered the establishment of 175 Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) parks — one in each Assembly segment—starting with 26 parks, one per district. Additionally, he set a one-month deadline for setting up five Ratan Tata Innovation Centres in designated locations.

Highlighting the importance of proactive governance, Naidu stressed that ministers and officials must work diligently to achieve tangible results. He urged fast-tracking approvals and ensuring seamless execution of investment commitments.

So far, SIPB has cleared projects worth Rs 4,32,584 crore across four meetings, with an employment potential of 3,92,680 jobs.

AP Inter Board announces key reforms for 2025-26 academic yr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Board of Intermediate Education, Andhra Pradesh (BIEAP), has approved major reforms for the 2025-26 academic year to improve the quality and accessibility of intermediate education. The decisions were taken at the 77th Board Meeting, chaired by Minister of Human Resource Development, Nara Lokesh, after considering public feedback received between January 8 and January 26, 2025.

The academic year will begin earlier, starting from April 1, 2025, instead of June. Admissions for first-year students will commence on April 7. Final exams for both first and second-year students will be conducted in the last week of February 2026, shifting from the usual March schedule.

BIEAP will digitise exam results from 1973 to 2003, making them accessible through platforms like DigiLocker and WhatsApp.

Continued on Page 2

AP signs MoU with Microsoft for AI skill development

2 lakh youth to be trained in one year: Nara Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant move to enhance skill development, the Andhra Pradesh government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Microsoft on Thursday. The agreement aims to train youth in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced technology, equipping them for the evolving job market.

The MoU was formalized between Microsoft and the Andhra Pradesh Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) in the presence of IT, Electronics, and Education Minister Nara Lokesh at the State Secretariat. The initiative focuses on imparting vocational AI and advanced technology skills to secondary school students and young professionals to meet the demands of IT and other industries.

Nara Lokesh announced that under this partnership, Microsoft will train over two lakh youth within a year. He emphasized that this training would open global opportunities in AI and advanced technology, improving employability prospects.

As part of the initiative, Microsoft will train 500 teachers and 10,000 engineering students from 50 rural engineering colleges in AI and cloud computing.

Continued on Page 2

All 5 NDA MLC candidates elected unopposed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

All five NDA candidates were unanimously elected to Andhra Pradesh's Legislative Council under the MLA quota, an official said on Thursday.

The Election Commission had recently notified biennial elections for five members of Andhra Pradesh's Legislative Council (MLCs) under the MLA quota, with polling scheduled for March 20.

Continued on Page 2

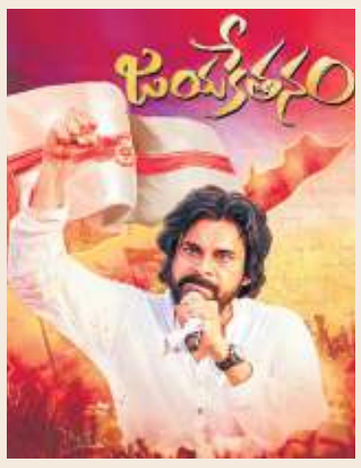
DGP urges public to remain vigilant against cyber threats

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State DGP Harish Kumar Gupta has urged the public to stay alert against cybercrimes, warning that those involved in such offences will face action under the Prevention Detention (PD) Act.

Speaking to the media at the DGP office on Thursday, he emphasized that women's safety remains a top priority across the state. While a Women Protection Cell was already in place, a dedicated Women Protection Wing has now been established under the leadership of an Inspector General (IG).

Continued on Page 2



All set for Jana Sena's '*Jaya Ketanam*' today

Grandeur to mark 12th Formation Day celebrations of Pawan's party

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The stage is set for the grand celebration of Jana Sena's 12th Formation Day, which will be held in the Pithapuram constituency of Kakinada district on Friday. The event will be held on a 50-acre site beside the national highway in Chitrada village, with elaborate arrangements made to accommodate a large gathering of party activists, Jana Sainiks, Veera Mahilas, and fans.

Deputy Chief Minister and Jana Sena leader Pawan Kalyan will attend the event, along with other key dignitaries. A massive stage has been set up to host up to 250 people, while three grand entrance gates, named after prominent historical figures, will welcome attendees. The first gate is dedicated to Pithapuram Maharaja Sri Raja Suryarao Bahadur, recognized for his contributions to education and social service. The second gate honours social worker Dokka Seethamma for her service to public welfare and the third gate is named after Malladi Satyalingam Naicker, known for his role in establishing educational institutions in the region.

Janasena PAC Chairman and Minister Nadendla Manohar stated that the event would reflect the rich history and culture of the Telugu people. Discussions during the meeting will focus on Janasena's future course of action following its electoral success and the party's growth.

Continued on Page 2

ISRO achieves de-docking of SpaDeX satellites

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

ISRO on Thursday said it has accomplished de-docking of the SpaDeX satellites, clearing the way for future missions such as exploring the moon, human spaceflight, and building its own space station.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh announced the successful de-docking of satellites in a post on 'X'.

"SpaDeX satellites accomplished the unbelievable de-docking. This paves the way for smooth conduct of ambitious future missions including the Bharatiya Antriksha Station, Chandrayaan 4 & Gaganyaan," Singh said.

"Congrats team ISRO. And heartening for every Indian," he said.

Singh said Prime Minster Narendra Modi's continuous patronage keeps the spirits soaring.

The SpaDeX mission was launched on December 30 last year when the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed in orbit two satellites -- SDX01 and SDX02 -- to demonstrate the docking experiment in space

The SpaDeX mission was launched on December 30 last year when the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) placed in orbit two satellites -- SDX01 and SDX02 -- to demonstrate the docking experiment in space.

After several attempts, the space agency successfully docked the two satellites on January 16. Later in a statement, ISRO said that after the undocking, it has planned further experiments with satellites.

"The SPADEX satellites were successfully docked on 16 January 2025. ISRO has now accomplished the pivotal operation of undocking of SPADEX satellites in the very first attempt on 13th March, 2025 at 09:20 Hrs (ISD)," ISRO said in a statement.

The undocking of the satellites took place in 460 km circular orbit with 45-degree inclination, the space agency explained.

It added that the satellites are now orbiting independently and their health is normal.

With this, ISRO has now successfully demonstrated all the capabilities required for rendezvous, docking and undocking operations in a circular orbit.

ISRO said the in-orbit performance of the docked satellites was extensively analysed and an immediate opportunity was found to be feasible from March 10, 2025 till March 25, 2025. The entire operations were monitored through ground stations located at Bengaluru, Lucknow and Mauritius.

Continued on Page 2

TN govt replaces Rupee symbol with Tamil letter in Budget logo

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Intensifying the language tussle with the Centre, the Tamil Nadu government on Thursday replaced the Devanagari rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its logo for the budget 2025-26, in an unprecedented move signalling its unrelenting stance against the three-language formula under the NEP.

The move comes amidst a political firestorm over the issue after the Tamil Nadu government rejected the National Education Policy with Chief Minister M K Stalin accusing the Central government of trying to impose Hindi in the state under it and claimed that NEP was a "saffron policy" aimed at promoting and developing Hindi and not the nation.

The DMK has also asserted that Tamil Nadu would not tolerate 'Hindi colonialism' replacing British colonialism, while the Union government has accused the state government of being "dishonest" and "ruining the future of the students" in the state for politics.

The logo for the budget, released by the government on Thursday, carried 'ru', the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaai', which denotes the Indian currency in the vernacular language.

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TDP-led power reforms driving renewable energy growth: Gottipati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar said that the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) was the first in India to introduce electricity reforms. Speaking in the Legislative Assembly on Thursday during a short discussion on the power sector, he stated that reforms in Andhra Pradesh began only after Chandrababu Naidu became Chief Minister. He highlighted that Andhra Pradesh was the first to introduce the Electricity Regulatory Commission (ERC) as part of these efforts. He also said that under CM Naidu's leadership, major steps are being taken to strengthen the renewable energy sector and ensure that the state remains a leader in clean energy production.

As part of the state's renewable energy expansion, he announced that a Green Hydrogen Hub Project is being developed in Pudimadaka, Anakapalle district, in partnership with NTPC and NREDCAP. The project, covering 1,200 acres with an investment of Rs 1.85 lakh crore, aims to produce and export 3,000 tons of green hydrogen by 2030, positioning Andhra Pradesh as a key player in the global clean energy market. He also said that Reliance is setting up 500 Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants across the state, benefiting farmers economically.

He highlighted a recent agreement between the Andhra Pradesh government and Tata Renewable Energy Limited under the leadership of Minister Nara Lokesh, bringing an investment of Rs 49,000 crore to generate 7,000 MW of renewable power and create thousands of jobs. He also announced that Andhra Pradesh is introducing a battery storage system for the first time to improve energy storage and management. To enhance power distribution, 55 new substations are being constructed to ensure uninterrupted and high-quality electricity supply.

Minister Gottipati assured that the coalition government has not increased electricity charges and is committed to keeping power affordable. He said that power generation in the state now matches consumption, with an annual demand increase of 6%. The government has also reduced costs by increasing power generation from AP GENCO while cutting power purchases by 60%.

He further stated that CM Chandrababu Naidu has written to the Prime Minister requesting additional power connections under the PM Suryagarh Scheme to meet the state's growing energy needs. He added that quality power is being provided to farmers under the PM Kusum Scheme, and the state has formally requested 4.5 lakh agricultural electricity connections from the Central Government.

Addressing concerns about electricity infrastructure security, Minister Gottipati said that district Superintendents of Police (SPs) will be involved in strengthening surveillance to prevent transformer theft. He strongly criticized the previous YSRCP government for increasing electricity tariffs nine times, burdening consumers. He also accused the YSRCP of failing to implement lift irrigation projects, claiming that not a single acre of land received water despite repeated promises.

Ex-DRDO chief meets CM

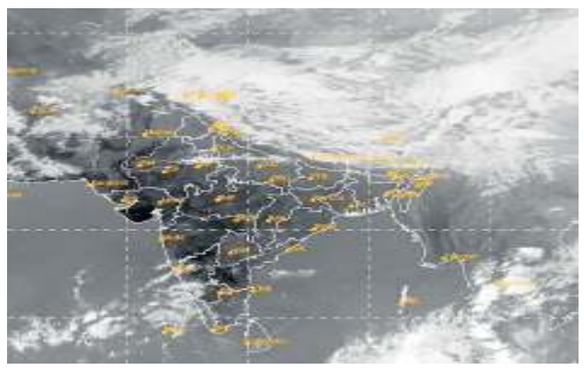
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former DRDO Chairman and Aeronautical Society of India President Dr G Satish Reddy met Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu at the Secretariat on Thursday to discuss industrial development in the state.

During the meeting, Dr. Satish Reddy gave a presentation on opportunities for setting up industries, particularly in the defence sector. He announced plans to assist 50 aspiring industrialists in establishing their businesses and sought the state government's support for the initiative.

Responding positively, the Chief Minister assured full cooperation, including infrastructure support, land allotment, and swift approvals for investors willing to set up industries in the state.

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) and Amalapuram MP Ganti Harish were also present at the meeting.



Mercury to rise by 2-3 degrees Celsius in AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Maximum temperatures in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema are expected to increase by two to three degrees Celsius over the next five days, the Meteorological Centre said on Thursday.

According to the daily weather report, Wednesday's trough in easterlies, extending from a cyclonic circulation over the West Equatorial Indian Ocean and adjoining Maldives region to the Southwest Bay of Bengal off Tamil Nadu coast, now runs from the same cyclonic circulation to south Kerala at 0.9 km above mean sea level.

Dry weather conditions are likely to persist across Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema for the next seven days. Kurnool recorded the highest maximum temperature of 39.2 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, the report added.

TN govt's move signals dangerous mind set: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

DMK-led Tamil Nadu government move to replace the rupee symbol signals a dangerous mindset that weakens Indian unity and promotes secessionist sentiments under the pretence of regional pride, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday.

Launching a scathing attack on DMK, she said the party should have protested when the rupee symbol was adopted by the UPA in 2010. DMK was part of the ruling UPA alliance at the Centre.

"Ironically, rupee symbol was designed by D Udaya Kumar, the son of former DMK MLA N. Dharmalingam. By erasing it now, the DMK is not only rejecting a national symbol but also utterly disregarding the creative contribution of a Tamil youth," she said.

Amarnath fires back at Vijayasai, defends YSRCP leadership

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former minister and Visakhapatnam district YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president, Gudivada Amarnath, has launched a sharp rebuttal to recent comments made by V Vijayasai Reddy, staunchly defending the inner circle surrounding Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Amarnath dismissed the allegations as politically motivated and hypocritical, emphasizing that the so-called "coterie" consists of dedicated loyalists who have remained unwavering in their support for YSRCP over the past 15 years.

Pointing out the irony in Reddy's critique, Amarnath reminded him of his own past as a close confidant within the party's highest echelons. "Before questioning others, Vijayasai Reddy should reflect on his own tenure as a trusted aide within the party," he asserted.

Refuting claims that inner circles are unique to YSRCP, Amarnath highlighted that all political parties, including the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) under N Chandrababu Naidu, operate with a core leadership group. He urged Reddy and other former allies to refrain from indulging in public mudslinging. Taking a pointed jab at Reddy's shifting political stance, Amarnath remarked, "A broken heart here means new love elsewhere," suggesting that his criticisms stem from political expediency rather than genuine concerns.

Amarnath also raised a critical question: would Reddy have voiced similar allegations had YSRCP secured a decisive electoral victory? He argued that Reddy's sudden change of stance reflects opportunism rather than principle. Turning to governance issues, Amarnath launched a scathing attack on the ruling coalition, accusing it of failing the state's youth and students. He pointed to ongoing protests by YSRCP activists as undeniable proof of the government's inability to fulfil its commitments.

His harshest criticism was directed at the alleged mismanagement of welfare schemes. Amarnath exposed glaring financial discrepancies, revealing that while the state government had allocated Rs 3,900 crore annually for pensions and fee reimbursements, only Rs 700 crore had been disbursed. Over the past two years, a staggering Rs 7,100 crore remained unpaid, while the government had allocated a mere Rs 2,600 crore—falling far short of its promises.

"This government is attempting to cover up its failures by deflecting blame onto YSRCP," Amarnath charged. He reaffirmed his party's commitment to holding the administration accountable, particularly in the crucial sectors of education and healthcare.

Ministerial team inspects steps for 'Srinivasa Kalyanotsavam'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A ministerial team inspected the preparations for the upcoming Srinivasa Kalyanotsavam, scheduled for March 15 at the TTD SV Temple within the CRDA limits. The review took place on Thursday evening.

Emphasising crowd management, the team instructed officials to ensure all necessary arrangements, including queue lines, traffic control, parking, lighting, decorations, prasadam distribution, laddu prasadam, drinking water, buttermilk, and cleanliness, to facilitate a hassle-free experience for devotees. The inspection team comprised Endowments Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Home Minister V Anitha, Revenue Minister Anagani Satya Prasad, Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana, TTD Chairman BR Naidu, TTD Board Members Jyothula Nehru, Panabaka Lakshmi, M Shantharam, and MS Raju, along with TTD EO J Shyamala Rao, DIG Sarvashresth Tripathi, TTD Additional EO CH Venkayya Choudhary, Endowments Department Secretary Vinay Chand, District Collector Nagalakshmi, TTD JEO V Veerabrahmam, SP Satish Kumar, and other officials.

The team conducted a thorough inspection to ensure the smooth and successful conduct of the event.

AP Inter Board announces...

Continued from Page 1

This move aims to enhance transparency and convenience for students.

First-year students will now be able to take an elective subject as a second subject, offering greater flexibility. A total of 24 elective options across languages, sciences, and humanities will be available from the 2025-26 academic year. A new Mathematics and Biology (MBiPC) subject combination will be introduced for BiPC and MPC students. This additional sixth subject will provide students with broader career opportunities.

The syllabus and textbooks for 14 key subjects in science, humanities, and languages will be revised, starting with first-year students in 2025-26. Mathematics-A and Mathematics-B will be merged into a single subject, Mathematics, while Botany and Zoology will be combined into Biology. The marking pattern for MPC and BiPC students will also be revised to ensure balanced weightage. BIEAP will provide free study materials for EAPCET, JEE, and NEET exams through its portal. These resources will be available at no cost to students in Government Junior Colleges.

From 2025-26, 10% of questions in IPE exams for science and humanities will be competency-based, including multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. This change aims to encourage practical learning.

BIEAP will collaborate with the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) to revise vocational course syllabi under the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). Students will also have the opportunity to earn dual certifications.

These reforms are expected to make intermediate education in Andhra Pradesh more flexible, student-friendly, and aligned with national and global standards.

TN govt replaces Rupee ...

Continued from Page 1

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Thangam Thennarasu is scheduled to table the budget on Friday.

The logo also had the caption "everything for all", indicating the ruling DMK's assurance of an inclusive governance model.

The symbol change triggered a political slugfest, with the BJP leaders attacking the DMK, and the ruling party members asking if any rule barred such a depiction. DMK MLA Ezhilan Naganathan justified the move and said there was nothing wrong with using the mother tongue.

Slamming the Stalin government's move, BJP TN chief K Annamalai asked the chief minister how stupid he could be to do it.

"The DMK Government's State Budget for 2025-26 replaces the Rupee Symbol designed by a Tamilian, which was adopted by the whole of Bharat and incorporated into our Currency. Thiru Udhay Kumar, who designed the symbol, is the son of a former DMK MLA. How stupid can you become, Thiru @mkstalin?" he said in a social media post.

He also shared the logo of the 2024-25 TN budget that had the Devanagari symbol.

Responding to Annamalai's criticism, DMK spokesperson Saravanan Annadurai said no law "opposed or stopped using Ru in Tamil."

"Then why such anger," he asked in a post on X.

Senior BJP leader and former state unit chief Tamilisai Soundararajan also attacked the DMK.

"We feel very sorry for the attitude of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister (Stalin) and the Tamil Nadu government," she told PTI Videos."

It is "stupidity", like Annamalai mentioned, she said. She also asked why the change was made after so long and if they have "become Tamil now." "They are against national integrity, national unity," she charged. Hitting back at the BJP, Ezhilan said: "Using the mother tongue for all purposes is the theme of any Union Government principles that they have set. So, it is falling on those lines."

"It is very clear that we had a Tamil transcript of the Budget, and for that, Tamil 'Ru' for Rupee has been used. So, we are using the mother tongue for official purposes, which is mandatory everywhere," he told reporters.

DGP urges ...

Continued from Page 1

He announced that 164 'Shakti Teams' have been deployed statewide to enhance security for women, with efforts underway to ensure swift response times to distress calls. He also confirmed that the Shakti app is now fully operational.

On tackling crimes, the DGP highlighted the establishment of Cyber Police Stations in all 26 districts, along with a special wing led by an IG. The state government is also set to install one lakh CCTV cameras to enhance surveillance, leveraging technology to curb crime. A new cybercrime wing is being formed, with technical experts to be appointed on a contract basis.

Addressing the state's crackdown on narcotics, the DGP revealed that 11,000 acres of ganja (cannabis) cultivation have been eradicated using drones and satellite technology. He added that authorities are actively seizing properties of individuals involved in drug trafficking and are determined to crack down on elements disturbing law and order.

Free dialysis services in Delhi govt hospitals

All 5 NDA MLC...

Continued from Page 1

However, all five candidates were elected uncontested.

"Since the number of vacancies and the number of contestants are the same, the following five members—Kavali Greeshma Prasad, B Ravichandra, B Tirumala Naidu, S Veerraju, and K Nagendra Rao—are declared elected uncontested," said Returning Officer R Vanitha Rani, announcing the results.

Under the NDA alliance, Kavali Greeshma Prasad, B Ravi Chandra, and B Tirumala Naidu contested from the TDP, S Veerraju from the BJP, and Nagendra Rao (Naga Babu), Pawan Kalyan's older brother, from the Janasena Party.

AP signs MoU with Microsoft ...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, 30,000 students from 30 ITIs will receive AI training in digital productivity.

Furthermore, 40,000 youth will be trained in AI skills under the 'Passport to Earning 2.0' initiative, and another 20,000 will undergo training in collaboration with the Union Labour and Employment Ministry. To strengthen governance, 100 hours of AI training will be provided to 50,000 individuals, including government officials, as part of a civil services capacity-building program.

The initiative will also focus on AI upskilling and reskilling for 20,000 government staff through self-learning paths, workshops, and webinars promoting cross-departmental collaboration. APSSDC will provide the required physical infrastructure for AI training, while Microsoft will work closely with relevant departments to facilitate training and certification, integrating AI curricula into educational institutions. The event was attended by Education Secretary Kona Sasidhar, APSSDC Managing Director Ganesh Kumar, Executive Director Dinesh Kumar, Microsoft South Head for Government Business Dinesh Kanakamedala, Microsoft India South-Asia Director Sandeep Bandwedar, and other dignitaries.

ISRO achieves...

Continued from Page 1

"Having accomplished this major mile stone of undocking, further experiments with satellites are planned in the coming days," ISRO said. According to the space agency, exhaustive ground simulations and analysis were the cornerstone of achieving the undocking in the first attempt itself. Various tests replicating on-orbit conditions were meticulously planned and carried out in preparation for the earliest opportunity for undocking operations.

ISRO said it has now successfully demonstrated space docking technology using two small satellites and termed it as a cost-effective experiment.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Purnima:	Mar 13 10:36 AM to Mar 14 12:24 PM
Krishna Paksha Pratipada:	Mar 14 12:24 PM to Mar 15 02:33 PM
Nakshatram:	
Uttara Phalguni:	Mar 14 06:19 AM to Mar 15 08:54 AM
Rahukalam:	10:56 AM to 12:25 PM
Yamagandam:	03:23 PM to 04:53 PM
Varjyam:	02:17 PM to 04:04 PM
Gulika:	07:57 AM to 09:27 AM
Amritakalam:	12:55 AM to 02:42 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:01 PM to 12:49 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 38°C
Humidity: 51%
Sunrise: 6:15 AM
Sunset: 6:17 PM

Updated: March 13, 2025 5:00 PM

All set for Jana Sena's 'Jaya Ketanam' ...

Continued from Page 1

The gathering in Pithapuram is also expected to serve as a platform to express gratitude to the people and outline the party's upcoming initiatives.

To ensure security and smooth conduct of the event, more than 1,500 police personnel have been deployed.

Supporters believe that the 'Jaya Ketanam' meeting will be a historic occasion for the party. In both Telugu states, Jana Sena followers have performed special prayers and rituals, including breaking coconuts, before setting out for Pithapuram. They see this event as a culmination of 11 years of struggles for people's welfare, with the party finally emerging victorious under the coalition leadership.

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SAC, APPCB discuss RDF usage in cement industry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a meeting with cement industry management, Swachh Andhra Corporation (SAC) Chairman Kommareddy Pattabhiram and Pollution Control Board (PCB) Chairman Dr P Krishnaiah stressed the importance of adhering to the 2018 Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. The rules mandate that at least 15 per cent of the fuel used in cement kilns should be Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF), derived from municipal solid waste, to reduce use of coal.

In the meeting attended by management representatives from 23 cement companies across the State, the two officials stressed the need for compliance with the Central government's directive to cut down the use of coal and instead incorporate RDF into cement production. This move is part of the government's broader plan to improve waste management and reduce pollution.

Chairman Pattabhiram shared that nearly 7,000 tonnes of waste is generated daily from 123 urban local bodies in the State and when including rural waste, the figure increases significantly. He said the State's commitment to processing this waste effectively without resorting to dumping, as envisioned by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

The meeting also focused on the phased increase of RDF usage in cement production, as per the 2018 guidelines. Initially, cement companies are expected to use six per cent RDF in the first year, gradually increasing to 10 per cent in the second year, and 15 per cent in the third year. The chairman urged cement industry leaders within a 400-km radius of municipalities and corporations to follow these directives. Both Pattabhiram and Krishnaiah highlighted that RDF usage in cement production is already widespread globally. In the European Union, the use of RDF in cement production stands at 44 per cent, while the United States uses about 20 per cent. They urged cement companies in the State to take the initiative to increase RDF usage to similar levels.

A joint technical committee will also be formed to oversee the implementation of RDF usage in cement production, with representatives from the cement industry, Pollution Control Board, and Swachh Andhra Corporation. The committee will work together to ensure the proper implementation of RDF in cement manufacturing.

Swachh Andhra Corporation CEO Dasharadh Ramireddy, Pollution Control Board CE Dr P Prasad Rao, JCM Rajasekhar and several cement industry leaders were present.

Govt revives Vaikuntapuram Barrage project, plans Rs 4,000 cr DPR

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The proposed barrage, located between the Prakasam Barrage and Pulichintala in Guntur district, is expected to provide ample drinking water and irrigation benefits, particularly in Krishna district's Damuluru region. Additionally, it aims to mitigate flooding, boost tourism, and promote aquaculture

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu reaffirmed that the coalition government will take responsibility for constructing the Vaikuntapuram Barrage, emphasizing its multiple benefits. Addressing the Assembly on Thursday, he outlined the project's background and its necessity.

He pointed out that Amaravati's population is projected to reach 3.5 million by 2050, increasing the demand for drinking water in Amaravati, Guntur, and Vijayawada. To address this, the then-Telugu Desam government initiated the construction of the Vaikuntapuram Barrage in 2016. Tenders were invited at an estimated cost of Rs 2,169 crore, and in 2018, work orders were issued to Navayuga and Venkat Rao Infra.

Ramanaidu criticised the previous YSR Congress government for scrapping the project after changing its stance on the capital. Following the coalition government's return to power, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu acknowledged the project's significance and proposed a new Detailed Project Report (DPR) with a revised cost of Rs 4,000 crore.

Highlighting cost escalations over the past five years due to delays, the Minister explained that last year, the Krishna River saw a peak flood intensity of 11.4 lakh cubic feet. The new DPR has been designed to withstand surges of up to 15 lakh cubic feet.

The proposed barrage, located between the Prakasam Barrage and Pulichintala in Guntur district, is expected to provide ample drinking water and irrigation benefits, particularly in Krishna district's Damuluru region. Additionally, it aims to mitigate flooding, boost tourism, and promote aquaculture.

Reaffirming the government's commitment, Ramanaidu stated that proposals for the barrage have already been submitted to Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Officials struggle to meet Bhu-Aadhaar card deadline

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Revenue officials are struggling to meet the deadline for distributing Bhu-Aadhaar cards, a unique 14-digit land identification number (ULPIN) similar to Aadhaar, to farmers across the district. The initiative, which launched on January 26th, aimed to provide these unique codes to 280,524 farmers by the 25th of this month. However, significant delays have hampered progress, with numerous mandals reporting issues.

The rollout has been plagued by discrepancies in land records and missing data on the government's Webland portal. Despite the establishment of dedicated camps at farmer service centres and the launch of a specific web portal, a considerable number of farmers are still awaiting their cards. As of Wednesday, only 195,558 farmers have received their unique codes, leaving 84,966 still in limbo.

A significant portion of the backlog, approximately 35,000 cases, is attributed to inaccuracies in land records. Specifically, details about forest settlement lands, Inam lands, D-patta lands, and endowment lands, frequently owned by farmers, are absent from the Revenue Department's Webland system. Furthermore, errors in farmer information such as names, addresses, bank account details, and UID numbers, all linked to subsidized land, are preventing the system from generating the codes.

The problem is particularly acute in 42 villages spread across various mandals, where nearly half of the land records are missing from the Webland system, effectively halting the distribution process. Notable examples include two villages in Madugula mandal, three in S. Rayavaram mandal, two in Devarapalli mandal, two in Munagapaka, and one in Atchutapuram, where land records are currently unavailable.

District Agriculture Officer Mohan Rao, speaking to The Pioneer, confirmed that cases involving revenue discrepancies are being forwarded to mandal revenue officials for immediate resolution. He expressed confidence that efforts are underway to complete the distribution within the planned time frame. Moreover, he reassured farmers that a missed deadline would not negatively impact their eligibility.

As the deadline looms, revenue and agriculture officials are intensifying their efforts to overcome the technical and administrative obstacles, striving to ensure all eligible farmers receive their unique land identification cards promptly.

Rs 49.18 cr for Gudur rly station redevelopment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Ministry of Railways has sanctioned Rs 49.18 crore for the redevelopment of Gudur Railway Station, marking a significant step towards enhancing infrastructure and passenger amenities in the region.

The project, part of the South Central Railway's broader station modernization initiative, aims to provide world-class facilities while preserving the region's cultural heritage. The revamped station is expected to cater to future growth and improve the travel experience for passengers in Tirupati and SPSR Nellore districts.

Key features of the redevelopment include a new station building with three floors, full-length platform covers for Platforms 1 to 5, a 12-meter-wide roof plaza connecting the east and west entrances, improvements to the circulating area, and a modern façade for the station building.

Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of Vijayawada Division, welcomed the sanction and thanked the Ministry of Railways for prioritizing infrastructural development in the region. He highlighted that with this addition, 21 railway stations in the division are being upgraded under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme with a total investment of Rs 567.41 crore.

'Molla left an indelible mark on Telugu literature'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC, EWS Welfare, Handloom and Textiles S Savitha has praised poetess Atukuri Mollamamba (Molla) for leaving an indelible mark on Telugu literature. The minister said her works have a special place in Telugu literature. On the occasion of Molla's birth anniversary on Thursday, the minister garlanded her portrait at the State Secretariat and paid tribute. Speaking on the occasion, Minister Savitha said that Mollamamba, born in an ordinary potter's family, praised Lord Rama with unwavering devotion. She praised Molla as the great person who translated Valmiki's Ramayana into Telugu. She said that the Ramayana she wrote in Telugu became famous as Molla Ramayana. Molla used to give importance to moral values in her works. History says that Molla was a contemporary of great poets like Tenali Ramalingadu. Born in Gopavaram village in Kadapa, Molla was praised as a role model for today's generation of women and poets. Minister Savitha made it clear that it is everyone's responsibility to pass on her works to future generations.

BC Welfare Department officials, public representatives and others were present.

DC urges families to consider organ donation, highlights life-saving potential

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

District Collector M N Harendira Prasad has made a strong appeal to families of brain-dead individuals to consider organ donation, emphasising its life-saving potential. Speaking at a walkathon organized by Jeevan Daan Andhra Pradesh at RK Beach on Thursday to mark World Kidney Day, he stressed the need to set a positive example for society.

Highlighting the impact of organ donation, Collector Prasad noted that a single donor could save up to eight lives. He revealed that 4,312 individuals are currently awaiting transplants through Jeevan Daan, with 210 patients having benefited from organ donations in the past year. He also reassured the public that organ allocation follows a strict first-come, first-served policy among registered recipients. "Organ donation is a noble act that can give a new lease of life to those in dire need," he stated. Sharing his personal experience with kidney stones, he emphasized the importance of kidney health and proper medical care. He urged people to consume at least three litres of clean water daily and ensure regular urination to maintain kidney well-being.

City Police Commissioner Dr. Shankhabrata Bagchi, who also participated in the event, assured full police support in the timely transportation of donated organs. He announced plans to introduce a dedicated emergency road transport mechanism, the "Green Channel," to expedite organ transfers to hospitals. Additionally, he discussed advancements in medical technology, including artificial heart implantation and experimental pig heart transplants, though he acknowledged that their widespread availability in India might take time.

VIMS Director Dr. Rambabu highlighted the recent successful liver transplant surgery at NIMS Hospital, underscoring the capability of government hospitals to perform high-quality transplant procedures. He addressed the legal complexities surrounding brain death declaration and called for a more streamlined process. Dr. Rambabu also encouraged eligible patients to utilize the Aarogyasri scheme, which covers free organ transplant surgeries in most hospitals. "Government hospitals are proving their ability to handle complex transplant surgeries, making these life-saving procedures more accessible," he said.

Several esteemed medical professionals participated in the event, including KGH Superintendent Dr. Sivananda and Andhra Medical College Principal Dr. Sandhya Devi. Following the formal proceedings, doctors, staff from private hospitals, and medical students joined a rally organized by the YMCA to raise awareness about organ donation.

YSRCP alleges bias in welfare schemes, seeks Guv's intervention

Beneficiaries are identified by economic and social status, not political affiliation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A YSRCP delegation has met Governor Abdul Nazeer and submitted a representation seeking his intervention alleging that the Chandrababu Naidu-led government has been showing discrimination in extending welfare on party lines, and is filing false cases against Opposition party cadre.

Speaking to media after submitting the representation here on Thursday, party leader Botsa Satyanarayana said that Chandrababu Naidu's remarks during his recent Gangadhara Nellore tour asking not to extend any benefit to YSRCP sympathisers, is in clear violation of the oath he has taken before assuming office, and a blatant violation of constitutional democracy.

Beneficiaries are identified and qualified by their economic and social status and not by political affiliation. Chandrababu Naidu's speech is in clear violation of constitutional norms as he has openly said that YSRCP sympathisers cannot be beneficiaries of the welfare schemes.

"'No one should help YSRCP. It is like feeding a snake with milk,' Chandrababu had said. Nowhere in the country did such a thing happen.

The government has also been filing false cases against YSRCP cadre indiscriminately and using police to settle political scores, which is the other point we have raised in the letter," he said. "We will continue to mount pressure on the government to ensure that welfare schemes reach all the people without any discrimination."

The representation was signed by former ministers, mayors and other leaders of YSRCP.

NTPC Simhadri: Balancing power generation, environmental responsibility

Plant's initiatives highlight sustainable practices and community support

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Executive Director and Head of Project of NTPC Simhadri Sameer Sharma said that NTPC Simhadri, a cornerstone of Visakhapatnam's energy infrastructure, is driving forward with a commitment to both power generation and environmental stewardship. Speaking to the media on Thursday, Sharma highlighted the plant's strategic role in addressing the increasing electricity demands of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. With a total capacity of 2,000 MW from its coal-fired units, supplemented by a 25 MW floating solar power installation, NTPC Simhadri is advancing efforts in sustainable energy solutions.

"Our mission is not just to generate power but to do so in an environmentally responsible manner," Sharma stated. The plant sources coal from Odisha's Talcher CoalFields, transported via the East Coast Railway, ensuring a stable power supply. Andhra Pradesh receives 720 MW, while Telangana is allocated 770 MW from NTPC Simhadri's output.

As NTPC's pioneering coastal coal-based power plant, Simhadri has set industry benchmarks in sustainable operations. Sharma highlighted that over 85% of the plant's water requirements are met through seawater desalination, significantly reducing reliance on freshwater sources. The integration of a floating solar plant further reinforces the company's commitment to renewable energy adoption.

Beyond power generation, NTPC Simhadri has implemented robust environmental protection measures. "We have deployed advanced pollution control technologies to minimize emissions and safeguard the ecosystem," Sharma noted. The plant actively contributes to the 'Green Visakha' initiative by planting thousands of trees and maintaining a plastic-free environment. These efforts have earned the facility prestigious recognitions, including the Greentech Environment Award and the Golden Peacock Award for CSR Excellence.

Sharma also detailed the plant's extensive Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, spanning education, healthcare, skill development, and infrastructure enhancement.

Several government schools in the region have been upgraded with smart classrooms, artificial intelligence and robotics education, and improved facilities. NTPC Simhadri's flagship Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) programme focuses on the holistic development of young girls, while mobile health units provide essential medical services, including free surgeries, to underserved communities.

Infrastructure development projects led by NTPC Simhadri include the construction of community halls, roads, drainage systems, and water storage facilities. Sharma emphasized the plant's role in boosting local employment through specialized tailoring courses and technical training in collaboration with the Central Institute of Plastics Engineering & Technology (CIPET), ensuring high placement rates for skilled workers. Additionally, the refurbishment of the Anakapalli Indoor Stadium has strengthened the region's sports infrastructure.

Reiterating NTPC Simhadri's dedication to sustainable growth, Sharma stated that the plant is implementing global best practices in power generation while expanding its renewable energy initiatives. "Innovation, responsibility, and commitment will remain our core principles as we work towards powering communities while promoting sustainable development," he said. Senior officials B. B. Patra (HoHR), P. K. Jena (GM-O&M), Smt. S. Padmapriya (GM-TS), and Velayudhanpillai Jayan (AGM - Environmental Management) were also present at the media briefing.

RINL staff face uncertain future

Contract workers at VSP fear job cuts, unions warn of protests

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Contract workers at Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Ltd (RINL), which runs the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, are worried as talks about job cuts have failed to move forward. A key meeting on Thursday, led by the Regional Labour Commissioner (RLC), did not bring any clear solution, leaving workers anxious.

Although the management acknowledged workers' concerns, they only promised to form a committee to review the layoff process. However, this has not reassured the workers since the committee has not ruled out future job cuts.

Earlier, the plant planned to reduce contract workers by 30%, leading to the termination of 2,400 employees. Strong opposition from labour unions forced management to withdraw this decision. But now, the threat of layoffs has returned, causing fresh tension among workers.

Labour unions have warned of major protests and an indefinite strike if the job cuts go ahead. In a meeting on Tuesday, held under the RLC's supervision, unions urged management to stop the layoffs. While management agreed to form a committee to review the process, they did not promise to cancel the job cuts entirely.

Union leaders are demanding a complete withdrawal of layoffs. However, contract workers fear that the committee is just a step towards a bigger downsizing plan before the financial year ends. Reports also suggest that 1,130 employees will leave under a Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), raising concerns about further job losses.

The possible layoffs come at a difficult time, as many workers and their families depend on the plant for their income. The local community, which relies on the plant for economic stability, is also worried about the impact.

As tensions rise, the next round of talks between unions and management is set for March 26, again under the RLC's supervision. But without a firm assurance from management, contract workers remain uncertain about their future.

7 dacoits arrested, weapons seized

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

In a swift and coordinated operation, Chittoor police foiled an attempted dacoity at the residence of Pushpa Kids World shop owner Chandrasekhar, arresting seven armed dacoits and seizing three guns, four bullets, and a knife.

Superintendent of Police (SP) VN Manikantha Chandolu told the media on Thursday that the gang broke into Chandrasekhar's house in the early hours of Wednesday when his wife, Santhi, opened the gate to sweep the premises.

Acting on immediate information, a police team, including OCTOPUS personnel, rushed to the spot. Using advanced technology such as drones, the police located the dacoits, who had veiled their faces to avoid identification.

The prime accused, Pasupuleti Subramanyam, held Santhi at gunpoint and forced her to the second floor, demanding cash and jewelry. When Chandrasekhar resisted, the gang attacked him, leaving him with bleeding injuries on his head and right hand.

As the police closed in, the dacoits attempted to flee by jumping off the building. In the process, Subramanyam sustained a leg injury. However, the police successfully surrounded the premises and arrested all seven dacoits. Three others who managed to escape were later apprehended at Kanipakam Cross Road by the Circle Inspector.

The police registered a case under Crime No. 39-2025 and relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Arms Act, 1959. All accused were remanded to judicial custody, while Subramanyam will be sent to prison after recovering from his injuries.

The arrested individuals were identified as Pasupuleti Subramanyam, S. Ibrahim, Changallu Navin Kumar, Dommara Ramanjaneyulu, Dommara Rajasekhar, Dommara Netti Kantaiah, and Kuncham Sampath Kumar.

Subramanyam, the key accused, has a history of major dacoity offences, with six cases registered against him in Nandyal Town Police Station. He had previously served a 10-year prison sentence in a criminal case. Another accused, Kuncham Sampath Kumar, also has multiple criminal cases against him in Kurnool and Nandyal police stations.

SP Manikantha Chandolu commended the police team for their swift action in preventing a major robbery attempt. The daring daylight crime in Chittoor town had sparked panic among residents.

All set for CM Naidu's anti-plastic drive in Tanuku: Collector

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu will participate in the Swarnandhra - Swachh Diwas programme in Tanuku on March 15, focusing on banning single-use plastic and promoting reusable goods. All necessary arrangements for the event have been completed, West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani confirmed on Thursday.

As part of the initiative, operational guidelines for the Swarna Andhra - Swachh Andhra programme will be released. The initiative, aimed at improving sanitation and hygiene, will be conducted every month across the state.

Collector Nagarani emphasised that the government is committed to implementing and monitoring sanitation measures effectively using Swachh Andhra indicators. To ensure its success, multiple departments have been directed to coordinate efforts under the programme.

Key departments, including Municipal Administration, Panchayat Raj, Forest, Environment, Education, Health, Transport, and Welfare, will actively participate in executing the initiative, she added.

Collector Nagarani emphasised that the government is committed to implementing and monitoring sanitation measures effectively using Swachh Andhra indicators. To ensure its success, multiple departments have been directed to coordinate efforts under the programme

No metro rail plan from VSP to Anakapalli: Narayana

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Minister P Narayana on Thursday informed the Assembly that there is no proposal for a metro rail from Visakhapatnam Steel Plant to Anakapalli due to insufficient passenger traffic.

The minister stated that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the Visakhapatnam Metro Rail corridors was prepared with traffic congestion projections up to 2051.

"There is no proposal for a metro rail from VSP to Anakapalli due to insufficient passenger traffic," Narayana said, adding that the central government approves metro rail projects based on peak-hour passenger traffic, which must be at least 10,000 passengers.

He explained that the peak-hour traffic from the Steel Plant to Kommadi exceeds 10,000, leading to the approval of metro rail for that corridor.

However, from the Steel Plant to Anakapalli, the peak-hour traffic is only 3,763, resulting in the project's rejection.

He added that alternative solutions for traffic diversion are being explored.

Meanwhile, Narayana informed the House that a committee has been formed to investigate irregularities in Township Infrastructure Development Corporation (TIDCO) housing allocations.

Regarding TIDCO housing, he alleged that the previous government removed 22,640 beneficiaries and reallocated houses.

He also noted that the erstwhile YSRCP government had completed only 57,040 houses.

A committee has been set up to investigate irregularities in the change of beneficiaries, he said.

The minister further revealed that bank loans were taken in the names of 77,606 beneficiaries without actually providing them with houses.

As a result, these individuals are burdened with EMI payments, and banks have categorised these loans as Non-Performing Assets (NPAs).

To address the issue, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has approved Rs 140 crore to clear outstanding bank payments.

Additionally, the Housing & Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has sanctioned Rs 4,460 crore for infrastructure development in TIDCO housing projects.

Due to fiscal responsibility and budget management (FRBM) constraints, the state government has requested the Finance Department to release the required Rs 7,000 crore in smaller instalments, Narayana said. Urban authorities are working to complete the remaining infrastructure, with 3,65,430 square feet of housing targeted for completion by June 12, he added.

Massive bandobast for '*Singarayakonda Thirunallu*'

PNS ■ BAPATLA

Superintendent of Police Tushar Dudi has announced that extensive security arrangements have been put in place with 650 police personnel for the Singarakonda Prasannanjaneya Swamy Thirunalla.

The SP inspected the arrangements for the 'Thirunallu' scheduled for March 14 on Thursday. He advised police personnel on crowd management and inspected diversion areas, parking zones, and queue lines from the entrance to the darshan area, the police control room, and the police outpost. Personnel on traffic duty were instructed to remain vigilant.

Speaking on the occasion, the District SP stated that approximately 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh devotees are expected to visit the Singarakonda Sri Prasannanjaneya Swamy Thirunalla. In response, a robust security plan has been implemented with around 650 police personnel, including 4 DSPs, 13 CIs, and 46 SIs.

"To prevent thefts and other untoward incidents, 70 CCTV cameras have been installed in and around the temple. These are being monitored through the police control room, and two drones will be deployed for surveillance in public areas and parking lots," the SP said.

He further warned that strict legal action would be taken against anyone disrupting peace and order. A police control room has been set up within the temple premises to assist devotees.

Restore 50% railway concession for scribes: AINEF

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

All India News paper Employees Federation (AINEF) Vice President Chaladi Poornachandra Rao has urged the Central Government to reinstate the 50% concession on train fares for accredited journalists.

In a statement on Thursday, he called for the immediate restoration of journalist railway concession passes, which were revoked during the COVID-19 pandemic. He also appealed to the Centre to introduce a national pension scheme for journalists, highlighting that AINEF has been raising this demand for a long time. Additionally, he requested the government to waive toll fees for vehicles used by journalists, urging authorities to consider these legitimate demands positively.

Dokka, a power-hungry opportunist: YSRCP leader

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP SC Cell working president Kommoori Kanaka Rao has sharply criticised Dokka Manikya Varaprasad, calling him a 'power-hungry opportunist' lacking political credibility. Speaking at Tadepalli, Kanaka Rao accused Dokka of making baseless allegations against former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. He labelled Dokka a principle-less leader, notorious for switching parties, starting with Congress, moving to TDP, and oscillating between them to secure positions.

Kanaka Rao highlighted Dokka's history of betraying parties, including criticising TDP while in YSRCP, only to forget those remarks in his current pursuit of power. He called Dokka's recent TV debate attacks on YS Jagan a desperate bid to impress Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu after failing to gain a coalition government post. Kanaka Rao noted Dokka's pattern of negotiating with rivals while in a party, citing his TDP MLC role after an MLA loss, followed by betrayals to join YSRCP and later return to TDP. He added that Dokka's name is in Nara Lokesh's "Red Book," implying his efforts to malign YSRCP won't yield rewards.

Refuting Dokka's claims against CJagan, Kanaka Rao denied financial impropriety in YSRCP, stressing its recognition of Dalits, minorities, and workers. He accused Dokka of projecting TDP's corruption onto YSRCP and betraying the Madiga community by exploiting his caste without addressing their issues. Rao warned that while Dokka can appease Chandrababu and Lokesh, attempts to defame Jagan will not be tolerated, asserting that the public rejects his rhetoric.

Jagan assures legal aid to 'harassed' YSRCP cadre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation of YSRCP sympathisers, predominantly from minority, SC, and BC communities, has met former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy at YSRCP Central Office. The delegation included Gurazala MLA Kasu Mahesh Reddy, residents from Pinnelli, as well as people from the Turakapalem, Madenapadu, and Chennaiyapalem villages of Gurazala constituency, who said they were threatened that they would be killed if they attempted to return to the village, solely due to their support for YSRCP. Nearly 400 families have been subjected to village exile by the coalition government since it assumed power.

Jagan assured the affected families of the party's unwavering support, promising full legal assistance to address their plight. The YSRCP is already pursuing justice for these families through legal action in the High Court regarding the village exile issue. Additionally, the party is preparing for a "Chalo Pinnelli" programme to be held within the next two months to highlight and protest the situation. The villagers expressed their anguish over the threats and ostracisation they face.

112 red sanders logs seized, 2 smugglers arrested

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSASTF) seized 112 red sander logs worth over Rs 45 lakh and arrested two smugglers at Ramasamudram village in Puttur mandal.

DSP G Balireddy said a task force team, led by RI Sai Giridhar and RSI KSK Lingadhar, was conducting vehicle checks on the main road in Ramasamudram when they intercepted a vehicle transporting the red sander logs illegally to Chennai.

The task force seized the logs, confiscated the vehicle, and arrested the two smugglers. The seized logs and vehicle were shifted to the task force police station in Tirupati.

Task Force SI Rafi registered a case, and the arrested smugglers were being produced before the court.

SRM-AP hosts annual management flagship event

Emphasis on the need for work-life balance

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University-AP hosted the second edition of its flagship event, Trending Issues in Management organised by the Department of Management at the Paari School of Business. The theme of the event -- "Work Life Balance" -- was inspired by the provocative remarks from prominent corporate leaders such as Narayan Murthy and S N Subrahmanyan.

Dr Chintan Doshi set the tone for the event through his keynote address. He highlighted eight pointers that stressed on the fundamental topic of why one must work. Doshi stated that money, of course, is one parameter for why one should work, but respect, prestige, being an inspiration to someone and working for credibility and reputation are other factors that surpass the monetary benefits.

During the panel discussion, the industry experts unanimously emphasised the need for work-life balance, but they also echoed that one must strike a balance between work and personal life. Roshni emphasised that team and organisation are important factors that need to be brought into consideration. She stated team deadlines and individual interest are considering factors at times.

Krishna Repaka, vice-president at Deloitte India, remarked, "As students, we have all dedicated those extra hours to hard work during our examinations when the need has risen, we never backed out because it disrupted our personal life balance. Similarly, when need rises we all need to pitch in to put that extra effort." Adding to this Deepak Bidla stated, "Collaboration is key, but more than extended work hours productivity is what matters."

The event concluded by emphasising a crucial balance between professional commitment and mental well-being. While factors like the need to unwind and relax are important, it is also not important to consider factors such as commitment, productivity and accountability at work.

Congress is 'care off' address for social justice: Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC Chief B Mahesh Kumar Goud addressing the media along with newly elected MLCs at Gandhi Bahvan on Thursday

The Congress party is a 'care off' address for social justice, TPCC Chief Mahesh Kumar Goud said. The Congress selected SC, ST and BC women as MLCs giving a big push to social justice, he said.

Addressing the media along with newly elected Congress MLCs Addanki Dayakar, Vijayashanti and Shankar Nayak at the Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, Mahesh said that in 2014, the BRS government arbitrarily cancelled the Assembly membership of Congress MLAs Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and Sampath Kumar.

During the last Assembly, the Congress gave a chance to the current Deputy CM, Bhatti Vikramarka, as the CLP leader, but he could not get the opposition leader status, he said.

Mahesh said the KCR government removed Rajaiah, who was the Deputy Chief Minister during BRS rule.

"Jagadish's behaviour towards the Dalit Speaker in the Assembly was wrong. People should check out the way BRS leaders are treating Dalits. While Congress is working for social justice, BRS leaders are belittling weaker sections," he said.

KTR talking about democracy and political values is ridiculous, he said and added that the KCR family looted record amounts of public funds in the shortest possible time.

"If the Congress gives a high post in the assembly to a Dalit and makes him the Speaker, it is shameful that BRS leaders acted in a way that humiliates the Speaker. Looking down on Dalits has become a habit for BRS leaders like KCR. KCR deceived them by saying he would make a Dalit the Chief Minister. BRS leaders are following in his footsteps," Mahesh said.

He said that as per Rahul Gandhi's idea, there should be political justice for the poor and weaker sections.

"We completed the caste census in TG and have become an inspiration for the country. Rahul Gandhi coined the slogan, "Whoever has more, gets more," he said.

Even though the Congress decided to provide 42 per cent reservation to BCs in politics and employment based on caste census figures, there was no response from the opposition, he said. KTR and Harish have no right to talk about the caste survey.

Youth electrocuted, another injured

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

A 22-year-old youth was electrocuted, and another sustained serious injuries after coming into contact with an electric fence set up by a farmer to protect his crop from wild boars at Kothapalli village in Gangavaram mandal on Thursday.

Police said the farmer, Sundar, had erected the fence around his field. The victims, Karthik (22) and Yuvaraj were searching for their missing cow when they unknowingly attempted to cross the live fence.

Karthik was electrocuted and died on the spot, while Yuvaraj suffered severe burn injuries. He was rushed to the Government General Hospital, where his condition remains critical.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MARCH 14, 2025

ACROSS THE STATES

BJP sweeps local body polls in Mizoram's Chakma

The BJP, which is in power in the Chakma Autonomous District Council in south Mizoram's Lawngtlai district, on Thursday swept the village council (VC) polls, securing a majority in 64 out of 88 VCs. According to the final results announced by the state election commission, Mizoram's ruling party, the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), stood second, winning a majority in 12 VCs, while the Mizo National Front (MNF) bagged eight VCs. The Congress, however, failed to secure a majority in any of the 88 VCs. There was no clear majority in two VCs, and two others were won by independent candidates, the SEC said. Out of the 64 VCs where the BJP registered victory, it won nine of those uncontested, the commission said. Polling for the village councils in the CADC was held on Wednesday, registering a voter turnout of 86.97 per cent, it said. According to the state election commission, there are 516 seats, of which 88 are reserved for women.

Man surrenders after killing wife in UP's Jaunpur

A man on Thursday killed his wife by smothering her with a pillow and later surrendered at the police station in Uttar Pradesh's Jaunpur district, police said. The incident took place in the Miyapur locality under the Line Bazar police station area, where one Alok Singh (38) had been living with his wife Alka Singh (35) and their seven-year-old son, Additional SP Arvind Verma said. Locals said on Wednesday evening, the couple had gone shopping for Holi with their son. They appeared normal at night but in the early hours of Thursday, Alok allegedly killed his wife and left with their son. Later in the afternoon, he reached the Line Bazar police station, confessed to the crime and surrendered before the police. Station House Officer (SHO) Satish Singh and his team broke the lock of the couple's room, recovered Alka's body and sent it for autopsy. Alka's maternal home is in Karo village under Barsathi police station.

Free dialysis services in Delhi govt hospitals

The Delhi government plans to expand free dialysis services under the Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme to all state-run hospitals, Health Minister Pankaj Singh said on Thursday. Speaking at an event on World Kidney Day, the minister highlighted the city government's commitment to improving healthcare infrastructure under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Announcing plans to expand the free dialysis services, he also said economically weaker sections would be prioritised in Delhi government hospitals, ensuring the same high-quality care for them as other patients. Singh urged the medical staff to treat patients with professionalism and compassion, creating a more welcoming and supportive environment in hospitals. He laid stress on the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle to protect kidney health and said, "The kidney is an essential organ that helps remove waste materials, regulate blood pressure, support red blood cell production and maintain bone health."

India, Mauritius ink pact to combat corruption

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India and Mauritius signed an agreement to enhance cooperation in combating money laundering, corruption, fraud, asset recovery and the financing of illicit activities, the ED said Thursday.

The collaboration between Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) of Mauritius will "bolster" financial enforcement capabilities and will also contribute to broader economic and security cooperation between the two nations, the federal probe agency said in a statement.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was exchanged in the presence of Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam.

During the discussions leading to the MoU, the ED and the FCC explored the possibilities of "joint operations" to detect, investigate and prosecute cross-border money laundering offences, according to the ED.

The collaboration between Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Financial Crimes Commission (FCC) of Mauritius will "bolster" financial enforcement capabilities and will also contribute to broader economic and security cooperation between the two nations, the federal probe agency said in a statement. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was exchanged in the presence of Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam

They also underlined the significance of exchange programmes, experience sharing, training and skill building of the officers of both the organisations, it said.

"Discussions were held on how ED can assist FCC by providing technological assistance and sharing of their digital forensic tools and best practices, towards ensuring better data seizing and extraction, and more productive data analysis," the statement said.

It said ED Director Rahul Navin highlighted the agency's expertise in financial crime investigations, its "high" conviction rate in money laundering trials, and its "successful" track record in asset tracing, confiscation, and recovery.

The ED Director also underscored the legal mechanisms available under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to safeguard the interests of victims by enabling asset restitution even during the pendency of trials.

"He (Navin) highlighted how ED has successfully restituted assets to the tune of INR 2.6 billion (Rs 226 crore) to the victims," it said.

The collaboration between ED and FCC will not only bolster financial enforcement capabilities but will also contribute to broader economic and security cooperation between India and Mauritius, the statement said

India announces USD 1 billion fund for creators' economy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday announced a USD 1 billion fund to give a boost to the emerging creators' economy in the country and reached out to envoys from over 100 countries seeking their participation in the first World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) to be held in Mumbai.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis hosted the envoys here and sought their presence at the Roundtable of top media CEOs to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the WAVES summit.

India is positioning WAVES to be held from May 1 to 4 as the first convergence platform for the media and entertainment sector on the lines of the World Economic Forum at Davos, a gathering of international leaders from governance and business.

Fadnavis said Mumbai, the entertainment capital of India, was the perfect permanent venue for the WAVES summit like Davos is for the World Economic Forum and Cannes is for the eponymous film festival.

Agents paid Rs 4-5K for trafficking Bangladeshi girls into India: ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A sum of Rs 4,000-5,000 per person was being paid by Hyderabad-based flesh trade operators to agents based along the India-Bangladesh international border in West Bengal for trafficking Bangladeshi girls into the country, according to an ED investigation.

The money laundering probe stems from a Telangana Police FIR, a case re-registered by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), against a flesh trade and prostitution racket being run by two brothels located on the outskirts of the city.

The Enforcement Directorate said in a statement on Thursday that it has provisionally attached assets worth Rs 1.90 lakh as part of this investigation and this includes funds kept in "Paytm wallets and bank accounts" as well as an immovable property of a man named Ruhul Amin Dhali, one of the "most prominent" agents involved in

the illegal trafficking of Bangladeshi girls into India.

The accused, according to the ED, were running brothels at various places in and around Hyderabad and they also sent the victim girls to other brothels and agents, on a commission basis.

They used "fake and forged" Indian identity documents and opened several bank accounts and online wallets for their illegal activities, the federal probe agency said.

"For trafficking the Bangladeshi girls and others, the accused were paying around Rs 4-5 thousand per person to agents/middlemen abutting the Indo-Bangladesh border in West Bengal, which was shared between various parties involved in the trafficking on either side of the border," it said.

India gifts urgently-needed medicine to Sri Lanka

PNS ■ COLOMBO

India has donated urgently-needed medicines to Sri Lanka responding to an urgent request from Colombo, the Indian High Commission said here on Thursday.

India gifted 50,000 ampoules of Furosemide injection 20mg/2ml to cater to its shortage in Sri Lankan hospitals in the immediate term. These were handed over by Santosh Jha, the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, to the Minister of Health and Mass Media Nalinda Jayatissa.

"India has been a reliable friend and first responder for Sri Lanka during times of difficulties and shortages, including in the health sector," a release from the Indian High Commission said.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, India supplied over 25 tonnes of medicines on a special aircraft to Sri Lanka in May 2020; gifted 5,00,000 doses of Covishield vaccine in January 2021; and 1 lakh Rapid Antigen Test kits in February 2022, it said.

In the wake of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, in February 2022, a USD 1 billion credit facility for supply of essential items, including medicines, was extended in March 2022 for a period of one year. It was subsequently extended until March 2024 on the request of the Sri Lankan government.

K'taka govt mulls raising retirement age for doctors

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka government is actively considering increasing the retirement age of doctors serving in super-speciality hospitals under the medical education department, from the current 60 years to 65.

During an interaction with doctors at Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research on Thursday, Medical Education and Skill Development Minister Sharan Prakash Patil assured medical professionals that the government is keen on extending the retirement age to retain experienced doctors in super-speciality hospitals.

The move comes in response to concerns raised by senior doctors at Jayadeva, who pointed out that after spending nearly 35 years in medical education and training, they only get to serve around 20-25 years before retiring at 60.

"We have been deliberating on this issue for some time. To ensure better healthcare services and make the most of our experienced doctors, I will soon discuss the matter with Chief

Minister Siddaramaiah and propose raising the retirement age for doctors in super-speciality hospitals," Patil said in a statement issued by his office.

In addition, Patil announced a significant benefit for doctors working in the medical education department—an insurance facility. "Currently, these doctors are not covered under any government insurance scheme, but the state is planning to implement Jeevana Sanjivini, a scheme already available under the Health and Family Welfare Department," he said.

To further strengthen medical infrastructure, the minister declared that the government would allocate additional funds to Jayadeva Hospital to introduce robotic surgery facilities.

Fake IPS officer held in Kochi for 'duping' women, banks

PNS ■ KOCHI

A 31-year-old man who allegedly posed as an IPS officer to defraud several women and financial institutions has been arrested in Kochi, police said on Thursday.

Karthik Venugopal, alias Vipin Karthik, hailing from Malappuram, was picked up from a shopping mall here by a team from Kalamassery Police Station. The arrest was carried out under the supervision of the Kochi City Police Commissioner Putta Vimaladitya at the request of the Bengaluru City Police Commissioner, they said.

According to police, Karthik befriended women by pretending to be an IPS officer, lured them with promises of marriage, and financially exploited them.

He also allegedly forged documents, obtained loans under false pretences, and created fake salary certificates to secure loans from multiple banks, police added. The accused was wanted in a case registered at Kadugodi Police Station in Bengaluru, where he allegedly took money and vehicles from a Malayali woman after promising marriage and later attempted to back out of the wedding by falsely claiming he had cancer.

17 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur

PNS ■ BIJAPUR

Seventeen Naxalites, nine of them collectively carrying cash reward of Rs 24 lakh on their heads, surrendered in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Thursday, a senior police official said.

The cadres, including a couple, turned themselves in before senior police and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) officials here, he said.

The Naxalites cited disappointment with the "hollow" and "inhuman" Maoist ideology, exploitation of innocent tribals by senior cadres and increasing influence of security forces, Bijapur Senior Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yadav said.

They were also impressed with the 'Niya Nellanar' (your good village) scheme under which security forces and

administration have been striving to provide basic amenities and carry out development works in interior areas, he said.

All the surrendered Naxalites were active in different capacities in the Gangaloor area committee of the outlawed Maoist organisation, he said.

Of them, Dinesh Modiam (36), a divisional committee member of Maoists, was wanted in 26 cases in Bijapur district and carried a reward of Rs 8 lakh, the senior police official said.

MP to have an airport every 200 km

Six new e-ways to create different identity for state: Yadav

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Thursday that the government would construct an airport every 200 km, an airstrip every 150 km and a helipad-cum-sports stadium in each assembly constituency.

Replying to the Thanksgiving Motion on the Governor's reply in the legislative assembly, he also highlighted upcoming expressway projects in the state.

Under the state's new aviation policy, the BJP government is making efforts to boost the sector and improve air connectivity across MP, he said.

"As per the new aviation policy of the state, one airport will be constructed every 200 km, while an airstrip will be built every 150 km," he said.

Yadav said one helipad will come up in each assembly constituency and it will have a small stadium and two rooms. In a way, it will be a multipurpose facility, he said.

About MP's road infrastructure, Yadav said the government plans to create a different identity for the state by building six expressways – Narmada Pragati Path, Vindhya Express Path, Malwa-Nimar Express Path, Bundelkhand Vikas Path, Madhya Bharat Vikas Path and Atal Pragati Path.

Citing the removal of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) corridors in Bhopal and Indore, he said the state government won't shy away from taking similar decisions concerning development.

Yadav also said that the government has decided to revive the state's transport network within a year as per public demand, after the construction of quality roads.

Referring to the social sector, Yadav said that under the women-centric 'Ladli Behna' scheme, the government started with monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 and raised it to Rs 1,250 after Rakshabandhan.

The present government will be in office for five years, he said, assuring that the Ladli Behna aid will be gradually increased to the promised amount of Rs 3,000.

The opposition Congress has been attacking the BJP government in the state, accusing it of not fulfilling its poll promise of providing Rs 3,000 per month to the beneficiaries of the Ladli Behna scheme.

The CM also highlighted his government's achievements in other sectors, including health (opening of medical colleges), energy, forest, wildlife and tourism.

India, Bangla conduct naval exercise in Bay of Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Bangladesh conducted a naval exercise and coordinated patrol in the Bay of Bengal this week that provided an opportunity for both the navies to develop closer links in tactical planning, coordination and information sharing for undertaking seamless maritime operations.

Bongosagar 2025 saw the participation of INS Ranvir from the Indian Navy and BNS Abu Ubaidah from the Bangladesh Navy, officials here said on Thursday.

"The enhanced synergy of naval operations between the

two navies is the testament to the shared commitment of countering global security challenges towards security and stability in the region promoting the Security And Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) initiative of India," a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said.

The exercise provided an opportunity for both the navies to develop closer links in tactical planning, coordination and information sharing for undertaking seamless maritime operations, he said.

It has "strengthened coordination and confidence" between the two navies, thereby improving the ability to undertake coordinated operations and respond swiftly and effectively against emerging threats at sea, the official said.

The exercise enhanced interoperability between the two navies, facilitating collaborative responses to shared maritime security challenges.

The exercise involved a range of complex operations encompassing surface firing, tactical manoeuvres, underway replenishment, visit-board-search-seizure (VBSS) cross boarding, communication drills, quiz for operations team and junior officers on professional topics and a steam past.

Editor's TAKE

Balochistan on the Boil

The deadly train hijacking episode has brought the region's struggle to the fore

The recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Balochistan marks another deadly episode in the decades-long struggle for Baloch independence. The attack, orchestrated by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), underscores the escalating insurgency in Pakistan's largest but most neglected province. The Pakistani military's swift operation to neutralise the hijackers may have ended the immediate crisis, but it has done little to address the underlying grievances that continue to fuel the Baloch nationalist movement.

On March 11, armed militants targeted the Jaffar Express, a passenger train traveling from Quetta to Peshawar. The BLA demanded the release of Baloch political prisoners and individuals allegedly abducted by Pakistani security forces. Pakistani military forces swiftly launched a rescue operation. The successful yet costly operation highlights the deteriorating security situation in Balochistan and the growing boldness of separatist groups.

The hijacking is not an isolated incident but rather a continuation of the Baloch people's longstanding quest for self-determination. Balochistan, rich in natural resources but historically marginalised, has seen multiple uprisings since Pakistan's creation in 1947. The roots of the conflict date back to what many Baloch consider a betrayal by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder. At the time of Partition, the princely state of Kalat, a major part of present-day Balochistan, opted for independence. However, in 1948, under pressure from Pakistan and with little international support, Kalat was forcibly annexed. This fueled deep resentment among the Baloch people and led to an armed insurgency that has resurfaced in different forms over the decades.

Balochistan, despite being rich in resources such as gold, copper, and natural gas, remains the most impoverished province in Pakistan. Baloch nationalists argue that the region's wealth is exploited by the central government, with little benefit to the local population.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has further intensified tensions, as Baloch rebels view Chinese investments and infrastructure projects as a means of increasing Pakistan's control over their land without addressing local grievances. Adding to the discontent are widespread allegations of human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of activists and civilians. The Pakistani state has often responded with heavy-handed military crackdowns, further deepening resentment.

While the Baloch nationalist movement has waxed and waned over the years, recent developments suggest it is gaining momentum. The BLA and other militant groups, such as the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), have intensified their attacks on security forces, government infrastructure, and projects associated with CPEC. Targeted assaults on Chinese nationals working in Pakistan further indicate a strategy aimed at destabilising foreign investments and pressuring the Pakistani state. The hijacking of the Jaffar Express is a testament to the insurgents' evolving tactics and growing audacity. By targeting civilian infrastructure and taking hostages, the BLA has demonstrated its capability to conduct large-scale operations, signaling an emboldened separatist movement.

A military response alone will not quell the insurgency. Addressing the root causes—political disenfranchisement, economic marginalisation, and human rights violations—is crucial for any long-term resolution.The ongoing struggle in Balochistan is a reminder of the consequences of neglecting ethnic and regional grievances. Without meaningful dialogue and political solutions, Pakistan risks further destabilisation in its most resource-rich yet volatile province. The recent train hijacking may have been neutralised, but the broader Baloch insurgency remains far from over.

Towards a Fit and Trim India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest initiative to combat obesity and curb excessive oil consumption is timely as obesity rates are rising sharply, underscoring urgent need for preventive healthcare and dietary reforms

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent initiative to combat obesity and reduce excessive cooking oil consumption has ignited nationwide discussions on health and nutrition. The campaign underscores the importance of preventive healthcare and dietary changes in addressing India's growing obesity crisis. Given the alarming rise in obesity worldwide, this initiative is both timely and necessary and has received support from healthcare professionals, sportspersons, and the World Health Organisation.

India is witnessing a sharp increase in obesity, with the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reporting that 23% of men and 24% of women are now overweight or obese. Urban areas show even higher numbers due to sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy diets. By now, we all know that obesity increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and certain cancers, placing a heavy burden on India's healthcare system. The WHO has identified obesity as a major global health crisis, and India is rapidly catching up with Western countries in obesity rates.

However, while addressing obesity through lifestyle changes is essential, an even more pressing concern needs urgent attention-food adulteration. In 2018-19, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) found that almost one-third of food samples tested in India failed quality checks due to adulteration. Media reports highlight alarming instances of harmful substances being added to food, such as urea, starch, and detergent in milk; synthetic dyes and artificial ripening agents in fruits; chalk in common salt; artificial colors in spices; formalin in fish; iron filings or colored leaves in tea; synthetic whiteners, chalk powder, or soapstone in rice and wheat; and lead chromate in pulses. These adulterants pose serious health risks, including food poisoning, kidney damage, cancer, and neurological disorders.

Food adulteration is now so rampant that, at times, we don't even need food inspectors to detect it. Walk through any vegetable market, and you will see unnaturally shiny apples, bright green peas, pointed gourds, and glossy brinjals. These are not signs of freshness but of harmful chemicals like wax, artificial dyes, and pesticides. Soak vegetables in water, and you may see colors leaching out-clear evidence of adulteration.

While obesity can be managed by raising awareness about the dangers of consuming processed foods with unhealthy ingredients or overconsuming edible oil and encouraging lifestyle changes, avoiding adulterated food is far more challenging. It is difficult to detect adulteration, and the issue is deeply rooted in systemic flaws in food production and regulation. Unless food adulteration is effectively tackled, even so-called "healthy" choices can be hazardous, exposing consumers to harmful substances despite their best efforts to maintain a nutritious diet.

Due to the widespread issue of food adulteration, many people have stopped eating fruits with their peels or raw salads, fearing pesticide residues and chemical coatings. This shift highlights how food adulteration forces people to compromise on natural and healthier eating habits, ultimately hindering efforts to promote a balanced diet and combat obesity.

With adulteration becoming so prevalent, it's no surprise that people are turning to organic food. The organic food market is expanding rapidly worldwide. In India, it was valued at around $1.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach $8.9 billion by 2032. However, organic food in India is much costlier than conventionally grown food, making it less accessible to middle—and lower-income groups. To make matters worse, fake organic labels have become a growing concern. As demand rises, many brands and sellers misuse the "organic" tag, passing off conventionally grown food at a premium price under the guise of organic produce. If left unchecked, this defeats the very purpose of switching to organic food, leaving us right back where we started.

VISHWARUPA BHATTACHARYA

PM Modi's past campaigns, such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the promotion of yoga through the International Day of Yoga, have demonstrated his ability to mobilise public participation and drive meaningful change. His efforts to combat obesity are also likely to strike a chord with the masses. However, while his past initiatives have successfully influenced public hygiene and global health trends, his latest campaign against obesity will have a meaningful impact only if the issue of food adulteration is effectively addressed.

In the fight against obesity, food adulteration is the elephant in the room. Addressing it first will ensure that when Indians make healthier choices, they are truly consuming safe and nutritious food.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to combat obesity and reduce excessive cooking oil consumption is a crucial step toward improving public health in India.

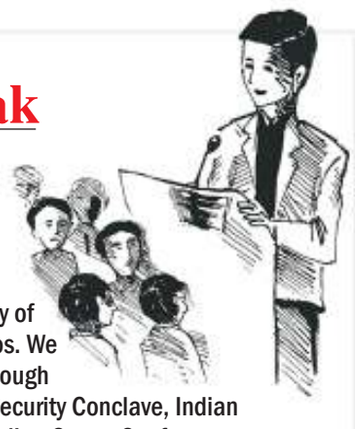
Indeed, rampant food adulteration undermines even the best health-conscious efforts, exposing consumers to harmful substances despite their intent to eat well. The presence of hasardous chemicals in everyday foods, from fruits and vegetables to dairy and staples, poses severe health risks.

PM Modi's past campaigns have successfully driven large-scale behavioral changes, and his anti-obesity initiative holds similar promise. However, its success depends on a holistic approach that includes stringent food safety regulations, public awareness about adulteration and affordable access to truly healthy food.

Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enforcing stricter penalties for food fraud, and promoting verified organic practices can help bridge the gap.

(The writer is Additional Director, Research Division, Rajya Sabha Secretariat. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak



We fully respect the sovereignty of Mauritius with regard to Chagos. We will extend our cooperation through forums such as the Colombo Security Conclave, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and Indian Ocean Conference. Be it the Global South, the Indian Ocean, or the African continent, Mauritius is our important partner. We have come up with SAGAR vision for the stability and prosperity of this entire region. India shall also assist in setting up of National Maritime Information Sharing Centre in Mauritius

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Four-Day Workweek: Challe- ges a- d Promises

SECOND Opinion

RACHNA LAKHPATI

The concept of a four-day workweek has taken the world by storm, promising enhanced work-life balance and efficiency. However, implementing such a model in a heterogeneous and populous nation like India-home to over 1.4 billion people-presents significant challenges.

India's labor market has distinct complexities, making a four-day workweek more of an aspiration than an immediately achievable solution. The country's economy encompasses sprawling informal sectors alongside emerging knowledge industries, creating a stark divide in working styles and employment patterns.

The informal economy, which employs approximately 90% of India's workforce, operates beyond conventional employment paradigms. Agricultural laborers, small business owners, and daily wage earners typically work based on demand rather than a fixed schedule. For such workers, a four-day workweek may hold little relevance, as their earnings are directly tied to the number of hours worked.

Conversely, India's expanding service and technology sectors may be better positioned to experiment with compressed workweeks. Some e-commerce organisations have already tested four-day workweeks, reporting promising results in employee satisfaction and productivity. However, these remain exceptions rather than the norm.

Cultural perceptions of work in India present another significant hurdle. The deeply ingrained belief that long hours demonstrate commitment and dedication fosters resistance to reduced workweeks. This cultural mindset suggests that even if policies change, shifting attitudes may take considerably longer.

Infrastructure challenges further complicate the feasibility of a four-day workweek. Many Indian workers endure long commutes due to inadequate transportation networks and urban congestion. As a result, even with a compressed work schedule, the actual time available for leisure and personal activities might remain limited.

Despite these challenges, there are compelling reasons to explore pathways toward introducing a four-day workweek in India. Research suggests potential benefits, including reduced burnout, lower absenteeism, and improved mental health-factors that could address key workplace issues currently affecting Indian employers.

A sector-specific approach may offer the most viable path forward. Pilot programs in knowledge-intensive industries could serve as testing grounds, allowing successful models to be gradually expanded to other sectors. Additionally, government incentives for businesses willing to adopt such programs could accelerate broader acceptance.

The pandemic has already reshaped work arrangements worldwide, including in India. Remote and hybrid work models have demonstrated that productivity is not necessarily dependent on physical presence or rigid schedules. This shift in perspective creates opportunities for workplace innovations, including compressed workweeks.

Rather than viewing the four-day workweek as a universal, short-term solution, India could integrate it into a broader movement toward more flexible, worker-oriented employment practices. While full-scale implementation across industries may be a distant goal, selective adoption in specific sectors could lay the groundwork for wider acceptance as the economy and infrastructure continue to evolve.

The journey toward workweek reform in India will be long, culturally complex, and closely tied to the nation's economic landscape. However, initiating the conversation is a crucial first step in the right direction.

The four-day workweek presents both opportunities and challenges for India. While its informal economy and cultural perceptions pose obstacles, the growing service and technology sectors offer a testing ground for its feasibility. Infrastructure limitations and deep-rooted work traditions may slow widespread adoption, but pilot programs and government incentives could drive gradual acceptance. The pandemic has already reshaped work models, highlighting flexibility's potential. Rather than an immediate, universal solution, a sector-specific approach could pave the way for broader implementation.

(The author is a motivator and freelance write. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PRIME MINISTER MODI IN MAURITUS

Madam —Prime Minister Modi's second visit to Mauritius on its National Day, following his 2015 trip, has revitalized the previously weakened ties between the two nations. The ritual of pouring Gangajal into Mauritian waters symbolizes the cleansing of past grievances and has led to the signing of eight Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), including a strengthened strategic partnership focused on artificial intelligence, set to begin soon. Once under British rule, Mauritius saw the arrival of Indian laborers who endured harsh conditions and exploitation. These laborers, known as 'Girmityas' or 'People of Agreement,' share a common history and cultural ties with India. This enduring rapport is expected to foster mutually beneficial developments in the region.Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second visit to Mauritius on its National Day, following his 2015 trip, has significantly strengthened the ties between the two nations. Historically, Mauritius and India share deep-rooted cultural and historical connections. Modi's visit included a symbolic ritual of pouring Gangajal into Mauritian waters, signifying the cleansing of past grievances. This visit resulted in the signing of eight Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), including a strategic partnership focused on artificial intelligence, set to commence soon. This visit marks a new chapter in their enduring relationship.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

EUROPE FIGHTS TRUMP TARIFFS

Madam—The European Union announced on Wednesday, March 12, that it would impose retaliatory trade measures, introducing new duties on U.S. industrial and agricultural products. This decision came just hours after the Trump administration increased tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25 percent.As the world's largest trading bloc, the EU had anticipated the U.S. tariffs and prepared accordingly. However, the measures still place significant strain on already tense transatlantic relations. Just last month, in February, Washington warned Europe that it would need to take responsibility for its own security in the future.The EU's retaliatory measures will initially target U.S. goods worth approximately 26 billion euros (USD 28 billion). These measures will not be limited to steel and aluminum products but will also affect textiles, home appliances, and agricultural goods. Additionally, items such as motorcycles, bourbon whiskey, peanut butter, and jeans will face renewed tariffs. With this, an open trade war has erupted between the European Union and the United States, which may escalate into a serious and dangerous situation in the coming days. The economic impact could extend beyond these regions, affecting countries like India, which may be particularly vulnerable due to its weaker economy. This escalating trade war between the EU and the US threatens global economic stability, with potential ripple effects on various nations.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

TRUMP PUSHING INDIA INTO TRADE WAR

Madam —President Donald Trump, who champions the slogan "America First," has drawn India into his trade war. He has threatened that if India does not reduce import tariffs on American goods, the US will impose equivalent tariffs on Indian goods starting in April. This has placed India in a difficult position.Calling India the "Tariff King," Trump argues that the taxes India imposes on American goods are unfair. When he took a similar stance against China, the Chinese government responded aggressively, demonstrating its readiness not only for a trade war but for any kind of confrontation. However, the situation between India and the US is different, raising the question: Is India prepared for such a scenario?Last year, trade between India and the U.S. amounted to $118 billion, with India exporting goods worth $77 billion and importing $40 billion. The major imports from the U.S. include crude oil, pearls and precious stones, nuclear reactors and related materials, boilers, machinery, and other equipment. On the other hand, India's major exports to the U.S. consist of automobiles, textiles, and metals. If Trump's tariff threat becomes a reality, these three Indian industries could suffer a significant blow.The U.S. is struggling with a $1.2 trillion trade deficit and a market flooded with Chinese products, which has become a major concern. Trump's policies aim to address this issue. Trump's background as a businessman is evident in the strategic moves he is making.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

TRAIN HIJACKING IN BALOCHISTAN EXPOSES PAKISTAN'S FAULTLINES

The recent hijacking of the Jaffar Express in Balochistan has once again highlighted the deep-rooted insurgency in the region. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) seized control of the train, which was carrying over 500 passengers, including 214 Pakistani soldiers.

The group issued a 48-hour ultimatum, demanding the release of Baloch prisoners and the withdrawal of Pakistani forces. In response, the Pakistani military launched a rescue operation, deploying Special Service Group (SSG) commandos. Reports indicate that 104 hostages have been freed, while 16 militants were killed. However, several hostages also lost their lives during the operation, further escalating tensions.

The local population has long accused the government of exploiting their resources while denying them political and economic rights. This discontent has fueled multiple insurgencies over the decades, with separatist groups like the BLA leading armed resistance against the state. The Pakistani military's heavy-handed response, including enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, has only intensified the unrest.

A major factor driving the insurgency is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The project, which includes the strategic Gwadar Port, is seen as an effort by Pakistan and China to exploit Balochistan's resources without benefiting the local population. Baloch insurgents have repeatedly attacked CPEC infrastructure and Chinese investments, viewing them as symbols of foreign occupation.

The BLA's warning after the hijacking—demanding that Pakistan and China leave Balochistan—reinforces this narrative.The crisis in Balochistan poses a significant challenge for Pakistan. A sustainable solution requires dialogue, economic inclusion, and an end to military repression.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | BHOPAL

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

Carney: From Central Banker to Prime Minister

Mark Carney's rise from a globally respected central banker to Canada's Prime Minister signals a dramatic shift in the country's political landscape. Among his most urgent tasks is repairing Canada's strained relationship with India, a key economic and geopolitical partner

FIRST Column

Mark Carney's transition from a globally acclaimed central banker to Canada's Prime Minister marks a profound shift in leadership dynamics. Renowned for his crisis management at the helm of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, he now faces the uncharted terrain of political leadership. Taking charge of a deeply divided political landscape, he must navigate a strained Indo-Canadian relationship and the resurgence of protectionism in a Trump-led America.

From Central Banker to Political Leader

While his economic acumen lends him credibility in managing fiscal policy and trade relations, his greatest challenges will be diplomatic-repairing strained ties with India, navigating a hostile White House, and restoring public trust in Canada's institutions. His leadership style, devoid of political baggage but rooted in financial pragmatism, will determine whether he succeeds in stabilising Canada's position on the global stage.

Repairing Indo-Canadian Relations

It is well known that former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alienated much of the Indian community in Canada by openly supporting Khalistani elements, severely straining relations with India. Carney has indicated that he favors stronger ties with India, a move that would benefit both nations. Unlike Trudeau, who pursued a self-serving political agenda at the cost of diplomatic relations, Carney must now leverage his skills and experience to mend fences with New Delhi.

KS TOMAR

One of Carney's most urgent foreign policy tasks will be repairing Canada's damaged relationship with India. Rebuilding trust through direct talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior officials-while avoiding public accusations that could further aggravate tensions-will be crucial.

Key measures include:

1.Addressing India's concerns about pro-Khalistan extremism operating from Canadian soil.

2.Strengthening counterterrorism collaboration with India.

3.Reviving discussions on the stalled Canada-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

4.Encouraging Canadian investments in India's technology and infrastructure sectors.

5.Attracting Indian investments into Canada's energy and AI industries.

6.Easing visa restrictions for Indian students and professionals to reinforce diaspora-driven relations.

Tackling Khalistani Extremism

Managing the presence of Khalistani elements in Canada remains a significant challenge. Trudeau's perceived leniency toward these extremists led to a diplomatic crisis, especially after the Nijjar controversy. If Carney aims to restore relations with India while maintaining domestic stability, he must strike a balance between national security and democratic freedoms.

Potential steps include:

1. Directing CSIS and the RCMP to closely monitor extremist groups.
2. Increasing surveillance on pro-Khalistan funding networks.
3. Implementing stricter regulations on events that glorify violence against India.
4. Enhancing intelligence-sharing with India's RAW and IB.
5. Considering the deportation of individuals involved in terrorist financing or inciting violence against India.
6. Establishing a bilateral security task force to monitor extremist activities.

Carney must also distinguish between moderate Sikhs and extremist Khalistanis, ensuring that law enforcement targets violent elements rather than peaceful Sikh advocacy groups. His approach must be security-driven rather than politically motivated-unlike Trudeau's strategy of appeasement.

> CARNEY MUST ALSO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MODERATE SIKHS AND EXTREMIST KHALISTANIS, ENSURING THAT LAW ENFORCEMENT TARGETS VIOLENT ELEMENTS RATHER THAN PEACEFUL SIKH GROUPS

Balancing Indo-Canadian Relations and Domestic Politics

Restoring trust with India while managing domestic political sensitivities will require a delicate balancing act. Carney's lack of political baggage allows him to take a fresh approach, while his global reputation ensures India takes his diplomatic overtures seriously. Leveraging economic incentives to reset relations with India could provide him with a major diplomatic victory early in his tenure. However, he will face opposition from pro-Khalistan groups in Canada, accusations of suppressing free speech and resistance from left-leaning Liberals who supported Trudeau's stance. If he implements a balanced policy-cracking down on extremists while protecting legitimate Sikh voices-he can repair Indo-Canadian ties without shaking domestic instability.

The Indian Diaspora's Influence

The Indian community in Canada, comprising approximately 1.86 million individuals according to the 2021 census, represents about 5.1 per cent of the national population. This demographic has significantly influenced Canada's multicultural landscape, particularly in urban centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, and Montreal.

Notable political figures from this community include:

Jagmeet Singh: Leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) since 2017 and the first person of Indian descent to lead a major federal party.

Harjit Singh Sajjan: MP for Vancouver South and former Minister of National Defense.

Anita Anand: Appointed Minister of National Defense in 2021.

Bardish Chagger: Former Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

Chandra Arya: MP for Nepean, Ontario, and advocate for economic development and immigrant integration.

Political Engagement and Diplomatic Tensions

The Indian community's active political participation underscores its commitment to Canada's democratic processes. However, relations between Canada and India deteriorated following the October 2024 murder of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia.

Trudeau accused the Indian government of orchestrating violence against dissidents in Canada, leading to reciprocal diplomatic expulsions and further straining bilateral ties. This crisis has raised concerns among the Indian diaspora, particularly regarding immigration, education, and economic exchanges. For Carney, engaging constructively with the Indian community is crucial. Addressing their concerns, fostering inclusive policies and working toward diplomatic reconciliation with India will be essential steps in strengthening Canada's social and economic fabric.

Domestic Political Challenges

Carney assumes office amid deepening political divides. The Liberal Party has suffered declining public confidence, particularly in Western Canada, where Trudeau's policies alienated oil-dependent provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan. Meanwhile, right-wing populism has gained traction, mirroring global trends.

While Carney's lack of electoral experience may be a vulnerability, his credibility as an economic strategist could help him regain voter trust.

Managing inflation, stabilising interest rates, and addressing affordability concerns will be immediate priorities. Gaining support from both progressive and conservative voters will be crucial for effective governance, while restoring confidence within his party and among centrist voters will determine his political longevity.

Conclusion

Carney's leadership will be defined by his ability to steer Canada through complex domestic and global challenges.

A strategic recalibration of ties with India could elevate his stature, but any misstep-particularly on the Khalistan issue-risks deepening tensions and undermining economic prospects in South Asia. India will also have to understand the priortise and compulsions of the new Canadian prime minister to reboot the relations

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

Ramza- a- d Navratri: A Shared Jour- ey of Self-Restrai- t a- d Purity

Ramzan and Navratri symbolise the essence of all that is good, pure, and noble in the two religions: Islam and Hinduism. The common message for devotees of these respective religions is to achieve excellence in behavior through introspection and self-restraint.

The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, once said, "There are limits to self-indulgence, none to self-restraint." Truly, self-restraint plays an important role in shaping human behavior in different societal and cultural settings. The entire concept of social control is based on the type, range, and depth of restraint exhibited in human behavior. More often than not, we see laws being violated, manipulated, and disobeyed because they are externally imposed. In contrast, by practicing self-restraint, we become the masters of our actions and, in turn, our destiny.

Ramzan, the ninth lunar month in the Islamic calendar, is a period of spiritual reflection and piety, observed through fasting from dawn to sunset and increased charitable deeds by Muslims worldwide.

The objective behind this month-long exercise is to cultivate self-control and self-restraint through fasting, with the goal of achieving excellence in behavior and guarding against evil. According to the Quran (Verse 2:183):

"O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you so that you may become righteous."

Ramzan is seen as a time for introspection and strengthening one's connection with God. One night during Ramzan, known as Laylat al-Qadr, is believed to be a night of exceptional blessings, during which the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. The first revelation of the Holy Quran took place on Laylat al-Qadr.

However, fasting does not mean abstaining only from food and water; it also necessarily includes refraining from all evil actions and thoughts. One must not indulge in falsehood, gossip, backbiting, or foul language while fasting.

Once, as Prophet Muhammad was passing through a street with his followers, he heard a woman shouting and abusing others. The Prophet asked, "Who is this woman? Is she a Muslim?" His followers replied, "She is a Muslim and is observing the fast." The Prophet then instructed his followers to offer dates to the woman to break her fast, explaining that by using vulgar language and expressing anger, she had rendered her fast meaningless.

In essence, a fasting person must exercise utmost control to eliminate even the slightest traces of waywardness in behavior and demeanor. The observer of a fast must ensure that their thoughts and deeds remain pure, noble, decent, and benevolent toward others, including all of humanity.

There are two types of sinners:

1. Fasiq-ul-Amal - One who commits sin while knowing it is wrong.

2. Fasiq-ul-Aqeeda - One who commits sin and does not believe it is wrong.

Fasting can refine and purify those in the first category. During Ramzan, believers are given the opportunity for repentance and forgiveness. If a person sincerely seeks pardon from the Lord for their misdeeds, the Lord listens to their prayers during this holy month.

The faithful are instructed to adopt taqwa (refraining from sin and guarding against evil). If those observing the fast do not adhere to this principle, their fast will not be accepted by Allah. As the Quran (79:40-41) states:

"As for him who fears to stand before his Lord and restrains himself from low desires, Paradise is surely the abode."

Fasting detoxifies the body when observed properly. Namaz (prayer), besides being an act of worship, is similar to yoga and meditation. Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Hazrat Fatima Zehra, highlighted the benefits of fasting during Ramzan, stating that one of its purposes is to help the rich understand the pangs of hunger experienced by the poor. For this reason, Zakaat (charitable almsgiving) is prescribed during this period.

TUALIA REHMAN

The Quran states:

"And spend in the way of Allah and cast not yourself to perdition with your own hand."

It further clarifies:

"He loves those who purify themselves."

Someone once asked Hazrat Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the Caliph of Islam, "How do we know that Allah has accepted our prayers during Ramzan?"

Hazrat Ali replied, "If, between the sighting of the moon at the beginning of Ramzan and the sighting of the moon for Eid, you notice a positive change in your behavior, your prayers have been accepted."

Similarly, in Hinduism, Chaitra Navratri is observed between April 2-11, while Sharad Navratri is celebrated in the autumn season, around October-November. According to the Shastras, devotees observing Navratri fasts must practice Brahmacharya (celibacy), as it helps in reducing negative qualities such as anger, pride, deceit, and greed.

It also aids in keeping and honoring different vows and commitments in life. Devotees observing the fast should also abstain from falsehood and refrain from using intoxicants like gutka, tobacco, and wine. Consumption of non-vegetarian meals is also prohibited during these periods.

Currently, the month-long Ramzan is being observed, and Chaitra Navratri will be celebrated from March 30 to April 7, 2025. From a cultural perspective, Delhi has a unique character of celebration, as people from all corners of the country reside here.

The great Urdu poet, Mirza Ghalib, beautifully captured the fervor of the holy month of Ramzan in Delhi in a letter to his close friend, Mir Mehdi Husain 'Majroh':

"How did you presume that during the month of Ramzan, I would be staying in Rampur? Although Nawab Sahab insisted that I stay in Rampur, tempting me with mangoes, I left and, by 'Chand Raat' (the night before Ramzan), reached Delhi, for Delhi is a place where people feel the pulse of absolute bliss.

"In Delhi, during Ramzan, I have three commitments: At dawn, I go to Masjid Hamid Ali Khan, at Kashmiri Gate, to listen to the soulful recitation of the Holy Quran by Hazrat Qari Jafar Ali Jarchavi; in the evening, I break my fast at Mehtab Bagh, near Jama Masjid; and at night, I perform Namaz-e-Isha at Jama Masjid. How mirthfully life is passing here!"

Ramzan and Navratri, two sacred observances in Islam and Hinduism, exemplify the virtues of self-restraint, introspection, and spiritual elevation. Both are deeply rooted in religious traditions and serve as periods of reflection, discipline, and devotion, guiding individuals toward moral and ethical excellence.

Spiritual fasting

Ramzan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is a time for fasting, prayer, and increased charitable acts. It is believed that during this holy month, the first revelation of the Quran was bestowed upon Prophet Mohammad on Laylat al-Qadr, a night of immense blessings.

Fasting during Ramzan is not merely about abstaining from food and drink but also about refraining from falsehood, anger, and immoral behavior. The objective is to cultivate 'taqwa'—a heightened sense of God-consciousness and righteousness. Acts of charity, such as 'Zakaat' (almsgiving), further strengthen the bond of empathy between the rich and the poor.

Similarly, Navratri, a Hindu festival observed twice a year, emphasises devotion, purity, and self-discipline. Devotees engage in fasting, prayer, and abstinence from material indulgences, aiming to purify the mind and body. Observing celibacy and refraining from falsehood, intoxicants, and non-vegetarian food are integral to this practice.

In a culturally diverse city like Delhi, these spiritual occasions are observed with great fervor, reflecting the city's unique ethos of religious harmony. Ultimately, both Ramzan and Navratri remind us that true devotion lies in self-restraint, moral conduct, and a compassionate heart.

(The author is a lawyer. Views expressed are personal)

India's fragile trade deal with the US

India is currently in a tight spot regarding its economic relations with the United States. In less than two months since the new US President took office, high-level Indian officials, led by the Prime Minister himself, have visited Washington, D.C. Last week, India's Commerce Minister was in Washington for discussions with the newly appointed US Trade Representative and Commerce Secretary. According to news reports, Piyush Goyal is expected to return to Washington towards the end of March. The reason? President Trump's simultaneous announcement, during Goyal's visit, of imposing reciprocal tariffs on all countries with high import duties, including India.

President Trump has consistently targeted India as a high-tariff nation since taking office. His public outbursts against various allies and friendly countries have become a near-constant spectacle, akin to a reality show streaming across the globe. Several world leaders who managed early meetings with Trump were relieved that they were spared the harsh treatment that the Ukrainian President faced in the Oval Office. Trump's confrontational style is now well known, and global leaders fear reputational damage from their bilateral conversations with him. He employs his blunt, undiplomatic rhetoric to put foreign leaders in a difficult position, compelling them to return with lucrative economic deals for the US

KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

It was no surprise, then, that after meeting India's Commerce Minister, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick stated, "We would like to focus on a bilateral conversation just between India and the United States-to bring down the tariff levels that India has, which protect some of its sectors." Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US last month, discussions on a bilateral trade agreement have been actively initiated, with expectations of finalisation by the end of the year. Intense consultations are underway in Delhi, with all relevant ministries contributing their recommendations.

One of India's key priorities is retaining control over the agricultural sector, which has significant domestic political implications. The US is pushing for greater access to the Indian agriculture market, while India seeks reciprocity without jeopardising its small farmers. American farmers, who are generally more prosperous and own larger farmlands, rely on advanced machinery to boost crop output. However, the US Commerce Secretary made it clear that access to India's agriculture market remains a top priority. He stated, "Maybe certain products have quotas. Maybe certain products have limits... And then we do the same thing on the other side and craft an agreement that makes sense for both of us. The Indian agriculture market has to open up. It can't just stay closed."

Meanwhile, back in India, the government is considering reducing import duties on certain products, including electronics. India currently imposes nearly 16.5 per cent import duties on several ICT hardware products, while the US maintains rates well below 1 per cent. Many experts believe that lowering duties on electronics could benefit India by encouraging US companies to shift their supply chains to the country. However, there seems to be some confusion over the definition of "US-manufactured" and "Made in the US" when determining tariff reductions. At present, many US technology companies do not manufacture in the US but operate their largest factories in China or Southeast Asia.

President Trump, meanwhile, is pressuring American companies to relocate their manufacturing bases back to the US, threatening consequences if they fail to do so. This move could further complicate the already fragile global supply chain. India is closely monitoring these developments and must remain agile in its decision-making.

Conclusion

India and the United States have shared a complex yet evolving economic relationship, marked by cooperation and contention. Over the years, India has worked towards strengthening trade ties with the US, which remains one of its largest trading partners. However, friction has persisted over issues such as tariffs, market access, and trade imbalances. With the new US administration taking a firm stance on protectionist policies, India faces increasing pressure to lower its trade barriers and open its markets to American goods, particularly in agriculture and technology. President Trump's aggressive trade policies, including reciprocal tariffs and demands for reduced Indian duties on US imports, have added new challenges to negotiations.

As India navigates these complex trade dynamics, it must strike a balance between fostering economic cooperation with the US and protecting its domestic industries, especially agriculture and manufacturing. While a bilateral trade deal could provide long-term benefits, hasty concessions could threaten small businesses and farmers. At the same time, global supply chain shifts present opportunities for India to attract investments from US firms. With careful negotiations and strategic decision-making, India can work towards a trade agreement that ensures mutual benefit while safeguarding its economic interests. The coming months will be crucial in shaping the future of India-US economic relations.

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

RBI to set up 'on Tap' cohort on climate change risks: Guv

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Reserve Bank will set up a dedicated 'on Tap' cohort on climate change risks and sustainable finance under its regulatory sandbox initiative, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said on Thursday.

The Reserve Bank has been encouraging and facilitating innovations through its Regulatory Sandbox and Hackathon initiatives in the fintech space.

"We propose to set up a dedicated 'on Tap' cohort on climate change risks and sustainable finance under RBI's Regulatory Sandbox initiative. We are also planning to conduct a special 'Greenathon' on climate change and related aspects," Malhotra said.

He was speaking on the Policy Seminar on Climate Change Risks and Finance organised by the Reserve Bank of India here.

The Governor said there are two dimensions to climate change-related risks that regulators, policymakers and practitioners have to be aware of – the first is facilitative involving capacity building, development of the ecosystem and financing of green and sustainable transition; and the second is the prudential aspect, which is related to risk management.

"While the role of the Central Banks in managing risks posed by climate change to the financial system is increasingly being recognised, their role in facilitating the financing of green and sustainable transition has been a matter of debate and has varying dimensions to it," he said.

Central banks in advanced economies have traditionally followed an asset-neutral approach.

Central banks in emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs), on the other hand, have adopted directed lending policies to channelise credit to certain sectors of their economies given their individual country circumstances and developmental objectives..

In the Indian context, the priority sector lending guidelines facilitate credit to be channelled to specific sectors including renewable energy.

"On the prudential aspect, there are several channels through which climate change risks impact the financial system. All the major types of financial risks - be it credit, market, or operational risk - are influenced by climate change," Malhotra said.

As a central bank, he said the RBI is mindful of its role in addressing and mitigating risks to the financial system from climate change.

"In this context, our endeavour has been to play the role of a facilitator – including supporting capacity building and fostering a conducive regulatory framework for promoting green and sustainable finance," he said.

The Governor further said one important aspect of green financing/lending for sustainable finance is the higher credit risk due to borrowers' use of new and emerging green technologies, which have relatively limited track record in terms of reliability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Regulated entities, therefore, need to develop suitable capacity and technical know-how to better appraise risks in financing projects which use such green technologies, he said. He emphasised that the impact of climate change risks is not limited to the financial system alone but extends to the real economy.

In Brief

Rupee surges 22 paise to settle at 87 against US dollar

The rupee surged 27 paise to settle at 87 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday following robust macroeconomic data and easing crude oil prices. Besides, recent weakness in the US dollar index also supported the local currency, forex dealers said. However, losses in domestic equities and unabated foreign capital outflows capped the sharp gain, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.13 and hit the intraday high of 86.94 against the greenback. The unit touched the day's low of 87.15 before ending the session at 87 (provisional), 22 paise higher from its previous closing level. In the previous session on Wednesday, the rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 87.22 against the US dollar. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee recovered on upbeat macroeconomic data and a soft US dollar. However, weak domestic markets capped sharp gains.

Paper & paperboard imports surge 20%: IPMA

Paper and paperboard imports into India jumped by 20 per cent to 1.76 million tonnes in the April-December period of 2024-25, according to the Indian Paper Manufacturers Association. In value terms, paper and paperboard imports surged to Rs 11,196 crore (USD 1.3 billion) - breaching Rs 10,000 crore for the first time in the nine-month period, the association said, adding that in volume terms the shipments are the highest for the nine months. "A significant contributor to this surge is the 36 per cent increase in imports from China and a 23 per cent increase from ASEAN in volume terms, exacerbating the challenges faced by Indian paper manufacturers," IPMA said. India remains the fastest-growing paper market in the world, yet the domestic manufacturing sector is struggling since the rising demand is being increasingly met by imports, IPMA President Pawan Agarwal said. "This paradox - where demand is growing while domestic manufacturing suffers - is a rare and alarming situation," he added. The situation is highly concerning for virgin fibre paperboard, one of the growth drivers for the industry, IPMA said.

Chile keen to enhance agri-cooperation with India

Chile has expressed a strong desire to enhance cooperation with India in the field of agriculture and allied sectors, according to the agriculture ministry. The first India-Chile Joint Working Group meeting on agriculture held in virtual mode on March 12 emphasised strengthening bilateral cooperation in agriculture and allied sectors. "Both sides discussed key issues related to market access, cooperation in horticulture, capacity building in the areas of extension, and research collaboration among other issues," an official statement said. Gabriel Layseca, Director of the Department of International Affairs at Chile's Bureau of Agricultural Studies and Policies (ODEPA), said, "Chile values its relationship with India and expressed a strong desire to enhance cooperation in the field of agriculture and allied sector". Both countries, with their rich experience in agriculture, have the potential to complement each other in boosting agricultural productivity, promoting rural development, and improving farmers' welfare, he said.

India to be 3rd largest economy by 2028, predicts Morgan Stanley

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will be the world's third-largest economy by 2028 as it becomes the world's most sought-after consumer market and gains share in global output, driven by macro stability influenced policy and better infrastructure, Morgan Stanley said.

From a USD 3.5 trillion economy in 2023, the Indian economy is projected to expand to USD 4.7 trillion in 2026, which will make it the fourth largest in the world behind the US, China and Germany.

In 2028, India will overtake Germany as its economy will expand to USD 5.7 trillion.

According to Morgan Stanley, India was the 12th largest economy in the world in 1990, slipped to 13th position in 2000 before rising to 9th rank in 2020 and 5th in 2023.

India's share in the world GDP is projected to rise from 3.5 per cent to 4.5 per cent in 2029.

It projects three scenarios for India's growth - Bear - where the economy expands to USD 6.6 trillion by 2035 from USD 3.65 trillion in 2025, Base - where it grows to USD 8.8 trillion and Bull - where the size balloons to USD 10.3 trillion.

It saw GDP per capita rising from USD 2,514 in 2025 to USD 4,247 in the Bear scenario in 2035, USD 5,683 under the Base scenario and USD 6,706 under the Bull scenario.

"India is likely gaining share in global output in the coming decades driven by strong foundational factors, including robust population growth, a functioning democracy, macro stability influenced policy, better infrastructure, a rising entrepreneurial class and improving social outcomes," it said in a report.

"The implication is that India will be the world's most sought-after consumer market, it will undergo a major energy transition, credit to GDP will rise and manufacturing could gain share in GDP."

Talking of present times, Morgan Stanley said the growth is likely recovering. "High-frequency indicators were mixed in recent weeks but are distinctly better than a couple of months ago.

Creators should take India story to world: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday urged the creative industry to take India's story to the world and contribute further to the economic growth.

He emphasised putting trust and authenticity at the centre of their work and taking responsibility and accountability for the output they generate.

Addressing an event, Goyal said that access to low-cost data has been one of the key pillars of this government's Digital India policy, making India the largest consumer of data globally.

"Our data costs are a fraction of what they would be in Europe, the US, or any other developed country. When we combine low-cost data with the high-quality talent that India possesses, we have a revolution awaiting us in the field of creativity and technology," he said.

He also underscored the vast opportunities in India's creative sector, which is rapidly evolving beyond traditional fields like film, drama, and theatre to encompass gaming, AI-driven content creation, and digital media.

Sensex falls on selling in realty and auto shares

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex reversed its early gains to close lower by 200 points on Thursday, marking its fifth straight session of losses due to selling in realty, IT and auto counters.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 200.85 points or 0.27 per cent to close at 73,828.91 with 22 of its constituents ending lower and eight with gains. The index opened higher and hit a high of 74,401.11 in the late morning session.

However, it failed to hold onto gains due to persistent selling in select bluechips and shed 259.17 points or 0.35 per cent to hit a low of 73,770.59 later.

The NSE Nifty fell 73.30 points or 0.33 per cent to settle at 22,397.20. In the session, the benchmark declined by 93.15 points or 0.41 per cent to hit an intraday low of 22,377.35.

Zomato, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Maruti Suzuki India, Adani Ports, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, UltraTech Cement and Infosys were the major losers among Sensex shares.

In contrast, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Tata Consultancy Services, PowerGrid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Sun Pharmaceuticals were the gainers.

"Shortened trading week and sell-off in the US short market are providing a hiccup to the global market. However, India is withstanding with resilience and healthy outperformance, by a narrow negative trend," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said, "On the weekly expiry day, markets remained range-bound and closed slightly lower. While positive global cues initially drove an uptick, selling pressure in heavyweight stocks across sectors pulled the Nifty into the red."

In broader markets, the BSE smallcap gauge fell 0.62 per cent, while midcap index declined 0.77 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, Realty, Auto, Consumer Discretionary, Metal, Services, Commodities, Consumer Durables, Teck, IT, Focussed IT, Energy were among the laggards.

Canada, EU swiftly retaliate against Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs

PNS ■ BRUSSELS

Major trade partners swiftly hit back at President Donald Trump's increased tariffs on aluminum and steel imports, imposing stiff new taxes on US products, from textiles and water heaters to beef and bourbon.

Canada, the largest supplier of steel and aluminum to the US, said on Wednesday it will place 25 per cent reciprocal tariffs on steel products and also raise taxes on a host of items: tools, computers and servers, display monitors, sports equipment and cast-iron products.

Across the Atlantic, the European Union (EU) will raise tariffs on American beef, poultry, bourbon and motorcycles, peanut butter and jeans.

Combined, the new tariffs will cost companies billions of dollars, and further escalate the uncertainty in two of the world's major trade partnerships. Companies will either take the losses and earn fewer profits, or, more likely, pass costs along to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Prices will go up, in Europe and the United States, and jobs are at stake, said European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

"We deeply regret this measure. Tariffs are taxes. They are bad for business, and even worse for consumers," von der Leyen said. The EU duties aim for pressure points in the US while minimising additional damage to Europe. EU officials have made clear that the tariffs -- taxes on imports -- are aimed at products made in Republican-held states, such as beef and poultry from Kansas and Nebraska and wood products from Alabama and Georgia. The tariffs will also hit blue states such as Illinois, the No. 1 US producer of soybeans, which are also on the list. Spirits producers have become collateral damage in the dispute over steel and aluminum.

Blackstone to buy 40 pc stake in Kolte-Patil Developers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global investment firm Blackstone will acquire a 40 per cent stake in Pune-based realty firm Kolte-Patil Developers Ltd for Rs 1,150 crore.

The investment firm will acquire a 14.3 per cent stake for Rs 417 crore through a preferential issue of equity shares and another 25.7 per cent stake from the promoters group for Rs 750 crore, according to an exchange filing.

Blackstone will launch an open offer to acquire an additional up to 26 per cent stake in the Kolte-Patil Developers Ltd.

In a regulatory filing on Thursday, Kolte-Patil Developers Ltd informed that the board has approved issuance by way of a preferential allotment on a private placement basis an aggregate of 1,26,75,685 equity shares of the company at Rs 329 per share, aggregating to Rs 417.03 crore to BREP Asia III India Holding Co VII Pte. Ltd.

That apart, Blackstone affiliated firm will acquire another 25.7 per cent from the promoters group. Blackstone will purchase 2,27,96,353 equity shares (being 25.7 per cent) from the sellers at Rs 329 apiece.

Gold reclaims all-time high level of Rs 89,450/10g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices climbed by Rs 600 to revisit the all-time high of Rs 89,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a firm global trend, according to local marketmen.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 88,850 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 600 to reclaim its all-time high level of Rs 89,050 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 88,450 per 10 grams.

On February 20, the yellow metal of 99.9 and 99.5 per cent purity inched up by Rs 50 to hit an all-time high of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams.

Silver prices also rallied by Rs 1,000 to hit nearly a five-month high of Rs 1,01,200 per kg. The white metal had finished at Rs 1,00,200 per kg in the previous market close.

Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold contracts for April delivery rallied by Rs 210 or 0.24 per cent to hit a record high of Rs 86,896 per 10 grams in the evening session.

"Gold prices surged to a new record high in the domestic market, while in the international market, spot gold rallied to near-record highs buoyed by safe-haven demand and cooler-than-expected US consumer inflation data, which supported the case for further Federal Reserve monetary easing this year," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

On the global front, spot gold rose by USD 11.67 or 0.40 per cent to USD 2,946.44 per ounce.

Traders are now looking forward to US macroeconomic data, including weekly jobless claims and PPI/Core PPI (Producer Price Index), for more cues on the overall inflation basket, Gandhi added.

'Women hold just 1 in 5 jobs in India's blue-collar workforce'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Women hold just one in five jobs in India's blue-collar workforce with harsh workplace challenges ranging from wage disparities to poor sanitation, a survey by job matching and hiring platform Indeed has shown.

The survey, which studied over 4,000 employers and employees across 14 industries in tier 1 and 2 cities, revealed that while 73 per cent of employers hired women for blue-collar roles in 2024, female participation remained stagnant at 20 per cent nationwide.

Blue-collar occupations are formally defined as those labour roles that primarily involve manual or physical work.

While industries like retail, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, construction and real estate, and travel and hospitality lead with average 30 per cent women's participation, telecommunications, BFSI, and IT/ITeS have below 10 per cent representation.

While more women are seeking blue-collar jobs primarily for financial independence, workplace realities remain harsh, the report said.

Over half of the surveyed women cite a lack of flexible shifts as a barrier. The nature of blue-collar jobs often demands strict shift timings, making it difficult for women to balance work and personal responsibilities.

A significant wage disparity exists in India's blue-collar sector, with 42 per cent of women believing they are underpaid compared to their male counterparts.

Additionally, these women face fewer opportunities for career advancement and promotions, further exacerbating the gender pay gap.

IMPORT OF VITAMIN FROM CHINA, EU, SWITZERLAND

DGTR recommends anti-dumping duty

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry's investigation arm DGTR has recommended anti-dumping duty of up to USD 20.87 per kilogram on import of a certain kind of vitamin, used for animal consumption, from China, the European Union and Switzerland for five years.

The Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) in its findings has concluded that imports of 'Vitamin A Palmitate' have significantly increased in absolute terms.

Due to the dumping, the performance of domestic industry in terms of profit, cash profits and ROCE (Return on Capital Employed) has been adversely affected.

"The authority recommends imposition of anti-dumping duty on the imports...for a period of five years," it said. The recommended duty ranges between USD 0.87-20.87 per kg.

The finance ministry will take the final decision to impose the duty.

Piramal Pharma Ltd had filed a petition before the DGTR for imposition of the duty on the imports.

Anti-dumping probes are conducted by countries to determine whether domestic industries have been hurt because of a surge in cheap imports.

As a counter measure, they impose these duties under the multilateral regime of the Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO).

The duty is aimed at ensuring fair trading practices and creating a level-playing field for domestic producers vis-a-vis foreign producers and exporters.

India has already imposed anti-dumping duty on several products to tackle cheap imports from various countries, including China.

In a separate notification, the DGTR has also recommended anti-dumping duty of up to USD 358 per tonne on 'Insoluble Sulphur' exported from China and Japan for five years.

The chemical is widely used in the manufacture of tyre, shoes, and all kinds of automobile rubber parts

The Pioneer
Vijayawada | Friday March 14, 2025

MAAHERU – THE SOULFUL LOVE ANTHEM FROM *INN GALIYON MEIN* HITS THE RIGHT CHORDS

As the highly anticipated socio-drama *Inn Galiyon Mein* nears its theatrical release, excitement among audiences continues to build. Adding to the film's growing musical charm, the makers have dropped another soulful track *Maaheru*, a soul-stirring love song that beautifully captures the essence of modern romance.

Sung by the soulful Javed Ali and the versatile Shalmali Kholgade, *Maaheru* features Vivaan and Avantika and paints a mesmerizing picture of new-age love. The song is beautifully composed by Saurabh Kalsi, with heartfelt lyrics penned by Yash Malviya and Saurabh Kalsi.

Javed Ali said, "This song is our heartfelt tribute to modern romance. *Maaheru* is about embracing love in all its forms. It's a melody that holds the promise of love and the beauty of every emotion."

Shalmali Kholgade added, "The first time I heard *Maaheru* I fell in love with the melody. The simple arrangement and heartfelt lyrics make the song enchanting. Every note and word is an invitation to feel deeply and love fearlessly. Singing this song has been a truly fulfilling feeling for me."

Directed by Avinash Das, Inn Galiyon Mein delves into themes of love, societal dynamics, and the unprecedented impact of social media in today's world. With the refreshing on-screen pairing of Avantika and Vivaan Shah, alongside the seasoned Jaaved Jaaferi, the trailer has heightened excitement for the film, promising a compelling and emotional journey.

Presented by Yadunath Films, *Inn Galiyon Mein* is produced by Vinod Yadav & Neeru Yadav, with co-production by Jannisar Hussain, Adarsh Saxena, Sanjeevv Gosswami and Alcor Productions.

Excitement builds for *Brahmastra: Part two*—Dev as Ranbir Kapoor shares major update

Brahmastra: Part One—Shiva, the first installment in the highly anticipated cinematic trilogy, made waves at the box office upon its release in 2022. The film, directed by Ayan Mukerji, introduced audiences to a thrilling new world inspired by Indian mythology, featuring powerful characters and captivating cosmic elements. Starring Ranbir Kapoor as Shiva and Alia Bhatt as his love interest, the movie became a massive success, leaving viewers eagerly awaiting the next chapter in the saga.

The film's conclusion set the stage for its sequel, *Brahmastra: Part Two—Dev*, with an exciting tease that promised to take the epic story to even greater heights. Since then, fans have been on tenterhooks, waiting for any updates on the highly anticipated follow-up.

In a recent interaction with the media during a meet-and-greet session in Mumbai, Ranbir Kapoor, who plays the central character Shiva, shared some exciting news regarding *Brahmastra 2*. He revealed that director Ayan Mukerji is set to begin the pre-production phase of the sequel once he wraps up his work on *War 2*. Kapoor explained that Mukerji has been nurturing the vision of the entire *Brahmastra* saga for a long time and *Part Two—Dev* is an integral part of his creative journey.

"He is currently busy with *War 2*, but once that film is completed, he will dive into the pre-production of *Brahmastra 2*," said Kapoor. "It is definitely happening," he reassured fans, adding that there will be interesting announcements coming soon regarding the sequel.

The confirmation of *Brahmastra 2's* progress has already sent fans into a frenzy, further heightening anticipation for what is sure to be another thrilling ride. While details about the sequel are still under wraps, fans are eagerly awaiting more information about the characters, plot, and the expanded cinematic universe.

The first film introduced viewers to Shiva, a young man with unique powers who embarks on a journey to discover the truth about his abilities and his connection to the larger cosmic forces. Alongside Kapoor and Bhatt, the film featured Amitabh Bachchan, Mouni Roy and Nagarjuna in pivotal roles, with their performances adding to the film's appeal.

With *Brahmastra: Part One—Shiva* marking the beginning of a larger, interconnected universe, *Brahmastra: Part Two—Dev* promises to delve deeper into this mythical world, offering a deeper exploration of characters and their destinies. The film will undoubtedly build on the success of its predecessor, and fans can expect more twists, larger-than-life visuals and an even grander narrative.

As the wait continues for updates and further announcements, one thing is certain: *Brahmastra: Part Two—Dev* is a highly anticipated continuation of one of Bollywood's most ambitious projects, and it looks set to be a game-changer in Indian cinema.

Neil Nitin Mukesh wishes 'warmth of togetherness' this Holi

As the festival of colors approaches, Bollywood actor Neil Nitin Mukesh shares a heartfelt message, reminding everyone of the deeper essence of Holi. The actor, known for his charismatic screen presence and warm personality, sees Holi as more than just a celebration of colors—it is a festival of love, hope, and new beginnings.

"Holi is a celebration of love, hope and new beginnings. Let's cherish the colors of life, the warmth of togetherness and the joy of the moment. May this festival bring endless laughter and beautiful memories. Wishing you a Holi filled with happiness and positivity!" he shares.

Big B confirms hosting *KBC 17*

Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan has confirmed that he will return as the host for the upcoming season of the popular game show, *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. This announcement comes after widespread rumors about his potential departure from the show. On March 12, the makers released a heartfelt video featuring Amitabh, where he bids an emotional farewell to the fans while confirming, "I will see you in the next season." In the video, Big B can be heard expressing his gratitude.

'My life has been made by the critics'

Raghav Juyal, widely recognised as the "King of Slow Motion," has carved a unique niche in the Indian entertainment industry with his innovative dance styles and charismatic screen presence. He first gained national attention as a contestant on *Dance India Dance 3* in 2012, where his distinctive slow-motion dance moves captivated audiences. Since then, Juyal has expanded his repertoire to include acting and television hosting, showcasing his versatility across various entertainment platforms. Juyal's transition to films took a defining turn with *Kill*, where he played the menacing antagonist, Fani. His compelling performance earned him critical acclaim and led to his nomination for 'Best Supporting Actor' at the Critics' Choice Awards India 2025. Reflecting on the impact of critical recognition on his career, Juyal shared, "My life has been made by the critics—my career shift happened because of the recognition I received from them, especially with *Kill*. It truly works for an actor when critics praise you because it also leads to more opportunities. It is incredibly difficult to change your image from something you're so well known for to something new—for both the audience and the industry to accept you as an actor. It took me five years to build this image."

Kabir Khan hints at possible collaboration with Vicky Kaushal

Filmmaker Kabir Khan, known for his successful collaborations with actress Katrina Kaif in films like *New York* and *Ek Tha Tiger*, has shared an exciting update about his future projects. Beyond their professional relationship, Kabir and Katrina share a close personal bond, and now there are speculations surrounding a potential collaboration between Kabir Khan and Katrina's husband, actor Vicky Kaushal. In a recent conversation, Kabir Khan addressed rumors about working with Vicky Kaushal. The filmmaker expressed a strong interest in collaborating with the talented actor, highlighting their close relationship that goes beyond professional ties. Speaking about Vicky, Kabir described him as one of the "finest actors" in the industry and referred to him as 'family'. He shared, "I'm extremely close to both Vicky and Katrina, so I would love to work with him." Despite the ongoing speculation, Kabir was quick to clarify that there were no concrete plans yet. "At the end of the day, we as directors and actors keep discussing ideas. There's nothing concrete right now that can make me say that yes, we're doing something together. But yes, I've been speaking to him," he said. Kabir also mentioned that he has been in discussions with several other actors, including Salman Khan and Kartik Aaryan, emphasising that ideating with talented individuals is part of his creative process. However, the director revealed that he is currently focused on developing a couple of ideas, enjoying the creative journey that comes with them.

While fans eagerly await news of Kabir Khan's next collaboration, it is clear that the filmmaker is exploring various avenues for future projects, with the possibility of working with Vicky Kaushal being an exciting prospect.

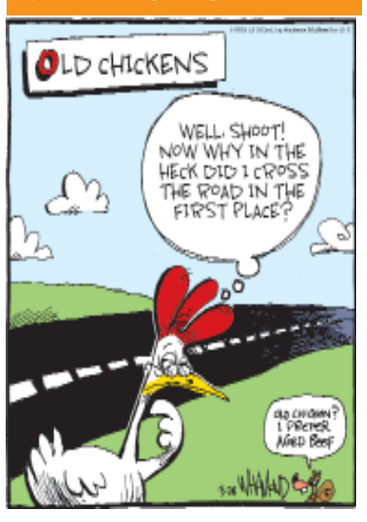
FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBES

GARFIELD

REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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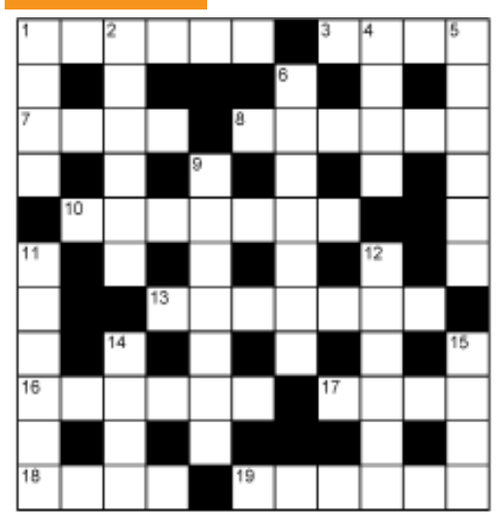
Rules

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

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Thief
3 Tidy your hair with this
7 Young woman
8 A dairy product
10 To turn round and round
13 Gleam
16 Truthful
17 Bitter-tasting
18 Thick cord
19 Defeated

DOWN

1 Great anger
2 A round wooden container with flat ends
4 Above
5 A light wind
6 Trembles with cold
9 Find north with this
11 Book writer
12 Nearly
14 Cut something with scissors
15 This metal goes rusty

SOLUTION

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APARNEET MANN'S ARTISTIC CALL TO RETHINK URBANISATION AND FEMININITY

Artist **Aparneet Mann**'s latest exhibition, *It's a Jungle Out There*, is a bold visual critique of urbanisation's impact on nature, using striking animal imagery to highlight ecological imbalance and displacement. In an exclusive conversation with ***The Pioneer***, Mann delves into her inspirations, the personal experiences shaping her art, and the urgent message she hopes to convey—encouraging viewers to reflect on the cost of unchecked development and the power of feminine energy in preserving nature

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Artist Aparneet Mann masterfully blends art with social commentary, using her canvas to challenge the unchecked expansion of urban spaces and the shifting role of femininity in modern society. Her latest exhibition, *It's a Jungle Out There*, visually explores the impact of urbanization through striking animal imagery, drawing attention to the ecological imbalance and loss of biodiversity that rapid development has caused. The exhibition focuses on displacement—both of wildlife and natural ecosystems—while highlighting the growing tension between human ambition and environmental responsibility.

Alongside this, Mann presents her Divine Feminine series, a collection that reimagines women as powerful, spiritual forces, free from traditional societal constraints. Through these works, she questions conventional narratives of femininity, portraying women not just as nurturers but as guardians of nature and change-makers in their own right.

In an exclusive conversation, Mann shares the inspirations behind her work, the personal experiences that have shaped her artistic journey and the messages she hopes to leave with her audience.

Mann's fascination with urbanisation and its impact on nature stems from her childhood experiences. "Extensive travel exposed me to different cultures and the drastic ecological changes that urbanisation was bringing about. My education at Shantiniketan, where nature was an integral part of artistic inspiration, reinforced my belief that the imbalance caused by urbanisation is both precarious and irreversible. Cities across continents are seeing a huge depletion of nature and its ecosystems, and my work reflects that reality."

Having lived in Chandigarh, Mann has witnessed firsthand the city's transformation. "Inspired by Le Corbusier's proto-brutalist architecture, I started a monochromatic series of paintings. One day, my ten-year-old son looked at one of the works and said it looked like an animal inside a shopping mall—exactly the emotion I wanted to evoke," she recalls. This sentiment gave rise to the title Tropical Mall, a series that encapsulates the contrast between nature and consumer-driven urban spaces.

A key focus of *It's a Jungle Out There* is displacement—both of animals and natural ecosystems. Mann predominantly portrays animals that have been forced out of their natural habitats. "Even domesticated animals in my work help emphasise the broader theme of dislocation," she explains.

She employs a vivid colour palette to reinforce this tension. "In Corbusier in the Wild, the architectural elements are painted in flat, bright, and abstract tones, almost like pop art. Juxtaposed against this is a leopard, rendered more lifelike. This stark contrast creates a dramatic effect, drawing the viewer's attention to the unsettling reality of nature being confined within an artificial world," she says.

Mann's work is deeply personal, influenced by her travels and observations of India's rapid urbanisation. She reflects on how modern aspirations—excess, consumerism and expansion—are reshaping landscapes. "I explore these ideas through the depleting fauna in my artworks. My work also speaks to my feminine instinct for conservation, making the female form a symbol of nature's strength," she shares.

When asked about what she hopes viewers will take away from the exhibition, she says, "I hope people connect with my aspirations in a larger, more holistic way. Art is a reflection of a society's choices. It should evoke an emotion that makes people pause and think."

Mann believes that art has the power to raise awareness about social and environmental issues. "Art doesn't necessarily bring change overnight, but it sparks conversations, and conversations lead to awareness," she says. However, she acknowledges the challenge of striking the right balance in her work. "The biggest challenge is presenting ecological destruction in a way that engages the viewer without being overly descriptive or patronising."

In addition to her focus on urbanization, Mann's Divine Feminine series examines the conservation of nature in response to its reckless depletion. "Femininity, in my works, is not viewed in reference to masculinity—it stands as a force of its own," she asserts.

The modern woman, according to Mann, often has to take on masculine roles to provide for her family. Through her artwork, she aims to depict feminine energy as a force of protection and resilience. "For example, in some pieces, I paint the female form in monochromatic tones against a colorful backdrop, symbolizing her constancy amidst change," she explains.

She also integrates symbolism to reinforce her themes. "A recurring motif in my work is landscapes of fossils—they act as a time capsule, merging elements of the past, present and future on a single canvas," she notes.

With the world evolving rapidly, Mann believes an artist's role is to remain true to their sensibilities. "If an artist is honest about their perspective, their work will naturally address the issues that matter most to them," she says.

Through *It's a Jungle Out There* and *Divine Feminine*, Mann continues to provoke thought and spark dialogue about humanity's relationship with nature, consumerism, and gender roles. Her work serves as both a critique and a call for introspection, urging viewers to consider the consequences of urbanization and the power of femininity as a universal force.

Expert insights on women's health

PNS|HYDERABAD

Shreya Iyer, the primary wellness expert and habit coach at Alyve Health's holistic approach to health and wellness, is incredibly motivating and empowers people to realise their best potential! She has a strong background in psychology and has developed a deep comprehension of the complex relationships that exist between the human mind and body. Her specialty in sport and exercise science has further enhanced her knowledge and allowed her to create creative approaches that mix mental health and physical activity in a balanced manner.

In addition, her yoga and personal training certifications highlight her dedication to a holistic approach to health that skillfully combines the spiritual, emotional and physiological facets of the human experience. She has established a transforming environment where people may find their inner strength, develop resilience and flourish in all facets of life thanks to her special fusion of scientific knowledge, compassionate understanding and mindful practice. Her work has been crucial in encouraging others to prioritise self-care and holistic living and her work with a variety of populations—from elite athletes to those seeking holistic wellness—has influenced her expertise.

She has become a brilliant example of the power of holistic wellness by exemplifying the ideal fusion of art and science. She has illuminated a path that inspires us to cultivate our whole selves—body, mind and spirit—and realise our greatest potential. Take a look at our most recent interview with her!

How do women's physical and mental health interact?

For all people, regardless of gender, mental and physical health are inextricably linked. But for women, more layers are created by things like hormonal changes, cultural expectations and particular physiological experiences. Interactions between stress, sleep, diet and emotional health affect the body and the mind. Hormonal imbalances, for instance, can impact mood and cognition and long-term stress can impact menstrual cycles. Women can prioritise holistic wellbeing over treating mental and physical health as distinct things by being aware of this junction, which enables them to make well-informed decisions about their health.

What are the primary obstacles to women's wellbeing maintenance?

Misinformation is a major problem; while there is a wealth of health advice, not all of it is reliable or relevant. In addition, many women find it difficult to put their health first, frequently putting the needs of others—particularly mothers and caregivers—first. Stress and a lack of time for self-care result from the combined weight of household and work obligations. Furthermore, women find it more difficult to concentrate on what actually improves their health rather than pursuing unachievable aspirations because the media promotes unrealistic body and wellness standards.

What particular obstacles do women athletes have to overcome?

What women "can" or "should" do has long been determined by societal prejudices, but our physical potential is limitless! Consider Tia-Clair Toomey, who is among the world's most fit women, even after giving birth. However, obstacles still exist for female athletes, such as unequal compensation, lesser viewership, sponsorship discrepancies and lack of representation in policymaking. Despite biological distinctions, sports science has historically been male-centric as well, applying findings on men to women. The good news? Women athletes are tearing down boundaries on a daily basis and the landscape is changing!

In what ways may psychology improve women's athletic performance?

Performance can be made or broken by mental toughness. Being an athlete myself, I have direct experience with how decision-making, discipline, motivation and emotional control affect performance. Psychology, however, assists athletes in navigating self-worth beyond performance—your accomplishments do not determine your worth. Training in mental skills promotes self-assurance, fortitude and concentration, enabling women to overcome both personal and societal constraints and realise their full potential.

What are some ways to motivate more women to participate in competitive sports?

Normalising women in sports at all levels is crucial. Participation can be encouraged by equitable media coverage and compensation, long-term career paths and positive role models from early life. The way we raise our kids matters. Let girls select between cars, dolls and footballs. It's also critical to change how female athletes are portrayed in the media. Young girls think they can succeed in athletics when they witness women doing so, and representation is important.

How can women develop habits that boost their self-esteem?

We frequently assume that confidence and action follow motivation, yet the opposite is true! Momentum generated by action subsequently feeds confidence and motivation. Automating activities to function even when willpower is weak is the goal of habit formation. Women can increase their self-efficacy by employing techniques including implementation intentions (deciding when and where to act), environmental design (making habits easier) and habit stacking (combining a new habit with an old one). Over time, little, regular acts add up to give one a sense of mastery and self-assurance.

How can workplaces help women develop strong leadership habits?

Culture, culture, culture. Workplaces need to create spaces where women feel empowered, heard, and appreciated. Leadership is about having a say in decisions, not simply about titles. Leadership development initiatives, equitable promotions and equal participation. Is there an implicit culture that encourages women to assume leadership positions that go beyond a title? Are their opinions actually taken into account? Organisations that ensure women's viewpoints are incorporated into decision-making processes, in addition to providing them with a place at the table, foster true leadership.

YOUR LIFESTYLE, YOUR RISK

How everyday habits harm kidney health

Kidney diseases have been steadily rising across our country and the numbers are only getting worse. While most people associate kidney damage with conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, lifestyle choices are emerging as an equally dangerous culprit. Unhealthy eating habits, obesity and physical inactivity are placing an increasing burden on the kidneys, yet many remain unaware of the risks until significant damage has already occurred.

Obesity is one of the biggest yet often overlooked contributors to kidney disease. Excess weight forces the kidneys to work harder, filtering more blood than they should. Over time, this extra workload leads to kidney strain and increases the risk of long-term damage. Fat cells do more than just store energy—they release inflammatory substances that weaken blood vessels, including those inside the kidneys. This leads to protein leakage in urine, a warning sign of kidney trouble that often goes unnoticed.

Dr. Rajesh Aggarwal, Director, Nephrology & Kidney Transplant, Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, Delhi, explains that many people fail to connect obesity with kidney damage. She points out that fat deposits do not just impact the heart and liver, but also harm kidney function by promoting silent inflammation. This hidden inflammation, which does not always show immediate symptoms, plays a major role in the progression of kidney disease.

Unhealthy dietary habits are another factor causing significant kidney damage. Excessive consumption of processed foods, salty snacks and sugary beverages has put a strain on kidney health like never before. The kidneys regulate sodium levels in the body and when too much salt is consumed, they struggle to maintain balance. This leads to high blood pressure, one of the most common causes of kidney failure. The damage does not stop there. High sugar intake, especially from carbonated drinks and packaged foods, contributes to obesity and diabetes, both of which weaken kidney function.

Dr. Rajesh, warns that phosphates in processed foods are an underestimated threat to kidney health. Many people assume kidney damage is only linked to sugar or protein consumption, but excessive phosphates found in sodas and packaged meals quietly accumulate in kidney tissues. Over time, these deposits impair the kidneys' ability to filter waste effectively, leading to gradual but irreversible damage.

A sedentary lifestyle further amplifies the risk of kidney disease. Physical activity is essential for maintaining healthy blood circulation and metabolic balance. When exercise is neglected, obesity, high blood pressure, and insulin resistance develop, all of which place tremendous strain on the kidneys. Many assume that kidney disease presents obvious symptoms in its early stages, but the reality is different. The kidneys compensate for damage for a long time before any warning signs appear. By the time someone experiences fatigue, swelling, or noticeable changes in urination, a significant portion of kidney function may already be lost.

Dr. Dinesh Kumar, Lead Consultant Nephrologist, SPARSH Hospital Infantry Road, Bangalore, emphasises the importance of early screenings, even for those who feel healthy. Many people do not associate lifestyle choices with kidney damage until symptoms become severe. However, by that point, treatment options become limited. Regular health checkups and kidney function tests can detect issues long before they become serious.

The rise in kidney diseases caused by lifestyle factors makes it more important than ever to adopt healthier habits. A well-balanced diet, proper hydration, and regular exercise are essential for maintaining kidney function. Reducing salt intake, avoiding sugary beverages, and maintaining a healthy weight can significantly lower the risk of kidney complications. Small but consistent changes in daily habits can go a long way in preventing irreversible kidney damage. The kidneys perform the vital function of filtering toxins and excess fluids from the body, yet they are often taken for granted. Paying attention to their health today can prevent major complications in the future.

BREAKING BARRIERS IN AVIATION LAW

Neha Singh entered the Trilegal office, where discussions on aviation regulations, aircraft financing, and cross-border transactions shaped the day. Women's Day was not just another workday but a moment to reflect on her journey in the legal profession.Years ago, she stepped into corporate law, focusing on an industry where legal frameworks continuously evolved. Aviation transactions required precision—negotiating aircraft leases, advising on regulatory compliance and structuring cross-border investments. With experience spanning financing, asset management, and policy advisory, she played a role in shaping key transactions in the sector. At Trilegal, she continues to work on acquisitions, financing, and regulatory compliance, including policy advocacy for the more nascent intiatives and business movements. Beyond transactions, she has mentored legal professionals, advocating for stronger representation of women in aviation law.Looking at her colleagues, she acknowledged the collective effort behind every deal, contract, and legal framework shaping aviation."To every woman in law and aviation, expertise and perseverance create opportunities. Keep moving forward."

I am comfortable in top order, feels natural to me: KL Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

KL Rahul has been performing consistently irrespective of his position in the batting order but given a choice, the stylish keeper-batter would be "most comfortable" occupying one of the top-order slots.

Rahul, who usually bat No 5, was pushed down a position lower in the Champions Trophy, and made 174 runs in five innings in Dubai. Rahul's success was a reflection of his preparedness for this new challenge and dedication to keep working on his game.

"I have grown up playing in the top order. From my first competitive match in Mangalore at the age of 11 to my early days playing for India, and for most of my career, I have been a top-order batter. It is the position I am most comfortable in and the one that feels most natural to me," Rahul said.

"That said, when you play a team sport, you don't always get to choose what you want. You have to be flexible and willing to adapt to the team's needs. Over the years, I've learned to embrace that and give my best in whichever role I'm assigned," he added during an interaction with JioHotstar.

Rahul, who has led Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants in the past, has reportedly turned down an opportunity to captain his new franchise Delhi Capitals in the upcoming IPL.

Speaking about the IPL auction, he said it can significantly impact a player's future in the game.

"Having been a captain for the last three seasons, I have been actively involved in the process of building a team. I understand the kind of pressure franchises face when assembling a squad.

"But from a player's perspective, it's even tougher because your career is at stake. The auction can shape a player's future or present unexpected challenges.

"I was definitely nervous, even a little anxious (during the last auction). But at the same time, I knew this was the right step for my career. There was excitement too, though it didn't last very long because reality sets in quickly."

If not Rahul then spin-bowling all-rounder Axar Patel is the favourite to lead

DC this season. After a forgettable season at LSG last year, Rahul is looking for a fresh start at the Capitals.

"I'm really happy to be joining Delhi Capitals. Parth Jindal, the team's owner, is a close friend, and we have spent a lot of time outside of cricket discussing various things.

"I know how passionate he is about the sport, and I'm thrilled to be a part of this team. We have a strong squad, and I'm looking forward to the season ahead. This will be a new experience for me joining a new franchise, possibly my fourth or fifth team in the IPL. I feel both excited and a little nervous.

"Every time you step into a new team environment, a lot of thoughts cross your mind - how the players will be, how the owners run the team, how the fans will respond all of that. So, it's a mix of emotions," he added.

DC have never won the IPL, but Rahul is optimistic of putting up a good show with a "solid team."

"Looking at the squad and how the management has built the team, it looks like a well-balanced side with most areas covered. There's a great combination of experienced players and young talent, and I'm excited to play alongside some incredibly skilled youngsters and learn from them as well.

"With players like Mitchell Starc, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, many of whom I have played with before, we have a solid squad. I can't wait for the IPL to begin."

Rahul, who has maintained an impressive average in recent times, remained not out on a fluent 34 in the final of the Champions Trophy against New Zealand on Sunday, also reflected on his journey in international cricket.

"The journey has been filled with challenges there have been highs and lows, and I have experienced everything an athlete possibly can. But looking back, it has been a beautiful ride, and I wouldn't want it any other way.

"Now, I am excited for the next 10 years of my career. I want to build on everything I have learned in my first decade, apply that experience, and continue evolving. My focus is on improving every day, growing as a player, and winning more matches for my team," he added.

Sport ministry updates draft NCAAFS, invites suggestions from general public

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Uniform penalties, amnesty scheme, and a whistle-blower mechanism are some of the key features of the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) which was released for public consultation by the Sports Ministry on Thursday. The Draft NCAAFS 2025, which is a significant update to the existing framework, invites suggestions and comments from the general public till March 31.

"The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has put in the public domain the Draft National Code Against Age Fraud in Sports (NCAAFS) 2025 for inviting comments/suggestions from the general public and stakeholders, as part of the consultation process," the ministry said in a statement. This addresses age fraud comprehensively, aiming to protect genuine athletes and uphold the integrity of sports competitions nationwide.

"This revision has been undertaken almost after 15 years marking a significant update to the existing framework to ensure fair competition, ethical governance, and enhanced accountability in Indian sports." The Draft Bill has 10 salient features, including Mandatory Age Verification & Digital Locking, Medical Examination for Age Discrepancies, Two-Tier Appellate Mechanism, Dedicated National Database and QR-Enabled ID Cards.

According to Draft NCAAFS, "Athletes found guilty on the first violation will face a two-year ban from all competitions, along with forfeiture of any titles or medals won. "A second violation will result in a lifetime ban and initiation of legal proceedings under the penal code. Coaches and other officials found guilty will also face suspension and debarment from their roles," the statement said. As part of the amnesty scheme, a one-time amnesty window of six months will be provided, "allowing athletes to voluntarily declare their correct age without penalties."

"Athletes who participate in this amnesty program will undergo a performance review and subsequently be reassigned to the appropriate age group," the ministry said. There will also be a Whistle-blower Mechanism where "a secure and confidential platform will be created for stakeholders to report cases of age fraud anonymously. Additionally, a reward system will be implemented to encourage and incentivise whistle-blowers to come forward with genuine reports."

There will also be a Two-tier Appellate Mechanism to "handle disputes related to age determination" and a "centralised digital portal linked with the National Sports Repository System (NSRS) will be established to securely store all age verification data of athletes."

The draft also says "athletes will receive ID cards embedded with QR codes" after verification. "These ID cards will be made accessible digitally through the DigiLocker platform and must be presented mandatorily for participation in all sporting events," the statement said.

"A robust monitoring framework will be established to ensure effective implementation of the Code." As per the draft Bill, "all athletes must submit three mandatory documents during the registration process. Upon verification, the athlete's age will be securely recorded in a centralised digital database, permanently locking their verified age to prevent any future manipulations." Also for cases involving age discrepancies, "medical examinations will utilise the TW3 method, MRI scans, and general physical and dental examination.

"Further, AI-based bone assessments to accurately determine an athlete's age will be done in pilot phase. Any disputes arising from these examinations may be appealed through designated appellate medical panel for further review."

DC ready for WPL final, says Rodrigues

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals vice-captain Jemimah Rodrigues emphasised that the long gap between the last league match and the Women's Premier League final has revitalised the team, and said it will work to her side's "advantage" in the title clash.

The Capitals have qualified for their third straight WPL final after Mumbai Indians were defeated by Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last league match at Mumbai on March 11.

The Capitals had finished their league engagements on March 7 with a defeat against Gujarat Giants. Hence, they had to wait until the match between RCB and MI to decide the group leaders.

"It's (the gap) actually working for our team. We've had a lot of team bonding sessions and at the same time, this WPL was a bit hectic for us. We did play back-to-back games, we traveled and we played too," Rodrigues said in a virtual press meet on Thursday. Rodrigues said the DC have had good training sessions in the last six days, and that will stand her team in good stead.

"I think getting this break is, honestly, how I look at it and I think how the team is looking at it, that it's working to our advantage," she said.

The Capitals will meet the winner of the Eliminator between Mumbai and Gujarat Giants in the title clash on March 15. "So I think sometimes it's nice to have this break and yes, you know, we're ready for the finals. They are looking forward to it. We're prepared well. You know, like the other two years, this year has not been like the smoothest sailing for us.

"But like I said in one of the interviews that this team just doesn't know how to give up and we're going to come back stronger this year," she noted.

However, the WPL draw meant that the Capitals advanced to the final without having played a single league match at the Brabourne Stadium

Rodrigues did not read too much into that. "The thing is that everyone in our team has played on these pitches (in Mumbai). Everyone's pretty familiar with the conditions and the pitches.

"And like I said, we've been having good practice sessions on these off days, which is preparing us well enough to adjust to the conditions. "The Mumbai pitch is a batter's dream. The outfield's fast. So yeah, I mean, we are really looking forward to it and so are our bowlers. They've come up with their plans," she said.

Rodrigues said the experience of skipper Meg Lanning will help DC in landing their maiden WPL title after defeats in the last two editions.

"I think Meg is someone who wants to win, who wants to win every game. The thing I love about Meg, and this is something that I would like to add in myself also. She's calm but aggressive at the same time. And I think as a leader, that's a very, very crucial quality to have.

"She told me last year that as a captain, it's very important that I set the tone for the team. If I stay calm and because everyone's looking up to me and if I am calm, I know the team is calm." Shafali Verma made a bright return to her run-making ways after a slew of disappointing moments last year, where she was also dropped from the Indian team.

Rodrigues patted the opener for keeping her composure during tough times.

"Shafali is such an inspiration in the way she's come back. The kind of strike-rate and the kind of impact she's been having for the team. I think it just shows her character," she said. Shafali has made 300 runs from eight WPL 2025 matches with four fifties and made those runs at a strike-rate of 157.

"But to be dropped and to come back the way she did, I think hats off to her. I can't wait to see her. I'm sure she'll be back soon in the Indian team too," said Rodrigues. Veteran pacer Shikha Pandey has also contributed heavily to DC's win, taking 11 wickets from eight matches at an acceptable economy rate of 7.01.

In fact, she is currently holding the fifth place in the wicket-taker's list, and Rodrigues lauded Pandey for continuing to churn out impressive performances. "She's always bowled those crucial overs, always nailed her yorkers, always been so crucial in DC winning. She wants the tougher overs.

Toto Wolff denies rumours of signing Verstappen for 2026

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Melbourne

Mercedes team principal and chief executive Toto Wolff has denied rumors on the eve of the Australian Grand Prix weekend that he's still seeking to sign reigning F1 world champion Max Verstappen for 2026.

Mercedes, which has a new driver lineup this year that sees rookie prospect Andrea Kimi Antonelli join George Russell, is hoping to emerge from its recent lean spell in F1 that has seen it score just five wins from the last three seasons, four of which came in 2024.

But while Verstappen was reportedly on Mercedes' shopping list last year as a top-gun replacement for its then-outgoing star Lewis Hamilton, Silver Arrows' team boss Wolff says extending Russell's contract beyond 2025 is the priority. "I think we've said it pretty clearly last year, and (Verstappen) said the same, we need to concentrate on our driver line-up, we need to do (the best with) that we have," Wolff said Thursday in Melbourne.

"I don't flirt outside if I'm in a good relationship, and that is true for this year, too. So, at the moment that is not on any, let's say, radar and I don't plan to shift my concentration away from these guys and make sure that George has a contract (extension) pretty soon and we agree on the final things."

Plenty of decisions to comeWolff's future driver lineup came into focus this week after McLaren extended its deal with Australian Oscar Piastri, which puts him out of reach during the sport's next big expected grid shuffle in 2027.

"We have had a chat (with Russell) a few weeks ago about what the right timing would be to liaise, and I'm naively or not someone that sticks to what he says," Wolff said.

"These three (including reserve driver Valtteri Bottas) are the combination that I want to go forward with Mercedes, and I have no reasons to doubt that. We're going to find some time, I guess, before the summer."

Russell, a long-time Mercedes protégé who joined the works team in 2022 fresh from three years at Williams, is keen to stay in silver.

"We've had such a long-term relationship, and there's so much trust," Russell said. "We are focused on getting Mercedes back on top and trying to win races, and championships, and to be honest in this sport, the performance speaks."

Hamilton: 'most exciting period of my life'Hamilton made it clear in Melbourne that he's moved on, following his record-breaking stint with Mercedes, with the seven-time F1 world champion enjoying life at Ferrari as he prepares for his maiden start with the Scuderia.

Satwik-Chirag pair enters All England second round

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Birmingham

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the men's doubles competition at the All England Championships, registering a straight-game victory over Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard.

Returning to the court after his father's loss last month, Satwik, along with his doubles partner Chirag, put on an impressive display, securing a 21-17, 21-15 win in just 40 minutes late Wednesday.

Moments after sealing the victory, Satwik raised his finger to the sky, his gaze fixed skyward perhaps reaching out to his father, searching for him in the beyond.

"It's tough, but that's how life is," said Satwik. "It wasn't expected."

The 24-year-old from Amalapuram expressed his gratitude to his partner for being there during this challenging time. "During hard times he (Shetty) came to my home town, we practised there a bit, and for that I'm thankful. He was there during my injury; his parents came down and sssour coach also came down to my home town.

> During hard times he (Shetty) came to my home town, we practised there a bit, and for that I'm thankful. He was there during my injury
>
> — SATWIKSAIRAJ RANKIREDDY, PLAYER

"My father always wanted to bring them there."

Reflecting on the sudden turn of events in the past fortnight, Chirag said: "Credit to Satwik, what he's gone through and how he's come back and decided to play here, nobody could do that.

"Kudos to him, he's a strong-willed person to come out of it, and keep it all aside, because that's what his dad would've wanted him to do. I'm proud to be his partner."

The duo, seeded 7th, will next take on China's Hao Nan Xie and Wei Han Zeng in the round of 16 on Thursday.

In other matches involving Indian players, Lakshya Sen will face Indonesia's Jonatan Christie, while Malvika Bansod takes on Japan's third seed Akane Yamaguchi, a two-time World Champion.

Malvika had earlier stunned Singapore's Yeo Jia Min in her debut match at the prestigious tournament.

World No. 9 Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, who reached back-to-back semifinals at this event, will meet the eighth-seeded Korean pair of Hye Jeong Kim and Hee Yong Kong.

Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde will square off against the fifth-seeded Chinese duo of Yan Zhe Feng and Ya Xin Wei.

Special Olympics Games: India win five medals on Day 2

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India secured two gold, two silver, and one bronze medal across two sporting disciplines to extend their medal tally to nine on the second day of the Special Olympics World Winter Games in Turin, Italy. Snowboarding, which brought India four medals on the opening day of the tournament, added two more accolades to the tally. Bharti (division F25) clinched a gold medal in the Novice Slalom Final, while Harshita Thakur (division F26) secured a bronze in the same event. This marked Bharti's second gold medal in the tournament, while Harshita had previously won a silver on the inaugural day. The Indian contingent also made its mark in Alpine Skiing, securing one gold and two silver medals in the discipline.

Real Madrid thrashes Atletico Madrid in Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Real Madrid beat Atletico Madrid in a Champions League penalty shootout again to keep its title defense alive Wednesday and advance to the quarterfinals.

Defender Antonio Rüdiger scored the decisive spot-kick in a 4-2 shootout win after two Atletico players missed. Marco Llorente's shot struck the bar after Julián Álvarez's score despite slipping was disallowed on video review because he touched the ball twice.

Madrid also beat Atletico in a shootout to win the 2016 final part of a streak of eliminating its city rival in the knockout rounds for four straight years. That hard-luck run started with the 2014 final when Atletico gave up an equalising goal in stoppage time.

Madrid moves on to the quarterfinals to face Arsenal, which also advanced Wednesday along with Aston Villa and Borussia Dortmund. The quarterfinals lineup was completed with Madrid's win in a tense derby that had ended 2-2 on aggregate score.

Atletico led 1-0 after 90 minutes and extra time in a typically tenacious performance at its Metropolitano Stadium to cancel out Madrid's 2-1 advantage from the first leg last week.

"When you get knocked out, it is not easy to digest," Atletico coach Diego Simeone said, "but I go out with a feeling of peace." Two key incidents defined regulation time. Atletico Madrid scored within 30 seconds and Real Madrid missed a penalty in the 70th minute.

Atletico took the lead with its first attack when England midfielder Conor Gallagher pounced on the ball from close range when a cross by Rodrigo De Paul was deflected into the goalmouth.

Madrid star Vinícius Júnior blazed a penalty kick high over the Atletico goal when he could have sent the 15-time champion through. He was substituted in extra time for his teenage fellow Brazilian, Endrick. Kylian Mbappé and Jude Bellingham stepped up to score Madrid's first two spot-kicks, and Fede Valverde also scored before Lucas Vazquez's kick was saved by Jan Oblak.

It was more relaxed in London, where Arsenal rested some regulars in a 2-2 draw with PSV Eindhoven to run up a 9-3 aggregate score.

Aston Villa also had a stress-free evening at home to ensure England has two teams in the quarterfinals, one night after Premier League leader Liverpool was beaten at Anfield by Paris Saint-Germain in a shootout. Villa won 3-0 against Club Brugge, which played with 10 men from the 17th, after a 3-1 win in Belgium last week. Brugge defender Kyriani Sabbe was sent off for pulling back Marcus Rashford when running clear on goal.

Substitute Marco Asensio, on loan at Villa from PSG, scored twice in the second half to ensure his temporary club will meet his parent club next.

Borussia Dortmund rallied with two second-half goals to win 2-1 at Lille and advance 3-2 on aggregate. The beaten finalist last season now faces Barcelona.

Quarterfinals draw

The quarterfinals pairings are: Arsenal vs Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain vs. Aston Villa, Barcelona vs. Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich vs. Inter Milan

First-leg games are on April 8-9 and return games are one week later.

England's unexpected challenge

There's only one former European champion from England left in the Champions League. Villa's unbeaten home record has driven its run to the quarterfinal, with wins against Bayern, Bologna, Celtic and now Brugge.

Liverpool's exit to PSG followed Manchester City being pushed out of the knockout playoffs last month by Real Madrid. Without the Champions League winners in 2019 and 2023, respectively, England's challenge halved to just two.

Villa's 1982 European Cup title is perhaps a less-remembered one in the competition's 70-year history. Arsenal's only time in the final was a loss to Barcelona in 2006.

Villa manager Unai Emery now goes back to Paris where his two seasons as coach there until 2018 seemed to be unsatisfactory for both parties.

The Pioneer
Vijayawada | Friday March 14, 2025

COURT: STATE VS A NOBODY KEEPS YOU HOOKED IN THE SECOND HALF

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Actor Nani is busy with his own films, yet he continues to produce small-scale projects, encouraging fresh talent. His latest production, *Court: State vs A Nobody*, directed by debutant Ram Jagadeesh, is set to hit the screens on March 14. This courtroom drama features Priyadarshi in the lead role, with Rohini, Sai Kumar and Sivaji playing key roles. Prashanti Tipirneni has produced the film alongside Nani. Here's how it fares.

STORY

Set in 2013 in Visakhapatnam, the story follows Chandu (Harsh Roshan), a young man juggling part-time jobs to support himself. His father, a watchman, urges him to attend college, but Chandu refuses. Jabili (Sridevi Apalla), a 17-year-old student from a respected family, lost her father and now lives with her mother (Rohini), grandfather (Subhalekha Sudhakar) and uncle Mangapathi (Sivaji).

Mangapathi is strict—especially with the girls in his family. He disapproves of them wearing sleeveless dresses and even talking to boys at school or college. When Jabili randomly calls Chandu as a prank, the two eventually develop feelings for each other. But when Mangapathi learns they were seen together, he decides to frame Chandu with the help of the local police and a powerful lawyer (Harsha Vardhan). A POCSO case is filed against Chandu, leading to his immediate arrest.

As the case strengthens under Mangapathi's influence, it seems certain that Chandu will face severe punishment. At this point, Chandu's friends turn to lawyer Surya Teja (Priyadarshi), who works under senior advocate Mohan Rao (Sai Kumar). Surya Teja takes up the case, determined to prove Chandu's innocence. The rest of the film revolves around how he fights the legal battle.

ANALYSIS

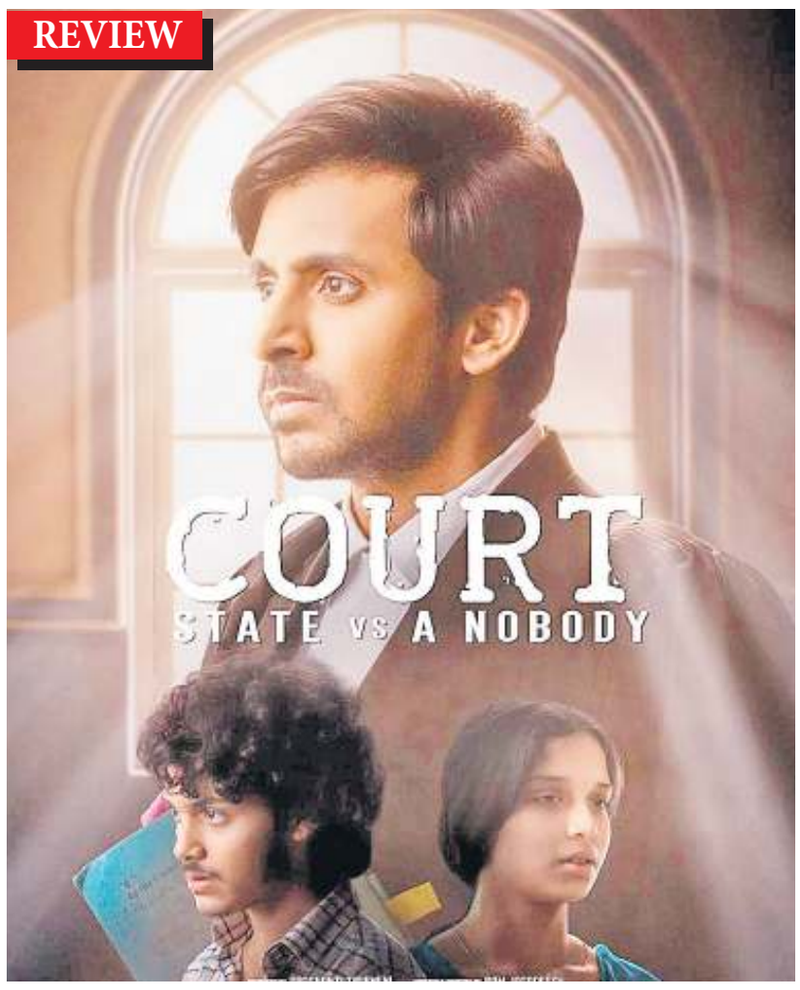
Courtroom dramas have been explored in Indian cinema, but films specifically addressing the POCSO Act are rare. Notable exceptions include Tamil film Sembi starring Kovai Sarala and Hindi film *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kafi Hai* starring Manoj Bajpayee.

Director Ram Jagadeesh attempts a fresh take on the subject, focusing on the misuse of the POCSO Act. Before the film's release, he claimed to have conducted extensive research on courts, police procedures and legal acts. While some parts of the movie are well-executed and engaging, others feel generic. The first half, which delves into teenage romance, is dull and drags on unnecessarily. The narrative picks up only in the second half, making it a film of two halves.

Though the director researched courtroom proceedings, the inclusion of comedic moments in such a serious subject feels misplaced. Certain scenes between Harsha Vardhan and Priyadarshi are presented as comic relief but weaken the impact of the trial. The character of Sai Kumar is introduced as a great lawyer, but it is unclear why he initially dismisses Surya Teja (Priyadarshi) as unimportant. Later, he suddenly recognises Surya Teja's legal potential and goes to his house to encourage him. Another inconsistency arises when Sai Kumar's character claims there is no hope for Chandu's case, only for his assistant Surya Teja to take it up and find a way to argue it successfully. The film fails to fully utilise Sai Kumar's talent, reducing his role significantly.

Priyadarshi is introduced in a lighthearted manner, but as the story progresses, he becomes more serious. However, certain courtroom scenes, like him narrating how his mentor (Sai Kumar) would question a witness, feel forced and disrupt the tension. The second half, however, offers some gripping courtroom moments. In the climax, Priyadarshi's character delivers a message about the importance of legal awareness, particularly regarding the POCSO Act and its misuse.

Had Sai Kumar taken on the primary courtroom arguments instead of Priyadarshi, the film could have been elevated to another level, thanks to his commanding voice and presence.



PERFORMANCES

Sivaji delivers a standout performance as Mangapathi, breaking away from his usual comedic and supporting roles. His portrayal of a manipulative and controlling guardian is natural and convincing, making this a career-defining role for him.

Priyadarshi gives a subtle performance but could have been more intense in the courtroom sequences, where Harsha Vardhan occasionally overshadows him. Rohini has limited screen time but delivers a heartfelt performance. Sridevi Apalla and Harsh Roshan fit well into their teenage roles. Sai Kumar, a seasoned performer, handles his role effortlessly, but the screenplay doesn't give him enough scope. Subhalekha Sudhakar and other supporting actors deliver competent performances.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The cinematography by Dinesh Purushothaman is solid, capturing the courtroom drama effectively. The dialogues are well-written, adding depth to the legal arguments. However, Vijai Bulganin's music is average and fails to make a lasting impact.

VERDICT

Court: State vs A Nobody is a courtroom drama that takes too long to become engaging. The first half is tedious, weighed down by an unnecessary focus on teenage romance, while the second half delivers some compelling courtroom sequences. Sivaji's performance is a major highlight, and the film effectively raises awareness about the POCSO Act's misuse. As a producer, Nani remains on the safer side, as the film has already been sold to Netflix, as revealed in the opening credits.

Cast: Priyadarshi, Sivaji, Harsh Roshan, Sridevi Apalla, Sai Kumar, Harsha Vardhan, Rohini, Subhalekha Sudhakar, Rajasekhar Aningi, Surabhi Prabhavathi and others

Music Director: Vijai Bulganin

Cinematographer: Dinesh Purushothaman

Producer: Prashanti Tipirneni

Director: Ram Jagadeesh

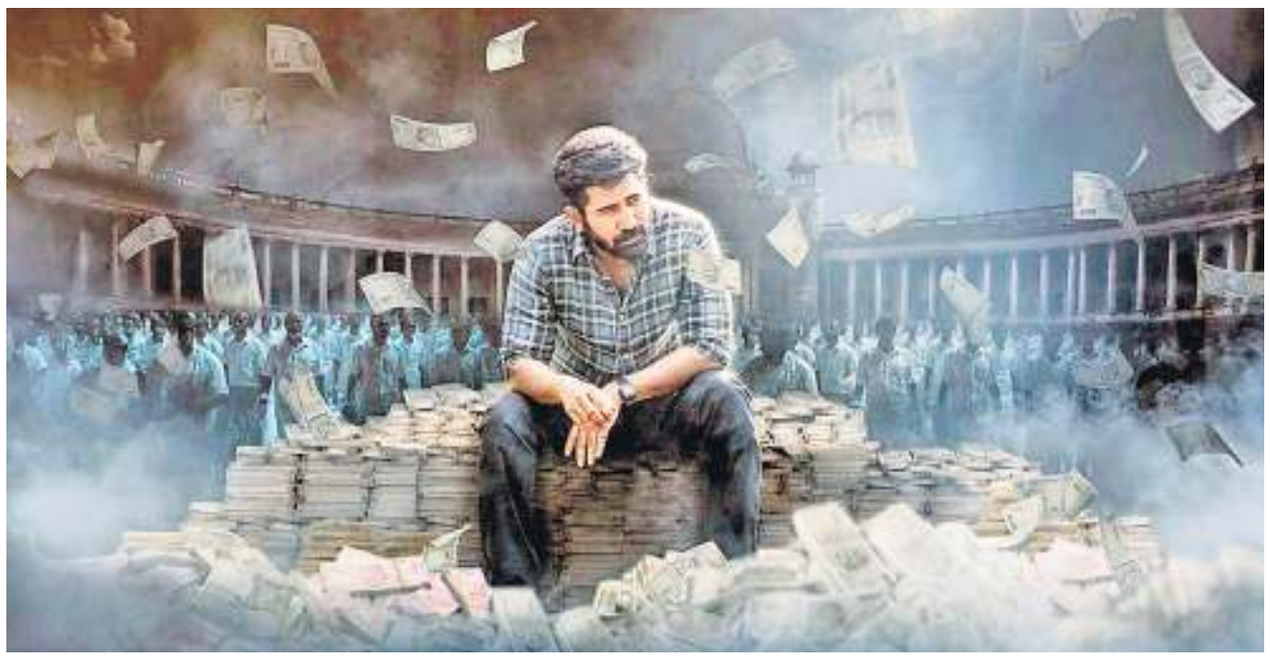
Rating: 2.5/5

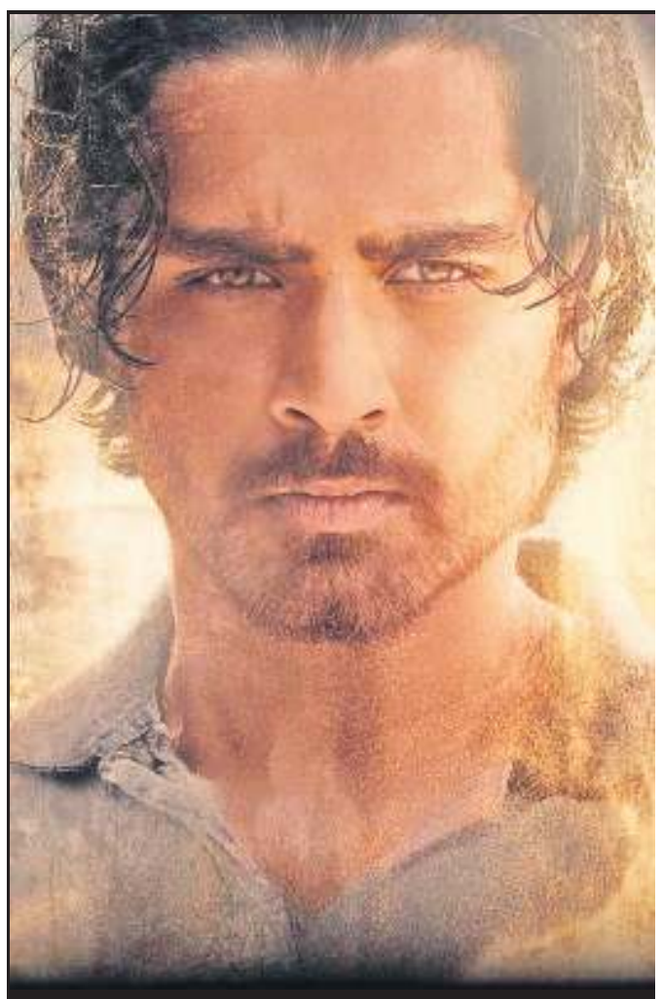
VIJAY ANTONY'S *BHADRAKAALI* TEASER HINTS AT A HIGH-STAKES THRILLER

Vijay Antony's 25th film, *Bhadrakaali*, directed by Arun Prabu, has finally released its teaser. The film initially ran into controversy over its title when Vijay Antony planned to name it Parasakthi. However, since actor Sivakarthikeyan was also working on a film with the same title, the issue was later resolved. Now, the film is titled Shakti Thirumagan in Tamil and *Bhadrakaali* in Telugu.

Director Arun Prabu, known for his thought-provoking films like *Aruvi* and *Vaazhl*, brings another unique and compelling story to the screen. Produced by Vijay Antony Film Corporation, the film is presented by Meera Vijay Antony.

Vijay Antony plays Kittu, a man with multiple identities—he's a gangster, a hustler, and a trickster, with a dark past tied to a Rs 190 crore scam. The teaser raises intriguing questions: Who is Kittu really? What is his ultimate goal? The mystery surrounding his character is sure to keep audiences hooked as they wait for further revelations. Vijay Antony is also composing the film's background score.





Another year, another *Champion* tease – but when will it release?

Swapna Cinemas, owned by Swapna Dutt and Priyanka Dutt, announced a film titled *Champion* starring Roshan, son of veteran actor Srikanth, a few years ago. However, updates about the film surface only on Roshan's birthday. Every year, the makers release a glimpse of the actor from the film, but nothing more.

Directed by Pradeep Advaitham, the film's cast and other details remain undisclosed. Mickey J Mayer is composing the music. On the occasion of Roshan's birthday on Thursday, the makers released a teaser-like promo, revealing that the story is a period drama set before Independence with a football backdrop. The makers have promised to reveal more details soon. The film's title, *Champion*, was first announced on Roshan's birthday in 2023. On his birthday last year, they unveiled his first look, and this year, they released a teaser. Given the slow pace of updates, the film might not be completed this year either. A source speculates that fans may have to wait until Roshan's next birthday for a more substantial update.

Roshan made his debut as a lead actor in Pellisandadi, directed by Gowri Ronanki, under the supervision of K. Raghavendra Rao, with Sreeleela as the female lead. Following that, he signed the pan-India film *Vrushabha*, in which he shares screen space with Malayalam superstar Mohanlal.

Shilpa Shirodkar returns to Telugu cinema after 30 years with *Jatadhara*

Sudheer Babu is playing the lead role in *Jatadhara*, a pan-India film releasing in multiple languages. Sonakshi Sinha has been cast as the female lead, and now, another addition to the ensemble is veteran Bollywood actress Shilpa Shirodkar. After her latest appearance on *Bigg Boss 18*, she is making a comeback to acting.

Shilpa, known for her performances in *Gopi Kishan, Aankhen, Khuda Gawah, Kishen Kanhaiya* and *Bhrashtachar*, has made a mark in Hindi and Marathi cinema. Now, she is set to return to Telugu films with *Jatadhara*, a supernatural mystery thriller.

Her first look from the film has been unveiled. Interestingly, her only previous Telugu film was *Brahma*, released back in 1992. After more than three decades, she is once again part of a Telugu project.

Sudheer Babu's character in *Jatadhara* is deeply connected to the supernatural elements of the story. His look from the film, featuring a Trishul and a strong connection to Lord Shiva, was revealed earlier and received significant attention. This film also marks the first on-screen collaboration between Shilpa Shirodkar and Sonakshi Sinha.

Directed by Venkat Kalyan, *Jatadhara* promises a gripping blend of mystery and supernatural elements.

Yash's *Toxic* brings hollywood action expertise with JJ Perry

Following the massive success of *KGF*, actor Yash has teamed up with director Geetu Mohandas for the upcoming film *Toxic*, which is currently being shot at a brisk pace. The makers have now brought in renowned Hollywood action director JJ Perry to choreograph the action sequences for the film.

In an Instagram post, Perry expressed his excitement about working with Yash, stating, "Had a great run in India, got to work with a lot of my dear friends from all over Europe. Can't wait for everybody to see this one. It's a banger! So proud of what we did." In response, Yash replied, "My friend, working with you was straight-up, raw power."

Beyond bringing in international technicians, *Toxic* is making history as the first South Indian film to be shot separately in both English and Kannada. Alongside these versions, it will also release in Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam and Hindi.

The film is jointly produced by Venkat K Narayana and Yash under KVN Productions and Monster Mind Creations.