

The Pioneer

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Global leaders descend on Delhi for Raisina Dialogue

INDIA, NEW ZEALAND ANNOUNCE RESUMPTION OF FTA TALKS



'If you have guts, come on stage,' Anasuya's bold response to HECKLER



QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

Harish Rao should tell whether it is family life if you do it, and adultery when it is done by others. When his uncle KCR speaks he is a moralist! If others speak the same thing, are they abusive? KCR holds the patent for vulgar language. Harish Rao, if you speak about morals it is like demons quoting the Vedas. There is no need to talk about Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's words. Revanth is a leader heading a people's government to ensure the welfare of the people. Harish Rao should look back before speaking about others. Then you will understand what you have done.



- Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, Bhongir Cong MP

DON'T MISS...

'Face SSC exams with confidence'

Minister for BC Welfare S Savitha encouraged SSC students to approach their examinations with confidence and strive for first-class results. She extended her best wishes to Class 10 students from BC hostels and other schools. In a statement on Sunday, Minister Savitha advised students to appear for their Class 10 examinations without pressure or fear. The SSC exams are set to commence across the state from Monday. She expressed hope that students from BC hostels and MJP schools would perform well and make their parents and teachers...

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'Will kick anyone who talks about caste'

In strong remarks against caste-based politics, Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said that nobody should be discriminated over caste, religion, language or sex. "Jo karega jaat ki baat, usko kaske marunga laot (I will kick hard anyone who talks about caste)," the senior BJP leader said, while addressing the convocation ceremony of Central India Group of Institutions in Nagpur on Saturday. Gadkari, 67, said he believes no person is big because of his caste, religion, language or creed but he is big...

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'AI has potential to enable collusion'

Artificial intelligence is a driving force in modern markets that also has the potential to enable collusion, including algorithmic discrimination under the garb of dynamic pricing, CCI chief Ravneet Kaur said on Sunday. She also emphasised the need to adopt a forward-looking approach as well as trust-based regulations. Delivering the special address at the 10th National Conference on Economics of Competition Law in the national capital, Kaur said Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a driving force in...

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New Zealand beat Pak by 9 wickets

A new era for Pakistan white ball cricket got off to a rough start on Sunday with a nine wicket loss to New Zealand in the first of five Twenty20 internationals. First time captain Salman Ali Agha-led a new look team into the match which followed Pakistan's poor performance at home in the 50-overs Champions Trophy and began its buildup to the 2026 T20 World Cup. The Pakistan batting crumbled against the New Zealand pace attack and the tourists were all out for 91 in 18.4 overs, its fifth-lowest total...

-SPORTS

Drone empanelment in tune with AP's agro-climatic needs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The drone empanelment process in Andhra Pradesh has been meticulously designed to match the State's agro-climatic requirements, ensuring that only suitable and DGCA-compliant drones are deployed for agricultural use, official sources clarified.

Sources said "Every state must assess drones based on their specific agricultural conditions. Andhra Pradesh has ensured that only drones meeting technical and environmental criteria are empanelled, ensuring cost-effective and efficient services for farmers."

In collaboration with Acharya NG Ranga Agricultural University (ANGRAU), which holds India's first agricultural Remote Pilot Training Organization (RPTO), the State government has developed crop-specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) tailored to the agro-climatic zones of the state. These SOPs guide the evaluation of drones to ensure optimal pesticide spraying efficiency while minimizing environmental impact.

Sources pointed out that the Department of Agriculture took a structured approach by constituting a technical testing committee, which assessed DGCA-certified drones for their suitability in Andhra Pradesh's farming conditions.

Continued on Page 2



"Andhra Pradesh's model is now being looked at as a benchmark for other states seeking to develop a scientific and policy-driven approach to agricultural drone deployment. By integrating regulatory compliance, technical validation, and cost-effectiveness, the initiative is set to redefine modern farming practices."

CM's TOWERING TRIBUTE TO AMARAJEEVI

58-ft statue in Amaravati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A towering tribute to Potti Sriramulu is set to rise in Amaravati, with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu announcing a 58-foot statue in honour of the freedom fighter's 58-day hunger strike that led to the creation of Andhra State. The statue, along with a memorial, will be completed before his next birth anniversary.

To preserve his legacy, Potti Sriramulu's ancestral house in Padamatipalli will be transformed into a museum. Additionally, a modern health centre and a high school building will be constructed in the village. Responding to the long-pending requests of locals, the Chief Minister also assured the construction of a bridge over the Buckingham Canal.

Addressing a gathering at Undavalli during the birth anniversary celebrations on Sunday, Naidu paid floral tributes to Potti Sriramulu, describing him as a rare soul whose sacrifice reshaped Indian history.

"Many are born on this earth, but only a few leave an indelible mark. As long as Telugu history exists, Potti Sriramulu's name will be remembered. His ultimate sacrifice paved the way for the formation of linguistic states in India," the Chief Minister said.

Born on March 16, 1901, in Madras, Potti Sriramulu's family hailed from Nellore. A firm believer in linguistic identity, he championed the demand for a separate Telugu-speaking state, undeterred by initial indifference from both the people and the government. His 58-day hunger strike ended in his martyrdom on December 15, 1952, sparking a mass movement that forced then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to announce the creation of Andhra State within days. The formal declaration came on March 25, 1953, and the state was officially carved out on October 1, 1953.

Andhra Pradesh, which later merged with Telangana, was bifurcated again in 2014. "We have honoured his sacrifice by commemorating December 15 as his martyrdom day," Naidu said, stressing that Potti Sriramulu's legacy must be preserved for future generations.

Continued on Page 2



Naidu paid floral tributes to Potti Sriramulu, describing him as a rare soul whose sacrifice reshaped Indian history. "Many are born on this earth, but only a few leave an indelible mark. As long as Telugu history exists, Sriramulu's name will be remembered," he said

SSC exams from today; free RTC bus travel for students

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Education Minister Nara Lokesh extended his best wishes to students appearing for the Class 10 examinations beginning on March 17. He encouraged them to stay confident and strive for excellence, advising them to arrive at exam centres on time and manage their time effectively to reduce stress.

Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, in a message on 'X', said, "Best wishes to all young friends appearing for their 10th class exams! Exams are a key milestone in your academic journey. Stay focused, work hard, and manage your time wisely."

Continued on Page 2



CRDA, HUDCO enter into Rs 11K cr loan deal over Amaravati works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh's Capital Region Development Authority and HUDCO inked a Rs 11,000 crore loan agreement on Sunday for the construction of the greenfield capital city, Amaravati, Government sources said.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at his residence in Undavalli of Guntur district. "HUDCO and CRDA agreed in the presence of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu... As per this deal, HUDCO will extend a loan of Rs 11,000 crore for the capital construction," said a press release.

A Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) board meeting held in Mumbai on January 22 had given a green signal for the loan.

Municipal Minister P Narayana, HUDCO CMD Sanjay Kulshrestha and other officials were present during the signing of the agreement.

Earlier in the week, Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister P Narayana reaffirmed that the capital city would be developed on 5,000 acres at an estimated cost of Rs 64,000 crore. He said tenders worth Rs 50,000 crore had been invited for various works in the capital region.

He reiterated that the land for the capital city was acquired under the land pooling scheme. Spread over 217 square kilometres, the city will be developed to international standards. "The burden of constructing the capital will not fall on the people," he assured.

The Minister emphasised that public funds collected through taxes would not be used for the project. Instead, the government would finance the construction through loans from HUDCO, the World Bank, and ADB. He described the project as self-financed and well-planned.

DEMOLITION OF KASINAYANA JYOTHI KSHETRAM



Sanctity of temples compromised amid ideological rift in NDA: YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP has criticised the coalition government over the demolition of Kasinayana Jyothi Kshetram and the conflicting responses from its partners, arguing that the sanctity of holy shrines is being compromised amid ideological confusion.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, former TTD chairman Bhumana Karunakara Reddy pointed out that while Nara Lokesh issued an apology following public outrage, Forest Minister Pawan Kalyan, who has vowed to uphold Sanatana Dharma, has remained silent.

Continued on Page 2



Dastagiri's wife alleges attack on her

PNS ■ KADAPA

Shabana, the wife of Dastagiri, who turned approver in the YS Vivekananda Reddy murder case, has alleged that two YSRCP women activists barged into her house and attacked her on Saturday night.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, Shabana said she had visited Malayala village in Thonduru mandal, Pulivendula constituency, to meet her relatives on Saturday evening.

Continued on Page 2

RISE OF PAWAN KALYAN

A political boon or a looming challenge for TDP?

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As Andhra Pradesh's political landscape undergoes a dramatic transformation, Deputy Chief Minister and Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief Pawan Kalyan is emerging as a force to reckon with. His growing influence within the TDP-led alliance is raising eyebrows, with some viewing his ascent as a double-edged sword for the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). While Pawan Kalyan has firmly reiterated his commitment to the alliance, political analysts believe his support is more strategic than sentimental.

Within TDP circles, unease is growing over the possibility that Pawan Kalyan could realign his political trajectory if circumstances demand. Observers speculate that should the alliance falter on governance or policy fronts, he may distance himself, citing the public interest as justification. Such a shift would not only bolster his credibility but could also elevate the JSP as a formidable alternative in the state's evolving political landscape.

Adding another layer of complexity is Pawan Kalyan's perceived proximity to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This relationship amplifies both his leverage and unpredictability, making his next moves a subject of keen speculation. With JSP and TDP drawing from overlapping voter bases, Pawan Kalyan's growing clout could erode TDP's traditional support, disrupting the delicate power balance in Andhra Pradesh.

Political strategists warn that the TDP must anticipate the long-term ramifications of its alliance with Pawan Kalyan.

Continued on Page 2



Pawan turned Jana Sena into 'Andhra Communal Party': YS Sharmila

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

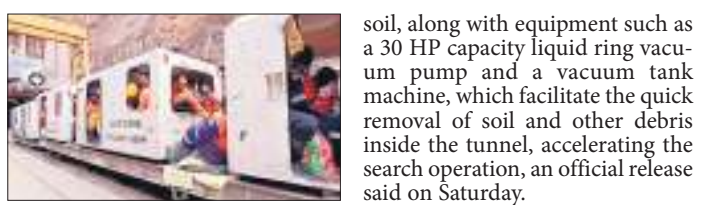
Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president YS Sharmila on Sunday accused Pawan Kalyan of turning his Jana Sena party into an "Andhra Communal Party".

The APCC president noted that while the actor-politician once claimed Jana Sena was founded for the people, he has allegedly turned it into an 'agenda serving a single religion'.

"Jana Sena has been turned into an Andhra Communal Party. It is unfortunate that a party, initially touted as one for the people, has ended up serving the agenda of a particular religion," she claimed in a release. Her comments come in the wake of Pawan Kalyan's recent Jana Sena Formation Day speech, in which he waded into several contentious national issues, including 'pseudo-secularism', delimitation, Tamil Nadu's language policy dispute with the Centre, and the north-south divide.

TELANGANA TUNNEL COLLAPSE

Search ops underway to locate seven missing persons



PNS ■ NAGARKURNOOL

The search operation to locate seven persons trapped inside the partially collapsed Srisailem Left Bank Canal (SLBC) since February 22 gathered pace with teams and equipment going inside the tunnel on Sunday, official sources said.

An autonomous hydraulic-powered robot is being used to remove soil, along with equipment such as a 30 HP capacity liquid ring vacuum pump and a vacuum tank machine, which facilitate the quick removal of soil and other debris inside the tunnel, accelerating the search operation, an official release said on Saturday.

Approximately 620 cubic meters of soil and muck can be removed from the tunnel per hour using a conveyor belt, it added.

Teams from the Army, National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force, human remains detection dogs (HRDD), state-run miner Singareni Collieries, a Hyderabad-based robotics company, and other agencies have been actively involved in the mission.

Embrace life instead of fretting over death: PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Death is inevitable and what truly matters is how life is lived, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said in a podcast with Lex Fridman released on Sunday.

Modi said one must embrace life instead of fretting over death.

Asked about whether he fears death, PM Modi said, "We know for a fact that life itself is a whispered promise of death and yet life is also destined to flourish."

"So again, in the dance of life and death, only death is certain, so why fear what is certain? That is why you must embrace life instead of fretting over death. That is how life will evolve and flourish, for it is uncertain."

PM Modi urged people not to waste time worrying but to channel their energy into enriching their lives and contributing positively to the world. The prime minister stressed that since life is uncertain, every moment should be spent with purpose, learning and making a difference.

"You must commit to enriching, refining and elevating your life so you can live fully and with a purpose before death comes knocking... you must let go of the fear of death."

"After all, death is inevitable and there is no use worrying about when it will arrive. It will arrive when it is meant to," he said.

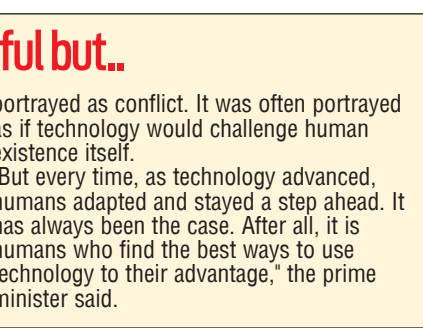


AI is powerful but..

Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday asserted that while artificial intelligence is powerful, it may never be able to match the depth of human imagination, and no matter what the world does with AI, it will remain incomplete without India.

"It is true that in every era, a competitive atmosphere between technology and humanity was created. At times, it was even portrayed as conflict. It was often portrayed as if technology would challenge human existence itself."

"But every time, as technology advanced, humans adapted and stayed a step ahead. It has always been the case. After all, it is humans who find the best ways to use technology to their advantage," the prime minister said.



Monday Mirchi

RAMAKRISHNA RAO'S BUDGET MARATHON NEARS THE FINISH LINE

Finance Secretary K Ramakrishna Rao has the rare distinction of preparing eleven Budgets for Telangana, a feat that no one else in the state bureaucracy or country can claim. Yours truly has always kept track of how he outdid himself year after year, setting his own records. But now, the streak may finally come to an end. With his retirement set for later this year, this could very well be his last Budget. For the uninitiated, Ramakrishna Rao took charge as Finance Secretary on February 29, 2016. Since then, governments have changed, leaders have come and gone, but when it came to drafting the Budget, no one knew the system better than him. Through revenue booms and crises like Covid and demonetisation, through election years and welfare spurges, he has been the man behind the numbers. Now, the question remains - will he truly hang up his boots post-retirement, or will there be a new role waiting for him? Because let's be honest, if there's one person who understands Telangana's finances inside out, it's him.

CMO OR CPRO? BABUS WHISPER ABOUT PRIORITIES

The corridors of power are abuzz with murmurs about the Telangana Chief Minister's Office (CMO) being more preoccupied with tracking negative news than focusing on governance and policy-making. The frustration isn't just limited to casual chatter - bureaucrats are beginning to voice their exhaustion, albeit in hushed tones. Senior Principal Secretary, in a moment of candid exasperation, quipped, "I have held several significant posts in my career, but never have I been forced to check newspaper clippings from some remote corner of the state." The sentiment resonates with many in the administration, as some bureaucrats privately admit they are growing weary of this over-vigilance. The whispers are getting louder - where exactly does governance end and damage control begin? There's a well-defined hierarchy in place, but the way things are going, it almost feels like the Chief Minister himself is being asked why a road wasn't cleaned on a particular day. For now, the bureaucratic grapevine is alive with the debate - is the CMO functioning as the Chief Minister's Office or as an extension of the Chief Public Relations Office?

KRISHNA BHASKAR'S WORLD BANK FELLOWSHIP - CONGRESS SETS A NEW TREND
By CM Bhatti Vikramarka's Officer on Special Duty (OSD) and Telangana Transco

CMD, IAS Krishna Bhaskar, has earned a prestigious spot in the World Bank Fellowship, making Telangana proud. The buzz isn't just about the achievement—he's the only officer from India to be selected this year, and that's no small feat. The World Bank has been running this exclusive fellowship on statistics and analytics since last year, selecting only 33 government officials worldwide. Krishna Bhaskar made the cut based on his Master of Applied Science degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). And the best part? The entire course is fully funded by the World Bank, with a live session set to take place in the US from March 18 to 27. But here's where it gets interesting—Congress seems to be changing the script when it comes to celebrating bureaucratic achievements. Unlike the usual subdued nods, the ruling party is openly acknowledging and appreciating their officers' milestones. Whether this signals a new culture of recognition or just a strategic move, one thing is clear—Krishna Bhaskar's success is getting the attention it deserves.

SAJJANAR'S BETTING APP CRUSADE

VC Sajjanar's campaign against betting apps started with a bang, winning applause and appreciation from all corners. His timeline has been flooded with warnings, awareness posts, and calls to action, making it clear that he's on a mission to wipe out online gambling. But just as the applause was getting louder, the Twitter crowd decided they had seen enough. At first, there were supportive messages, nods of approval, and even some "good job, sir" tweets. But as the posts kept coming, a new sentiment started taking shape—why is Sajjanar the one talking about this, and not the IT department? Enter Jayesh Ranjan's name into the conversation, because ideally, he should be the one explaining why these apps are still functioning despite the ban. Why is the IT department silent when they should be actively working on blocking these platforms? Then came the tipping point. Twitterati, known for their short attention spans and love for fresh content, began to get restless. They've reminded Sajjanar that RTC needs attention - his full-time job. Some even put it out bluntly that if he's so passionate about this issue, he should request a task force on cybercrime and betting apps and lead it himself. For now, Sajjanar continues his online crackdown on good.

--Yours truly

AP's RySS leads natural farming revolution in Zambia

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS), an organisation under the Department of Agriculture, Government of Andhra Pradesh, has launched a transformative Natural Farming (NF) pilot programme in Zambia. Under the visionary leadership of Executive Vice Chairman T. Vijay Kumar, this initiative, which began in September 2024, marks a significant step towards sustainable and regenerative agriculture. The programme is being implemented at Valponasca Learning Farm in Luwingu and Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre in Lusaka. It introduces chemical-free, climate-resilient farming models through the natural farming methodology, benefiting local farmers, agricultural experts, and students by demonstrating effective and practical farming techniques.

RySS has collaborated closely with local partners to ensure seamless knowledge transfer and the successful adoption of sustainable farming practices. The pilot programme features key natural farming models, including Maize A-Grade, Groundnut A-Grade, Vegetable A-Grade, ATM (Any Time Money), and Pre-Monsoon Dry Sowing (PMDS). These models have shown remarkable success, with PMDS and A-Grade Natural Farming models achieving 100% germination rates, minimal pest issues, and strong crop resilience—all without the use of



The success of the RySS Natural Farming pilot programme in Zambia underscores the potential of sustainable, chemical-free agriculture to improve soil fertility, boost productivity, and reduce dependence on irrigation. The adoption of intercropping and crop diversification within the A-Grade models has been a key factor in enhancing soil health and fertility.

chemical fertilisers or irrigation. In contrast, conventional farming plots exhibited poor germination, with only five crops surviving compared to 27 out of 30 in the natural farming plots.

Natural farming techniques, such as crop diversification, the use of biostimulants like Beejamrutham, Ghana Jeevamrutham, and Drava Jeevamrutham, and maintaining a year-round green cover, have enhanced soil microbial activity and improved plant health.

Sr. Modester, Director of Valponasca Learning Farm, said, "This initiative has opened new possibilities for sustainable farming in Zambia. The Indian Natural Farming models are not only

enhancing soil fertility but also empowering our farmers to achieve self-sufficiency. We are excited to see the long-term impact." Fr. Claus, Director of Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre, Lusaka, noted, "We have seen many farming models, but the way RySS integrates soil regeneration, water conservation, and biodiversity is truly unique. This could be a game-changer for our food security."

Local students from Evergreen College of Agriculture, Super Shine College of Agriculture, Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre, and Valponasca Learning Farm are actively engaged in the pilot project. They are conducting field research, monitoring

plant growth, and studying improvements in soil health. They are also learning about biostimulants such as Jeevamrutham and Drava Jeevamrutham, integrating Natural Farming principles into academic curricula and agricultural research.

The success of the RySS Natural Farming pilot programme in Zambia underscores the potential of sustainable, chemical-free agriculture to improve soil fertility, boost productivity, and reduce dependence on irrigation. The adoption of intercropping and crop diversification within the A-Grade models has been a key factor in enhancing soil health and fertility.

Sanctity of...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, coalition partner BJP and Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu have also refrained from commenting on the issue.

The Endowments Minister had stated on record that the demolition was carried out because the structure was located within a Tiger Reserve Zone. If that is the case, will the coalition government also target Srisaalam, which falls under the same zone? Reddy questioned.

He highlighted the contradictions within the coalition, noting that while Lokesh has apologised and promised to rebuild the shrine, Pawan Kalyan's silence and BJP's inaction expose internal differences. He also recalled how Pawan Kalyan made a spectacle of a stampede during Vaikunta Ekadasi, while Lokesh remained indifferent. Reddy accused the coalition of putting sacred sites at risk, entangled in political manoeuvring. He alleged that Chandrababu Naidu has a history of demolishing temples and that Kasinayana Kshetram, a revered place providing daily 'annadanam' to devotees, has now fallen victim to his policies.

Furthermore, he claimed that Naidu is trying to undermine the sanctity of temples for political gain by targeting YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, citing the 'Tirupati laddu' controversy, which even drew the Supreme Court's ire. He went on to say that Naidu's rise to power has been built on a foundation of political violence.

BJP spokesperson slams Stalin's political remarks



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawala has emphasised the need for simultaneous elections across India, arguing that a unified electoral process would aid national development and benefit political parties. Speaking at a Social Media Influencers' Meet in Vijayawada on Sunday, Poonawala said such a system had been implemented successfully in other nations, including Sweden, and had historical precedence in India, with elections held simultaneously on three occasions after independence.

He cited the 1983 Election Commission proposal for 'One Nation, One Election,' which has received several endorsements over the years. Poonawala questioned why there had been no objections to the idea until now, calling on all political parties to put aside ideological differences and support the initiative for the country's progress.

Responding to questions from social media participants regarding the ongoing Hindi language debate in Tamil Nadu,

Poonawala criticised Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, accusing him of politicising the matter. He argued that names such as Stalin, Tamil Sai, and Annamalai reflected regional affiliations, while parties like the Congress and DMK were merely using the language issue for political gain.

Poonawala pointed to what he described as a contradiction in Stalin's stance, recalling that in 2011, the late Karunanidhi had supported the formation of a Hindi language committee, yet Stalin now opposed it. He further questioned why the DMK had remained silent when Congress made similar decisions but was now voicing opposition.

He also reminded Stalin that the design of the Rupee symbol in 2010 was the work of a Tamil Nadu native, criticising the Chief Minister for disregarding this fact.

The event was hosted by BJP's Social Media In-Charge, Sanjay, and presided over by State Social Media Convenor Adusumilli Keshav Kant. Also present were State Convenor for One Nation One Election, Vetukuru Surya Narayana Raju, Co-Convenor Nagothu Ramesh Naidu, political analysts Duggaraju Srinivas, BJP State Media In-Charge Paturi Nagabhushanam, BJP Spokesperson Yamini Sharma, and Social Media Co-Convenors Satish Kotha, Abhilash Gundepalli, and Bharat Kenjoli, among others.

YSRCP pays tributes to Potti Sreeramulu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) marked the birth anniversary of Potti Sreeramulu with a solemn tribute at its central office in Tadepalli on Sunday. Party leaders honoured the revered freedom fighter by garlanding his portrait and offering floral tributes, recognising his sacrifices and contributions to the formation of Andhra State.

Prominent leaders, including MLC Lella Appi Reddy, former MLA Malladi Vishnu, and party state secretary Narayanamurthy, participated in the commemoration. They reflected on Sreeramulu's unwavering commitment to



social justice and his historic hunger strike that led to the creation of a separate Telugu-speaking state.

Earlier in the day, former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy paid homage to Sreeramulu, describing him as an eternal inspiration for the people of Andhra. In a statement, he said, "As long as the people of Andhra exist, Sri

Potti Sreeramulu will remain eternally memorable. His unwavering determination and selfless sacrifice for the creation of a separate state for the Telugu-speaking people will forever serve as an inspiration." Jagan Mohan Reddy extended his heartfelt respects, underscoring Sreeramulu's enduring legacy in the fight for linguistic and social rights.

Pawan Kalyan's remarks widening North-South divide: APCC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji strongly objected to the remarks made by Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan on the Tamil Nadu government's opposition to the Hindi language, warning that his statement could further aggravate differences.

In a statement on Sunday, the APCC Vice-President said Pawan Kalyan's comments were misleading and lacked clarity.

"The Central Government itself is fuelling hostility between the southern and northern states. It is acting unilaterally, disregarding the sentiments of the people," he said.

Expressing concern over the delimitation issue, he warned that if the Centre implemented the process unilaterally, it would result



in injustice to South Indian states. He criticised the Centre's approach, stating that its move on delimitation would hurt the sentiments of the people in the region.

"Instead of questioning the Centre over its unilateral imposition of Hindi on South Indian states and its approach to delimitation, Pawan Kalyan is backing the government," he alleged.

Shivaji also pointed out that the Centre had not involved South Indian states in the implementation of the new education policy or the three-language policy. He condemned the government's attempt to enforce the policy in the South without considering public sentiments.

Taking strong exception to Pawan Kalyan's comments on Sanatana Dharma, the Congress leader asserted that people would not support policies that create division and hostility.

"Pawan Kalyan should have addressed Centre-State relations, fund allocation, and resource sharing instead of speaking about Sanatana Dharma and the Hindi language at a public meeting. It would have been more appropriate if he had discussed the establishment of new industries, job creation, women's empowerment, and reservations," Shivaji remarked.

Drone empanelment...

Continued from Page 1

The results were presented before the State Level Technical Committee (SLTC) for final selection, ensuring that empanelled drones met both performance standards and insurance eligibility for farmers.

Despite the structured selection process, the empanelment has faced criticism from non-compliant drone vendors. Among them, Drogo Drones was at the centre of controversy, with allegations that its product was selected without meeting the mandatory 'Detect and Avoid' capability.

Official Sources, however, refuted these claims. "Drogo Drones voluntarily withdrew from the process after acknowledging that they lacked the required sensor systems. Their Krishi 2.0 model was never selected," sources said.

To maintain transparency, the government has allowed non-

compliant companies to upgrade their models and participate in future evaluations. However, officials have condemned vendors who have attempted to discredit the empanelment process by spreading misinformation and threatening to involve opposition parties. "The empanelment process has been conducted with full transparency and scientific rigour. The aim is to provide farmers with reliable and affordable drone technology while maintaining regulatory compliance," sources said.

Sources said, "Andhra Pradesh model is now being looked at as a benchmark for other states seeking to develop a scientific and policy-driven approach to agricultural drone deployment. By integrating regulatory compliance, technical validation, and cost-effectiveness, the initiative is set to redefine modern farming practices while ensuring long-term sustainability."

SSC exams from today...

Continued from Page 1

"Believe in yourself, and success will follow." Lokesh emphasized that students should remain calm and make the best use of their time in the examination halls. He assured that necessary arrangements, including drinking water and other facilities, have been made at the centres to help students cope with the summer heat.

Transport Minister Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy announced that the government has arranged free RTC bus travel for Class 10 students to ensure they reach their examination centres on time. He urged students to utilize the facility and focus on achieving good results, fulfilling their parents' aspirations.

The Class 10 exams begin today (Monday), with 649,884 students across Andhra Pradesh appearing under the English medium and NCERT syllabus. The Education Department has set up 3,450 examination centres, ensuring necessary amenities and strict security measures to prevent malpractice.

In a major relief for students, the Andhra Pradesh government has extended free bus services until the conclusion of the exams. This initiative particularly benefits students from rural areas who travel to towns for their exams.

Continued from Page 1

She claimed that two YSRCP activists, Shemshan and Parvin, forcibly entered the house and assaulted her. "They thrashed me, behaved aggressively and rudely," she

lamented. In her complaint to the police, she alleged that the attackers also issued death threats against her husband, Dastagiri, for being an approver in the Vivekananda Reddy murder case.

Upon learning of the

attack, Dastagiri rushed to the spot, but the two women allegedly misbehaved with him as well. Shabana urged the police to investigate and determine who had sent Shemshan and Parvin to attack her.

A political boon or a...

Continued from Page 1

If the JSP chief successfully consolidates financial and political resources through this partnership, he may ultimately carve out an independent identity or even strengthen ties with the BJP. A realignment of this nature could prove destabilising for the TDP, especially if the BJP seizes the moment to expand its footprint in the state.

More pressing for the TDP is Pawan Kalyan's open ambition for the Chief Minister's post. His political history suggests a willingness to take calculated risks, and should the right opportunity arise, he may not hesitate to make a deci-

sive bid for power. Such a move could fundamentally alter the State's political trajectory, reshaping alliances and electoral calculations. With Nara Lokesh gradually assuming a more prominent role within the TDP, the party must navigate a complex relationship with Pawan Kalyan.

His unpredictability and long-term ambitions may present a more significant challenge than initially anticipated. To safeguard its influence, the TDP must carefully manage its alliance with the JSP, ensuring it does not inadvertently empower a leader who could ultimately challenge its dominance in Andhra Pradesh's political theatre.

Govt committed to completion of MMC building works: Kollu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Mines & Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, has reaffirmed his commitment to completing the long-pending Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation (MMC) building, which was neglected for five years under the previous YSRCP government.

Speaking on the occasion, he recalled that the historic Machilipatnam Municipality was established in 1864 and later upgraded to a Municipal Corporation. The foundation stone for the new MMC building was laid in 2016 during the TDP regime near the Railway Station, but only the basement construction was completed.

As part of developmental initiatives, Minister Kollu Ravindra and Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao laid foundation stones for various works in the MMC 19th Division, valued at Rs 14.48 lakh under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds. These include a Rs 5.20



Minister Kollu Ravindra performing puojas during the foundation stone-laying ceremony for developmental works under the CSR scheme in Machilipatnam on Sunday.

lakh compound wall for Pylan Park and an Rs 8.78 lakh walking track.

Following the ceremony, the minister and officials visited the unfinished MMC building, where he reviewed its status with Municipal Corporation officials. Addressing the media, he criticized the previous administration for leaving the project incomplete and assured that the new government would resume construction. He directed offi-

cial to prepare estimates for the project's completion. He further announced plans to relocate the Machilipatnam Municipal Corporation to new premises under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Additionally, he revealed that vacant MMC lands would be developed under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model and instructed officials to draft plans accordingly. The Baby Centre, Municipal Office

Building, Old Vegetable Market, and Balladoddi would also be developed under the PPP mode. He stated that the Machilipatnam Iconic Koneru Centre would be upgraded with business community involvement, with a Detailed Project Report (DPR) currently in preparation.

He also revealed that a special team, supported by the Krishna district collector, has been formed to oversee the Koneru

Centre development. He assured that the government is dedicated to transforming Machilipatnam into a "Beautiful City" and taking all necessary steps towards its development. Machilipatnam Municipal Commissioner Bapi Raju, former Municipal Chairman M Baba Prasad, NDA leaders Konakalla Jagannadham (Bulliah), Bandi Ramakrishna, G Gopichand, and others were present at the event.

As part of developmental initiatives, Minister Kollu Ravindra and Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao laid foundation stones for various works in the MMC 19th Division, valued at Rs 14.48 lakh under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds. These include a Rs 5.20 lakh compound wall for Pylan Park and an Rs 8.78 lakh walking track

Amarajeevi's fast-unto-death key to AP formation: NTR DC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmi paid floral tributes to Amarajeevi Potti Sreeramulu on the occasion of his birth anniversary at the Collectorate camp office in Vijayawada on Sunday. Remembering Sreeramulu's sacrifice for the formation of a Telugu-speaking Andhra State, he described the struggle as a momentous achievement.

In his address, Collector Lakshmi highlighted Sreeramulu's extraordinary commitment, noting that his fast unto death was a pivotal moment in the creation of Andhra State. He urged people to reflect on his efforts to establish a state that upholds the regional language and encouraged students and young people to draw inspiration from his legacy and pass it on to future generations.

The birth anniversary was also observed at the NTR District Police Commissionerate, where Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu paid tribute to Sreeramulu, acknowledging his sacrifice for Andhra State.



Additionally, Vijayawada Mayor Rayana Bhagya Lakshmi honoured Sreeramulu at the Command Control Room within the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation premises. She stated that his fight for the rights of the Telugu people remains unforgettable.

The event saw participation from VMC Additional Commissioner (Projects) D Chandrasekhar, Chief Engineer R Srinath Reddy, SES P Satyanarayana and P Satya Kumari, Assistant Medical Officer Dr Gopi Naik, and Manager AUB Sharma, among others.

Tribal communities struggle amid severe drinking water crisis

Villagers undertake exhausting treks across rugged terrain to reach scarce and often contaminated water sources

PNS ■ PADERU

In Alluri Sitarama Raju district, tribal communities are facing an escalating drinking water crisis. Years of neglect, coupled with political inertia, have plunged these marginalised populations into an ongoing struggle for survival.

With no access to proper roads, villagers—mostly women and children—undertake exhausting treks across rugged terrain to reach scarce and often contaminated water sources. In Mandutenda village, residents recount grueling daily journeys to distant springs. "We have no alternative," says an elderly villager with a heavy heart. "Our children frequently fall sick." Their distress is a microcosm of a larger crisis that underscores the severe health repercussions of water scarcity.

Despite funds being allocated for borehole repairs and piped water systems under the previous YSRCP government, no significant action was taken. Now, nine months into the coalition



Tribals earnestly pleading with folded hands for access to clean drinking water and road connectivity

government's rule, these funds remain unused.

In Balarevulu village, situated within the Budaralla panchayat, the crisis has worsened. A newly installed motor broke down within a month, forcing villagers to rely on nearby streams, or 'geddas', for their daily water supply. This situation is far from isolated—over 30 villages in the mandal face similar hardships. The region's unforgiving terrain further complicates efforts to transport and install vital repair equipment.

"The drinking water crisis in our village remains unaddressed," laments Lakshman, a Balarevulu resident. "We have no option but to depend on the stream. A motor was installed in the tank, but it broke down and has yet to be repaired. Authorities must act now." Lakshmi, another villager, echoes the frustration. "Even with a canal nearby, we struggle for drinking water. Fetching water from the canal is a gruelling task. The government must fix the motor and ensure a steady supply."

Amarajeevi's selfless struggle recalled

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Social Welfare Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy paid tributes to freedom fighter Potti Sriramulu, who made the ultimate sacrifice for the creation of a separate Andhra Pradesh, on the occasion of his 125th birth anniversary on Sunday.

Accompanied by Collector A Thameem Ansariya, MLA BN Vijay Kumar, and Mayor G Sujata, the Minister garlanded Potti Sriramulu's statue at CVN Reading Room Centre and offered floral tributes. Speaking on the occasion, he recalled Potti Sriramulu's selfless struggle for Andhra Pradesh's statehood. He noted that Sriramulu not only participated in the freedom movement during British rule but also undertook a fast unto death after independence, demanding a separate state for Telugu-speaking people. The Minister urged everyone to draw inspiration from his patriotic ideals.

Collector Ansariya stated that Potti Sriramulu's sacrifice for the Telugu people would remain unforgettable in history. MLA Vijay Kumar also addressed the gathering.

NTR district gears up for SSC exams from today

Authorities have identified six examination centres in Tiruvuru, Nandigama, Jaggayyapeta, and Mylavaram as sensitive locations. To prevent malpractice, CCTV cameras have been installed at these centres.

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The NTR district is set to conduct the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations for Class 10 students from 17 to 31 March. The School Education Department has made all necessary arrangements to ensure the smooth administration of the exams. A total of 31,231 students are expected to appear for the examinations, including 27,683 regular candidates, 1,743 from Open Schools, and 1,805 supplementary candidates. To accommodate them, 168 examination centres have been established across the district.

Education department officials have deployed a comprehensive team to oversee the examinations. This

includes 168 Chief Superintendents, 168 Superintendent Officers, 50 Custodians, five Flying Squads, 12 Route Officers, 12 Assistant Route Officers, and 1,848 invigilators. Authorities have identified six examination centres in Tiruvuru, Nandigama, Jaggayyapeta, and Mylavaram as sensitive locations. To prevent malpractice, CCTV cameras have been installed at these centres.

Students have been advised to reach their respective examination centres at least 30 minutes before the start of the exams. Additionally, the use of mobile phones within the examination centres has been strictly prohibited, except for the Chief Superintendent.



Sports competitions for MLAs, MLCs from tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Chief Whip GV Anjaneyulu has stated that sports competitions for Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs) and Legislative Assembly (MLAs) will be held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium and Dandamudi Rajagopala Rao Municipal Corporation (DRRMC) Indoor Stadium in Vijayawada from 18 to 20 March. He emphasised that the TDP-led NDA government, under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, has revived this longstanding tradition of sports for public representatives.

On Sunday, Anjaneyulu, along with Government Whip and Gannavaram MLA Yarlaga Venkata Rao, inspected the preparations at IGMC Stadium. They reviewed the arrangements with officials from the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) to ensure the smooth conduct of the event.

Speaking to the media at the Tennis Complex, Anjaneyulu expressed regret that this tradition had been neglected in the past, blaming the previous government for disregarding the cultural and sporting traditions of the Legislative

Assembly. However, he praised CM Chandrababu Naidu and Speaker Chintakayala Ayyannapratrudu for reviving the event, highlighting that sports play a crucial role in relieving stress and promoting a healthy lifestyle among public representatives.

He also emphasised the government's commitment to developing stadiums in every constituency, giving top priority to sports and games.

The coalition government has invited all MLAs and MLCs, irrespective of party affiliation, to participate in the competition, he said. Around 12 sporting events are scheduled, including Cricket, Tennis, Tennisball, Throwball, Badminton, Kabaddi, Volleyball, 100-metre races, Tug of war, and Table tennis, he added.

Meanwhile, he said that the competitions will be held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium and DRRMC Indoor Stadium on 18 and 19 March. On 20 March, a budget dinner at Haritha Berm Park will be hosted for the participants, followed by cultural programmes for the winners, he added.

The meeting was attended by APLA Secretary Prasanna Kumar, TDLP In-charge Koneru Suresh, SAAP AO Ramavat Venkata Ramana Nayak, and other officials.

HUDCO team, Minister Narayana visit Durga Temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sanjay Kulshrestha, Chairman and Managing Director of HUDCO, visited the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada on Sunday. He was accompanied by Directors M Nagaraj (Corporate Planning) and Daljeet Singh Khatri (Finance), along with AP Regional Chief BSA Murthy, Joint General Manager (Legal) SM Srinivas, and Senior Manager T Subba Rao. They had darshan of Kanaka Durga Devi.

The HUDCO delegation was joined by P Narayana, the Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban

Development. The temple authorities extended a warm welcome to the group in accordance with temple customs, performing special pujas. Vedic scholars bestowed blessings upon the HUDCO team and Minister Narayana at the Veda Ashirvachana Mandapam. The temple authorities then presented them with Laddu Prasadam, Sessa Vastram, and a portrait.

Meanwhile, numerous special pujas were conducted at the Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla. A significant number of devotees participated in rituals such as Chandi Homam, Kumkumarchana, Sri Chakra Navaavarana, Shanthi Kalyanam, Mrityunjaya Homam, Suryopasana and



Vedic scholars at the Kanaka Durga Temple, Vijayawada, giving blessings to HUDCO CMD Sanjay Kulshrestha, Minister P Narayana and others at the Veda Ashirvachana Mandam atop Indrakeeladri on Sunday

other Arjitha Sevas.

Also, a large number of devotees thronged the temple to have darshan of goddess Durga Devi. The temple authorities made extensive arrangements

for the devotees as per the directives of Executive Officer K Ramachandra Mohan. They offered free darshan to newly married couples and provided drinking water for devotees



Devotees waiting in queue lines atop at the Kanaka Durga Temple, Vijayawada, on Sunday

waiting in queue line. Following this, Anna Prasadam was distributed.

In anticipation of the SSC Public Examinations commencing on March 17, the

temple authorities performed special pujas for students, placing their hall tickets at the feet of the presiding deity. Later, priests gave blessings to the SSC students.

Glaucoma awareness walk held in city

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Glaucoma Awareness Walk was organised on Sunday as part of the concluding events for Glaucoma Awareness Week. Penamaluru MLA Bode Prasad attended as the chief guest. The LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) eye care network marked the awareness week from 8 to 16 March, aiming to educate people about glaucoma, a disease that can affect both adults and children.

The week-long programme included social media campaigns, workshops for practitioners, and continuous medical education (CME) ses-

sions. Around 300 people participated in the awareness walk, which started at LVPEI's Kode Venkatadri Chowdary Campus in Vijayawada and concluded at Tadigadapa main centre.

Speaking on the occasion, Bode Prasad urged people to spread awareness about the importance of regular comprehensive eye examinations to detect glaucoma early and prevent blindness.

Dr Myrank Rai, Consultant Ophthalmologist (Glaucoma) at LVPEI, emphasised the need for routine eye check-ups, especially for those with a family history of glaucoma.

Ageing in isolation: The growing crisis of elderly neglect

Many senior citizens are left to navigate loneliness and abandonment

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a country where respecting elders has long been a core value, a distressing shift is occurring in the port city — many senior citizens are being left to navigate their later years in loneliness and neglect. This growing trend highlights the changing nature of family relationships and the erosion of traditional values that once ensured the well-being of the elderly.

Take the case of a 73-year-old retired civil servant from MVP Colony. After dividing his savings between his children, he

continued working until his wife's passing. When health issues arose, he turned to his children for help, only to be met with indifference. They claimed their busy schedules left them unable to assist, forcing a close friend to step in. "I never imagined that the children I raised with such care would one day turn their backs on me," he lamented.

Similarly, in Gajuwaka, a 68-year-old man who had ensured his children's financial stability was denied shelter by them after his wife's death, ultimately seeking refuge in an old age home. "I never thought they would

abandon me," he shared with a social worker. The emotional devastation of such abandonment is profound, reflecting a societal shift where traditional respect for elders is diminishing.

The rise in such cases is evident from the growing number of residents in old age homes. Institutions like Prema Samajam in Visakhapatnam shelter many seniors who, despite having families, feel forsaken. "We just want someone to listen," one resident tearfully admitted. Another elderly woman shared, "I spent my life ensuring my children had everything they needed. Now, I

am left with no one."

What is particularly striking is that neglect transcends economic backgrounds. Even affluent, well-educated families abandon their parents, seeing caregiving as a burden rather than a duty. One retired professional from Maddilapalem lived with his daughter's family for two years, enduring emotional isolation. Treated as invisible, he eventually moved to an old age home, saying, "I felt lonelier with them than I do here."

Some children attempt to bypass their responsibilities by hiring caregivers, visiting sporadically. A 73-year-old from

HB Colony recalled being told, "If you come home, it will be a problem for us. Stay here," before being left behind. While financial support is often provided, emotional connection is missing, leaving the elderly to struggle with profound loneliness.

The psychological impact of such neglect is severe. Dr. Mutyala Balaji, a psychologist, explains that abandoned elderly parents frequently suffer from depression and insomnia. "Despite financial security, they yearn for love, companionship, and a sense of belonging. The pain of feeling alone despite

having a family is immense," he noted. Many seniors enter old age homes discreetly, fearing social stigma and wishing to protect their family's reputation. This silence obscures the true scale of the problem, making it difficult to address.

Elderly neglect is not just a family issue but a societal one. Financial support alone is insufficient; emotional care is equally vital. "Caring for aging parents is a moral obligation, not an option," said social activist Anuradha Rao. "A society's true character is defined by how it treats its most vulnerable members."



Min urges SSC students to attend exams with confidence

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for BC Welfare S Savitha encouraged SSC students to approach their examinations with confidence and strive for first-class results. She extended her best wishes to Class 10 students from BC hostels and other schools.

In a statement on Sunday, Minister Savitha advised students to appear for their Class 10 examinations without pressure or fear. The SSC exams are set to commence across the state from Monday. She expressed hope that students from BC hostels and MJP schools would perform well and make their parents and teachers proud.

Highlighting the significance of SSC exams as a milestone in a student's life, she urged them to stay calm and focused. She expressed confidence that students from MJP schools and BC hostels would showcase their talent and achieve outstanding results.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu also extended his best wishes to Class 10 students. "Best wishes to all young friends appearing for their Class 10 examinations, a key milestone in your academic journey. Stay focused, work hard, and manage your time wisely. Believe in yourself, and success will follow," he posted on social media.

Transport Minister M Ramprasad Reddy announced that free buses had been arranged specifically for SSC students. In a statement on Sunday, he advised students to reach their examination centres early and strive to fulfil their parents' aspirations.

Vasamsetti launches Natl Safety Week celebrations



PNS ■ KAKINADA

The 54th National Safety Week celebrations commenced in Kakinada District on Sunday morning. State Labour Minister Vasamsetti Subhash inaugurated the event by hoisting the flag. The event was attended by district factory officials and representatives from industries such as Coromandel, SRMT, Reliance, ONGC, and others. During the meeting, the minister emphasised the importance of raising safety awareness among workers and the general public.

He expressed his gratitude to

the IALA of Okalapudi and IALA of Peddapuram for their support in organising the event, as well as to the department officials for their cooperation. He shared his happiness at meeting workers' families, stating that ever since he took the oath as the state's Labour Minister, he has considered all workers as his family members. Ensuring their safety is his responsibility, and for this reason, he has taken it upon himself to organise these safety celebrations on a large scale to promote awareness.

The 54th National Safety Week was launched with the slogan "Safety and Well-being are

Crucial for a Developed India 2047." The minister highlighted that the safety of workers is essential for the safety of the state, and the dream of a prosperous Andhra Pradesh will be realised through ensuring worker safety. He stressed that the responsibility for making this dream a reality lies with management, workers, and officials alike.

He further stated that if a worker neglects safety, not only is their own life at risk, but the lives of those around them are also endangered. He reminded them that their families are eagerly waiting for them to

return home safely. The minister also mentioned that the government is taking key actions in this regard. Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has established a committee under the leadership of Vasudha Mishra to provide recommendations on preventing industrial accidents. The report from this committee is expected within a month, and the minister assured that safety measures will be strictly enforced based on the committee's recommendations.

The minister urged management, workers, and government machinery to work together towards the goal of "Zero Accidents" and reiterated the government's commitment to the welfare and prosperity of the working community. He thanked everyone involved in making the event a success and specifically appreciated the support of industries in providing resources to the Deaf and Dumb School in Kakinada.

The event was attended by AP Factory Director D Chandrashekar Varma, Factory Deputy Chief Inspector D Radhakrishna, Kakinada District Fire Department Officer Rajesh, Kakinada District Training Collector MS Bhavana Vakapudi, representatives from the Peddapuram Industries Association, and local public representatives and leaders.



Village panchayats regained past glory: R & B Minister

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Minister for Roads & Buildings and Infrastructure Development, BC Janardhan Reddy, asserted that village panchayats have regained their past glory following the coalition government's rise to power.

Inaugurating a drinking water project under NTR Sujala Sravanthi at Kolimigundla village in Banaganapalli on Sunday, the Minister stated that the facility had remained non-functional for three years. Necessary repairs were undertaken at a cost of Rs 4 lakh before restoring its operations.

Expressing concern over the previous YSRCP regime's negligence, he pointed out that the Rs 4 crore project had been non-operational for five years.

He emphasized that due to the former government's apathy, the drinking water facility, established in 2018 at a cost of Rs 3.79 crore, was never commissioned for use.

The Minister announced that drinking water from the project would be supplied to 26 villages through tankers and assured that necessary repairs to the water tankers would be completed within 15 days. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to ensuring potable water supply to all villages in Kodimiguntla mandal at the earliest.

Highlighting the State government's focus on rural development, he said Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had instructed officials to take immediate measures to prevent drinking water scarcity in vil-

lages. He blamed the previous YSRCP government for depleting underground water resources by March 15, leading to an acute shortage.

The Minister also stated that concrete roads (CC roads) were being constructed in every village with an investment of up to Rs 40 lakh, along with other basic infrastructure. He assured that the flagship "Thaliki Vandanam" scheme would soon be implemented and that ration cards would be issued to all eligible beneficiaries.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to fulfilling its promises, he said the Naidu-led administration is determined to implement welfare initiatives while focusing on the State's overall development.

Foundation stone laid for 33/11 KV sub-station

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

A 33/11 KV electric sub-station will be set up at Losari village in Bhimavaram mandal at a cost of Rs 3.15 crore. MLA Pulaparthy Ramanjaneyulu performed the bhoomi pooja and laid the foundation stone for the project.

Speaking on the occasion, he said the sub-station would resolve low-voltage issues, ensure uninterrupted power supply, and improve power quality for near-



by villages. The facility will benefit

Barrivanipet, Dongapindi, Garivididibba, Gootlapadu,

Kotha Pusalamarru, Losari, Tokathippa, Nagendrapuram, and Nagidipalem.

It will cater to 3,830 domestic consumers, 242 commercial consumers, 86 street lights, drinking water schemes, schools, temples, 345 agricultural and aqua connections, and one high-tension industry. TDP leaders, including former Rajya Sabha member Thota Sitaramalakshmi, along with BJP and JSP leaders, attended the event.

Complex heart surgery performed on young woman

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A highly complex heart surgery was performed successfully on a 26-year-old woman from Odisha at Aster Ramesh Hospitals in Vijayawada, offering her a new chance at life. Reena, from Jajpur district, had been suffering from severe breathlessness since the age of 16. After years of neglect due to a lack of medical facilities, her condition worsened, prompting her family to seek treatment at multiple hospitals.

Diagnosed with multiple congenital heart defects, Reena was referred to Aster Ramesh Hospitals, known for its expertise in paediatric cardiac care. Dr Vasudev, a paediatric cardiologist, diagnosed her with a rare condition requiring complex surgery. The surgical team, led by senior cardiac surgeons Dr Shivaprasad and Dr Bharat Siddharth, performed a 12-hour procedure involving Senning's Repair (To correct, corrected transposition of the

The Odisha native was diagnosed with multiple congenital heart defects



great arteries, c-TGA), LV to Aorta Baffle Repair (To correct inefficient blood flow from the left ventricle to the aorta), and RV to PA Conduit Repair (To restore proper blood flow from the right ventricle to the pulmonary artery).

Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu, Chief Cardiologist at Aster Ramesh Hospitals, praised the

surgical team's expertise, highlighting the rarity of such procedures in India. This surgery is one of the first of its kind in the Telugu States.

The hospital's team included paediatric cardiologists Dr Vasudev, Dr Jyothiprakash, and Dr K Anusha, and senior surgeons Dr Shivaprasad and Dr Bharat Siddharth.

'KCR holds patent for vulgar language'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress's Bhongir MP, Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy, said that KCR holds the patent for vulgar language.

Responding to BRS MLA T. Harish Rao's criticism against Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, he said that the abusive language which KCR used during his 10 years in power is enough to fill a big book.

"Harish Rao should tell whether it is family life if you do it, and adultery when it is done by others. When his uncle KCR speaks he is a moralist! If others speak the same thing are they abusive? KCR holds the patent for vulgar language. Harish Rao, if you speak about morals it is like demons quoting the Vedas. There is no need to talk about Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's words. Revanth is a leader heading a people's government to ensure the welfare of the people. Harish Rao should look back before speaking about others. Then you



will understand what you have done," he said.

He said that there is no need for Harish to speak about the Congress Government's schemes to the people as Harish is deceiving the public by telling lies.

"The people know how many jobs Revanth Reddy's government gave. People know that the government waived the farm loans of 24 lakh farmers. Harish is famous by the name 'Aggipette Rao' and we will see on whose side the people would stand in coming days," he said.

Car crash near Kuridingi claims couple's lives

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

A road accident claimed the lives of a couple near Kuridingi village in Saravakota mandal on Sunday evening. The incident occurred when their car, en route from Srikakulam to Pathapatnam, collided head-on with an oncoming lorry.

The victims, identified as Peddagopu Venkataprasad (56) and his wife Vani (45) from Pathapatnam, succumbed to their injuries on the spot. Two other occupants of the car, including their son, sustained severe injuries and were rushed to a nearby hospital for treatment.

The impact of the collision left the car completely mangled. According to reports, the family was returning home after attending a wedding ceremony in Srikakulam when the tragic incident took place. Authorities have registered a case and are investigating the cause of the accident.



GITAM School of Business empowers tribal women

Training programme held on leaf plate making for tribal women in Araku Valley

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

GITAM Deemed to be University's School of Business has launched an initiative to empower tribal women in Alluri Seetarama Raju district. As part of its commitment to social responsibility and sustainable development, it organised a comprehensive training programme on leaf plate making for tribal women in Araku Valley.

The training session was conducted by faculty members Prof. Sheela, Dr. Krishna Kumari, and Dr. Srilalitha Sagi, who guided and mentored the women. The programme aimed to equip them with entrepreneurial skills to

generate sustainable income and improve their livelihoods. The School of Business also

donated a leaf plate making machine to women's groups from Hattahuda, Turaiguda, Karai Guda, and Chinalguda. This contribution is expected to enhance their production capacity and enable them to establish their own small-scale enterprises. Toyotsu Rare Earth Pvt Ltd, funded the leaf plate making machine. Dr. Muralidhar Mahadev Rao, Associate Vice President of Toyotsu Rare Earth Pvt Ltd., appreciated the faculty's dedication and emphasised the positive impact such programmes can have on tribal women's lives.

Long-awaited dialysis centre set to open at NTR Hospital

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

After years of prolonged delays and significant hardship for patients, the much-anticipated dialysis unit at NTR Hospital in Anakapalli district is finally on the verge of becoming operational. This facility promises to be a crucial lifeline for individuals suffering from kidney disease, sparing them from arduous journeys to Visakhapatnam for life-sustaining dialysis treatments.

Originally sanctioned under a previous administration, the project encountered multiple setbacks under subsequent governments, forcing patients to travel long distances for essential medical care. Despite repeated assurances from political representatives, delays in acquiring necessary medical equipment further worsened the plight of affected families. However, recent political intervention has expedited the project's completion. In collaboration with Chandigarh-based Rahi Care Private Limited, the hospital has fast-tracked the final stages of implementation. The installation

Facility to spare patients from arduous journeys to Visakhapatnam



Dialysis centre at NTR Hospital in Anakapalli district

of critical medical equipment, which began last month, is now nearing completion.

Speaking to this correspondent, Hospital Superintendent Dr. Srinivasa Rao confirmed that the five-bed dialysis unit is expected to be fully operational within a week to 10 days. The facility will function in three shifts per day, accommodating up to 15 patients daily. "The machines and beds are in place, and we are in the final

stages of preparation," Dr. Rao stated. The launch of this facility holds immense significance for residents of villages such as Mondipalem and Mangodipalem, where kidney-related ailments are prevalent. Previously, these patients were forced to endure exhausting and expensive trips to King George Hospital (KGH) in Visakhapatnam, adding to their financial and physical burdens.

Vizag Jail faces surge in drug smuggling

Narcotics continue to permeate the high-security facility

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Central Jail in Visakhapatnam is currently facing a significant challenge: a growing drug problem. Despite rigorous security protocols, the persistent smuggling of marijuana has raised serious questions about potential breaches and possible internal complicity.

The jail, housing over 2,000 inmates, including a substantial 1,145 individuals detained on drug-related charges, is struggling to control an expanding underground narcotics network. Many inmates arrive with pre-existing dependencies, which fuels an illicit drug trade that undermines current anti-narcotics efforts. While authorities have implemented stringent measures, such as the Preventive Detention (PD) Act, to combat



trafficking, smuggling operations continue to expose vulnerabilities within the prison's security system.

Recent investigations have highlighted the ingenuity of

smugglers and weaknesses in surveillance. One incident involved a known criminal attempting to introduce liquid marijuana into the jail using a modified eye drop bottle. This

intercepted shipment triggered a police investigation by Arilova authorities to trace its origins. These incidents are not isolated. Last November, a deputised pharmacist was apprehended delivering 35 grams of marijuana hidden in a prisoner's lunchbox. Separately, a repeat offender attempted to throw drug packets over the prison wall.

Allegations of internal collusion have further complicated the situation, with reports suggesting that some prison staff may be facilitating trafficking in exchange for bribes. In response, authorities have increased internal inspections and initiated undercover investigations. "These allegations are being taken extremely seriously. Internal inquiries are going on, and any staff found culpable will face severe penalties," a senior

prison official stated. Recognising the severity of the issue, the government has announced plans to establish an on-site de-addiction centre to rehabilitate inmates struggling with substance abuse. "Addressing the underlying causes is crucial to breaking the cycle of drug-related crime," a government spokesperson emphasised.

Despite bolstered security measures, increased patrols, and stricter entry procedures, completely eradicating smuggling remains a significant challenge. Officials remain determined to dismantle trafficking networks and eliminate corruption within the prison system. "Our objective is to create a drug-free environment through both rigorous security and rehabilitation programmes," a police official asserted.

ACROSS THE STATES



German national duped of Rs 30 lakh by cyber frauds

Cyber fraudsters allegedly duped a German national of Rs 30 lakh here by approaching him as suspect in a fake money-laundering case, police said on Sunday. On March 4, Herman Heinrich, who was staying in an ashram located in Kumsi village of Dunda area, approached police alleging that he got a call from a person informing that his name had come forward in a money laundering case, Uttarkashi Kotwali in-charge Inspector Bhavana Kanthola said. The German national alleged that the person introduced himself as a police officer and asked him to deposit money in a bank account given by the fraudster to avoid any kind of action in this regard, the officer said. The accused told Heinrich that his money will be returned to him later, Kanthola said. Following this, the foreigner deposited Rs 30 lakh in the bank account of the accused. When Heinrich tried to contact the accused, his mobile phone was switched off, the officer said. A case has been registered at Dehradun Cyber Police Station.



Delhi's air quality 'satisfactory' for 2nd day

Delhi saw the second consecutive 'satisfactory' air quality on Sunday, with an AQI reading of 99, according to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). On Saturday, Delhi recorded its cleanest air for any day between January 1 and March 15 in the last three years, with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 85. This was the first day of 'satisfactory' air quality in 2025. An AQI between 0 and 50 is considered 'Good', 51-100 is 'Satisfactory', 101-200 is 'Moderate', 201-300 is 'Poor', 301-400 is 'Very Poor', and 401-500 is 'Severe'. The maximum temperature in Delhi on Sunday was 31 degrees Celsius, three notches above the seasonal average, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature was recorded at 18 degrees Celsius, with humidity levels fluctuating between 60 per cent and 42 per cent. The weather department has forecast strong winds for Monday, with maximum and minimum temperatures expected to be around 32 degrees Celsius and 17 degrees Celsius, respectively.



Man found charred in bed in outer Delhi

A 25-year-old man was found burnt to death under mysterious circumstances at his residence in Ratan Vihar area of outer Delhi, a police officer said on Sunday. The deceased, identified as Mandeep Khatri, was found sitting in his bed in a completely charred state on Holi, he said. Police said Mandeep lived with his family. While his family members stayed on the ground floor, he occupied a small room on the first floor. At around 5.33 am on March 14, neighbours noticed smoke emanating from his room and raised an alarm, the officer said. The door was locked from inside, prompting immediate calls to the police and fire department. While fire fighters doused the flames, Mandeep was charred. He was rushed to Sanjay Gandhi Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead. Given the suspicious nature of the incident, forensic teams collected evidence from the scene. Police said they are investigating both suicide and accident angles. The body has been sent for post-mortem, they added.

Let BJP make Christians, Muslims RS members or union ministers: Shivakumar

PNS ■ GADAG (KARNATAKA)

Defending the decision to introduce a 4 per cent reservation for Muslims in public contracts, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday hit out at the BJP for opposing it and asserted that the Congress government thinks about all citizens.



He said let the BJP make people from Christians and Muslim communities MLAs or Rajya Sabha members or ministers in the union cabinet. Shivakumar was reacting to state BJP president B Y Vijayendra's post on X, accusing the government of Muslim appeasement, while criticising the decision on reservation for Muslims in public contracts. Vijayendra said: "The BJP has always adhered to the principle of equality in share and livelihood for all, but the Congress government has decided to follow the policy of majority for Muslims, small share for others and has set fire to the concept of the state being a garden of peace for all races, as envisioned by Kuvempu (in the state anthem)."

Global leaders descend on Delhi for Raisina Dialogue

MODI TO INAUGURATE THE CONFERENCE TODAY
ZEALAND PRIME MINISTER TO BE CHIEF GUEST

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday throw open the three-day Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-economics that will be joined by delegates from 125 countries. New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, US Director of National Intelligence Tuili Gabbard and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybha are among those attending the 10th edition of the conclave.

In a first, a delegation, including a senior security official, from Taiwan is also attending the deliberations reflecting growing cooperation between the two sides in the last few years, people familiar with the matter said.

The Raisina Dialogue is being hosted by the leading think-tank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

It will witness the participation of representatives from about 125 countries including ministers, former heads of state and heads of government, military commanders, captains of industry, technology leaders, academics, journalists, scholars on strategic affairs and



experts from leading think tanks, the MEA said on Sunday. Officials said foreign ministers from 20 countries are attending the deliberations. The visit to India of the Ukrainian foreign minister comes as the US is stepping up efforts towards a temporary ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia to end their conflict.

New Zealand PM Luxon will deliver the keynote address at the inaugural session on Monday. Foreign ministers of Slovenia, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Latvia, Moldova, Georgia, Sweden, Slovak

Republic, Bhutan, Maldives, Norway, Thailand, Antigua and Barbuda, Peru, Ghana, Hungary and Mauritius are among the attendees.

Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Martinez Diaz and Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines Enrique A Manalo are also attending the conference.

The theme of this edition of the Dialogue is "Kalachakra - People, Peace and Planet".

Over the course of three days, decision-makers and thought leaders of the world will engage each

other across conversations in various formats, over six thematic pillars.

The pillars are: Politics Interrupted: Shifting Sands and Rising Tides; Resolving the Green Trilemma: Who, Where, and How; Digital Planet: Agents, Agencies and Absences; Militant Mercantilism: Trade, Supply Chains and the Exchange Rate Addition; The Tiger's Tale: Rewriting Development with a New Plan; and Investing in Peace: Drivers, Institutions, and Leadership.

Maharana Pratap descendant Arvind Singh Mewar dies at 81

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Arvind Singh Mewar, a member of the erstwhile royal family of Mewar and chairman of the HRH Group of Hotels, died in Udaipur early on Sunday after prolonged illness, his family said.

He was 81. He is survived by wife Vijayraj Kumari, son Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar and daughters Bhargavi Kumari Mewar and Padmaja Kumari Parmar. A descendant of Rajput king Maharana Pratap, Mewar had been ill for a long time and under treatment at his residence in Udaipur's City Palace.

JYOTI BASU REJECTING PM POST NOT FACTOR
Support loss in WB, Tripura caused CPI(M) decline: Karat

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The decline of the CPI(M) was caused by the erosion of support in West Bengal and Tripura, veteran leader Prakash Karat has said and added a roadmap to rebuild the party's strength would be discussed during its upcoming all-India congress.

Karat further said he did not consider veteran leader Jyoti Basu declining the prime minister's post in 1996 as a reason behind the party's decline.

"It is a fact that the party's independent strength and influence have not grown ... And that's primarily been due to the erosion in our base of support in West Bengal and

Tripura, two of the strong states that we have," Karat said in an interview.

"So, the focus of our forthcoming party congress is how we strengthen the party," the CPI(M) interim coordinator added.

The CPI(M) had 43 MPs in the 14th Lok Sabha from 2004 to 2009. Its tally declined to 16 in 2009, nine in 2014 and three in 2019. The party won four seats in the Lok Sabha in the 2024 elections.

In state assemblies, the CPI(M)-led Left Front was defeated by the TMC in West Bengal in 2011 after being in power for 34 years. It was defeated by the BJP in Tripura -- which the CPI(M)-led coalition had governed since 1993 -- in 2018.



Speaking about preparations for the party congress, Karat said political and organisational reviews during the past three years had been done. Shortcomings and weaknesses in political, ideological and organisational work would be identified during the meet.

"Keeping in mind that ... Our political task or goal still remains how to isolate and defeat the BJP or the Modi government, for that you need wider unity. We recognise that. How to maintain this wider unity, a broader platform, that we will have to strive for," he said. "At the same time, we don't see this as separate. Strengthening of the CPI(M) will also help strengthen the overall opposition unity or strengthening of the Left. And we feel that the Left's alternative politics or policies need to be projected as a rallying point for the fight against the various policies of the Modi government," he added. He also disagreed with the

suggestion that the party's decision not to accept the prime minister's post offered to then-West Bengal chief minister Basu in 1996 as a reason for its gradual decline.

"We should not forget that our main strength in Parliament at that time came from West Bengal ... And our party does not think being in government or in any position will help to increase the strength of the party," Karat said.

"What we had as (our) strength in West Bengal was decades of work, struggles of the different sections of people for their rights. And that led to the formation of the Left Front government there (in 1977)," he added.

Delimitation based on population will be injustice to southern states: Kharge

PNS ■ GADAG (KARNATAKA)

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday said that if the delimitation exercise is based on population, it will be an injustice to the southern states as it would reduce their representation in the Lok Sabha and urged people to unite against this "injustice."

Speaking at the centenary celebrations of the late K H Patil, a former minister, he also criticised the central government, expressing concern over the alleged lack of emphasis on education and the large number of vacancies in educational institutions.

"The central government talks about cooperative federalism. If there is cooperative federalism, why are people not receiving the funds they are entitled to? Are cooperatives in Karnataka getting the money they should from the National Bank for Agriculture



and Rural Development (NABARD)? It has decreased by 58 per cent," Kharge said.

Addressing the gathering, he urged the people of Karnataka to unite and fight against the injustice being done to them.

"When the issue concerns Karnataka and its development, everyone should speak in unison," he said.

"Delimitation based on population is being planned, through which efforts are being made to reduce the number of parliamentary and legislative assembly seats in South India," Kharge stated,

adding that in the northern states, representation is expected to increase by 30 per cent.

"Such reports are emerging, and we should wait and see. If this happens, it will be an injustice. We must unite against this injustice," he added.

Accusing the union government of interfering in various institutions, the AICC chief said that the education sector is not receiving the importance it deserves.

Alleging a reduction in central funding for education, he said, "The number of vacancies that should be filled, the number of teachers who need to be appointed—whether in Navodaya schools, Kendriya Vidyalayas, or universities—50 per cent of these posts remain vacant."

"If 50 per cent of positions are unfilled at central universities, IITs, IIMs, and Kendriya Vidyalayas, how will our children study and progress?" he asked.

Uttarakhand min Aggarwal resigns

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand minister Premchand Aggarwal resigned from the Cabinet on Sunday, weeks after his remark in the assembly on people from the state's hill regions had sparked protests.

Aggarwal, who held key portfolios, including finance and parliamentary affairs, submitted his resignation to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami at his official residence, according to an official statement.

During the budget session in February, Aggarwal reacted angrily to a comment directed towards him by Congress MLA Madan Bisht and said he had not fought for Uttarakhand's statehood to see a day when a dichotomy would be made between 'pahadi' and 'desi'.

Aggarwal had also uttered an objectionable word during his argument with the opposition MLAs.

His remark sparked anger among the people, especially those from the state's hill areas.

Will kick anyone who talks about caste: Nitin Gadkari



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In strong remarks against caste-based politics, Union minister Nitin Gadkari has said that nobody should be discriminated over caste, religion, language or sex.

"Jo karega jaat ki baat, usko kaske marunga laot (I will kick hard anyone who talks about caste)," the senior BJP leader said, while addressing the convocation ceremony of Central India Group of Institutions in Nagpur on Saturday.

Gadkari, 67, said he believes no person is big because of his

caste, religion, language or creed but he is big because of his qualities. "Hence, we do not discriminate anyone based on his caste, religion, sex, or language," he added.

"I am in politics and lots of things take place, but I walk my way. If anyone wants to vote for me, he can and if someone does not want, he is free to do so," he said.

"My friends tell me why have you said this or taken such a stand. I tell them that one is not finished if he loses an election. I will not compromise with my principles and will follow them in my personal life," Gadkari said.

Gadkari also emphasized the importance of education for the development of society and the country.

He said that many years ago, when he was a legislator, he helped a Muslim education institute get an engineering college to promote education in the community.

India to host regional counter-terror conclave

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will host a two-day conclave of 10-nation ASEAN grouping and some of its dialogue partners beginning Wednesday that will focus on firming up a comprehensive strategy to combat the threat of terrorism and extremism.

The conclave of the experts working group (EWG) on counter-terrorism under the framework of ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) mechanism is also expected to deliberate on the evolving regional security scenario, officials said.

The ADMM-Plus is a platform comprising 10-nation ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and its eight dialogue partners -- India, China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Russia and the US.

The EWG conclave to be held in Delhi will be co-chaired by India and Malaysia.

The defence ministry said delegations from 10 ASEAN members and the bloc's eight dialogue partners along with Timor Leste and ASEAN Secretariat will be participating in the meeting.

India will co-chair the



EWG on counter-terrorism for the first time," it said.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh will deliver the

keynote address at the opening ceremony of the conclave on Wednesday.

It will be the first meeting

for activities planned for EWG on counter-terrorism for the ongoing cycle from 2024-2027.

"Discussions will focus on evolving a robust and comprehensive strategy designed to tackle the evolving threat of terrorism and extremism," the ministry said.

"The meeting aims to share the on-ground experience of the defence forces of ASEAN and its dialogue partners. It will lay the foundation for the activities/exercises/seminars/workshop planned for the cycle 2024-2027," it added in a statement.

The ADMM-Plus has been focusing on seven areas of practical cooperation such as countering terrorism, maritime security, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian mine action and cyber security. EWGs have been established to facilitate cooperation in these areas.

The EWGs are each co-chaired by one ASEAN member state and one dialogue partner following a three-year cycle. The task of the co-chairs is to lay down the objectives, policy guidelines and directions for the EWG for the three-year cycle.

Editor's TAKE

From SAGAR to MAHASAGAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Mauritius bolsters Indo-Mauritius relations

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent state visit to Mauritius marks a significant step in reinforcing the historical and strategic ties between the two nations. Received with warmth and enthusiasm by Mauritius' Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, Modi's visit underscores the mutual commitment to fostering greater collaboration in infrastructure, defence, economic growth, and cultural exchange.

India and Mauritius share a long-standing relationship shaped by cultural ties, historical connections, and strategic interests. As a major partner in India's Indian Ocean Region (IOR) strategy, Mauritius plays a crucial role in regional stability and economic cooperation. Modi's visit, which comes a decade after his previous trip in 2015, aligns with Mauritius's National Day celebrations, reinforcing the historical linkage between the two nations. Mauritius, strategically positioned in the southern Indian Ocean, has traditionally engaged with global powers such as France and the United States. However, with India's growing strategic influence in the region, New Delhi has solidified its role as Mauritius's leading development partner and security provider. While Mauritius has explored economic ties with China, India remains focused on ensuring fair competition for Indian businesses and safeguarding regional security. One of the most significant outcomes of Modi's visit was the announcement of an upgraded partnership framework—transitioning from the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine to MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). This enhanced partnership is designed to promote trade-driven development, capacity-building for sustainable growth, and mutual security, benefiting both India and Mauritius while strengthening regional collaboration. Mauritius holds a key position as the host of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Secretariat and is an active participant in the Indian Ocean Commission and the Colombo Security Conclave. This trilateral engagement ensures that Mauritius remains a pivotal player in the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, with India playing an instrumental role in its economic and strategic development. India views Mauritius as a vital neighbour with deep cultural and political ties. The recent political shift in Mauritius, with Ramgoolam's Alliance du Changement securing a decisive victory in the November 2024 general elections, necessitates a recalibration of bilateral relations. While former Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth's administration had closely aligned with India, Ramgoolam's previous tenure saw an exploration of other global partnerships, including closer economic engagements with China. Modi's swift visit following Ramgoolam's return to power signifies India's proactive approach in ensuring Mauritius remains within its strategic fold. This move is particularly important given the evolving geopolitical landscape in the Indian Ocean, where India has faced challenges from external players like China in neighboring Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Modi's visit brought a renewed focus on several key areas of cooperation. India continues to support Mauritius through grants and concessional loans for major infrastructure projects, including the Metro Express, smart cities, and digital connectivity initiatives. The security partnership includes maritime surveillance, joint naval exercises, and enhanced intelligence-sharing to combat transnational threats in the Indian Ocean. Both nations are working on deepening trade relations through preferential trade agreements, investment in fintech, and capacity-building in key economic sectors. Given the significant Indian diaspora in Mauritius, cultural and educational collaborations remain a key pillar in bilateral relations, ensuring the preservation and promotion of shared heritage. Modi's visit to Mauritius marks a renewed commitment to strengthening Indo-Mauritian ties.

Religious supremacism in Pakistan

What began as a tool of political manoeuvring during the Zia-ul-Haq era has now morphed into an all-encompassing force, blurring the lines between faith and performance

Muhammad Ali Jinnah may have wished, "Religion should not be allowed to come into Politics....Religion is merely a matter between man and God", but reality proves that religion is not just allowed, but insisted, in everything that Pakistan does. It is an unleashed genie that is eating the sovereign from within. Hindsight suggests that it was perhaps inevitable given the dalliance with inherent supremacism in the sovereign idea that is predicated on the "land of the pure" ie, Pakistan, the only country in the world to be created in the name of religion.

Pakistan watchers would confirm that religion got truly valorised, accelerated, and institutionalised in the national bloodstream during the Shariaisation years of the Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship (1978-88). Geopolitics of the times (read, Afghanistan's Mujaheddin war) aided Zia's regressive project. The byproduct of creating the mujaheddin ecosystem in the '80s subsequently bred the phenomenon of the Taliban (and its various offshoots that were either India-facing or sectarian) and an accompanying air of religious extremism that was amplified by all subsequent governments. No so-called educated, moderate or well-travelled politicians could extricate themselves from the curse of invoking religion, and so even an Oxford-educated, married to a Westerner (Jewish to be precise), and self-proclaimed reformist, ultimately morphed to Taliban Khan ie, Imran Khan.

The surrender to religious fundamentalism was similarly mirrored in the realm of Pakistani cricket. Once the playing ground of flamboyant hardboys who played hard and partied even harder with the likes of Imran Khan, Zaheer Abbas, Majid Khan, Asif Iqbal et al, took a U-turn to displayed piety and persona that reflected the nation's obsession with Puritanism. Beyond optics of sporting long beards, praying on pitches, and prefixing all public utterances with religious invocations like "bismillah rahman raheem" (In the name of Allah, the most gracious and the most merciful) and contextualising all situations with "inshaallah" (God willing) etc., — the postured fervour became highly religiously charged.

By itself, faith is perfectly healthy and can give the impetus for living life to the fullest, but when it spills out from a personal or private matter to a public insistence, the danger of enforced religiosity or even proselytisation is usually consequential. It could then distract from the task, in this case, cricket, to be secondary to religious pandering.

Like many of Jinnah's suggestions towards secularism (even if often contradictory), the invisibility of the same is mirrored in the



Pakistani dressing room. The '90s saw the sudden advent of Tableeghi Jamaat (Party of Preachers) stressing the 'authentic Islamic lifestyle' that went beyond a private/individual matter and became a matter of team routines. Pakistani cricket also got mired in embarrassing cricketing scandals (e.g., match-fixing), which led to the appropriation and demonstration of religiosity as a means of suggesting otherwise.

Soon accusations of only those who were visibly adherent getting selected saw the 'coincidental' conversion of Christian-born Yuusuf Youhana to a bearded and pious Mohammad Yousuf, diminishment of the career of Danish Kaneria (only Hindu in the squad) etc. But all this turn towards religiosity wasn't helping cricketing results (as was the case in the national narrative on all other fronts). In the moments of rare success against India, it took the Interior Minister to incredulously attribute the same as "Victory of Islam" and say that "Muslims all over the world are rejoicing!"

In another instance a fast bowler, Waqar Yunis said that the sight of watching Rizwan kneeling in namaz "in front of Hindus was very special to him" — basically, the entire



BHOPIINDER SINGH

Muslim, no matter whatever you do in your life, straight to heaven" and after Dilshan's inaudible retort, Shezad responded, "Then be ready for hell fire" (incidentally, Pakistan lost the match).

Soon the depressing performances on the field led a slew of people like the then President Parvez Musharraf, PCB Chairman Shahryar Khan, coach Bob Woolmer to media manager PJ Mir all call out to curb overt religiosity as it was distracting and leading to poor performance.

Recently, Danish Kaneria who was also

country was caught in a vortex and normalisation of bigotry.

Not satisfied with their transformation, Pakistani players took to proselytising foreign players. Ahmed Shezad was infamously caught on camera during a Pak-Sri Lanka telling Tillakaratne Dilshan, "If you are a non-Muslim and you turn

one of the many Pakistani players accused of spot-fixing reiterated the discrimination that he faced when he accused, "Shahid Afridi was the main person telling me to convert, and he did a lot of times".

While guilty of corruption, he perhaps was singled out for a harsher treatment vis-à-vis other players, even though he took 261 wickets in Test cricket to just 48 for Shahid Afridi. Danish's career was cut prematurely with no hope for a return. The fourth-highest wicket-taker was on a roll and as he said, "PCB didn't support me because I was Hindu, and I would break all the records. They could not drop me based on my performance. They knew I could break all the records, and Pakistan has never had a Hindu rising through the ranks".

The accusation does not seem unreasonable. To think that there is no excess space, consideration and toxic naturalness for religiosity in the Pakistani dressing room is to live under a rock, and the resultant performance is only collateral.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. Views expressed are personal)

AI-powered LASIK: The future of vision correction

SECOND Opinion



MAHIPAL S SACHDEV

In an era where technology is reshaping healthcare, ophthalmology is experiencing a paradigm shift with artificial intelligence (AI)-driven advancements in vision correction. The latest milestone in this evolution is the integration of FORESIGHT technology with the AMARIS 1050RS laser system—ushering in a new era of unprecedented precision, safety, and speed in LASIK surgery. With the capability to correct vision in under 10 seconds per eye, this innovation is poised to redefine the treatment of refractive errors. Myopia (nearsightedness) is emerging as a global health concern, with projections indicating that nearly half of the world's population could be affected by 2050. As dependence on digital screens increases, the demand for precise, safe, and minimally invasive vision correction solutions has never been greater.

While traditional LASIK surgery remains highly effective, it has continued to evolve to meet these growing demands—leading to the development of AI-assisted laser vision correction. At the core of this breakthrough is FORESIGHT, an AI-driven predictive system that enhances surgical precision. By analysing thousands of data points unique to each eye, FORESIGHT customises laser correction plans, allowing surgeons to predict surgical outcomes before the procedure even begins. This AI integration ensures unmatched accuracy through real-

time eye tracking and adaptive treatment planning, minimising potential complications by adjusting treatment based on real-time corneal analysis. The result is a safer, more effective procedure with faster recovery and superior visual outcomes. For the first time in Asia, FORESIGHT is available in India, along with AMARIS 1050RS—the world's fastest and safest refractive surgery technology. With this advancement, cutting-edge vision correction solutions such as CustomEyes and SmartSurf ACE have also been launched.

CustomEyes offers a highly personalised approach to LASIK, tailoring treatment to the unique characteristics of each eye for superior results. Meanwhile, SmartSurf ACE provides a completely touch-free, blade-free LASIK experience, enhancing patient comfort and ensuring faster healing. These innovations mark a significant leap forward in refractive surgery, offering patients safer and more effective alternatives to traditional laser vision correction.

While LASIK remains the gold standard for refractive correction, AI-driven solutions are also revolutionising the management of complex corneal conditions like keratoconus. FORESIGHT-powered treatments such as Topography-Guided Removal of Epithelium for Keratoconus (TREK) and Topography-Guided Custom Ablation Treatment (TCAT) are bringing new hope to patients with irregular corneas. These techniques provide customised corneal reshaping for improved vision and reduced dependency on specialised contact lenses. Furthermore, their minimally invasive nature enhances safe-

ty and optimises patient outcomes, making them a game-changer in corneal treatment.

The continuous evolution of refractive surgery, driven by AI and next-generation laser technology, is setting new benchmarks in ophthalmology. Centre for Sight has been at the forefront of pioneering refractive techniques, from bringing Small Incision Lenticule Extraction (SMILE) to India to leading clinical trials for Smooth Incision Lenticule Keratomileusis (SILK). Today, with the adoption of AI-enhanced LASIK through FORESIGHT and AMARIS 1050RS, vision correction is entering an era of unparalleled precision and safety. The integration of AI into laser vision correction represents more than just technological progress—it signifies a commitment to patient-centric care. With faster procedures, enhanced safety, and optimised outcomes, individuals suffering from refractive errors now have access to the most advanced solutions available.

As technology continues to evolve, so does the promise of a future where perfect vision is within reach for all. The next decade will witness even greater strides in laser eye surgery, further solidifying technology's role in transforming lives through vision. With myopia on the rise, these advanced LASIK laser correction technologies are set to redefine vision correction by providing safer, faster, and more effective solutions to reduce dependence on glasses or contact lenses.

(The author is an eye surgeon, Chairman, and Medical Director of Centre for Sight. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak

I do have tendencies to kind of go overboard. I have never shied away from that. For a lot of people, it might not have been something that they are able to process. But for me, it always comes from the right place. My competitiveness has not gone down. You can still be aggressive in your mind, but you do not necessarily need to express it out there every now and then out of frustration, which I have. I mean, in the recent past as well, I do not feel great about those things myself.

VIKAS KOHLI, INDIAN CRICKETER

Letters to the Editor

Festival of Colours or Divisive Tool?

Madam — In a display of outright arrogance, Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister and Nirbal Indian Shoshit Hamara Aam Dal (NISHAD) party president Sanjay Nishad shot his mouth off when he said that "those who have a problem with Holi colours should leave the country." Such a calculated push to divide communities through religious festivals is being increasingly used by BJP leaders.

In fact, another BJP leader had gone a step further, saying that Muslim men should wear tarpaulin hijabs if they wished to avoid Holi colours. And it is all the more regrettable that UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath defended a police officer who told Muslims to stay indoors if they did not wish to be smeared with colours, rather than condemning such open communal bias.

His words further reinforced the idea that India's religious minorities are expected to either assimilate into the dominant narrative or be excluded from public spaces. Holi, the festival of colours, has always been a celebration of joy, togetherness, and the breaking down of social divisions.

However, in recent years, political rhetoric has sought to distort this spirit, turning moments of harmony into flashpoints of communal tension. The increasing use of festivals to push a divisive agenda has exposed the extent to which India's secular fabric is under threat.

Stuck in space no more

Madam—NASA and SpaceX have launched a joint mission to bring back veteran astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Wilmore stranded in the international space station (ISS) and replace them with new crew. What has been originally scheduled to be an odyssey for eight days has now stretched past 285 days. The NASA duo (both 'Butch' and 'Suni' are now household names) has garnered a lot of sympathy around the world. It is a matter of great relief that the countdown to the splashdown off the Florida coast is all set to begin.

The saga of the expedition has shown the risks involved in space travel and exploration. Professional astronauts venture into space and push back the frontiers of science and the boundaries of human knowledge despite being conscious of the fact that human space flight is inherently risky. Technical glitches are always possibilities. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Findings from experiments and research help to broaden our horizons. Imagining ourselves as the astronauts stuck on the remote orbital outpost is an exercise in self-evaluation and an appreciation of their resilience, adaptability, grit, agility, will power and courage.

The pair has rejected the adjectives 'stranded' and 'stuck' to describe their state and maintained that it is all 'fun' for them and they have enjoyed their time in space.

Vote for transparency

Madam — Apropos of the headlines 'EPIC Aadhar link on cards' (March 16), the absolute transparency of voter list and complete linking of the remaining 33 Crore Voter ID-Aadhar linking are imperative at the earliest possible. The political controversy on fake voters should be set at rest by eliminating the fake voter IDs.

Rather, a step further, like banks and Income Tax Department, Voter ID should also be linked with the PAN and mobile numbers to rule out any possibility of fake voter ID even in future and new voters should be registered with the multiple linking of Aadhar, PAN and mobile numbers.

In fact, broad based roll reforms should be considered by the Government and the Election Commission barring culprits and corrupt from contesting elections, making it mandatory to exercise franchise to vote and incorporating facility to vote from remote and distant locations through online voting facility for the voters outside their constituencies on the voting day.

The EC should make necessary arrangements for online voting facility from all the district headquarters in the country. The Opposition politics is still around caste and religion divide in the society and is likely to remain so in the distant future too. The aspirational youth of the young country should decide the future of the country.

The global race for resources in the Arctic

The Arctic is emerging as a critical frontier in the race for mineral wealth, fossil fuels, and geopolitical dominance. As ice continues to melt at alarming rates, new trade routes are opening, intensifying competition among global powers

FIRST
Column

There has been increasing competition and conflict in the Arctic region for the exploitation of mineral wealth and fossil fuels. It has environmental consequences such as pollution, habitat destruction, impacts on wildlife and indigenous communities. In the warming world, the melting of ice in the Arctic Sea has been opening many new routes for trade in the region and the use of high-fuel oil in ship propulsion is becoming increasingly common. Diesel vehicles, open biomass burning and the use of high-fuel oil for engine propulsion in shipping are the largest global sources of black carbon, which consists of pure carbon in many linkages and is produced by incomplete combustion of fossil fuel and biomass by wildfires.

It can generate sufficient energy only next to carbon dioxide and its proximity around ice/snow sheets and glaciers of Arctic and Antarctica regions can extend the period of snow melting and can result in environmental catastrophes caused by the melting of glaciers and the rise in sea level. Eventually, it contributes to the warming of the planet.

South of the treeless Arctic region, we have the world's largest forests known as boreal forests covering large portions of Alaska, Canada, Scandinavia and Siberia. These forests have stored huge quantities of carbon and have protected the planet from further warming. Forests are rich in biodiversity and house numerous species of mammals, fish, plants of coniferous and broad leaved species, insects and birds. Studies have revealed that the warming of Arctic and Antarctic regions is three to four times higher than that of equatorial and tropical regions. Boreal forests are thus experiencing more warming than the global average, which in turn is adversely impacting its growth and regeneration.

The northern part of the forests is slowly expanding towards the Arctic region where ice has melted. Studies in Alaska's Brooks Range have also found that spruce trees have grown and established north of the tree line. Once inaccessible, the southern part has been kept open for commercial logging. The Anthropogenic pressure and wildfires have been causing the degradation of forests considerably. The gain in northern boreal forests is far too low as compared to the loss in the south.

Nearly 15 Million hectares of Canadian forests, constituting approximately four per cent of the geographical area of the country burned in 2023 and researchers found that it released 2371 megatons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This caused a jump in Canada's ranking of global emissions from 11th in 2022 to fourth in 2023, behind China, the US and India. The new trade routes due to melting ice in the Arctic are seen as an opportunity, which in turn boosts the use of high-fuel oil in ship propulsion causing further warming.

Portuguese-flagged Solong cargo ship collided



BK SINGH

recently with MV Stena Immaculate in the North Sea off eastern England setting both vessels ablaze and despite great firefighting efforts, it took two days to control the blaze. It caused oil leakage and such incidents have severe environmental consequences, especially threatening aquatic biodiversity.

Ever since February 24, 2022, Russian aggression in Ukraine began, decade-long cooperation between Russia and other Arctic countries on biology and nature conservation has been paused. The suspension of data across the boundary has made it difficult to understand how wildlife and ecosystems are changing during unprecedented warming. 2023 has been the warmest year recorded on the planet and 2024 has further broken this record and registered an average rise in global temperature by 1.56 degrees Celsius above the preindustrial temperature.

Data are also not available to find the impact of permafrost thaw that contains two and half times more carbon than what is already available in the atmosphere.

TRUMP ALSO REPEATEDLY BROUGHT OUT THAT THE US HAS PROVIDED \$350 BILLION WORTH OF DEFENCE EQUIPMENT DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS TO COUNTER RUSSIAN AGGRESSION, HOW UKRAINE WOULD PAY IT BACK?

The critical and rare earth minerals have applications in over 200 high-tech consumer products namely electric and hybrid vehicles, computer hard

drives, flat screen monitors and TVs, cellular telephones, and defence applications like electronic displays, guidance systems, lasers, submarines, radars sonar systems etc. The quantity used in some of the applications is insignificant, yet it is critical for the functioning of the technology. The magnets made have a relatively insignificant volume of the element as compared to the volume of the product but it is needed for the functioning of spindle motors, and voice coils of desktops and laptops.

Neodymium magnets are made of Neodymium, iron and boron which have the highest strength and can withstand 230 degrees Celsius temperature. Magnets are used in automobiles, computer hard disks and digital cameras. Lanthanum is used for digital and cell phone cameras and also in petroleum refining and steel making. Erbium is used in optical fibre and laser repeaters. Cerium is used in water purifiers and its alloys with other elements are useful for making catalytic converters. Europium, Terbium and Yttrium are used in phosphors that emit luminescence.

The traditional mining of these elements was labour-intensive; with lower wages and duly relaxed environmental laws, China proceeded and devel-

oped the infrastructure for extraction and processing of the minerals in a big way leaving the US far behind. China built mines to magnet industries and high-tech countries like the US and Japan had to depend on it. The territorial conflict between China and Japan in 2010 led to China using it as a weapon and putting an embargo on the sale of the minerals to Japan. China dominated the supply chain and even today major chunk of these elements mined outside China also continue to be shipped back to China for separation, refining and magnet production. To bring the US back to dominate the supply chain of rare and critical minerals Donald Trump in his second term as US President has moved to rename the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, expressed taking over the Panama Canal from Panama and purchasing Greenland from Denmark for strategic reasons.

He has also vowed to end Russian aggression in Ukraine and stop the years-old war early. US Vice President D Vance asked why Ukraine was not thanking the US for billions of dollars in tax-payer-funded aid. Trump also repeatedly brought out that the US has provided \$350 Billion worth of defence equipment during the last three years to counter Russian aggression, how Ukraine would pay it back? Though Ukraine President Zelensky was initially hesitant, he has come forward to sign the rare earth deal with the US to pay back the military aid already provided by the Biden administration. Greenland has voted for the central right democratic party vocal against Trump.

The Arctic island holds large reserves of critical and rare earth minerals. It is also home to a US air-base and straddles a strategic route to the North Atlantic. Though Greenland wants independence, Trump has been outspoken about his desire to control the island. In his address to Congress recently he said, "he thought US is going to get Greenland one way or the other."

In an exclusive conversation with NATO's Secretary General recently, Trump reiterated that Greenland would be annexed to the US. It is an island of 56,000 people, whose ancestors were colonized 300 years ago by Denmark. Since 2009, the island has been on the path to independence and Denmark controls only foreign and defence policies. Trump has an eye on Greenland's oil and rare earth resources.

All these moves in the Trump 2.0 regime are to gain the upper hand in supply chain dominance of rare earth minerals. Russia is also expanding exploration and extraction of oil and gas in Western Siberia and opening new trade routes by cutting the ice, yet to melt in the Ocean. The race in the Arctic region will surge greenhouse gas emissions at an unprecedented scale.

(Writer is a retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of forest force, Karnataka. Views expressed are personal)

Maha Kumbh: Sacred together-ess i- the world's largest gatheri-g

The Maha Kumbh Mela, a pilgrimage that draws over 450 Million people, is often hailed as the world's largest human gathering. Yet, beneath its spiritual significance lies a sociological marvel—a transient civilisation where hierarchies dissolve, altruism flourishes, and time itself seems to bend. This grand spiritual event holds immense religious significance, attracting not only devotees from across India but also pilgrims from around the world. Maha Kumbh is considered the ultimate confluence of all major Hindu rituals and traditions.

At first glance, the Kumbh Mela may appear to be a ritualistic pilgrimage, a momentary pause where millions immerse themselves in the holy rivers to wash away sins and attain spiritual liberation. However, beyond this sacred act lies a deep-seated cultural narrative. The event is an ancient ritual encapsulating centuries of collective memory, myths, and legends—a continuous reminder of India's quest for meaning in a chaotic world. Sociologists observe that the act of congregating at the confluence of sacred rivers transforms personal spirituality into a communal experience—a shared ritual of rebirth and renewal that transcends individual belief systems.

The suspension of social stratification

The Maha Kumbh Mela functions as a dynamic arena where India's social fabric is both displayed and redefined. In the temporary cities that spring up along the riverbanks, traditional hierarchies are simultaneously challenged and reaffirmed. The festival becomes a melting pot where age-old caste distinctions, regional identities, and modern socio-economic divides are momentarily blurred. Here, the paths of the pious ascetic, the devout seeker, and the curious traveler intersect.

Anthropologist Victor Turner's concept of "liminality"—a transitional phase where societal norms are suspended—finds vivid expression at the Kumbh. For weeks, the mela transforms into a liminal space where caste, class, and creed merge. A CEO and a farmer bathe in the same waters, a Dalit and a Brahmin share meals in community kitchens (langars). Turner termed this egalitarian bonding *communitas*, a temporary but transformative unity. In this sacred space, the rigid hierarchies of everyday India dissolve, revealing a latent potential for radical equality.

The Kumbh Mela also offers a unique opportunity to meet various saint groups, such as the Naga Babas, Moni Babas, Kabootar Babas, and Manchan Wale Babas. Observing their daily routines, including their methods of prayer, deep meditation, and spiritual discourses, provides insight into the diverse spiritual practices within Hinduism. The mela is a place where every-

one is immersed in a sense of collective unity. The Gift Economy: Altruism as Social Currency

Marcel Mauss's theory of the gift economy—where exchanges foster social bonds—comes to life at the Kumbh. Volunteers serve millions of free meals, ascetics offer blessings without expectation, and strangers share resources. This is not mere charity but a ritualised reaffirmation of interdependence. The mela's economy operates on trust rather than transactions, challenging modern capitalism's transactional ethos. In a world fractured by inequality, the Kumbh models a society where giving is sacred.

At the Kumbh Mela, people enthusiastically extend help—offering water, food, or prasad from saints. Receiving prasad through the Ganga is considered a divine blessing. This culture of generosity fosters an environment devoid of bias, where individuals unite in a shared spirit of giving.

A living tapestry of India's soul

Emile Durkheim's notion of "collective effervescence"—the electric energy of communal rituals—pulsates through the Kumbh. The syn-

chronised bathing rites, devotional chants, and grand processions generate a transcendent solidarity. Pilgrims shed individual identities to become part of a cosmic whole, mirroring Durkheim's idea that religion is society worshipping itself. This collective energy is not just spiritual, it acts as a social glue, bridging the divides of a diverse nation.

To reach the Kumbh, pilgrims walk for miles, yet their faith and devotion energise them, making fatigue an afterthought. Wrapped in saffron, a color symbolising peace and devotion, they forget their individual identities and merge into a harmonious collective.

Cyclical Time and Social Renewal

The Kumbh's 12-year cycle mirrors India's ancient rhythms of renewal. Unlike linear time, which progresses toward an uncertain future, the Kumbh's cyclicity offers a ritualised "reset." Communities fragmented by modernity reunite, and generational stories are retold. This periodicity is not nostalgia but a sociological balm, healing temporal fractures and reaffirming continuity in a rapidly changing world.

Beyond its religious significance, the Kumbh Mela is a space where societal renewal unfolds daily. As millions journey to the sacred waters, they seek not just personal salvation but also a



BABITA CHAUDHARY

symbolic cleansing of societal ills. The sheer scale of the event demands meticulous coordination and cooperation—elements that mirror the broader workings of democracy in action. In a country characterised by its diversity and complexity, the Kumbh Mela serves as a microcosm of India's pluralistic society, where order emerges from chaos through an intricate balance of tradition and modern administrative ingenuity.

Gender and Quiet Subversions

Historically, both men and women have held esteemed positions in Hindu traditions. In the Vedic period, religious ceremonies were considered incomplete without the participation of women. Even in Hindu worship, the names of goddesses are inseparably linked with deities, such as Lakshmi-Ganesh, Sita-Ram, and Radha-Krishna. Just as men uphold Hindu traditions, women play an equally vital role in preserving and practicing them at the grassroots level.

This devotion is clearly visible in the Maha Kumbh of 2025, where women have participated with great enthusiasm alongside men. Female religious leaders have taken part in rituals such as the Shahi Snan and Akhara processions with the same fervor as their male counterparts. Pilgrims have sought blessings not only from male saints but also from female Mahatmas, demonstrating a shift from traditional social barriers. The high number of participants in the Kumbh can also be attributed to the active involvement of women, symbolising their empowerment and societal progress.

Conclusion

The event culminates on the auspicious occasion of Mahashivratri, dedicated to Lord Shiva, who shares equal reverence with Goddess Parvati. The Maha Kumbh Mela is not just a religious festival—it is a celebration of faith, equality, and the timeless spiritual essence of India.

The true miracle of the Kumbh Mela is not its sheer scale but its social vision—a blueprint for harmony in a divided world. It serves as a reminder that societies can momentarily choose cooperation over competition, shared purpose over self-interest. As climate crises and polarization threaten global stability, the Kumbh's ephemeral utopia whispers: "Another world is possible, even if only for 42 days."

The Kumbh Mela is more than a pilgrimage; it is India's subconscious dreaming aloud. In its chaos, we find order, in its transience, permanence. To study it is to glimpse the soul of a civilisation—not in its temples, but in its people's capacity to imagine, however briefly, a society built on sacred togetherness.

(The author is an assistant professor Maitreji college University of Delhi. She works on gender issues. Views expressed are personal)

The five causes of action in the Bhagavad Gita

We all wish to be in control. Yet, we fail miserably because control is never truly in our hands. Lord Krishna explains in the Bhagavad Gita:

"The place of action, the doer, various instruments, different efforts, and the fifth—providence—are the five factors of action." (Bhagavad Gita 18.14)

The Lord further states: "Whatever action a person initiates through body, speech, and mind, these five are its causes." (18.15)

Are we not constantly engaged in actions through our bodies, speech, and minds? Speech and mind are mentioned separately because our words have a profound impact on our lives. Speech is not just another sense—it can shape outcomes significantly. For example, consider an accident where both parties are at fault. If they apologise, the matter is resolved amicably. However, if they resort to harsh words, a fight ensues. Similarly, our thoughts operate on a subtler level than our physical senses, yet they wield immense influence over our lives.

The five causes of action

What are these five causes?
1. The Place of Action (Circumstances):

Our circumstances significantly impact our actions, yet we have no control over them. Are we in a scorching summer in Delhi or a freezing winter in Toronto? Are we raising a newborn in a nuclear family or a joint family? Such external factors shape our experiences, but they remain beyond our control.

2. The Doer (The Individual): While we assume we are in control, the truth is that our nature governs us. Are we truly in command of our emotions and reactions? Hardly. In the same accident scenario, an aggressive person will likely escalate the situation, while a calm individual will seek resolution. Our inherent nature dictates our responses, often beyond our conscious control.

3. The Instruments (Resources Used): The tools we have at our disposal also play a role. A person with a modern smartphone can communicate and function more efficiently than someone with an outdated or non-existent device. The availability and quality of resources impact our actions.

4. The Effort (Personal Endeavor): Even our efforts are influenced by factors beyond our control. Our health, energy levels, and circumstances determine how much effort we can put in. While we may wish to exert ourselves fully, our limitations often dictate otherwise.

5. Providence (Divine Will):

This is the most decisive factor, and it is entirely beyond human control. Our past karmas (actions) shape our present outcomes. Success and failure are not solely determined by our present efforts but are deeply intertwined with the results of past actions (karmaphalas).

Are we in control?

Not at all. Control ultimately rests with God. Let's examine God's role in the five causes: "Circumstances are under God's control, as He is the Creator of all situations."

"The Doer (soul), though possessing free will, is bound by past karmas and thus remains under divine governance."

"Instruments and resources originate from God, as He is the ultimate source of everything. "Efforts are permitted by God, as He determines what we are able to do."

"Providence is part of God's justice, ensuring the consequences of past actions unfold accordingly."

The path forward

Understanding that God is the ultimate controller should inspire us to seek His guidance and refuge. As Lord Krishna advises:

"In all respects, take shelter in Me alone. By My mercy, you will attain supreme peace and the eternal abode." (Bhagavad Gita 18.62)

By surrendering to God's will, we can find true peace and liberation, rather than struggling to control the uncontrollable.

Conclusion

In our quest for control, we often overlook the deeper truth—true control lies with God. The Bhagavad Gita teaches that our actions are shaped by five factors: circumstances, the doer, instruments, effort, and providence. While we may influence some aspects, ultimate control remains beyond us.

Recognizing this should not lead to helplessness but to surrender and faith. Instead of resisting the inevitable, we can align ourselves with divine wisdom. By cultivating awareness of our nature, utilising our resources wisely, and making sincere efforts, we can act with greater clarity. However, accepting divine providence helps us navigate life with peace, rather than frustration.

As Lord Krishna assures, taking refuge in Him leads to supreme peace (Bhagavad Gita 18.62). True liberation lies not in control but in surrender—trusting that God's will is perfect and that every experience serves a higher purpose.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher. Views expressed are personal)

MONEY MATTERS



Sun Pharma, Zydus recall products in US

Sun Pharma and Zydus Pharmaceuticals are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, according to the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA). The New Jersey-based Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Inc is recalling 9,840 bottles of Morphine Sulfate extended-release tablets for "Failed Dissolution Specifications", the US health regulator stated in its latest Enforcement Report. The company initiated the Class II nationwide (US) recall on February 6, 2025. USFDA stated that Zydus Pharmaceuticals (USA) Inc is recalling a lot of Nelarabine Injection, used in the treatment of certain cancers, in the US. The company is recalling 36,978 vials of Nelarabine Injection in strength of 250mg/50mL, (5mg/mL) for "Failed Impurities/Degradation Specifications." USFDA stated. The company initiated the Class II recall in February. Zydus is also recalling 1,893 vials of the drug in strength of 250mg/50mL, (5mg/mL). The company initiated the Class II nationwide recall on February 13 this year. As per the USFDA, a Class II recall is initiated in a situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

AI has potential to enable collusion, says CCI chief

Stresses regulators need to adopt forward-looking approach

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Artificial intelligence is a driving force in modern markets that also has the potential to enable collusion, including algorithmic discrimination under the garb of dynamic pricing, CCI chief Ravneet Kaur said on Sunday.

She also emphasised the need to adopt a forward-looking approach as well as trust-based regulations.

Delivering the special address at the 10th National Conference on Economics of Competition Law in the national capital, Kaur said Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a driving force in modern markets.

AI shapes pricing strategies, decision-making, and operational efficiencies across industries but also presents risks, she noted.

According to the Competition Commission of India (CCI) Chairperson, AI can enable new forms of collusion such as "car-



tels without human communication, price coordination without explicit agreements, and algorithmic discrimination under the garb of dynamic pricing".

The fair trade regulator is already conducting a study on AI and competition.

While mentioning that tra-

ditional enforcement models, built on adversarial approaches, are no longer sufficient in addressing evolving market complexities, Kaur said the future demands a more collaborative regulatory strategy.

"Today's competitive landscape is defined by platform economies, network effects,

and algorithm-driven decision-making," the CCI chief said and added that market power today is about data control, network effects, and platform reach.

The goal is to balance innovation with competition, ensuring fair and open markets, she noted.



India, New Zealand announce resumption of FTA talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a gap of about ten years, India and New Zealand on Sunday announced resumption of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement to boost economic ties. India and New Zealand began negotiating the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in April 2010 to boost trade in goods, services, and investment. However, after nine rounds of discussions, the talks stalled in 2015.

"The two nations are pleased to announce the launch of negotiations for a comprehensive

and mutually beneficial India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations," the commerce ministry said.

The announcement was made after the meeting of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Todd McClay, New Zealand's Minister for Trade and Investment.

Prime Minister of New Zealand Christopher Luxon is here on a four-day visit from March 16. "The India-New Zealand FTA negotiations aim to achieve balanced outcomes that enhance supply chain integration and improve market access," it said.



Sebi plans SOP for applying settlement norms

Markets watchdog Sebi is in discussions to finalise the standard operating procedure for applying settlement regulations for cases amid rising number of settlement matters. Besides, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) is looking at having uniformity in applying the settlement formula for settling cases. Sebi Whole Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney on Sunday said the regulator is working on the SOP for applying the settlement regulations. "It is work in progress... it is in final discussions," he told PTI. Under Sebi norms, subject to various conditions, a matter can be settled without admitting or denying the facts and conclusions of law. On the sidelines of a conference in the national capital, Varshney also said Sebi is looking at how to have consistency in applying the settlement formula. "Formula also has certain value to be given. Now different people should give same value for same situation in different cases... basically uniformity across cases... we will work on that," he said. During a session at the conference, he said the interesting thing about Sebi is that when "you come for settlement you pay more than what you end up paying for litigation".



Sugar output falls; cooperative body flags production ambiguity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's sugar production has declined by 16.13 per cent to 23.71 million tonnes so far in the ongoing 2024-25 season, creating challenges for government policies which were formulated based on higher initial projections, cooperative body NFCSEF said on Sunday.

The National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories (NFCSEF) expressed concern over the "ambiguity" in sugar production numbers as the 2024-25 sugarcane crushing season (October-September) nears its end with significantly lower output than initially projected.

Sugar production estimates have been repeatedly revised downward since the season began, creating challenges for government policies which were formulated based on an initial projection of 33.3 million tonnes, the industry body said in a statement.

DVC's Rs 1,500 crore push to modernise power supply



PNS ■ KOLKATA

Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) has launched a Rs 1,500 crore project to modernise power supply in its command area to ensure round-the-clock quality power and to reduce aggregate technical and commercial (AT&C) losses, an official said on Sunday.

DVC's entire distribution network primarily serves industries, with negligible supply to retail consumers. The project focuses on shifting from conventional power distribution to a state-of-the-art, technology-driven system to establish a robust primary and secondary distribution network across DVC's command area spanning 24,235 square kilometres in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

"The project capex is nearly Rs 1,500 crore and will be completed in 18 months. The system integrates advanced features such as a distribution management system, outage management system, customer relation management, metering data management system, GIS mapping for real-time communication, ring main units (RMU), and fiber optic-based metering communication systems," DVC member (Finance) Arup Sarkar told PTI.

The new distribution system incorporates cutting-edge technologies, including unmanned container-based substations (E-houses) equipped with GIS-based 33 KV panels, modular battery chargers, and substation automation systems (SAS), he said.

Tariff-related developments to drive mkt movement: Analysts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The US Fed interest rate decision, global trends, tariff-related developments and trading activity of foreign investors will drive the equity market movement this week, analysts said.

Among macroeconomic data announcement, WPI inflation for February is scheduled to be announced on Monday.

"Persistent uncertainties surrounding global trade and the fear of a US recession may continue to influence the domestic market's momentum," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

However, the moderation in valuations following recent corrections, along with supportive factors such as falling crude oil prices, an easing dollar index, and expectations of a rebound in domestic earnings in the coming quarters, may limit the volatility and is expected to



contribute to stability amid prevailing trade uncertainties, he said.

"This week's release of China's retail sales growth data and industrial production data will provide a clearer understanding of the Chinese economic growth outlook," Nair said.

Investors will also be closely monitoring US retail sales and production numbers, he added. Among other global events,

the BoE (Bank of England) interest rate decision will also be tracked.

Escalation in global trade tensions and the US recession worries significantly weighed on investor sentiment last week.

"Last week, the Nifty-50 ended lower by 0.7 per cent at 22,397 level on account of weak global cues resulting from the uncertainty around US trade policies.



'Digital competition law after due process'

The digital competition law will be brought out after following the due process, Union Minister Harsh Malhotra said on Sunday. More than 100 suggestions have been received on the draft Digital Competition Bill (DCB), which was put out for public consultations by the corporate affairs ministry last year. Malhotra, the Minister of State for Corporate Affairs, said the report from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) on the bill is awaited. "We are not in a hurry (on bringing the digital competition law)... (we will follow) due process," the minister said. Speaking at the National Conference on Economics of Competition Law in the national capital, he also said the best practices with respect to digital markets in other jurisdictions like Japan, Australia, and Europe can be looked at and how they can fit into the Indian market. He also called for real-time monitoring and analysing of markets to ensure fair competition. The DCB has proposed certain ex-ante provisions to ensure proactive monitoring of the behaviour of large digital enterprises and curb possible competitive practices.

EIL, MECON, 4 others in fray for RBI's currency management project

PNS ■ MUMBAI

State-owned Engineers India and MECON as well as four private entities are in the fray for the project to comprehensively revamp RBI's currency management infrastructure in order to cater to future cash needs of the country's fast growing economy.

The four private entities are: Accenture Solutions; Colliers International (India) Property Services; Price water house Coopers and The Boston Consulting Group (India).

The RBI had earlier invited expression of interest (EoI) for 'Procurement of Consultancy and Project Management Services for Modernisation of Currency Management Infrastructure in India'. The central bank had received responses from 11 entities.

After evaluating the responses, RBI said it has shortlisted six entities for issuance of Request for Proposal (RFP), according to



an official document.

According to the EoI document, the RBI proposes creation of greenfield currency management centres, the introduction of warehouse automation, the installation of security and surveillance systems, an inventory management system, and a centralised command centre.

Despite moderation in the growth rate of NIC (Notes In Circulation), the growth is likely to continue to be positive over the foreseeable future though the pace thereof is expected to be slower over the next decade.

Navi Mumbai airport to be inaugurated in June: Adani

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The upcoming Navi Mumbai International Airport will be inaugurated in June, Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani said on Sunday.

Earlier, it was set for inauguration on April 17.

The greenfield airport -- the second such facility in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region after the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport -- is being developed by a special purpose vehicle, NMIAL, which is a 74:26 joint venture between Adani Airport Holdings Ltd (AAHL) and City and Industrial Development Corporation of Maharashtra (CIDCO).

Mcap of five of top-10 most valued firms declines Rs 93k cr



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market capitalisation of five of the top-10 most valued firms declined by Rs 93,357.52 crore, with IT giants Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services taking the biggest hit, in line with a weak trend in domestic equities.

Last week, the BSE Sensex benchmark declined 503.67 points or 0.68 per cent, and the NSE Nifty fell 155.3 points or 0.69 per cent.

The stock markets were closed on Friday on the occasion of Holi festival.

Meanwhile, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Hindustan Unilever, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries saw a decline in

their market valuations.

In contrast, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, ITC, Bajaj Finance and Bharti Airtel posted gains. The five firms together added Rs 49,833.62 crore in their market capitalisation.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Infosys dropped by Rs 44,226.62 crore to Rs 6,55,820.48 crore.

The Mumbai-based TCS' valuation tumbled by Rs 35,800.98 crore to Rs 12,70,798.97 crore and slipped to the third place among the country's 10-most valuable companies chart.

Hindustan Unilever's market valuation depreciated by Rs 6,567.11 crore to Rs 5,11,235.81 crore.

Innovating portfolio for Indian taste: PepsiCo



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

PepsiCo will increase its play in the packed food segment, catering to "multiple Indias" with different taste buds as it bets on innovations and premiumisation to continue its double-digit growth in the country, its India & South Asia CEO Jagrut Kotecha said.

PepsiCo will expand its snacks business in India, as consumption is very low vis-a-vis other countries and with growing urbanisation and more money coming in the pockets with a growing economy, Kotecha expects consumption of packed foods to increase.

PepsiCo, the makers of Kurkure and Lays, has internally divided India into nine clusters to match the regional taste buds of "multiple Indias", he said, adding "if you say it's just one India, I think we are not doing enough justice to it."

India should seek reciprocal concessions from EU: GTRI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India should seek reciprocal concessions from the European Union (EU) under the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) in the medical devices sector to promote its exports, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

India charges zero to 10 per cent tariffs on most medical devices and a duty cut by India on medical devices without addressing EU's regulatory chal-

lenges will result in low exports but large scale imports from EU. "To achieve a fair trade deal, India must demand reciprocity. India should cut tariff on medical devices only if the EU reduces its non-tariff barriers," the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

The ongoing India-EU FTA negotiations on medical devices are asymmetrical.

While the EU demands zero tariffs on medical devices from



India, it maintains high regulatory barriers that hinder Indian exports difficult in the EU markets, it added.

GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said the EU customs duty rates are zero, but market entry costs are substantial because of the stringent regulatory framework.

"Exporting to EU has become more difficult as it replaced the Medical Device Directives (EU-MDD) with the more stringent Medical Device Rules (EU-

MDR)," he said.

Citing an example, he said the new certification and regulatory expenses amount to 60,000-300,000 euro annually for market access of 100,000-3.75 million euro.

"Certification approval time increased from the earlier 4-8 months to 2-3 years now. Shortage of notified bodies and auditors in the EU is leading to high certification costs," Srivastava said.

SAIL to scale up Rourkela Steel Plant capacity to 9 MT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned SAIL has plans to more than double the capacity of its Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) to around 9 million tonne per annum at an investment of Rs 30,000 crore, a move which will boost supplies to sectors like defence, oil & gas, automobiles among

others. Post expansion, which will come up over an area of 1,200 acre, RSP will alone contribute around 25 per cent to SAIL's overall 35 million tonne per annum (MTPA) production capacity target by 2030, Alok Verma, Director In-Charge, RSP told PTI in an interview.

POSTPONED BUT WORTH THE WAIT?

Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari to release in September 2025

Bollywood fans, mark your calendars! Dharma Productions has officially locked in a new release date for its much-anticipated romantic entertainer, Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari. Originally slated for an April 2025 release, the film will now hit theatres on September 12, 2025. Promising a delightful mix of romance, emotions, and family drama, the movie is set to be a treat for lovers of heart-warming cinema.

Known for his expertise in crafting heartfelt romantic dramas, Shashank Khaitan takes the director's seat for Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari. Having delivered box office hits like Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania, Badrinath Ki Dulhania, and Dhadak, Khaitan is expected to bring his



signature charm and storytelling finesse to this project. The film was initially scheduled for release in April 2025, but unforeseen circumstances led the makers to postpone it. The new date ensures a bigger and better theatrical experience, allowing the team to perfect every detail of the film. While the storyline remains under wraps, the film's intriguing title hints at a cultural yet modern love story with a quirky twist. The blend of tradition and contemporary romance is a signature style of Dharma Productions, which has

given Bollywood some of its most cherished love stories. Produced under the banner of Dharma Productions, the film boasts a powerhouse production team including Karan Johar, Adar Poonawalla, Apoorva Mehta, and Shashank Khaitan himself. Given Dharma's track record of delivering blockbuster romantic dramas, expectations are already high for this venture. Adding to the film's stellar cast are Akshay Oberoi and Manish Paul, further raising anticipation for this cinematic spectacle.

Erica Fernandes says Do Patti triggered painful memories of abuse

Actress Erica Fernandes has bravely shared her past struggles, revealing that she once endured a violent and physically abusive relationship. In a candid conversation with Shardul Pandit on his podcast, Erica spoke about the deep scars left by that chapter of her life and why she chose to stay silent at the time.

Reflecting on her painful past, Erica revealed that the trauma, heartbreak, and trust issues she faced shaped the person she is today. Describing the severity of the situation, she shared, "I have gone through a very violent relationship. It was physically abusive as well. But I didn't want to bring it out at that time."



She explained her reasons for not reporting the abuse, citing concerns about media scrutiny and the judicial system. "When you're an actor, everything becomes news. If you go to the police, it'll be all over the media, leading to a media trial. If you don't reveal the name, people start linking it to someone. Plus, I wasn't sure what the outcome would be if I went to the police. I don't trust the judicial system that much." Erica also admitted that she feared being accused of staging a "publicity stunt" if she had spoken out earlier, a concern many public figures grapple with when addressing personal struggles. When asked how she dealt with the trauma, Erica shared that she confided only in a select few friends. She acknowledged that the experience "left a scar" and admitted that watching depictions of abuse in films can trigger painful memories. One such instance was when she watched Shaheer Sheikh's film Do Patti, which reminded her of those dark days. "When I watched Shaheer's Do Patti, it took me back to those days, and I was like, st...*" Erica emphasized that she is not sharing her story for attention but rather to encourage others to speak up. "It took me years to build the courage to speak about it publicly," she said, urging those in similar situations to seek help and give themselves time to heal.

Hansal Mehta questions India's creative stagnation

Renowned filmmaker Hansal Mehta has voiced his concerns over the state of India's entertainment industry, calling out its tendency to churn out formulaic, uninspired content rather than pushing the boundaries of storytelling. In a thought-provoking Instagram post, Mehta highlighted the stark contrast between international content and the repetitive patterns dominating Indian films and shows.

deemed unsuitable for commissioning—considered too niche, something that wouldn't travel 'wide'. As a result, it would never get made," he lamented. He further questioned whether such exceptional storytelling is reserved only for the 'first world', while India remains trapped in mass-producing content that underestimates audience intelligence.

While praising the British crime drama Adolescence, Mehta reflected on how global industries are evolving, experimenting, and challenging storytelling norms, while India remains stuck in a cycle of playing it safe. "Adolescence on @netflix_in is perhaps the best TV show I've seen in years. An exploration of men, misogyny, and murder. Of boys, bullying, and beyond. Of crime and misdemeanour. Of family and failure. It is a universal story of our times. It scares you, shakes you up, and keeps you riveted,"* Mehta wrote. He described the show's execution as "beyond awe-inspiring", praising its single-shot episodes, immersive storytelling, and masterful casting that heighten the tension and realism of the narrative. Drawing comparisons with India's creative landscape, Mehta criticized the industry's reluctance to take risks, arguing that a show like Adolescence would never see the light of day in India. "In a country like India, the idea of such a show would likely be

Despite his critique, Mehta acknowledged the potential for transformation, stating that countries like the UK—where police procedurals are as routine as breakfast—still find ways to push beyond conventional genres. "The country that produces police procedurals as routinely as breakfast has shown us that there is a way—if there is the will—to push beyond the genre. Kudos." She also acknowledged the widespread influence of Bollywood, stating that while Hindi cinema continues to dominate, audiences now have greater access to regional films. "When we started, we used to watch a lot of world cinema but not so much regional cinema. Of course, (Satyajit) Ray and (Ritvik) Ghatak were always considered classics. But now, we have access to so much more—Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam films. Any kind of cinema is good. The more we make, the better." Having played some of the most layered and powerful female characters in Indian cinema, Chadha believes that the gender of the director is irrelevant when it comes to telling women's stories. "It depends on how deeply you are immersed in the story that you want to tell. Beyond a point, gender may not matter so much," she stated. However, when asked whether Indian cinema—especially Bollywood—has done justice to representing women on screen, Chadha admitted it was a complex question.



actor Sheeba Chadha, known for her remarkable performances in films like Badhai Do and Dum Laga Ke Haisha, as well as web series such as Mirzapur and Bandish Bandits, believes that there is little difference between working in feature films and digital content. According to Chadha, the primary contrast lies in the time and depth afforded to an actor's character in OTT projects. "I really don't find much difference. The crews are so osmotic that people working in one medium are also working in the other. One is long format, while the other has a finiteness in features. Actors like us get more compounded, fleshed-out characters in OTT with more space and time to explore, which is not possible in a film," she said in an interview. She added that the satisfaction of playing a well-nuanced role can exist in both mediums, depending on the depth of the character. A seasoned theatre artist, Chadha acknowledged that her stage performances have taken a backseat due to her demanding schedule in films and web series. "Yes, I am doing less theatre. I don't think I should be calling myself a theatre practitioner right now, because I am not practising theatre actively," she admitted. Despite her current hiatus from the stage, Chadha remains confident that she will return to it in the future. "Earlier, I used to think it would be impossible for me to stay away from theatre. But I have realized that cinema and OTT have organically become the center of my life. That said, theatre is not going anywhere. I just don't have the time and investment needed for it at the moment. Theatre requires full commitment—you can't just start rehearsals and drop out when a film project comes along," she explained.

Cinema has organically taken over my life

Unlike many actors who have an ideal role in mind, Chadha doesn't believe in a 'dream character'. Her approach to selecting roles is straightforward. "There is no science to it. I don't go about it in a very detailed way. Of course, the character has to be interesting enough with a definitive space in the story. After that, it's just the maths of dates, money, and other things. It's quite simple," she said. While she has been busy with her projects, Chadha admitted that she hasn't had the time to watch many films recently, particularly Malayalam cinema, which she has heard great things about. "I really want to start watching Malayalam films. I have been hearing wonderful things about them. Every kind of cinema has its place in society," she said. She also acknowledged the widespread influence of Bollywood, stating that while Hindi cinema continues to dominate, audiences now have greater access to regional films. "When we started, we used to watch a lot of world cinema but not so much regional cinema. Of course, (Satyajit) Ray and (Ritvik) Ghatak were always considered classics. But now, we have access to so much more—Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam films. Any kind of cinema is good. The more we make, the better." Having played some of the most layered and powerful female characters in Indian cinema, Chadha believes that the gender of the director is irrelevant when it comes to telling women's stories. "It depends on how deeply you are immersed in the story that you want to tell. Beyond a point, gender may not matter so much," she stated. However, when asked whether Indian cinema—especially Bollywood—has done justice to representing women on screen, Chadha admitted it was a complex question.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



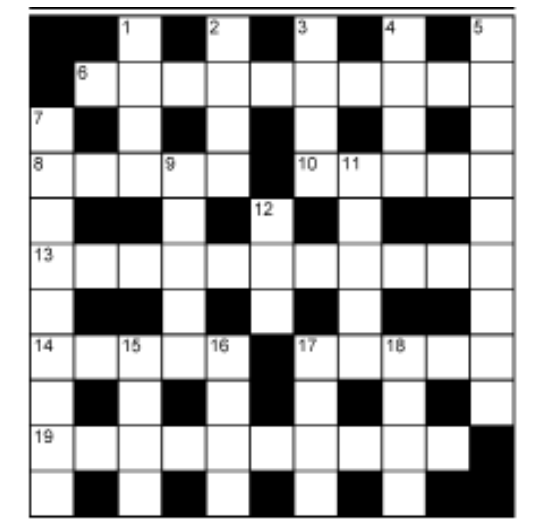
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



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.

ACROSS

- Speed up
- Elephant tusk material
- Leather belt
- Performer
- Keep your money in this
- Large group of singers
- Avalanches

DOWN

- Sound bouncing back
- Extremely
- Fewer
- Head covering
- Not permanent
- A tropical fruit
- These tall grass-like plants grow in or near water

11 The upper part of your leg

12 Pig pen

15 Ladder step

16 Compass direction

17 Small bed for a baby

18 Finished

SOLUTION

R	O	B	B	E	R	C	O	M	
A	A	S	V	R	E	R	I	E	
F	R	E	G	I	R	E	S	E	
R	E	V	O	L	V	E	R	E	
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T	E	A	S	B	M	I	E	S	
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R	O	P	E	B	E	A	T	E	N

GINGER MEGGS



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Monday
March 17, 2025

DYNAMIC, DARING & PURVASTIC POISE

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Purva Mantri is more than just a singer—she's a force of nature. With her dynamic stage presence, viral independent music, and now a breakthrough in Bollywood playback, she has carved a unique identity in the music industry. From performing at grand Navratri events to lending her voice to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's lyrics, Purva's journey is as inspiring as it is exhilarating.

For Purva, music is not just a career; it's in her DNA. "My mother is a classical Dusani singer, and my grandfather was also a classical singer. I grew up in a family where music was a way of life," she shares. Her childhood was filled with devotional music, attending bhajans at temples that lasted till dawn. "We would sing all night and end with the morning aarti. That was my foundation. My mother has been my guru since childhood, and I owe everything to her."

Looking back at her journey, Purva recalls two defining moments that changed everything. "The first was my solo performance in Gujarat in front of 10,000-12,000 people. My father was in the audience, and after the show, he told me, 'You were meditating on stage. Keep doing music like this—with complete passion and focus.' That became my mantra."

The second milestone came in the studio when she recorded "Aavati Kalay," a Garba song penned by PM Narendra Modi. "It's one of my biggest achievements. Out of so many talented artists in the industry, I was chosen to bring his lyrics to life. It's beyond anything I ever dreamed of."

Purva's Navratri concerts are legendary, with fans going wild over her electrifying presence. "The audience is my biggest source of energy. When I perform, I don't just sing—I meditate. I feel the power, the aura, and the love from the crowd, and that reflects in my performance."

Making the transition from independent music to Bollywood playback was a significant milestone for Purva. Her debut track, "Ishqa," featured in Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story, allowed her to explore a different creative space. "In independent music, the artist is the hero, but in playback singing, my voice becomes the soul of a character. For Ishqa, I had to bring in fresh yet melancholic emotions to match the young on-screen couple."

The film boasts an impressive musical lineup, including A.R. Rahman, Shaan, and Sneha Khanwalkar. While she hasn't collaborated with Rahman yet, she hopes to work with him soon. "I met him once during IPML

From setting Navratri stages on fire to making her Bollywood playback debut, Purva Mantri is redefining versatility in the music industry. As she gears up for her PURVASTIC World Tour and the success of her new single Mascara, she takes The Pioneer through her humble beginnings, lending her voice to PM's lyrics, her latest song and more



but haven't recorded with him yet. It would be a dream come true."

Purva's latest single, Mascara, is all set to drop on February 20. "Mascara is all about confidence and aura. It's a song for every girl—no matter her background, skin tone, or style. It has a Punjabi hint to it, blending indie pop with Indian elements, which is my signature style." When asked what kind of makeup style Mascara would be, she doesn't hesitate. "Bold and edgy—just like me!" The song celebrates femininity in a way that is playful yet powerful. "It's not just a song—it's an attitude!"

Music was always part of Purva's life, but the moment she chose it as a career came in 11th grade. "I was pursuing commerce, but I failed my exams. My father asked me what I really wanted, and I told him, 'I want to be like my mother. I don't want a 9-to-9 job—I want to sing, perform, and create.' The next day, we sat in the principal's office and changed my stream to music. That was the moment my passion became my profession."

Purva's fans have coined a term for her performances—"PURVASTIC." "One fan backstage told me, 'Fantastic is old. Your performance was PURVASTIC!' Since then, the word has stuck, and I love it! It reflects the connection I have with my audience."

2025 is shaping up to be a massive year for Purva. "I'm doing my PURVASTIC World Tour, covering the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand with my Bollywood and Navratri performances. Mascara is just the beginning—I'm also planning my first-ever album with 5-6 songs dropping together. This year is all about indie pop, folk vibes, and high-energy concerts!"

From independent hits to Bollywood playback, Purva Mantri continues to break boundaries with her music. With her raw passion, fearless energy, and deep-rooted love for her craft, she is an unstoppable force in the music industry.



FALLING IN LOVE WITH YOURSELF

The foundation of true wellness

Did you know that every person has already met their one true love—yet most remain unaware of it?

In a world that constantly demands more—more perfection, more productivity, more validation—there's one thing we often forget: ourselves. True wellness doesn't begin with a diet plan, a workout routine, or a self-care Sunday. It begins with a relationship—the one you build with yourself. Falling in love with yourself isn't arrogance; it's acceptance. It's looking in the mirror and seeing wholeness instead of flaws, growth instead of gaps. It's the moment you stop searching for love outside and realize you've been your own home all along. But how do you fall in love with yourself?

Listen—to your emotions, your needs, your inner whispers.
Forgive—your past mistakes, your imperfections, your humanness.
Celebrate—your wins, your efforts, your existence.

When you love yourself, your energy shifts. You stop chasing people who don't value you. You

stop settling for relationships that drain or mistreat you. You stop seeking permission to be who you truly are. Because when you love yourself deeply, you start holding space for yourself, embodying confidence, peace, and emotional strength—the true pillars of wellness. As a result, your self-worth flourishes. So, pause. Breathe. Place a hand on your heart and remind yourself: "I am enough. I am whole. I am loved."

Not by the world. Not by someone else. But by the most important person of all, your one true love—you. By falling in love with yourself, you also develop healthier relationships with others, because you approach the world from a place of self-assurance and balance. It becomes easier to connect with others authentically, without relying on them to validate your worth.

Ultimately, self-love creates a foundation for holistic wellness, helping you achieve harmony in mind, body, and spirit. It's the most important relationship you'll ever have—the one with yourself.

(The author, Esha Bhardwaj, is an Emotional Wellness Expert.)

When motherhood sparks a movement!

PNS| HYDERABAD

What started as a simple quest for safer, natural skincare soon became a full-fledged brand with a mission. A Dash of Me was born from the personal experiences of two mothers, Pinal Patel and Priyanka Patel, who were determined to create chemical-free skincare solutions for their families. Frustrated with the lack of truly natural products in the market, they spent months researching, experimenting, and perfecting formulations that were not only safe but also effective.

Their journey wasn't about launching a business—it was about finding a solution, first for their children and then for countless others facing similar concerns. Today, A Dash of Me stands as a testament to their commitment to purity, sustainability, and mindful self-care. In this conversation, Pinal and Priyanka share how their brand came to life, the challenges of ensuring 100% natural formulations, and their vision for empowering women entrepreneurs in the beauty and skincare industry.

Reflecting on how it all began, Pinal Patel shares, "It started with my own struggles. I've always had dry skin and rough hair, and I was trying to stick to traditional remedies like ubtan, shikakai, and coconut milk. But as a mom, finding the time for all that was really tough. Things got more concerning when my son started having skin issues too—itching and dryness that really needed attention. I didn't feel comfortable using chemical-based products on him, and honestly, I wasn't okay using them on myself either. I've always believed in keeping things natural, but I was stuck because I couldn't find anything that worked for us."

Seeing that Priyanka was facing similar struggles, the two friends began their journey into natural skin-

care. "We were curious about natural soaps, so we began experimenting. It took a lot of trial and error, but eventually, after almost a year, we made something that actually worked," Pinal recalls. "When we saw how well these soaps worked not just for us but also for our friends and family, it hit us—there must be so many people out there who are looking for the same thing. That's when we decided to turn it into a brand."

Developing products that met their high standards was no easy feat. Pinal explains, "It all started because I was struggling with dry skin and rough hair, and my son was dealing with eczema—itching, dryness, and just so much discomfort. I didn't feel comfortable using chemical-based products on either of us. Priyanka was going through the same thing, both for her child and herself. We were tired of not finding natural solutions that actually worked, so we decided to figure it out ourselves. We spent about a year researching and experimenting."

One of the biggest hurdles was sourcing the right ingredients. "We didn't want to compromise on safety or purity, so we were really particular about where we got our materials. We made sure to get them from trusted sources who were just as committed to quality as we were. It took time to find the right suppliers, but it was worth it," Pinal adds.

Priyanka echoes this sentiment, emphasizing how they maintained strict quality control. "We started making these products for our own kids, so being 100% natural was a necessity. We spent about a year researching and testing. We were really careful about every ingredient we used. Before letting our kids try anything, we tested it on ourselves to be absolutely sure it was safe and effective."

Beyond formulating safe and effective skincare, sustainability was a core focus for A Dash of Me. Priyanka

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, co-founders Pinal Patel and Priyanka Patel reveal how personal struggles with dry skin, rough hair, and family skin issues inspired them to create their women-led brand



maintain freshness and quality. It's not given out for mass production—we're personally in charge of the entire process."

The brand also ensures its packaging aligns with its values. "We've also put a lot of thought into our packaging. We use eco-friendly materials and reusable tins, making sure they can be repurposed or recycled. It was important for us to create products that don't just take care of our skin but also respect the environment," Priyanka adds.

For Pinal and Priyanka, A Dash of Me isn't just about skin care—it's about empowerment. "Honestly, I feel there's so much power when women come together and support each other. We want to encourage women with ideas and innovative solutions to step up and share them with the world. Age doesn't matter—you can start at any point in your life. It's really about taking that first step. Once you do, the rest starts to fall into place," Pinal shares.

In a market flooded with natural skincare brands, staying transparent and customer-focused is key. "Our focus is on staying genuine and transparent. We want people to see real experiences from those who actually use our products because that builds trust. Nothing speaks louder than honest feedback from real users," Priyanka explains.

One of the most touching success stories came from a young customer. "I remember a 14-year-old girl called me once to thank me because our products helped with her acne breakouts and body odour issues, especially during puberty. That meant so much to me," Pinal recalls.

As they continue their journey, Pinal and Priyanka remain committed to their original mission—creating skincare that is not only effective but also ethical, sustainable, and deeply personal.

McLaren's Lando Norris wins Australian Grand Prix

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Melbourne

McLaren's Lando Norris has won a chaotic rain-affected Australian Grand Prix, his first at Albert Park, with the Brit just managing to stay ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen following a third safety car late in Sunday's race.

Lewis Hamilton had a miserable Ferrari debut. The seven-time champion finished 10th and was annoyed by constant radio messages from his pit team.

Norris started the season-opening race, Melbourne's first wet race since 2010, from pole position. But, while he initially came under increasing pressure from Piastri, who set a series of fastest laps until his papaya team told him to hold position, the Australian spun at the penultimate corner on lap 44 as the rain intensified and dropped down the order.

A late race fightback helped Piastri recover to take ninth place including passing Hamilton on the final lap and two championship points. Verstappen finished 0.895 of a second behind Norris after starting from third on the grid, and took advantage of Piastri's misfortune and the



final safety car and tire stops. Mercedes' George Russell closed out the top-three.

"I knew I had a good pace, but I made one mistake in turn six and he got me in the DRS and the DRS around here is probably like a second or something so that allowed it to keep staying within that second," said Norris, who scored McLaren's 12th win in Australia to steal the outright record from Ferrari.

"I know what I'm capable of, I know what I can do, but obviously it's just round one, so we need to go and do it again next weekend and then continue from there. A long season ahead, we've just got to keep our head down and keep pushing."

Williams endured a mix bag, with Alex Albon securing his best result since Abu Dhabi 2020, and new recruit Carlos Sainz who won here last year driving for Ferrari out at the final turn on the opening lap.

Mercedes was thrilled to get two cars in the top five, with Russell onto the podium, his first since winning in Las Vegas last year. Rookie Andrea Kimi Antonelli, who replaced Hamilton at the silver squad, showed his class with a superb fightback drive from 16th on the grid, following his Q1 exit, to finish fifth.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll also made the best of the chaotic conditions to move up from 13th to sixth, ahead of Sauber's Nico Hulkenberg, bringing home eight points in what has been a difficult weekend for the green team with its car uncompetitive in dry running.

Ferrari is the most successful constructor at the Australian Grand Prix, with 11 wins since its first in 1987, but it will leave Melbourne disappointed with just five points to show after Charles Leclerc finished eighth and Hamilton 10th.

The Scuderia was seen as a potential championship challenger ahead of the season start and has plenty of work to do ahead of the Chinese Grand Prix next week. The Melbourne race had a thrilling start with Racing Bull's Isack Hadjar out on the formation lap, and Alpine's Jack Doohan joined Sainz in crashing out on the opening lap.

There were just 14 finishers, after Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso hit the turn eight barriers on lap 34, while Red Bull's Liam Lawson and Sauber's Gabriel Bortoletto went into the barriers and out of the race 10 laps from home in the treacherously wet conditions.

New Zealand beat Pakistan by nine wickets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Christchurch

A new era for Pakistan white ball cricket got off to a rough start on Sunday with a nine wicket loss to New Zealand in the first of five Twenty20 internationals. First time captain Salman Ali Agha-led a new look team into the match which followed Pakistan's poor performance at home in the 50-overs Champions Trophy and began its buildup to the 2026 T20 World Cup.

The Pakistan batting crumbled against the New Zealand pace attack and the tourists were all out for 91 in 18.4 overs, its fifth-lowest total in T20 internationals. New Zealand easily ran down that total, reaching 92-1 from 10.1 overs with Tim Seifert making 44 from 29 balls and Finn Allen 29 from 17.

Tim Robinson was 18 not out and took two runs from the first ball of the 11th over to complete the win. "It was obviously difficult and we weren't up to the mark," Ali Agha said. "They bowled really well. They were bowling in the right

areas and there was swing and seam for them as well. "But out batting wasn't up to the mark. We have won day before the next game and we will try to gather ourselves and be better in the next game."

Pakistan was in trouble from the start with the new opening pair of Mohammad Haris and Hasan Nawaz, stepping in for the veterans Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam, both dismissed without scoring in the first eight balls of the match.

They bowled really well. They were bowling in the right areas and there was swing and seam for them as well

— SALMAN ALI AGHA, PAKISTAN CAPTAIN

A fully fit Kyle Jamieson took 3-8 and Jacob Duffy 4-14 as Pakistan stumbled to 14-4 at the end of the six over powerplay. Jamieson and Duffy produced pace, bounce and swing on a brownish pitch at Hagley Oval and the Pakistan batters had no early response.

"It was really nice to be back on home

soil," said Jamieson who bowled 18 dot balls. "We had some pretty favorable conditions which I'm sure me and (Duffy) would take most places around the country. "It was nice to have those and just try to cash in as much as we could."

Salman and Khushdil Shah gave the Pakistan innings some impetus when they took 14 runs from the 10th over bowled by Ish Sodhi and 15 from the 11th bowled by Michael Bracewell to lift Pakistan from 28-4 after nine overs to 57-5 after 11. The Pakistan batters looked more at home against the spinners

But Duffy returned to dismiss Khushdil for 32 and the rest followed quickly with only three batters reaching three figures.

Seifert put New Zealand on course to a comfortable win, taking 12 runs from the third over and 14 runs off the fifth as New Zealand reached 43-1 in the power play. Allen, unusually subdued, scored only nine runs in the first six overs.

New Zealand was 90-1 after 10 overs, needing only 2 runs to win, when the umpires unaccountably called for drinks.

Bayern held to 1-1 draw at Union Berlin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Munich

A mistake by young goalkeeper Jonas Urbig meant Bayern Munich dropped points for the second Bundesliga game in a row with a 1-1 draw at Union Berlin.

Bayern seemed on course for victory when Leroy Sané scored in the 75th minute after Bayern had struggled to break through Union's deep defensive line, but Urbig's error eight minutes later proved costly.

Urbig came off his line to deal with a deflected cross which looped high into the air, but he could only palm it to Union striker Benedict Hollerbach, who hit it in low to level the score.

Bayern's lead in the Bundesliga over Bayer Leverkusen increased to nine points, but Leverkusen could cut the gap to six with a win Sunday over Stuttgart. Union is 13th.

"We're not happy with the result but it wasn't a bad performance," Bayern coach Vincent Kompany said.

While Bayern has been strong in the

Champions League, beating Leverkusen 5-0 over two legs to reach the quarterfinals, its Bundesliga form has dipped. The draw with Union follows a 3-2 loss last week against Bochum.

The 21-year-old Urbig played both of those games because first-choice goalkeeper Manuel Neuer tore a calf muscle when celebrating a goal in the first leg against Leverkusen last week.

Leipzig punishes wasteful Dortmund Dortmund's disappointing Bundesliga season took another turn for the worse with plenty of missed chances in a 2-0 loss at Leipzig that left the club 11th in the 18-team league.

Three days after beating Lille to reach the Champions League quarterfinals, Dortmund looked a different team in a loss which dealt another blow to its hopes of qualifying for any European competition next year.

Xavi Simons made the difference for Leipzig, scoring on a rebound in the 18th minute and setting up Lois Openda to volley in the second goal in the 48th.

Dortmund came alive after that and

racked up 26 total shots in the game, but a mix of strong goalkeeping by Leipzig's Peter Gulacsi, poor finishing and bad luck three shots hit the crossbar or post prevented a comeback.

It was the fourth loss in six Bundesliga games since coach Niko Kovac took charge last month, and he could face more problems after midfielder Marcel Sabitzer went off with a potentially serious knee injury. Leipzig moved up to fifth after its first Bundesliga win in more than a month and only its third victory in 11 league games since the new year.

Champions League-chasing Mainz clings on Mainz earned a 2-2 draw with Freiburg despite a first-half red card but its efforts to qualify for the Champions League for the first time were still dented. Third-place Mainz twice took the lead with goals from Jonathan Burkardt and Andreas Hanche-Olsen and ended Freiburg's run of not having conceded in six games but Freiburg leveled each time. Mainz had Dominik Kohr sent off just before halftime for a foul as the last defender.

Early wickets of Shafali, Lanning turned match for us: Edwards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians head coach Charlotte Edwards said the early wickets of Delhi Capitals' skipper Meg Lanning and opener Shafali Verma helped her team win the Women's Premier League final here.

Lanning (13) and Shafali (4) departed with just 17 runs on the board as DC ended up at 141 for nine while chasing 150. "150, we knew we were a little bit light, but in a final, it's always worth a little bit more. Shafali didn't come out like she normally does, and I knew straightaway that potentially we were in with a chance, because if we could get her wicket," Edwards said in the post-match press conference on Saturday night.

Edwards said the Capitals were a bit cagey in their chase, and it made things easier for her side. "It probably fell in our hands a little bit that we were a bit short, and potentially they went about it a bit slower than they normally do."

"The opening partnership of Lanning and Shafali has been our curse over the last few years, if I'm honest, so I was really pleased to see the back of those two batters early. It was a real team performance," she added.

Edwards lauded MI skipper Harmanpreet Kaur for making an important 66 off 44 balls that led her side to a

competitive total.

"She's been really calm. She's deeply competitive, so clearly she wanted to win another title here, and she did everything in her power to do that with the innings she played. She's great around the group, she brings out the best in our young players, and works brilliantly with all our overseas and experienced players," she said. Edwards also praised all-rounders Nat-Sciver Brunt and Hayley Matthews for making heavy contributions throughout the tournament.

Brunt was the highest run-getter in the WPL 2025 with 523 runs and Hayley shared the top wicket-taker spot with teammate Amelia Kerr, taking 18 wickets apiece.

"I think Hayley's been exceptional, and Nat Sciver-Brunt has been absolutely amazing, and to have that kind of experience around Harman, I think it really frees her up to play the way that she's played," she said.

The former England skipper also patted MI players for maintaining intensity despite playing four matches inside six days.

"To play four games in six days, yeah. I mean, it's been fantastic to see how the players have backed those performances up, and to come out here on the big stage and still give that energy to the performance, you know, I'm truly proud," she said.

Having family around helps player to recover from on-field disappointments, says Kohli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Star batter Virat Kohli supported the presence of players' families on tours, saying he would always prefer having personal support around him to deal with tough and intense days on the field, instead of sulking alone in his hotel room. A BCCI directive which was issued after India's 1-3 Test series defeat against Australia had curtailed the family time of players for no longer than 14 days on tours exceeding 45 days.

The wife, children or girlfriends of players could be with them for a maximum of one week on shorter tours.

"The role of family is very difficult to explain to people...how grounding it is to just come back to your family every time you have something which is intense, which happens on the outside," said Kohli during RCB's Innovation Lab summit which concluded here on Saturday.

"I don't think people have an understanding of what value it brings," Kohli said having the family around would help a player to recover from on-field disappointments that much quicker. "I don't want to go to my room and just sit alone and sulk. I want to be able to be normal. Then you can really treat your game as something that is a responsibility. "Not in a vague sense, but in a very real way that



you finish your commitment and then you come back to your house, you're with family, and absolutely normalcy in your house and normal family life goes on.

"So, for me, that is absolutely a day of immense pleasure. I won't miss any opportunities to go out and spend time with my family whenever I can," said Kohli. The 36-year-old was "disappointed" because people with no real connection with such issues have been involved in such discussions.

"I feel quite disappointed about that

because it's like people who have no control over what's going on are brought into conversations and put out at the forefront of that, 'oh, maybe they need to be kept away.' "And if you ask any player, do you want your family to be around you all the time? You'll be like, yes," he said. "Support system from the team's point of view wasn't tough. Convincing my mom what I was doing was way harder. She was very disappointed in the fact that I wasn't eating any parathas and I was looking weak on the field," he said.

Jack Draper knocks off Carlos Alcaraz to reach BNP Paribas open final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Indian Wells

Jack Draper toppled two-time defending champion Carlos Alcaraz 6-1, 0-6, 6-4 to reach the BNP Paribas Open final. The 13th-seeded Draper will face 12th-seeded Holger Rune on Sunday. Rune beat fifth-seeded Daniil Medvedev 7-6, 6-4 in the first semifinal for his 150th tour-level victory.

In the women's final Sunday, top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka will play 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva. They won semi-final matches Friday night in chilly conditions.

Draper ended Alcaraz's 16-match winning streak in the ATP Masters 1000 event in the California desert. The 23-year-old English left-hander set to break into the top 10 in the world for the first time Monday won last year in Vienna and Stuttgart for his lone tour titles. He's 2-3 against Alcaraz. Alcaraz, seeded second, missed a chance to become the youngest player to win three consecutive singles titles at any ATP Tour event and just the third to do it at Indian Wells. The 21-year-old Spanish star won in Rotterdam in February for his 17th ATP Tour title.

The 21-year-old Rune, from Denmark, snapped a seven-match losing streak in semifinals. He's 2-2 against Medvedev.

Real Madrid 2-1 over Villarreal in Spanish League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

After a slow start to his Real Madrid career, Kylian Mbappe has already surpassed one of the club greats.

Mbappe scored twice in Madrid's 2-1 comeback win over Villarreal on Saturday to take his tally to 31 goals in all competitions this season one more than Brazil striker Ronaldo managed in his first campaign at the club. It also helped Madrid open up a three-point lead atop the Spanish league over Barcelona, which has played two games less.

Long gone are the scoring troubles Mbappe endured in his first months at Madrid. Having surpassed Ronaldo's tally from 2002-03, the former Paris Saint-Germain player is now closing in on the 33 goals that Cristiano Ronaldo scored in his first season with Madrid in 2009-10.

"They are legends who marked eras with the club," Mbappe said about the two Ronaldos. "If I score more goals than Ronaldo and Cristiano it doesn't mean that I am better, just that my first season is better. Scoring goals is important, but it is even more so if we win La Liga, the Champions League and the Copa del Rey." His double at fifth-placed Villarreal took Mbappe's La Liga tally to 20 goals, only one fewer than Barcelona's Robert



Lewandowski in the domestic competition. Leading the comeback Villarreal made it a pulsating game as it attacked in waves with Alex Baena and Nicolas Pepe helping create a series of chances. Thibaut Courtois made three good stops for Madrid to deny Pepe, Ayoze Pérez, and Pape Gueye in the first half.

But Villarreal paid at the other end

where Mbappe ruthlessly exploited the holes in the Yellow Submarine's defense. "Mbappe didn't participate much, but he was lethal," Villarreal coach Marcelino Toral said.

A one-handed save by Courtois to deny Ayoze led to a corner kick that resulted in Villarreal's eight-minute opener. Juan Foyth swept home a ball that fell to him

inside the six-yard box after it had ricocheted off players in a packed area.

Mbappe leveled in the 17th after he teed up teammate Brahim Diaz for a shot that was saved by goalkeeper Diego Conde, and the ball fell to the France striker to rifle home. Mbappe was on the scoreboard again in the 23rd when Villarreal's defense lost track of him at the top of the area. He received a pass from Lucas Vázquez and had all the time he needed to place a shot into the right corner.

Half-time substitute Thierno Barry and Foyth both squandered scoring opportunities early in the second half before Madrid tightened its defense to see out the game.

Carlo Ancelotti left Vinicius Júnior and Antonio Rudiger on the bench until the final half hour - with Luka Modric going on shortly after - as the Madrid coach rotated his lineup three days after its grueling Champions League victory over Atletico Madrid that went to a penalty shootout.

"This was an important and difficult game against one of the best teams in the league," Mbappe said. "After the game against Atletico and its added time it was very tough today but we knew we had to win. We showed character and that we wanted this win."

AC Milan beat Como 2-1 in Serie A

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Milan

Christian Pulisic scored again to help AC Milan earn another comeback victory in Serie A with a 2-1 home win over Como. Tijjani Reijnders set up Pulisic's second-half equalizer before netting the winner himself in the 75th minute. It was Pulisic's third goal in two matches, taking the United States international to nine goals in Serie A and 15 in all competitions this campaign equaling his tally from his first season at Milan.

Milan moved up to seventh, five points below fourth-placed Juventus. Como remained seven points above the relegation zone. Pulisic's two goals last weekend helped Milan fight back to win 3-2 at Lecce and end a three-match losing streak.

It again went behind on Saturday, when Lucas Da Cunha drilled into the bottom left corner from the edge of the area in the 33rd minute. The Milan fans jeered loudly at halftime and it almost got worse for them four minutes after the restart but Da Cunha's second goal of the night was ruled out for offside.

Instead it was Milan which leveled four minutes later. Rafael Leão and Alex Jiménez combined on the left before

picking out Reijnders, who delicately dinked the ball over the top for Pulisic to sweep into the far bottom corner from a tight angle.

Reijnders also clipped the top of the crossbar before scoring the winner in the 75th minute, slotting home after being sent through on goal by a backheeled pass by Tammy Abraham. Como substitute Dele Alli's return to soccer lasted just nine minutes as he was shown a straight red card late on for a foul on Ruben Loftus-Cheek, shortly after coming off the bench for his first appearance in two years.

Lengthy goal wait ended Monza captain Armando Izzo scored his first goal in more than two years but it wasn't enough to secure a win as the last-place team drew 1-1 against fellow struggler Parma.

Izzo netted in the 60th minute but Parma substitute Ange-Yoan Bonny leveled six minutes from time with a solo effort.

Monza remained 10 points from safety while 17th-placed Parma inched three points clear of the relegation zone. Hellas Verona moved seven points above the drop after a free kick by Ondrej Duda handed it a 1-0 win at Udinese, ending the host's six-match unbeaten streak.



AR Rahman fit and fine after dehydration-related hospital visit

Legendary composer and Oscar-winning music director AR Rahman was hospitalized in Chennai on Sunday morning, sparking concerns among his fans. Reports initially suggested that Rahman was admitted to a private hospital due to chest pain, but later, doctors confirmed that he was suffering from dehydration.

According to hospital sources, Rahman arrived at Apollo Hospitals, Grems Road, around 7:30 AM, where doctors immediately attended to him and shifted him to the ICU for observation.

However, after routine check-ups, his condition was found to be stable, and he was discharged later in the afternoon.

A statement from the hospital clarified the situation: "AR Rahman visited Apollo Hospitals with dehydration symptoms and was discharged after a routine check-up." The news initially caused panic among Rahman's fans, especially since the composer has been busy with several events in recent weeks. Additionally, he has been in the headlines due to his separation from his wife, who recently underwent surgery.



NTR's bollywood debut *War 2* set for Aug 14, 2025 release

NTR is set to make his Bollywood debut with the much-anticipated film 'War 2', where he stars alongside Hrithik Roshan. Directed by Ayan Mukerji and produced by Aditya Chopra, the action-packed thriller features NTR in a negative-shaded role.

Recently, speculations arose about a possible delay in the film's release after Hrithik Roshan sustained a leg injury while filming a dance sequence. However, Yash Raj Films (YRF) put the rumors to rest by officially confirming the film's worldwide release on August 14, 2025.

"Must say... you have set it up brilliantly even before we have started our marketing of 'War 2'... There will

be mayhem in cinemas on 14 August 2025, worldwide," YRF announced on social media.

Kiara Advani plays the female lead in the film, and her portions are reportedly complete. The announcement of her pregnancy alongside husband Sidharth Malhotra suggests that she wrapped up her shoot before taking a break.

With the massive success of 'RRR', NTR gained global recognition, and 'War 2' is expected to further expand his Bollywood presence.



'IF YOU HAVE GUTS, COME ON STAGE,' ANASUYA'S BOLD RESPONSE TO HECKLER

Popular actress and anchor Anasuya Bharadwaj made headlines again after an incident at a Holi celebration in Hyderabad. As she entered the event, someone from the crowd called her 'aunty,' which angered the actress, leading her to give a strong response.

Known for her bold personality and fearless opinions on social media, Anasuya has previously

addressed being called 'aunty' in a similar controversy.

When the incident happened this time, she immediately reacted and challenged the person to come onto the stage if they had the courage.

However, the individual chose to leave the venue instead. "If you have guts, come onto the stage. If you are trying to provoke me, I will show you what happens."

Anasuya reportedly said, also making a gesture with her little finger to indicate the person's lack of courage.

A video of this confrontation is now circulating widely on social media, sparking discussions among netizens.

Pushpa 3 confirmed for 2028 release, producer reveals update



The Pushpa franchise, starring Allu Arjun and directed by Sukumar, has been a massive success, with Pushpa: The Rise and Pushpa: The Rule achieving nationwide recognition. Now, fans have received an official update on the highly anticipated third installment.

During the promotional event for their upcoming film Robinhood in Vijayawada, Mythri Movie Makers producer Ravi Yelamanchili confirmed that 'Pushpa 3' is definitely happening and is planned for a 2028 release. "Yes, 'Pushpa 3' will happen, and we aim to release it in

2028," he stated.

Meanwhile, director Sukumar and Allu Arjun are currently focused on other projects. Sukumar is set to direct Ram Charan, while Allu Arjun is in talks with multiple directors, including Atlee and Trivikram Srinivas.

With no official confirmation on Allu Arjun's next film, it remains to be seen if he will complete two other films before returning to the Pushpa franchise. Fans are eagerly awaiting further updates on these major projects.

Saptagiri reveals struggling to find female lead in *Pellikani Prasad*

Actor Saptagiri, who started his career as a comedian before transitioning to lead roles, is set to return as the main actor in the upcoming film *Pellikani Prasad*, scheduled for release on March 21. However, the actor recently revealed that finding a female lead for the film was a major challenge.

Speaking at a promotional event, Saptagiri admitted that many actresses declined to act opposite him, as they did not want to be paired with a comedian.

"We faced a lot of difficulties in casting a female lead. Many actresses refused to act opposite me," he shared. Eventually, Priyanka Sharma accepted the role, and the film was successfully completed.

Saptagiri also revealed that Dil Raju is distributing the film after his brother Sirish saw a preview and decided to back it. "After watching just half an hour of the film, Sirish said he wanted to distribute it and asked me to start promotions," he stated.

Despite his previous lead roles in Saptagiri Express and Saptagiri LLB not performing well at the box office, Saptagiri remains confident about this project. "I gave myself 100 marks for this film, and I am sure the audience will do the same," he said.

Samantha ventures into production, introduces fresh talent with *Shubam*

After establishing herself as a successful actress in films and web series, Samantha Ruth Prabhu has now stepped into film production. She recently launched her production house, Tralala Moving Pictures, which has completed its first project and is gearing up for a theatrical release.

Titled 'Shubam', the film blends humor, thrills, and quirky comedy while offering a fresh take on everyday issues. Written by Vasanth Mariganti and directed by Praveen Kandregula, the duo previously collaborated on the critically acclaimed film 'Cinema Bandi'.

Samantha is also introducing several new talents to the industry, including Harshith Malgireddy, Shriya Kontham, Charan Peri, Shalini Kondepudi, Gavireddy Srinivas, and Shravani.

Speaking about the project, Samantha said, "This film embodies Tralala's vision of unique, thought-provoking cinema." The movie boasts an impressive technical team, featuring cinematographer Mridul Sujit Sen, production designer Ram Charan Tej, and editor Dharmendra Kakarla. Further details, including the release date, will be announced soon.

