



# The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1864

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**Maha Kumbh strengthened India's spirit of unity: PM**



**LOOKING FORWARD TO INK FTA WITH INDIA IN 60 DAYS**



I believe in spontaneous acting, rather prepare for it: Aadi

**SAIKUMAR**



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

**The Pioneer**

An OBC from the Congress will become the Chief Minister of Telangana in future. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is providing good governance in Telangana and the Congress has a good future here. It is not possible for an OBC to bag the CM's post in any other party in Telangana. It is possible only in the Congress. Other parties limit themselves to words. The Congress will show it through action

**-Mahesh Kumar Goud, TPCC Chief**

**DON'T MISS...**

**Onion prices dip in Kurnool market**

The sharp decline in onion prices has left farmers in distress, with many staring at severe losses. Once hopeful of a profitable season, they are now grappling with plummeting wholesale rates that barely cover their investment. Until March 10, onion farmers in Kurnool were fetching decent prices for their produce. However, in a sudden downturn, prices in the wholesale market began to collapse, dashing their expectations of a continued upward trend. "We thought prices would rise further, but the opposite has happened..."

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**'Committed to bring normalcy in Manipur'**

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the central government is committed to bringing normalcy to Manipur and assured all support for the economic growth of the state. Replying to a discussion on the passage of the Manipur Budget for the current fiscal and vote of account for the six months of 2025-26 in the Rajya Sabha, the minister also sought the support of the Opposition parties for peace in Manipur instead of engaging in the blame game. The senior minister also hit back...

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**Sensex jumps over 1,100 points**

The BSE benchmark index Sensex jumped 1,131 points to revisit the 75,000 level on Tuesday, and the NSE Nifty surged 1.45 per cent, tracking a bullish trend in global equities and intense buying in market majors ICICI Bank, L&T and M&M counters. Besides, lower crude oil prices in the international markets and a weak dollar against major currencies overseas also bolstered sentiment, traders said. Rising for the second day on the trot, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,131.31 points or 1.53 per cent to...

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**'I always knew my strengths, abilities'**

He fought perceptions about a so-called technical shortcoming, was "typecast", and had his contract torn up within months of being a World Cup hero but Shreyas Iyer was indefatigable through it all, trusting his sincerity and uncomplicated mind to steer him through. The result of the perseverance has been pleasing, to put it mildly. The 30-year-old has built himself into one of India's most consistent number four batters in recent times and was declared a "silent hero" by his captain Rohit Sharma...

-SPORTS

**Astronauts Sunita, Wilmore finally on way back to Earth**

PNS ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

NASA's two stuck astronauts headed back to Earth with SpaceX on Tuesday to close out a dramatic marathon mission that began with a bungled Boeing test flight more than nine months ago.

Butch Wilmore and Indian-origin Sunita Williams bid farewell to the International Space Station — their home since last spring — departing aboard a SpaceX capsule alongside two other astronauts.

The capsule undocked shortly after 1 am Eastern and aimed for a splashdown off the Florida coast five hours later, weather permitting.

The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on June 5. So many problems cropped up on the way to the space station that NASA eventually sent Starliner back empty and transferred the test pilots to SpaceX, pushing their homecoming into February. Then SpaceX capsule issues added another month's delay.



Sunday's arrival of their relief crew meant Wilmore and Williams could finally leave. NASA cut them loose a little early, given the iffy weather forecast later this week. They checked out with NASA's Nick Hague and Russia's Alexander Gorbunov, who arrived in their own SpaceX capsule last fall with two empty seats reserved for the Starliner duo.

meanwhile, officials discussed proposals to be presented to Prime Minister Modi regarding Amaravati's development. Apart from the Prime Minister, Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and other key dignitaries are expected to attend the event marking the restart of Amaravati's construction.

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**Modi invites Sunita to visit India**

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written to NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, who is scheduled to return to Earth early on Wednesday after a nine-month stay at the International Space Station, and invited her to visit India. The letter, written on March 1 and sent through former NASA astronaut Mike Massimino, was shared on X by Union Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh. "Even though you are thousands of miles away, you continue to remain close to our hearts. The people of India are praying for your good health and success in your mission," Modi said in the letter. "After your return, we are looking forward to seeing you in India."



**CM to meet Bill Gates in Delhi today**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will visit New Delhi on Tuesday to attend a wedding reception and will hold a meeting with Microsoft founder Bill Gates on March 19.

Naidu will depart from Amaravati at 4 pm on Tuesday to attend the wedding reception of a family member of Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

**PM to be invited for launch of Amaravati reconstruction**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP-led NDA government in Andhra Pradesh is prioritising the reconstruction of Amaravati as the State capital. The Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) has already granted approvals for various projects, and the Cabinet has also given its nod for these initiatives.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday held a review meeting with CRDA officials, attended by Minister Narayana and other authorities. The primary focus of the discussion was the proposed visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Amaravati.

On Wednesday, CM Chandrababu Naidu will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to formally invite him to inaugurate the restart of Amaravati's construction works. Officials reviewed key aspects of the visit, including site selection, scheduling, and other logistical arrangements for the relaunch of development activities.



The meeting also finalized an auspicious time (muhurtham) for the recommencement of capital construction. Instead of holding a symbolic foundation stone ceremony, the government plans to initiate actual construction work.

Additionally, officials discussed proposals to be presented to Prime Minister Modi regarding Amaravati's development. Apart from the Prime Minister, Home Minister Amit Shah, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and other key dignitaries are expected to attend the event marking the restart of Amaravati's construction.

**WB, ADB reps happy with Amaravati development plans**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The World Bank (WB) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) representatives expressed their satisfaction with various aspects of Amaravati construction presented by officials at a high-level meeting held at the CRDA office in Vijayawada on Tuesday. The discussion focussed on fund allocation for the city's development and the first-year action plan for the project.

APCRDA Commissioner K Kannababu, along with Additional Commissioners G Suryasai Praveen Chand and Mallarapu Naveen, provided an update on the initiatives undertaken in Amaravati and the progress made over the past year. They outlined the Disbursement Linked Indicators (DLIs) relevant to key aspects of the capital development project and briefed the World Bank and ADB representatives on the ongoing Programme Action Plans (PAPs).

Continued on Page 2



**500 govt services on WhatsApp by June 30: Lokesh**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for IT and Electronics Nara Lokesh has announced that by June 30, citizens will be able to access 500 government services through the Mana Mitra platform on WhatsApp.

Speaking during a discussion on WhatsApp governance in the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, Lokesh underscored the transformative role of technology in making government services more accessible, drawing comparisons to past administrative reforms.

Recalling the legacy of governance reforms, Lokesh highlighted how the late NT Rama Rao revolutionised administration in 1983 by abolishing the Patel-Patwari system and directly connecting the government with the people. He also credited former Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for launching e-Seva, inspired by Singapore's Citizen Service Centre. Initially designed for electricity bill payments, e-Seva later evolved into Mee-Seva, expanding digital access to various government services.

Lokesh emphasised that governance should be about delivering services efficiently and conveniently.

Continued on Page 2

**'Top varsities to set up campuses in AP'**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government is making significant strides to bring top universities from India and abroad to the state, announced Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh. Introducing the Andhra Pradesh Private Universities Establishment and Regulation Amendment Bill - 2025, he said the move is aimed at facilitating foreign university campuses in the State, aligning with the Central government's efforts to promote international educational institutions.

Lokesh emphasised that encouraging private universities is a key part of the government's vision for decentralization and balanced educational development. He cited Centurion University in Visakhapatnam as a successful model and highlighted the allocation of 70 acres in Amaravati for the prestigious Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS).

Continued on Page 2

**4 police officers hurt in stone-pelting at temple fete**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tensions flared in Penuganchiprolu, NTR district, on Monday night when a violent altercation broke out during the annual Tirupatamma Temple celebrations.

A group of miscreants pelted stones at police officers, leaving four personnel injured.

The clash erupted when police halted a chariot (prabha) associated with political party sympathisers near the police station, while other chariots proceeded on a different route toward the temple. Enraged by the police intervention, the miscreants launched an attack on the officers.

Continued on Page 2

**Four-phase plan for a lasting solution to Budameru floods**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government is set to formulate a special plan to provide a lasting solution to the persistent Budameru flood problem, which has long troubled Vijayawada and surrounding regions, including Kolleru and Upputeru.

Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu announced the initiative on Tuesday, emphasising that the issue was discussed in detail during a Cabinet meeting led by Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. The government aims to implement a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the recurring flood crisis. The plan, requiring coordination among the Water Resources, Revenue, and Municipal Administration departments, is expected to benefit hundreds of villages and thousands of acres affected by Budameru's overflow. Vijayawada city remains one of the most impacted areas due to its geographical positioning.

To tackle the problem, the government intends to seek assistance from the Centre through disaster management channels. The proposed plan will be executed in four phases, focusing on key infrastructural enhancements. These include increasing the capacity of the Velagaleru regulator, expanding the diversion channel, strengthening Budameru's embankments, and restoring Vijayawada's old canal to improve water flow. Additionally, floodwaters will be directed through Upputeru into the sea to prevent backflow and stagnation. Ramanaidu acknowledged the challenges posed by land acquisition in Vijayawada, given the presence of permanent structures and multi-storey buildings.

Continued on Page 2

**Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu suggests that deepening and expanding the old canal could help mitigate floods while reducing land acquisition costs, particularly in agricultural zones.**



**TG second after AP in MLAs facing criminal cases**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) said that its analysis of the affidavits of 4,092 of 4,123 MLAs indicated that Andhra Pradesh has the highest percentage of sitting MLAs facing criminal cases at 79% (138 of 174), followed by Kerala and Telangana with 69% each, Bihar with 66%, Maharashtra with 65% and Tamil Nadu with 59%.

Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh also leads the list of MLAs facing serious criminal cases at 56% (98), followed by Telangana (50%) and Bihar (49%). An analysis of 4,092 MLAs from 28 state and UT Assemblies revealed that nearly 45% (1,861 MLAs) have criminal cases registered against them. Of them, 1,205 or 29% face serious criminal charges like murder, attempt

to murder, kidnapping, and crimes against women. In fact, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu's TDP has the highest proportion of MLAs facing criminal cases at 86% (115 of 134 legislators). Moreover, 61% or 82 MLAs are facing serious charges.

Around 39% (638 out of 1,653) of BJP MLAs have declared criminal cases with 436 or 26% facing serious charges. The analysis shows that 339 out of 646 Congress MLAs (52%) also have criminal cases against them, with 194 facing serious charges.

Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK has 74 per cent (98 out of 132) MLAs facing criminal cases, including 42 facing serious allegations. Around 41% (95 out of 230) of Trinamool Congress MLAs are facing criminal cases. Among them, 78 or 34% are facing serious charges.

**Israeli strikes across Gaza kill more than 400 Palestinians**

**Shatter ceasefire with Hamas**

PNS ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israel launched airstrikes across the Gaza Strip early Tuesday, killing at least 404 Palestinians, including women and children, according to hospital officials.

The surprise bombardment shattered a ceasefire in place since January and threatened to fully reignite the 17-month-old war.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered the strikes after Hamas refused Israeli demands to change the ceasefire agreement. Officials said the operation was open-ended and was expected to expand. The White House said it had been consulted and voiced support for Israel's actions.

The Israeli military ordered people to evacuate eastern Gaza, including much of the northern town of Beit Hanoun and other communities further south, and head toward the centre of the territory, indicating that Israel could soon launch renewed ground operations. "Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength," Netanyahu's office said.

The attack during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan could resume a war that has already killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction across Gaza. It also raised questions about the fate of the roughly two



dozen Israeli hostages held by Hamas who are believed to still be alive.

A senior Hamas official said Netanyahu's decision to return to war amounts to a "death sentence" for the remaining hostages. Izzat al-Risheq accused Netanyahu of launching the strikes to try and save his far-right governing coalition and called on mediators to "reveal

facts" on who broke the truce. Hamas said at least four senior officials were killed in Tuesday's strikes.

There were no reports of any attacks by Hamas several hours after the bombardment, indicating it still hoped to restore the truce.

The strikes came as Netanyahu comes under mounting domestic pressure, with mass protests planned over his handling of the hostage crisis and his decision to fire the head of Israel's internal security agency. His latest testimony in a long-running corruption trial was cancelled after the strikes.

The strikes appeared to give Netanyahu a political boost, and a far-right party that had bolted the government over the ceasefire announced Tuesday it was rejoining.

The main group representing families of the captives accused the

government of backing out of the ceasefire, saying it "chose to give up on the hostages."

"We are shocked, angry and terrified by the deliberate dismantling of the process to return our loved ones from the terrible captivity of Hamas," the Hostages and Missing Families Forum said in a statement. **Wounded stream into Gaza hospitals**

A strike on a home in the southern city of Rafah killed 17 members of one family, including at least 12 women and children, according to the European Hospital, which received the bodies. The dead included five children, their parents, and another father and his three children.

In the southern city of Khan Younis, Associated Press reporters saw explosions and plumes of smoke.

## BRS must reinvent itself to regain its lost glory

The aggressiveness shown by ruling parties in taking on their principal rival indicates what kind of scenario is likely to unfold. This is a very big question that can decide the future of the BRS which played the key role in creating Telangana state. The BRS played the main role in spearheading the movement for achieving statehood for Telangana which was carved out of United Andhra Pradesh as per the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014.

The BRS could exploit the sentiment favouring the creation of a separate state in the minds of the four crore people of Telangana which had seen only meagre development. It just crossed the majority mark in the 119-member TG Assembly by bagging 60-plus seats. Eventually, the BRS opened its gates to the legislators of the Congress and the

TDP and its tally touched 80. By the end of its first term, the BRS had lost credibility as far as developing the new state was concerned. But the move of the TDP to align with Congress came as a boon for the BRS. It may be mentioned here that the Telangana Movement was based on the aversion of Telanganites towards Andhraites and the role played by Andhra leaders in the administrative affairs of United Andhra Pradesh.

Although the BRS put forward the slogan of water, funds and employment (Neellu, Nidhulu & Niyamakalu), it was originally based on the anti-Andhra sentiment in the minds of Telanganites. This aversion of Telanganites towards Andhraites had faded by the time of the 2018 Assembly elections. BRS supremo K. Chandrasekhar

**Although the BRS put forward the slogan of water, funds and employment (Neellu, Nidhulu & Niyamakalu), it was originally based on the anti-Andhra sentiment in the minds of Telanganites. This aversion of Telanganites towards Andhraites had faded by the time of the 2018 Assembly elections. BRS supremo K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR) turned public attention towards the seat sharing agreement between the Congress and the TDP.**

Rao (KCR) turned public attention towards the seat sharing agreement between the Congress and the TDP. KCR started drilling into the minds of Telanganites that Andhra rule may return to Telangana if the Congress-TDP combine won elections. He also said that Andhra rule may return due to the influence of Chandrababu Naidu as his party would be in the ruling alliance in case the two party combine came to power in Telangana. This

pierced the hearts of Telanganites and made them vote for the BRS. Aligning with the TDP proved disastrous for the Congress.

During the 2023 Assembly elections, the Congress kept the TDP away. The TDP did not contest to avoid splitting anti-BRS votes and to defeat the BRS. This yielded results and the TDP could attain its objective of defeating the BRS by not contesting and ensuring the defeat of the BRS.

The Congress patronised



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Revanth Reddy who was an outsider. Noticing his oratory skills against KCR, Sonia Gandhi made him the TPCC President signalling to Congress cadres indirectly that he would be made the Chief Minister if the party wins. Senior TPCC leaders did not like Revanth but agreed to work under him at the behest of the high command.

Revanth succeeded in marginalising the BRS by encouraging desertions by its legislators. The BRS went into decline and it couldn't even get representation in the Lok Sabha in the 2024 LS elections.

Now the BJP seems to have become the second biggest party in Telangana. The Congress and the BJP won eight LS seats each and the remaining one went to the AIMIM. The BJP is now confident of becoming the ruling party in TG in the next Assembly elections in 2028. By bagging eight LS seats for the first time in its 45-year-old history in United Andhra Pradesh, the BJP converted its 'enhanced strength' spread over 56 Assembly seats. With eight seats in the current TG Assembly, the BJP is moving aggressively. The BJP leadership has picked Bandi Sanjay Kumar and G. Kishan Reddy to strengthen the party organically and to ensure the

party's presence in all Assembly seats. The BJP is now searching for a new leader to lead its TG unit in the 2028 Assembly polls.

The BRS scored a big zero in the LS elections as it preferred to defeat the Congress instead of winning. The BRS's hidden support came in handy for the BJP to equalise its LS score in TG with the Congress. As Telangana is a key state for the Congress, the BRS thought that it can give a deadly blow to the Congress by reducing its LS tally in the state.

The BJP may become stronger in 2028 due to the possible presence of the TDP and the Jana Sena Party (JSP). Both the TDP and the JSP having considerable vote banks in Telangana which would be helpful for the BJP.

With its lethargic attitude due to its humiliating defeat in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BRS is unable to become active. The BRS need to rejuvenate

itself if it wants to regain its lost glory. The tussle between the BRS and the Congress might become useful for the BJP. This means that the BRS may not be the principal contender in the next Telangana elections. If the BRS decides to scuttle the chances of the Congress instead of winning, then it could end up with empty hands.

The 2028 elections would be crucial for the BRS in view of its continuous struggle for existence as the Congress is aggressively moving forward. Chief Minister Revanth Reddy exposed KCR for not attending Assembly sessions and drawing salary and other allowances amounting to Rs 56 lakh in the last 10 months embarrassing the BRS a lot.

The BRS may not be comfortable taking on both the BJP and the Congress. The impression of family rule that the BRS left in the minds of Telanganites is another minus point that it cannot erase.

## Gottipati lauds staff's service during natural calamities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar lauded the dedication of electricity department employees, particularly during natural disasters and emergencies. At an event held at the Secretariat on Tuesday, the minister, along with former Power Minister Kimidi Kala Venkat Rao, unveiled the diary and calendar of the AP Electricity BC Employees Welfare Association.

Association president Polaki Srinivasa Rao highlighted the various challenges faced by electricity employees due to policies of the previous YSRC government. Minister Ravi Kumar assured that these concerns would be brought to the attention of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. He reaffirmed the coalition government's commitment to address-



The minister praised electricity employees for their crucial role in restoring power during floods and cyclones. He emphasised that the electricity sector weakened under the previous administration, is now being strengthened with the cooperation and efforts of employees.

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emphasised that the electricity sector weakened under the previous administration, is now being strengthened with the cooperation and efforts of employees.

During the programme, Polaki Srinivasa Rao raised key issues affecting employees, including the long-pending transition from EPF to GPF. The minister assured that this matter would be taken up with the Chief Minister. Other demands included the removal of the basic pay ceiling imposed during the 2022 pay fixation and the provision of medical benefits without any ceiling.

Union leaders expressed confidence that the long-standing grievances of electricity employees, including the loss of certain rights under the previous government, would be addressed under the new administration. The event was attended by BC leader Keshana Shankara Rao, Vice President G. Ramu, Secretary of Finance S. Venkateswarlu, and union leaders from 13 districts.

## Call for quota in govt contracts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Senior Congress leader and former Union Minister Chinta Mohan has strongly objected to the lack of reservation for marginalised communities in government contracts in Andhra Pradesh. Drawing a comparison with Karnataka, he urged for a 24% allocation of government contract works for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), and 15% for Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Expressing deep emotion over the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet's resolution on SC categorization, he said, "Seeing this resolution brought tears to my eyes." He warned that the move could politically impact the Telugu Desam Party and its leader Chandrababu Naidu, particularly affecting Lokesh.

Highlighting disparities in financial access, he noted that despite SCs and STs forming 25% of the population, they receive only 1% of bank loans.

## Araku Coffee debuts at AP Assembly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Araku Coffee was officially launched on the Andhra Pradesh Assembly premises on Tuesday, with Assembly Speaker Chintakayala Ayyannapratru, Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan, Tribal Welfare Minister Gummidi Sandhya Rani, Tribal Cooperative Finance Corporation Chairman K. Sravan Kumar, several MLAs, and government officials in attendance.

Speaker Ayyannapratru and Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju cut the ribbon to inaugurate the Araku Coffee stall, marking the occasion.

The leaders praised Araku Coffee's distinct flavour,



emphasizing that the organically grown brew from the Araku region has earned international recognition.

They reiterated the government's commitment to supporting such indigenous products.

In a symbolic gesture, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu personally served cups of Araku Coffee to Speaker Ayyannapratru, Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju, and Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan.

## Ontimitta to emerge as a spiritual and tourist hub

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The historic Ontimitta Kodandarama Temple is set to undergo a major transformation, with plans to develop it as a key spiritual and tourist destination. Minister Kandula Durgesh has unveiled a proposal to integrate the revered temple into a broader spiritual tourism circuit, connecting several prominent temples across the State.

The proposed circuit includes Devanigadapa Lakshmi Venkateswara Swamy Temple, Pushpagiri Chennakesava Swamy Temple, Brahmangari Matham, Gandhi Sri Veeranjaneya Swamy Temple, Yaganti Uma Maheswara Swamy Temple, Navavaram Choudeswari Matham, and Mahanandiswara Swamy Temple. The initiative



aims to not only enhance the spiritual significance of these temples but also boost tourism in the region.

**Vision for holistic tourism**

In response to a query raised by MLC Ramachandra Reddy, Minister Durgesh emphasized that the government is committed to developing tourism in multiple dimensions. Along with spiritual tourism, efforts are underway to promote ecotourism, adventure tourism, and wellness tourism. "We want to offer a comprehensive experience for visitors that blends spirituality with nature,

culture, and modern facilities," he stated.

The minister did not shy away from criticising the previous government for its alleged neglect of temple maintenance and lack of adequate facilities for devotees. "Cleanliness, infrastructure, and accessibility were largely ignored in the past, but we are determined to change that," he asserted.

**Tech-driven pilgrimage**

As part of modernisation efforts, the government plans to integrate QR codes at Ontimitta, allowing visitors to access information about the temple's history and significance in multiple languages, including Telugu, English, Hindi, and Tamil. This step is expected to enhance the experience of pilgrims and tourists alike.

## 500 govt services on...

Continued from Page 1

Sharing insights from his pada yatra (foot march) across villages, he said people frequently voiced their frustration over long queues at government offices. They questioned why services like food delivery and cab booking were just a tap away, while essential government services remained cumbersome and time-consuming.

Addressing issues of corruption and inefficiency, Lokesh pointed out that many citizens were forced to pay bribes just to obtain basic documents. This, he said, strengthened his resolve to streamline service delivery. A turning point came when he witnessed political interference in issuing caste certificates in Mangalagiri, which reinforced

his vision for a more transparent, tech-driven system—one that has now taken shape as WhatsApp governance.

Currently, Mana Mitra provides 200 government services via WhatsApp, and Lokesh assured that this number will reach 500 by June 30. The initiative aims to reduce dependence on middlemen, cut wait times, and make government interactions seamless. He noted that the Andhra Pradesh government has studied global best practices in governance and is confident that WhatsApp-based services will drive meaningful reforms.

In the coming 100 days, AI-enabled features and QR codes will be introduced to enhance security and prevent document tampering. Lokesh also

announced that necessary legal amendments for WhatsApp governance would be tabled in the next Assembly session. Additionally, within the next 30 days, services related to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) will be integrated into the platform.

The Minister stressed that the ultimate goal is to put governance directly in the hands of the people.

He expressed confidence that WhatsApp governance would be a game-changer, revolutionizing how citizens engage with the administration. Lokesh reiterated that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu envisions Andhra Pradesh as a leader across all sectors, and this initiative is a key step toward realizing that vision.

## AP govt, Gates Foundation to sign MoU for AI-powered solutions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation are set to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on March 19 to harness artificial intelligence (AI) for advancements across key sectors, including healthcare, education, governance, agriculture, and employment.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Bill Gates will discuss the foundation's collaboration with Andhra Pradesh, focusing on initiatives in education, health, and agriculture. Several agreements are also expected to be formalized during the meeting.

In healthcare, the partnership aims to introduce AI-driven health data systems,

enhance telemedicine, and develop affordable diagnostics and medical devices to improve accessibility and quality of care.

The education sector will benefit from AI-powered EdTech tools, digital learning enhancements, and a national summit dedicated to integrating technology into education. Governance initiatives will leverage AI through a centralized data repository, enabling predictive analytics in health, agriculture, and education for better decision-making and resource allocation.

In agriculture, AI-assisted advisory systems for farmers, precision farming using satellite data, and a transparent subsidy distribution model are expected to enhance productivity and sustainability.

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**

Month & Paksham: Krishna Paksha

Tithi: Panchami: Mar 18 10:09 PM to Mar 20 12:37 AM

Shashthi: Mar 20 12:37 AM to Mar 21 02:45 AM

Nakshatram: Vishaka: Mar 18 05:51 PM to Mar 19 08:50 PM

Anuradha: Mar 19 08:50 PM to Mar 20 11:31 PM

Rahukalam: 12:24 PM to 1:53 PM

Yamagandam: 7:54 AM to 9:24 AM

Variyam: 01:17 AM to 03:03 AM

Gulika: 10:54 AM to 12:24 PM

Amritakalam: 10:56 AM to 12:44 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: Nil

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 35°

Humidity: 71%

Sunrise: 6:12 AM

Sunset: 6:18 PM

Updated: March 18, 2025 5:00 PM

## WB, ADB reps happy...

Continued from Page 1

Commissioner Kannababu stressed that the guidelines set by the World Bank and ADB for fund disbursement are being strictly followed, covering procurement, tendering, environmental protection, and social welfare initiatives. He assured that any queries raised by the visiting teams would be promptly addressed.

Additional Commissioner Suryasai Praveen Chand highlighted that a dedicated system is in place to swiftly handle complaints from farmers who provided land for the Amaravati project. He added that residents of the Amaravati region have been given avenues to communicate their concerns to authorities and receive timely solutions. Officials from APCRDA and ADCL briefed the World Bank and ADB representatives on the social welfare initiatives being implemented in Amaravati. They also detailed the environmental protection measures in place and confirmed adherence to directives from the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Additionally, they discussed ongoing skill training programs and the safety measures adopted at construction sites.

The meeting concluded with the World Bank and ADB representatives acknowledging the structured approach taken by the state in executing Amaravati's development plans. They lauded the grievance redressal mechanisms in place and commended the commitment to sustainable and inclusive growth.

## 'Top varsitiesto...

Continued from Page 1

He also revealed that leading institutions, including Tata, have expressed interest in setting up campuses in the region.

The government's plans include establishing a Deep Tech University and an Artificial Intelligence and Sports University in Visakhapatnam. Lokesh assured that necessary steps would be taken to bring premier institutions to Andhra Pradesh, transforming its higher education landscape. The minister pointed out that the Private Universities Act, introduced in 2016, had been amended five times by the previous government in ways that conflicted with UGC guidelines. He stressed the importance of joint degree collaborations with top-100 global universities for setting up greenfield institutions, underscoring the need for a thorough regulatory review. Several reputed institutions, including The University of Tokyo and AMA University Philippines, are in talks with the Economic Development Board to establish campuses in Andhra Pradesh. Lokesh said the government is working to expand beyond Amaravati and Visakhapatnam, offering special incentives to attract universities to Rayalaseema.

Addressing concerns about Andhra Kesari University in Prakasam district, which was established in 2022 but lacks sanctioned posts, Lokesh assured that efforts are underway to strengthen the university. He mentioned that donors are coming forward to support its development and that a special mechanism will be set up to resolve staffing shortages, ensuring its steady growth.

## Four-phase...

Continued from Page 1

However, he suggested that deepening and expanding the old canal could help mitigate floods while reducing land acquisition costs, particularly in agricultural zones.

Another major concern highlighted was the blockage at the Akividu railway bridge, which hampers floodwater drainage. The government plans to hold discussions with the Ministry of Railways to resolve the obstruction and facilitate smoother water flow.

With these measures, the government aims to implement a sustainable solution to the Budameru flood crisis, ensuring long-term relief for affected communities.

## 4 police officers hurt...

Continued from Page 1

Jaggaihpeth CI Venkateswarlu sustained a head injury, while three other officers were also wounded. All injured personnel were immediately taken to Nandigama Government Hospital for treatment. As tensions escalated, senior police officials, including ACPs Tilak, Rama Chander, and Prasad Rao, intervened to restore order and prevent further violence.

Home Minister Vangalapati Anita strongly condemned the attack on law enforcement and directed Vijayawada Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu to take strict action against those responsible. She also inquired about the condition of the injured officers and ensured they received proper medical care. Minister Anita issued a stern warning that any assault on police personnel would be met with severe consequences, emphasizing that officers were merely carrying out their duty to maintain peace and order.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH**  
**RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT**  
**E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE**

No 48 to 162/2024-25 Date: 13-03-2025

Tenders are being invited from qualified contractors for execution of 115 works in Srikulam district with an estimated cost of Rs 2543.00 lakh released under the JIM grant. Availability of tender documents: from 11.00 am on 22.03.2025 to 3.00 pm on 05-04-2025. For details, contact e-market place www.approcurement.gov.in or call 0894-222148 or 9100120686. Sd/- Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, CPWR.O.No: 15890/CLAD/VI/2025-Dt. 16.03.2025

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## Modi govt stoking regional tensions: CPI

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D Raja has accused the Modi government of deliberately stoking regional tensions between North and South India. He condemned alleged attempts to redraw constituency boundaries, calling it a political conspiracy to gain influence in states where the BJP remains weak—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Punjab.

Speaking at a press conference at Dasari Bhavan in Vijayawada, Raja, accompanied by CPI State secretary K Ramakrishna, assistant secretary Muppalla Nageswara Rao, and Secretariat member Akkineni Vanaja, reiterated that a national alliance against the Modi regime's "unconstitutional and anti-people policies" is taking shape. He hinted at plans for all secular parties to unite in future battles against these policies.

As part of the CPI's centenary celebrations, Raja announced that the party would focus on



CPI general secretary D Raja addressing a press conference in Vijayawada on Tuesday. Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

strengthening its grassroots presence and expanding its ideological reach. Reflecting on the CPI's journey since its founding on December 26, 1925, he highlighted its crucial role in the freedom struggle and the sacrifices made for India's independence.

Centenary celebrations are in full swing across the country, with Raja emphasizing that the party's ideology is being actively propagated through meetings and conferences in every state.

He announced that national seminars would be held in Vijayawada on December 24 and 25, featuring national leaders and representatives from various communist parties and public organizations. The celebrations will culminate in Khammam, Telangana, on December 26, with a massive demonstration preceding the concluding meeting. Additionally, he revealed that from March 23 to April 14, the

CPI will launch a nationwide campaign based on a political agenda.

Turning his attention to the situation in Chhattisgarh, Raja criticized the heavy police presence, alleging that tribals are being harassed under the pretext of Maoist suppression. He described Operation Kaghar—overseen by Home Minister Amit Shah—as an attack on innocent tribals who have long protected the region's forests, water, and land. Raja, who recently visited Chhattisgarh with CPI National Secretariat member Ramakrishna Pandey, said he witnessed firsthand the struggles of the tribal communities.

He accused the Central government of using Maoist insurgency as a cover to hand over forest land to corporate entities, condemning its shoot-to-kill tactics in Chhattisgarh. He also lashed out at right-wing forces for allegedly attempting to distort the legacy of Dr BR Ambedkar, the architect of India's Constitution.

Raja further opposed the joint allocation of spectrum to Elon Musk by Airtel and Jio, citing security concerns over Musk's ties to the Pentagon. He slammed Prime Minister Modi and the central government for their silence on this issue, accusing them of neglecting national security and public welfare.

On the education front, Raja criticized the government's failure to meet funding benchmarks. He pointed out that while the Kothari Commission had recommended allocating 6% of GDP to education, the Modi government has not even reached 3%, depriving millions of free education and fueling illiteracy.

He also denounced the new national education policy, arguing that it prioritizes privatization and corporate interests over accessible education. According to Raja, Modi's economic policies are systematically weakening the country, with the BJP and RSS driving divisive agendas that threaten social harmony.

## Lawmakers swap debates for sports with athletic spirit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium in Vijayawada came alive with energy and enthusiasm as Speaker Chintakayala Ayyannapratru inaugurated a spirited sports competition for legislators. Accompanied by Ministers and Deputy Speaker K Raghurama Krishna Raju, he emphasized that the TDP-led NDA government had introduced the events to provide much-needed recreation for Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and Legislative Council (MLCs).

The Speaker, reflecting on the significance of sports for public representatives, urged legislators to momentarily disconnect from their hectic routines and immerse themselves in the competitions. He fondly recalled how former Chief Minister Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao (NTR) had fostered a tradition of sports among legislators, underscoring the legendary leader's passion for both athletics and cultural activities. However, he lamented that such initiatives had been sidelined in recent years and expressed his delight at their revival.

Over the next three days, legislators will swap their formal attire for sports gear, embracing the camaraderie and competitive spirit of the games. The Assembly proceedings are scheduled to conclude by 2 p.m. each day, allowing ample time for the representatives to take part in the events. Ayyannapratru stressed that this initiative is not merely about competition



but also about rejuvenating the sporting culture that had once thrived in the state.

Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju lauded the sporting prowess of many legislators, some of whom had competed at national levels, and encouraged them to inspire students in their constituencies. He expressed joy over the revival of this initiative and hoped it would strengthen the bond between lawmakers and the people they serve.

Sports Minister Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy echoed similar sentiments, affirming the government's commitment to promoting athletics. He highlighted how Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's leadership has opened up new opportunities for sports persons and assured continued support for such endeavours.

Adding to the excitement, SAAP Chairman Ravinaidu credited Speaker Ayyannapratru for taking the lead in restoring this tradition. He praised the meticulous arrangements made by the

Sports Committee and acknowledged the efforts of Sports Minister Ramprasad Reddy in ensuring the success of the event.

The atmosphere at the stadium reached a crescendo as Speaker Ayyannapratru and Deputy Speaker Raghurama Krishna Raju, joined by ministers and chief whips, lit the ceremonial sports torch. This was followed by an impressive march-past conducted by members of the Sports Organising Committee, marking the formal commencement of the much-anticipated games.

As the event unfolded, the stadium echoed with cheers, laughter, and a spirit of friendly rivalry, showcasing a different side of the lawmakers—one where teamwork, determination, and sportsmanship took center stage. For many, it was not just a competition but a refreshing break from the rigours of governance, a celebration of fitness, and a step toward rekindling the state's vibrant sporting culture.

## Solve drainage issues in city: VMC Chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyana-chandra has instructed the officials to ensure that there are no drainage issues in the city. He emphasised the importance of addressing these problems through on-site visits to the affected areas.

On Tuesday morning, he, along with VMC second division Corporator Ambadipudi Nirmala Kumari, toured Yarram Vari Street near Bethlehem Nagar and Machavaram to assess the local issues in the division firsthand.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner Dhyana-chandra said that steps are to be taken to address the public issues in the 2nd division. He directed the officials concerned to remove stagnated water in the quarry pits in hill areas. He also instructed them to close the quarry pits to avoid untoward incidents.

The drainage issue near the Chinna Boarding School should be solved. Also, preventive steps are required to prevent the flow of water to Kummari Bazar. He assured the corporator that these two issues will be resolved.



He also directed the officials to take appropriate steps to overcome flaws in the drinking water supply. Officials should inspect all boosters at the hill areas and conduct repairs to whatever bores are required to prevent drinking water scarcity in the summer season, he said.

NTR District Assistant Collector Subham Nokwal, VMC Zonal Commissioner K Shamma, in charge CM&HO DR Suresh Babu, EE Samrajyam, Assistant City Planner Mohan Babu and others accompanied Dhyana-chandra.



## Guv lays stone for Red Cross hqs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer, who also serves as the President of the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), Andhra Pradesh State Branch, laid the foundation stone for the construction of a new state headquarters office building at Gandhinagar on Monday.

Following the bifurcation of the state, the IRCS Andhra Pradesh State Branch office was relocated from Hyderabad to Vijayawada in 2019 and has since been operating from the NTR District Branch office premises. The new headquarters building, spanning 17,000 square feet, will be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs 4 crore and will feature a still plus five floors.

The Governor commended the efforts of the new leadership team and encouraged them to proceed with the construction of an exclusive building for the Andhra Pradesh State Branch. He emphasized the Red Cross's commitment to alleviating the suffering of those in need during disasters and emergencies. The AP Red Cross provides extensive training in First Aid, Junior Red Cross, Youth Red Cross, and emergency response. It also offers free blood transfusions to thousands of children suffering from Thalassemia and Sickle Cell Anemia. On average, the 20 Red Cross Blood Centers across Andhra Pradesh supply approximately one lakh units of blood annually to emergency victims.

YD Rama Rao outlined the key features of the new building and highlighted the ongoing Red Cross activities in the state.

Retired IAS officer and AP Red Cross General Secretary AK Parida expressed gratitude to the Governor for his support and assured that more service programs would be launched to benefit tribal communities and people in remote areas. The event was attended by Dr M Hari Jawaharal, Secretary to the Governor; Dr G Lakshminsha, NTR District Collector; SV Rajasekhara Babu, Vijayawada Police Commissioner; Dhyana Chandra HM, Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner; P Jagan Mohan Rao, Vice-Chairman; and P Ramachandra Raju, Treasurer of IRCS Andhra Pradesh State Branch.

## Promote industrial development: Collector

Officials asked to provide essential permissions to entrepreneurs through single window system



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna District Collector DK Balaji has underscored the necessity of promoting industrial development within the district by simplifying the approval process. He has instructed officials to utilize the single window system to provide all essential permissions to entrepreneurs interested in setting up industries in the area.

The Collector presided over the District Industries Exports Promotion Board meeting at the Public Grievance Redressal Hall at the collectorate in Machilipatnam on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, Balaji asked for the provision of subsidies through this system to foster industrial expansion. To accelerate progress, Collector Balaji has directed officials to swiftly resolve and finalise all outstanding applications concerning the establishment of industries in the district.

Further, he said regarding the infrastructure facilities in estab-

lishing industries, various departments should verify the applications and provide facilities for them as per the norms. Also, he asked the municipal commissioners for early completion of the MSME survey.

Meanwhile, entrepreneur Kanakadurga approached the Collector with a request for the allocation of an appropriate site in the coastal region that offers road access, electricity, and other essential amenities. This site would be used for acquiring land to establish a seagrass cultivation project funded by her own resources.

Subsequently, Balaji contacted the district officer of the Fisheries Department over telephone, recommending that the necessary actions be initiated to identify a suitable location.

DIC Manager R Venkatrao, ZP CEO Kannama Naidu, DRDA PD Y Hariharan, LDM Ravindra Reddy, municipal commissioners, Fire, Fisheries, and other related officials were present.

## MLA seeks protection of Vijayawada city from inundation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

BJP MLA from Vijayawada West Yalamanchili Satyanarayana (Sujana Chowdary) has said that the government should take steps in that direction to protect Vijayawada from Budameru flood, and to avoid Vijayawada city from inundation in the future. He spoke in the AP Legislative Assembly on Tuesday regarding the threat to Vijayawada city from the Budameru stream.

Sujana Chowdary questioned what measures were being taken to prevent and control the Budameru flood and sought along with Budameru, steps that should be taken to prevent damage in the flood-affected areas of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna and Guntur due to heavy rains and floods that occur every year in the State.

The MLA said that in the last 10 years, they have been facing many major cyclones including Hudud and Titi. He asked for early action through AI technology to prevent the loss of life and property due to cyclones and floods in the future. He asked for coordination between the Water Resources Department, Roads and Buildings Department, and Disaster Management.

## Naidu's support for Modi's decisions draws Cong criticism

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) vice-president Kolanukonda Sivaji has strongly objected to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's endorsement of several controversial decisions taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a statement on Tuesday, Sivaji accused Naidu of unilaterally supporting multiple contentious policies, including demonetization, the three now-repealed farm laws, the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Waqf laws, One Nation One Poll (ONOP), the National Education Policy (NEP), delimitation, the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and the



three-language formula. "While people across the country are resisting the forced imposition of Hindi, it is astonishing that Chandrababu Naidu is backing the three-language formula, disregarding the sentiments of the Tamil people," Sivaji stated.

The APCC vice-president demanded that Naidu write to Union Minister Nitin Gadkari,

urging the installation of Telugu signboards on National Highways in Hindi-speaking states. He further asserted that Telugu should be made a mandatory second language in these states to safeguard the interests of Telugu-speaking citizens.

Sivaji pointed out that the absence of Telugu signboards during the recent Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh caused significant inconvenience to Telugu devotees. He insisted that similar signage be installed in Ayodhya and other major religious and cultural sites.

"Moreover, we urge the central government to ensure that all railway stations in Hindi-speaking states display name boards in Telugu, making travel easier for Telugu-speaking citizens," he added.

## NTPC Simhadri's training programme opens doors for unemployed youth

Partnership with CIPET delivers 100 pc job placement for local trainees

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In an effort to address unemployment and cultivate a skilled workforce, NTPC Simhadri has launched a vocational training initiative in the rural districts of Anakapalli and Visakhapatnam. The programme, aligned with Skill India Mission and Apprenticeship Scheme, aims to provide practical, industry-relevant skills to local youth.

The company has partnered with the Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering & Technology (CIPET) in Vijayawada to deliver a six-month residential programme. It focuses on specialised training for machine operators in

plastic processing and injection moulding, and crucially, guarantees job placement for all graduates. To date, 120 individuals, spread across four cohorts, have successfully completed the training and secured employment. An additional 60 trainees are currently enrolled in the programme.

On March 18, a delegation from NTPC Simhadri, led by Executive Director Sameer Sharma, visited the CIPET campus to observe the programme and engage with the trainees.

The delegation, which included senior officials, interacted directly with the students and faculty to assess the program's impact.

## Visakhapatnam to launch 'Time Bank' to support elderly

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In an effort to address the growing issue of social isolation among senior citizens, Visakhapatnam will soon implement the "Time Bank of India", a novel initiative designed to build a robust community support network. District Collector M.N. Harendhira Prasad unveiled the plan during a seminar focused on elderly welfare, held at the Pensioners Association Bhavan on Tuesday.

The programme, originally conceived in Rajasthan, aims to provide both companionship and practical assistance to the city's aging population. Speaking at the event, which was co-organised by the Departments of Welfare of Differently-abled Persons and Elderly Welfare, Prasad emphasised the State government's

Innovative programme to foster community support for senior citizens



dedication to enhancing the quality of life for its senior residents.

"The traditional support systems provided by joint families have diminished, leaving many

elderly individuals feeling isolated and in need of assistance," Prasad explained. "The 'Time Bank of India' seeks to fill this void by creating a network of volunteers who can offer essen-

tial services."

The need for such a programme is underscored by demographic trends. According to the 2011 Census of India, the country had 103.8 million

senior citizens, representing nine per cent of the total population. Projections suggest this figure will nearly triple to 300 million by 2047. Prasad expressed optimism that the "Time Bank" will play a crucial role in strengthening elderly care and support in the coming decades.

The State government's commitment to senior welfare is also reflected in existing legal frameworks, including the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007) and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act (1956). To promote awareness, the Collector distributed a brochure detailing the initiative's objectives and operational procedures.

AD J. Madhavi, from the Department of Diverse Talents, outlined the registration process. Individuals aged 18 and above can register for free through the official website (www.timebankofindia.com) or the Time Bank India mobile application. Volunteers, including young people eager to contribute, will accumulate service hours that can be exchanged for assistance when they themselves require it.

## Chandrababu's Vision-2047 a sham

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Minister Sake Sailajanath fiercely criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, calling his Vision-2047 a deceptive tactic to mask unfulfilled election promises and portray himself as a global visionary and accused him of using the "Swarnandhra" narrative to mislead people while failing to boost their purchasing power or create wealth.

Sailajanath pointed to Chandrababu's history, noting that despite four terms as Chief Minister and three vision documents Vision-2020, Vision-2029, and Vision-2047 tangible progress remains elusive. He questioned the TDP leader's

achievements, alleging that past visions facilitated privatisation of public assets. With "P4," Sailajanath claimed Chandrababu now plans to hand over both government and public properties, including roads with toll taxes, to private entities.

The former minister slammed Chandrababu for neglecting education and healthcare, citing user charges in hospitals and poor school infrastructure. He accused him of favouring corporate interests over MSMEs, earning the tag "World Bank employee" from Leftists. Sailajanath noted that post-Vision-2020, 70 per cent of families stayed below the poverty line, questioning the promised prosperity.

## Dip in onion prices leave farmers in tears

PNS ■ KURNOOL

The sharp decline in onion prices has left farmers in distress, with many staring at severe losses. Once hopeful of a profitable season, they are now grappling with plummeting wholesale rates that barely cover their investment.

Until March 10, onion farmers in Kurnool were fetching decent prices for their produce. However, in a sudden downturn, prices in the wholesale market began to collapse, dashing their expectations of a continued upward trend. "We thought prices would rise further, but the opposite has happened. This has been a huge setback," lamented a farmer at the Kurnool market yard.

### Market realities

According to market yard sources, Kurnool's agricultural market receives an inflow of 700 to 1,000 quintals of onions daily. Currently, traders are offering Rs 1,400 per quintal for superior-quality onions, while lower-quality produce is fetching as little as Rs 300 to Rs 500 per quintal.

"If farmers sell at these rates, they won't even recover their investment," said Ramana Reddy, a farmers' union leader. He urged the government to step in and ensure a fair price



for their produce.

To make matters worse, the searing summer heat and lack of sufficient water are taking a toll on the crop. Many onions are withering in the fields, while the harvested ones are perishing rapidly due to the intense temperatures. Traders, citing quality concerns, are further slashing their purchase prices, adding to the farmers' woes.

### External factors

The decline in onion exports to Bangladesh and West Bengal from Kurnool has also contributed to the falling prices, market officials said. Additionally, Maharashtra's bumper onion harvest, known for its superior quality, has further dampened demand for Kurnool's produce. For farmers like Suresh, the

losses have been devastating. "I invested Rs 1.50 lakh in my onion crop, but now I can't even recover my costs. I have decided never to grow onions again," he said.

### Different perspective

Despite the grim situation, Kurnool Agriculture Market Secretary Jayalakshmi pointed out that, compared to last year, farmers are still receiving slightly better prices. She attributed the recent drop in rates to the intense summer heat, which has affected the quality of the produce.

With farmers struggling to make ends meet, their hopes now rest on government intervention. Until then, the uncertainty looms large over Kurnool's onion farmers, leaving them in a precarious situation.



## Security steps for CM's Tirumala visit inspected

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Security preparations for Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's upcoming visit were reviewed by SP V Harshvardhan Raju and other senior police officials on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister, accompanied by his family, including his wife Bhuvaneshwari, son Nara Lokesh, and other relatives, is set to visit the Tirumala hill shrine on March 21 to offer prayers to Lord Venkateswara. The visit coincides with the birthday of his grandson, Devansh.

SP Harshvardhan Raju conducted an Advance Security Liaison review along with the

District Collector, inspecting the designated routes and security measures. He stated that bomb disposal teams, dog squads, and special police units have been deployed along both sides of the roads in the areas where the Chief Minister will travel.

The Chief Minister and his family will arrive at Renigunta Airport on March 20 at 9:30 pm before proceeding to Tirumala by road. They will participate in temple rituals on March 21 and depart for Renigunta Airport at 2 pm the same day.

RDO Bhanu Prakash Reddy and DMHO Balaji Naik were among the officials who accompanied the SP and Collector during the inspection.

## Medical students exhorted to excel in education

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prasanthi has exhorted medical students to excel in their studies and achieve outstanding results in their examinations.

Speaking at a programme held on Tuesday to mark the first anniversary of the Government Medical College, the Collector emphasized the significance of academic excellence. She noted that the 99 per cent pass rate recorded last year was a remarkable achievement and encouraged students to work hard, hone their skills, and serve society with dedication after becoming doctors.

Describing the medical profession as noble, Prasanthi advised students to understand their responsibilities and continuously improve their expertise to provide quality healthcare services. She also unveiled the "Saubhagya Rakta Mitra" logo, highlighting the importance of blood donation.

She pointed out that a single blood donation could save



**Describing the medical profession as noble, Prasanthi advised students to understand their responsibilities and continuously improve their expertise to provide quality healthcare services. She also unveiled the "Saubhagya Rakta Mitra" logo, highlighting the importance of blood donation**

three lives and called for more people to voluntarily donate blood and contribute to the initiative. She urged medical students to aspire to become compassionate doctors who serve the community with commitment.

Medical officers and stu-

dents took a pledge to donate blood during the event. Government Medical College Principal and Additional College Dr. B. Sowbagya Lakshmi, GGH Superintendent Dr. M. Suryaprabha, and Vice-Principal K. Shiva Prasad were among those present.

## 'Hi-tech' thief from AP held in Sathupalli

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

A 'high-tech' thief, who hid stolen property in crematoriums, was arrested by the Sathupalli Police in Khammam district on Tuesday. The accused had attacked a constable Naresh with a knife at the Sathupalli bus station on the March 10, the police said.

Khammam Police Commissioner Sunil Datt shared details of the incident with the media in Sathupalli.

Surendra (35), a thief from Chittapur village under Chitrai mandal in Andhra Pradesh is known for his technical skills. He commits thefts using offline Google map markings.

He first committed a property crime to buy a sari worth just Rs 300 for his mother. Surendra is the accused in a total of 90 cases. After being released on bail on November 25 last year, he committed 15 thefts in the limits of Khammam Police Commissionerate.

Surendra, who is a convicted criminal in a case in the limits of Challapalli Police Station in Krishna district, is also involved in four cases in Kothagudem, three cases in Mahabubabad, and three cases in Warangal Police Commissionerate. Within a span of three months, he committed 7 thefts in Suryapet, 5 in Nalgonda, 5 in Eluru, and 1 in West Godavari, totaling 43 cases. After committing the thefts, he often sought shelter in crematoriums and hid the stolen goods there.

## Anakapalli admin steps in to support Etikoppaka artisans

Government intervention aims to tackle wood shortage and sustain traditional toy-making industry

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

In a significant move to safeguard the legacy of Etikoppaka's traditional toy-making industry, the Anakapalli district administration has stepped in to address the acute shortage of Ankudu wood (Wrightia Tinctoria), a key raw material for the craft. In coordination with the forest department, officials are planning to establish a dedicated Ankudu wood depot to ensure a consistent supply, helping artisans sustain their livelihoods.

Etikoppaka, a serene village in Yelamanchili mandal, is widely known for its handcrafted Lakka Pidathalu, eco-friendly lacquerware toys that earned a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2017. However, artisans have been grappling with increasing production costs due to the skyrocketing prices of raw materials.

The cost of Ankudu wood,



prized for its lightweight and easy-to-carve nature, has surged from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,500 for 10 logs in recent years. Additionally, restricted availability from forest reserves has further compounded the challenges for artisans. Adding to their woes, the price of lacquer—another essential component—has also risen, making it increasingly difficult for them to sustain their craft.

Recognising the urgency of the situation, Anakapalli District Collector Vijaya Krishnan recently visited Etikoppaka and engaged with local artisans, assuring them of the government's commitment to resolving their concerns.



## Collector urges public to visit handicrafts expo

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has urged the public to take advantage of the upcoming Handicrafts Expo in Narasapuram.

The expo, organized under the New Delhi Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, aims to showcase a wide range of traditional goods and textiles. The Collector emphasized the importance of promoting exhibitions that highlight diverse cultural and artistic traditions.

The event will be held from March 21 to March 25 at the International Lace Trade Center on Rustumbada Kotha Kalava Road, Narasapuram, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.

## Facilities at Mangalagiri temple to be enhanced: Nara Lokesh



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a bid to develop the Mangalagiri Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy Temple on par with prominent temples, Minister for Education and IT, Nara Lokesh, directed officials to focus on enhancing facilities for devotees while preserving the sanctity and serenity of the temple environment. During a review meeting on the temple's development on Tuesday, officials presented the master plan designed for its improvement.

The development plans for the Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy Temple, located at the foothills,

along with the Panakala Narasimhaswamy and Gandala Swamy temples, were detailed through a PowerPoint presentation. Minister Lokesh reviewed various aspects, including road construction, accommodation, facilities, parking, and other infrastructure needs. He stressed the importance of balancing tradition with modern amenities to ensure a seamless experience for devotees.

Minister Lokesh highlighted the likelihood of a significant increase in the number of devotees—potentially two to three times more—and instructed

officials to plan accordingly, ensuring adequate facilities and accommodation. He underscored the need to create a peaceful environment where devotees can experience spiritual tranquility while visiting the temple. He also directed that the master plan be aligned with this vision.

The minister further instructed officials to consult temple priests and experts to develop an optimal design. He emphasized the urgency of finalizing the plan and commencing construction at the earliest, with the goal of completing the development work within a year.



## One killed, another hurt as giant wheel cabin crashes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a tragic incident, one person was killed and another critically injured when a cabin of a giant wheel detached and crashed while in motion at Penuganchiprolu village in Jaggayyapet constituency.

Police reported that the mishap occurred during the Tirupattamma Tirunallu festival, which was drawing a large crowd of devotees and visitors.

The victim, identified as Gijupalli Sai Manikanta, lost his life in the accident. Another person sustained severe injuries and was rushed to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Jaggayyapet, where his condition remains critical.

Authorities have launched an investigation into the incident, and safety measures at the festival venue are being reviewed to prevent further mishaps.

## TTD Trusts receive over Rs 1.23 cr in donations

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The trusts of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) received a generous donation of over Rs 1.23 crore on Thursday.

Representatives from Sri Srinivasa Construction India Pvt Ltd., based in Bellary, Karnataka, visited the camp office of TTD Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary and handed over



a demand draft for the contribution.

An amount of Rs 1,01,11,111 was donated to SV Annaprasadam Trust, Rs 11,11,111 to SV Pranadanam Trust and Rs 11,11,111 to SV Vidyadanam Trust.

TTD officials expressed their gratitude for the contribution, which will support various charitable and religious initiatives.

## Severed body parts of woman found in Anakapalle dist

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLE

The severed lower body of an unidentified woman was found wrapped in a bedsheet near Bayavaram National Highway bridge in Anakapalle district on Tuesday morning, said a police official.

Local police, along with forensic experts, have reached the spot and efforts are on to identify the deceased woman, said Anakapalle DSP K Sravani, who is probing the circumstances leading to the

crime. "The body was found cut from the navel downward, along with a severed hand, and was wrapped in a bedsheet," Sravani said.

According to the DSP, the deceased woman would be around 35 to 40 years old and her photographs have been circulated in the locality for identification.

A case has been registered under BNS section 302 while the CCTV footage from the surrounding areas is being analysed.

Police noted that the body was cut elsewhere and dumped here. So far, only the lower half has been recovered, and the search for the missing upper body is ongoing, Sravani added.

Forensic teams have been deployed to analyse evidence and reconstruct the crime scene.

Investigators are exploring multiple possibilities, including whether the murder was a personal dispute or linked to any other crime.

On March 10 around 9 pm,



## 5 inter-district robbers arrested

PNS ■ CHITTOOR

The police have arrested five notorious inter-district robbers and recovered stolen property worth Rs 35 lakh from them.

Addressing the media on Tuesday, Superintendent of Police VN Manikanta Chandolu said the arrested persons were involved in multiple offences across various districts.

The gang was responsible for chain snatching, thefts, bike lifting, and burglaries at temples and houses. The police recovered 316 grams of

gold jewellery, 3.15 kg of silver ornaments, and two motorcycles, collectively valued at over Rs 35 lakh. A special team led by CI E. Krishna Mohan, under the supervision of Sub-Division DSP T. Sainath, apprehended the accused at P. Kothaped Old Road.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Galla Hemachandra (A1), Kondaraju Suresh (A2), Sheik Mastan (A3), Poli Vara Prasad (A4), and R. Sanjay Kumar (A5).

A1 Galla Hemachandra has

a criminal history of over 60 offences across multiple districts. A2 Kondaraju Suresh has been involved in more than 27 criminal cases, while A3 Sheik Mastan has 57 cases against him. A4 Poli Vara Prasad has committed one offence.

The Preventive Detention (PD) Act was invoked against A1 Hemachandra and A2 Suresh at Gajulamandam police station in 2022. The gang had committed crimes in Chittoor, Kadapa, Kaveli, Kurnool, Badvel, and other areas.

## An OBC from Cong will become CM in future: Mahesh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC President B. Mahesh Kumar Goud reiterated that an OBC will become the Chief Minister of Telangana from the Congress in future.

Speaking in the Legislative Council on Tuesday, Mahesh said that OBCs are in high numbers in Bihar and that OBCs have successively bagged the post of Chief Minister in Bihar.

He said that OBCs have also become CMs in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. "Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is providing good governance in Telangana. The Congress has a good future in Telangana. In future, an OBC from the Congress will become the CM in Telangana. No other party can give the CM's post to an OBC in Telangana. It is possible only



because of the Congress. Other parties are limited to words. Congress will show it by doing it in practice," he said.

Mahesh said the opposition is spreading lies about Musli beautification. The government should move forward as per the people's aspirations without backing down on the Musli cleansing project, he added.

## MP's efforts secure Rs 34.50 cr for Kukunoor-Bhadrachalam Rd

PNS ■ ELURU

The persistent efforts of Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar have finally brought much-needed relief to commuters on the Kukunoor-Bhadrachalam main road.

In a statement on Tuesday, MP Mahesh Kumar highlighted the dire condition of the 37-km stretch from Veleru at the Telangana-Andhra border to Lankalappali, which had remained in a deplorable state for the past five years. Potholes and deep craters had made travel hazardous, often leading to accidents and forcing many to avoid the route altogether.

To address the issue, the government sanctioned Rs 34.50 crore for the road's development. However, due to technical hurdles, the work remained stalled for seven months. Responding to repeated appeals from the residents and local leaders of Kukunoor Mandal, MP



Mahesh Kumar took up the matter and held a review meeting with Roads and Buildings (R&B) officials to identify the cause of the delay. He then pursued the issue with the government to resolve the technical bottlenecks.

Following his intervention, the contractor resumed roadwork two days ago. The damaged road is currently being dug up and prepared with wet

mix macadam, while the BT (Bituminous) layering is progressing at a rapid pace.

Officials have set a target to complete the project by the end of May. The development works are being supervised by R&B DE Harikrishna. Residents of the region have expressed relief and gratitude to MP Mahesh Kumar for his proactive efforts in resolving this long-standing issue.

## ACROSS THE STATES



### Akhilesh slams BJP over religious rows

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of endangering religious sites and fostering communal tensions. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an Uttar Pradesh assembly session on Monday night, he alleged that the BJP was creating conflicts around all religious places to divert attention from "real issues" such as law and order, unemployment, and economic distress. "Slowly, not just mosques but all religious sites will be under threat due to the BJP's conduct. Even our Kedareshwar Temple (in Etawah) has become a problem for them," Yadav claimed. The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister asserted that the BJP had objections to temple construction by others. "If we build a temple with support from our people, even that troubles the BJP." On the controversy in Maharashtra over Mughal ruler Aurangzeb's grave, Yadav urged the BJP to focus on historical figures who promoted harmony rather than fostering divisions.



### Delhi's power demand likely to peak at 9,000 MW

Higher requirement during the upcoming summer months is likely to push Delhi's peak power demand to 9,000 MW, discom officials said on Tuesday. The city recorded an all-time high peak power demand of 8,656 MW in 2024, they said. "The peak load of the national capital is projected to reach 9,000 MW in late June or early July," Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited said in a statement. A BSES official said several initiatives, including network strengthening and thermo-scanning to identify potential hotspots, advanced load-forecasting techniques using artificial intelligence and machine learning, were being taken to meet the rise in demand. "More than 2,100 MW of green power will play an important role in ensuring adequate supply during the summer months," he added. Last year, Delhi's peak power demand crossed 8,000 MW for the first time, the discom officials said.



### 4-month-old baby girl found dead in well in Kerala

A 12-year-old girl was arrested on Tuesday for killing her four-month-old cousin sister, who was found dead in a well near their residence at Pappinisseri in Kannur city, after she confessed to committing the crime, police said. The baby, who was sleeping with her parents and two cousin sisters in the central hall of their residence, was found to be missing around 11.30 pm on Monday. Subsequently, a search of the nearby areas resulted in the infant being found drowned in the well, police said. A senior police officer said that since the door of the room was latched from inside, police suspected that someone in the family was involved. "On being questioned, the girl confessed to the crime. She claims to have killed the baby as she was concerned she would not get the same love and attention as she was getting earlier," the officer said. The 12-year-old girl was the daughter of the baby's father's elder brother who had died sometime back. Her mother had left her and therefore, her paternal uncle had taken her with him, police said. Besides her, the baby's father was also looking after the daughter of his younger brother.



### Committed to bring normalcy in Manipur, says FM Sitharaman

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the central government is committed to bringing normalcy to Manipur and assured all support for the economic growth of the state. Replying to a discussion on the passage of the Manipur Budget for the current fiscal and vote of account for the six months of 2025-26 in the Rajya Sabha, the minister also sought the support of the Opposition parties for peace in Manipur instead of engaging in the blame game.

The senior minister also hit back at the Opposition for its criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi not visiting the violence-affected state, saying none of the prime ministers in the past visited Manipur when the violence took place there. She cited the names of former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and IK Gujral.

Sitharaman stated that in 1993 when Manipur was under Congress rule and Rajkumar Dorendra Singh was the chief minister, a major flare-up between Nagas and Kukis led to the death of 750 people and the burning

down of 350 villages. However, neither the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao nor Home Minister Shankarrao Chavan visited the state.

Responding to the Opposition criticism of not paying the required focus to Manipur, she said the Union Home Minister and Minister of State for Home visited the state as part of the Centre's efforts to bring normalcy.

She added that violence in Manipur has adversely impacted economic activities in the state but expressed confidence that it will recover swiftly.

"We extend the fullest support to the state...so that the recovery of Manipur will be sooner than later...We are, all of us here, committed to getting that state back to some normalcy and we want that state to grow and prosper as much as any other state," Sitharaman asserted.

Observing that the unrest in Manipur led to a reduction in economic activities, she said, "With improvement in law and order and consequent improvement in economic activity, I expect GSDP to show some recovery this year onwards".

# Maha Kumbh strengthened India's spirit of unity: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Mahakumbh strengthened the spirit of unity in the country and gave a befitting response to those who questioned India's capability to organise such a large congregation.

Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, Modi said the success of the Mahakumbh was a result of the contributions of countless people from the government and society.

"We witnessed the enthusiasm and excitement of the Mahakumbh in India for about one and a half months. The way millions of devotees came together with devotion, rising above the concerns of convenience and inconvenience, is our greatest strength," Modi said.

"The nectar of unity is the most sacred offering of the Mahakumbh," he said.

"The Mahakumbh was such an event in which people from every region and every corner of the country came together.



People put aside their egos and gathered in Prayagraj with the feeling of 'we' and not 'I,' he added.

Modi said the huge display of unity at the Mahakumbh was India's strength, particularly at a time when the world was in disarray.

"The spirit of unity is so strong that it shatters any attempts to break it," he said.

"We have always said that unity in diversity is the speciality of India and we have experienced its grand form in

Prayagraj Mahakumbh. It is our responsibility to continue enriching this feature of unity in diversity," the prime minister said.

He said people speaking different languages and dialects chanting 'Har Har Gange' on the banks of the Sangam gave a glimpse of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', which increased the feeling of unity.

The prime minister likened the Mahakumbh to important milestones in the struggle for independence when the self-

**Modi said the huge display of unity at the Mahakumbh was India's strength, particularly at a time when the world was in disarray**

esteem of the country was awakened.

"Be it the war of independence in 1857, the time of Bhagat Singh's martyrdom, the call of Chalo Delhi given by Netaji Subhas babu or the Dandi March of Mahatma Gandhi, India achieved independence by seeking inspiration from such milestones in time," Modi said.

"Prayagraj Mahakumbh is a similar significant milestone that reflects the spirit of an awakened nation," he said.

## Nagpur violence premeditated: Fadnavis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than 50 persons have been taken into custody and curfew imposed in parts of Nagpur, a day after protests against Aurangzeb's tomb triggered violence in the city, which Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis claimed was premeditated.

Speaking in the legislative assembly on Tuesday, Fadnavis said the Vicky Kaushal-starrer film "Chhaava", based on the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, reignited people's emotions against the Mughal emperor and brought before them the true history of the Maratha king. The Vishwa

Hindu Parishad (VHP) it won't tolerate any attempts to glorify Aurangzeb and claimed the Nagpur violence was planned. Five FIRs have been registered in connection with the violence, Nagpur police commissioner Ravinder Kumar Singh said on Tuesday. Violence erupted in central Nagpur's Chitnis

Park in Mahal area on Monday around 7.30 pm, with stones hurled at police amid rumours that the holy book of a community was burnt during an agitation by a right-wing body for the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district, officials said.

## Railway fares in India far less than neighbouring countries: Vaishnav

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Tuesday said the railway fares in India have remained constant since 2020 and are far less than the neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

He also asserted that railway accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav was at the ministry's helm.

Vaishnav made the remarks in the Lok Sabha while replying to a debate on the Demands for Grants under the control of the Ministry of Railways for 2025-26. The Lok Sabha later passed the Demands for Grants.

In his reply, Vaishnav said the national transporter has emerged from difficulties of the Covid pandemic to meet its own expenses.

Amid noisy protests by the opposition over not being allowed to speak on Prime



Minister Narendra Modi's statement on the Maha Kumbh, the minister said the railways has taken numerous steps for crowd control at stations and is running several special trains during festival seasons.

He asserted that with Prime Minister Modi's focus on safety, accidents have come down by 90 per cent from the time when Lalu Prasad was at the ministry's helm.

"During Lalu Prasad's time, in a year about 234 accidents and 464 derailments took place, about 700 in a year.

During Mamata Banerjee's period, 165 accidents and 230 derailments took the accident tally to 395 in a year and during Mallikarjun Kharge's time, 118 accidents and 263 derailments happened, taking the total number of accidents to 381," he said. Prime Minister Modi focused on safety and investment in new technology and now it has come down to 30 accidents and 43 derailments, which is 90 per cent less from the earlier period and 80 per cent less than what it was in 2014-15, Vaishnav said.

## PM Modi meets Ilaiyaraaja, hails him as 'trailblazer in every sense'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday met renowned composer Ilaiyaraaja, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP, and said he made history by presenting his first-ever Western classical symphony, Valiant, in London a few days ago.

Modi said in a post on X, "Delighted to meet Rajya Sabha MP Thiru Ilaiyaraaja ji,



a musical titan whose genius has a monumental impact on our music and culture. He is a trailblazer in every sense and he made history yet again

by presenting his first-ever Western classical symphony, Valiant, in London a few days ago."

Modi noted that his performance was accompanied by the world-renowned Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

This momentous feat marks yet another chapter in his unparalleled musical journey -- one that continues to redefine excellence on a global scale, he added.

## Forty years on, 3 gets death for killing 24 Dalits in UP

PNS ■ MANIPURI

A special court in UP's Mainpuri district on Tuesday sentenced three persons to death in the 1981 Dehuli massacre which saw 24 Dalits, including women and two children, being killed.

On March 12, special judge Indra Singh convicted the trio, namely, Kaptan Singh (60), Rampal (60) and Ram Sevak (70).

Aside from the capital punishment, the court imposed a Rs 50,000 fine on the convicts, government counsel Rohit Shukla told PTI.

A gang of 17 dacoits dressed in khakis stormed Dehuli at around 4.30 pm on November 18, 1981. They targeted a Dalit family, gunning down 24 people, including the toddlers aged six months and two years, respectively.

The original FIR named 17 accused under Sections 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), and 396 (dacoity with murder), among others offences of the IPC.



Of the total accused, 14 persons died during the pendency of trial whereas one was declared an absconder.

The FIR was filed by Laik Singh, a local resident, on November 19, 1981, and following a detailed investigation, the dacoits, including gang leaders Santosh and Radhey, were chargesheeted.

In response to the tragedy, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met the affected families whereas Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader in the opposition, undertook a pad yatra from Dilli to Sadupur in Firozabad, offering solidarity with the grieving families.

## Does Lokpal have jurisdiction to hear cases against HC judges? SC to examine

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would examine the issue over the jurisdiction of anti-corruption ombudsman Lokpal in entertaining complaints against sitting high court judges.

A three-judge special bench comprising Justices B R Gavai, Surya Kant and Abhay S Oka was dealing with a suo motu proceeding initiated over the Lokpal's January 27 order on the issue. While posting the hearing on April 15, the bench asked senior advocate Ranjit Kumar to assist it as an amicus curiae in the matter.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said the limited point was whether the Lokpal had jurisdiction. "We will only consider the issue with regard to jurisdiction under the Lokpal Act," Justice Gavai said. The top court on February 20 stayed the Lokpal's order, saying it was "something very, very disturbing" and concerned the independence of the judiciary.

It then issued notices and sought responses from the Centre, the Lokpal registrar and the complainant. Mehta previously said that a high court judge would never



fall within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

The Lokpal had passed the order on two complaints filed against a sitting additional judge of a high court.

On Tuesday, the complainant appeared before the apex court and said he had filed an affidavit in support of his submissions.

"I want the honour of the Lokpal and also the judiciary to be uplifted," he said.

The bench asked the complainant whether he would engage a legal aid lawyer.

The complainant refused any legal assistance and said his submissions were already mentioned in the affidavit. Pointing out a substantial question of law in the matter,

Mehta said, "In my view, only one section of the Lokpal Act is to be examined."

When the bench said a counter affidavit was filed by the registrar of Lokpal, Mehta said it was almost a "reiteration of the order".

There was already a mechanism in place to deal with complaints against judges, the bench observed. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, who is also assisting the court, said, "The fundamental issue will be, can a complaint be ever filed outside the remit of the constitutional authority."

Kumar, the bench said, would go through the complainant's submissions and other materials to have a holistic view of the matter before it decided the issue.

## 'Develop Delhi Vidhan Sabha as 'model' assembly'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Tuesday gave a call to develop the Delhi Vidhan Sabha as a "model" Assembly and urged the newly elected MLAs to upskill themselves with modern technology such as Artificial Intelligence.

Inaugurating a two-day orientation programme for Delhi MLAs at the assembly, he said people have high expectations from the legislators and the new government.

"Delhi as the national capital is like a 'Mini India', representing the diversity among



people from different states living here... It is a big responsibility to meet their expectations and solve their problems by ensuring infrastructure development and social well-

fare," Birla said. The orientation programme will be helpful in learning ways to fulfil the high expectations of people from their MLAs and the new government, he said.

The inaugural session of the event was also attended by Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Leader of Opposition in Assembly Atishi, Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh and the MPs from Delhi.

Stating that a good orator is also the best listener, Birla urged the MLAs to spend time participating in the legislative business of the assembly.

"Artificial Intelligence should be used for capacity building and efficiency. One can ensure better dialogue and communi-

cation with more use of technology," he said.

The Delhi Assembly should be developed as a "model" with respect to maximum use of technology and skills of its members, Birla said.

The Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies is conducting the orientation programme, offering insights into parliamentary rules and legislative practices. Birla also said the new members should learn legislative drafting, employ the available legislative sources, and become aware of the rules and regulations to be able to work for the people.

Editor's TAKE

## New vistas with New Zealand

The visit of the New Zealand Prime Minister reinforces the ties between the two nations

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon is on an official visit to India from March 16 to 20, 2025, marking his first trip to the country as Prime Minister. He is accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, senior officials, business leaders, media personnel, and members of the Indian diaspora community. New Zealand happens to be one of the most friendly nations India has in the southern hemisphere. The two countries share warm and friendly relations, rooted in historical ties as former British colonies and members of the Commonwealth. The Indian diaspora in New Zealand, which numbers around 2,40,000 also plays a crucial role in strengthening bilateral ties.

This visit of New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon marks a significant step in the deepening of bilateral relations between the two nations. With discussions ranging from defence and security to counterterrorism measures, the visit underscores a growing alignment in worldviews between India and New Zealand.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of the meeting between Prime Minister Luxon and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the signing of a comprehensive pact aimed at strengthening defence and security cooperation. This agreement reflects a shared commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, where both nations recognise the importance of collaboration in countering security threats. New Zealand supports a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific but is not part of security arrangements like the Quad.

During the bilateral discussions in New Delhi, Prime Minister Modi conveyed concerns over the activities of separatist groups that misuse democratic freedoms to promote terrorism and threaten Indian interests. In response, the New Zealand government reaffirmed its commitment to addressing such concerns and acknowledged India's perspective on these security threats. Indeed, a significant highlight of the discussions was the shared stance against terrorism. Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Luxon emphasised that terrorism in any form is unacceptable, recalling tragic incidents such as the Christchurch attack in 2019 and the Mumbai 26/11 attacks.

Beyond security and counterterrorism, the visit also provided an opportunity to explore avenues for enhancing economic collaboration. Both leaders reiterated the need for stronger trade and investment ties, with a focus on sectors like technology, agriculture, and renewable energy. The two nations recognise the importance of fostering innovation and economic growth, paving the way for deeper economic integration. New Zealand is keen on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India, but progress has been slow.

India and New Zealand have been increasingly converging on global issues, including climate change, sustainable development, and maritime security. As responsible stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific, both countries aim to uphold international norms and work towards a stable and prosperous region. Their commitment to multilateralism and global governance is reflected in their ongoing cooperation with international organizations. From defence and security to economic collaboration and counterterrorism, India and New Zealand are steadily aligning their interests and working towards a shared vision for global peace and stability. Luxon's visit reflects a concerted effort to strengthen the multifaceted relationship between New Zealand and India, encompassing trade, security, education, tourism, sports, and cultural exchanges.

## Nepal's monarchy debate reignites

Former King Gyanendra Shah, backed by the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), has launched a bold campaign to reclaim relevance. His recent high-profile return to Kathmandu has ignited political tensions

Returning to Pokhara, Nepal, during the current weather-fickle Holi season what struck me was the re-ignition of the debate on the revival of monarchy in a carefully orchestrated campaign driven by the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), other royalists and former King Gyanendra Shah. Not since the republic replaced monarchy in May 2008, has the debate and movement been so intense. The Republicans have hit back in Parliament and outside it. For the royalists, RPP parliamentary party leader Rajendra Lingden, vice president RPP Rabindra Misra and sister party stalwart, Kamal Thapa along with dissident CPN UML leader Durga Parsain, joined by members of civil society are backing Gyanendra. A battle royal is brewing between the two sides.

Gyanendra returned to Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport in a helicopter from Pokhara on March 9 greeted by tumultuous crowds, according to one estimate of around 100,000 supporters. The Royal convoy took nearly three hours to reach Gyanendra's Nirmal Niwas. Earlier on Democracy Day (February 19) he broke his silence through a video message on the restoration of the monarchy. Speaking directly to his countrymen in the third person 'we', he urged for their support for the progress and prosperity of the country.

"Now we are ready to sacrifice anything for the country. We have decided to solve the national problem". Gyanendra has taken the horse by the bit.

Royalists say the monarchy was removed by 'foreigners' and that the 2015 constitution was backed by 'foreigners'. One implied foreigner is India. Banners showing UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were prominently displayed on March 9. The House of Shahs, the royal dynasty began nearly 400 years ago and has an abiding connection with Gorakhnath Peeth whose founder Guru Gorakhnath blessed Prithvi Narayan Shah, founder of modern Nepal. Yogi Adityanath, is still its presiding priest and had in 2015 in Kathmandu publicly advocated the return of Nepal as a Hindu Rashtra. I am frequently asked here if India supports the revival of the Hindu state and monarchy in Nepal. I have said that India does not officially support either institution for Nepal. RPP has 14 seats in Parliament and secured 60,000 votes (out of 14 Million electorates) in the 2023 elections. Even in the local elections, their performance was below par. I met some well-wishers from Nepal at the Holi get-together in my village Anpu. Former Havaladar Durga Bahadur Gurung told me that during the monarchy, 'all the money' went to the



King's coffers; there were no 'vikas'. Now there is round development but "money goes to several ministers". But "vikas is essential and necessary". After the monarchy ended Nepal became secular, democratic and a republic enjoying the freedom of speech and people free to indulge in legitimate pursuits of happiness.

What Royalists forget is that monarchy was dismantled following a people's revolution (Jan Andolan) of 2006 — which was the culmination of the civil war, the 10-year-long Maoists insurrection that cost 17,000 lives and several thousand were victimised through disappearances and displacement. Further, Gyanendra had led a coup in 2005 dismissing Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. He deleted democracy aspiring to return to absolute monarchy. It is therefore naive to think of turning the clock back.

The debate in and outside Parliament is continuing. Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai who has started a new party Nepal Samajbadi Party, had said after Gyanendra's Democracy Day speech, that he should be arrested. Prime Minister KP Oli has asked Gyanendra to start a political party and fight an election. The discussion in the

lower House has been civilised. Outside it, former prime minister and leader of the opposition, Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda the pathfinder of the republic, has said that the former King has found voice at this time due to the mis-governance of the ruling CPN UML and Nepali Congress alliance government.

He has also accused Gyanendra of murdering his brother Birendra and a statue smuggler. NC General Secretary Gagan Thapa has asked the government to withdraw Gyanendra's privileges. Gyanendra's alleged role in the 2001 Palace massacre has resurfaced. There are calls for a fresh enquiry into the royal tragedy; the initial enquiry was done hastily. Conspicuously Gyanendra and his notorious son Paras were among the few survivors of the tragedy.

On March 16, a royalist rally on the Durbar Marg between the main gate of the

palace and the statue of King Mahendra (Gyanendra's father) carrying a banner demanding the return of King Gyanendra for the third time to his throne. On March 28, republicans led by smaller Left parties will stage a counter-rally. And this duel will continue until governance and delivery improve which won't be any time soon.

How will the former King's clarion call resonate in India, and how will it resurrect the political fortunes of the royalists? Only elections and time will tell. The King will be pleased with his direct call, to the Nepali Janta to help him reclaim his throne. History will record February 19 and March 9, 2025, as dates of Gyanendra's riposte to return to Narayanhiti Durbar. Mr Shah will keep himself relevant to the discourse on monarchy at a time when many challenges confront Nepal not the least corruption which is at the heart of people's grievances. Unfortunately, the eight-month rule of the so-called stable alliance of two major parties has little to show to cheer Durga Bahadur.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views expressed are personal)



ASHOK K MEHTA

## Gathered by love, glued by familial bonds

SECOND Opinion



ASHA IYER KUMAR

I had been a footloose solo traveller until health issues bogged me down and kept me cloistered in my home for nearly two years. In that period, I had nearly lost the innate verve to step out and see the world without being accompanied by the spouse. There was a certain blitheness to the spirit that came when I travelled alone and it was all taken away when an ailment robbed me of the confidence to wing out on my own.

Having come out of the phase for the most part, I had an opportunity to travel to India to attend a nephew's wedding earlier this month. However, I was caught between the nervousness of having to set out alone or giving the occasion a pass. The former meant steeling up to face whatever my mind and body would do to me during the time of travel. The former meant giving up a glorious opportunity to meet a horde of extended family members.

My dad came from a family of 13 siblings, most of whom have now moved on, leaving behind a sprawling clan of cousins who, over time, have built families of their own. Now with time, this family tree has grown phenomenally, with my cousins adding sons and daughters in-laws too. The invitation to the wedding meant having an enviable chance to meet many of them, and the list of people who had confirmed their attendance made me slaver. It was something I could not gloss over.

Good health or not, this was an occasion I did not want to miss because in a world that is getting polarised faster than a sneeze, one thing we need to preserve is the ties that transcend differences — the bonds of family that remind us, no matter how far we have drifted, there are roots that still hold us together.

The wedding promised to be more than just a celebration, it was a rare convergence of faces and stories I had not seen in years. A chance to relive old memories, forge new connections, and feel the warmth of belonging once again.

In the days leading up to my journey, I found myself replaying fragments of childhood spent with these cousins — the carefree gatherings on family occasions, the teasing banter that stitched us together, and the quiet comfort of knowing we belonged to the same expansive family tree. Life had since scattered us across continents, and while social media kept us loosely tethered, it was not the same as being in each other's presence — seeing familiar eyes light up, hearing voices unchanged by time, and embracing those whose touch still carried the warmth of home.

I knew this gathering would be more than just a reunion, it would be a gentle reminder that no matter how far we wander, we remain connected by unseen threads woven from shared memories, loud laughter, and the silent understanding that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. And so, with a heart both anxious and eager, I packed my bags, not just for a wedding, but for a journey back to the roots that

still held me fast.

And boy, was I overwhelmed! From the first hug I received from my paternal aunt when I walked into her room through the number of embraces I got from dozens of people I was meeting after a long time, it was two days of nonstop reminders about how deeply intertwined our lives were, despite the years and distances that had come between us. Each embrace seemed to unlock a memory. Conversations flowed like an unbroken river, as if it had never stopped, carrying with them the warmth of familiarity and the quiet reassurance that some connections never truly fade.

In those two days, I found myself moving through a reel of faces and voices, yet each encounter felt personal and profound as if no time had lapsed at all. It was not just a family gathering, it was a homecoming for the heart, a reminder that love, in its purest form, doesn't need constant tending to thrive. It waits patiently, ready to embrace us the moment we return.

All we need to nurture is a willingness to cruise into embraces and a bonding that are not encumbered by status, health conditions, time lapse, achievements or other highs and lows of a world that has no time to stand and share.

For this reason alone, I have resolved to attend any major celebration in the family if conditions are conducive, not just to enhance my experience of life, but also to let the bonds that time threatens to fray find their strength again, because some ties deserve to be nurtured, not merely remembered.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and children's writing coach. She has published six books. Views expressed are personal)

## Leaderspeak

I really appreciate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not bring up New Zealand's Champions Trophy loss to India, and I did not mention our Test victories in India. Let's keep it that way and avoid a diplomatic incident. During PM Modi's tenure, the men in blue have been the most dominant side in cricket, most recently winning the Champions Trophy in Dubai against my men in black. They broke many, many New Zealanders' hearts in the process, including mine.

CHRISTOPHER LUXON, PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

## Letters to the Editor

### INDIA TAKES CENTER STAGE

Madam—The on air podcast episode of American podcaster and Youtuber Lex Fridman in which he had interviewed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has gone viral sensation on all the major internet platforms. Mr Fridman, who is known for interviewing the renowned personalities of the world, have so far achieved more than 1.5 Million views on his official YouTube channel for Modi's episode.

The exuberant interview of three long hours, make thought provoking discussion on so many critical issues including relationship with China, betrayal of Pakistan, his handling attempts of Godhara Riots, glimpses of his personal life, fasting, Donald Trump and his nostalgia stance of Howdy Modi to express the generous humility of Trump, Russia-Ukraine, war, peace, AI, education and so on.

He presented his bold words fearlessly on many of the controversial issues of his tenure as the Indian Prime Minister for three times. It seems like, not him alone voicing out locally about India, instead 1.46 Billion people's are being centre-staged for the Lex Podcast for the world to listen the roars of India and the Indians.

The whole interview is jam-packed about the life realities of PM Modi, stories of India and Indian legacy. He mesmerised the interview with his personal touch, depicting his entire age crisp snapshot in those three hours.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

### TRUMP AND PUTIN EYE 30-DAY CEASEFIRE

Madam—It is with reference to the news article "Putin Trump to hold talks about Ukraine war today" (March 18). US President Donald Trump is going to speak with Russian President Putin about 30 days ceasefire in Russia-Ukraine war field. White House officials are curiously optimistic about a proposal that would stop the fighting between Russia and Ukraine for 30 days. It is really a welcome move.

Recently Ukraine's government agreed to the US proposal of 30 days ceasefire in talks in Saudi Arabia. Putin has praised Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine and has agreed in principle with the US ceasefire proposal. At the same time Putin has raised so many questions that may require further discussion before the agreement could be reached. His main demand is no NATO membership be given to Ukraine and international sanctions against Russia should be ended. Also Putin wants guarantees that Ukraine would not use the pause in fighting to resupply its forces or squirrel out Ukrainian fighters to avoid capture by Russians. Putin also questioned who would monitor the deal across the front-line as well as what penalties would be for violating its terms. Ukraine has already agreed a 30 days ceasefire if Russia signs on too so that a longer peace deal can be discussed. Ukraine demands an exchange of prisoners and a return of thousands of children who had illegally been taken to Russia.

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NADU

### SOUTH INDIA'S TRIPLE WHAMMY

Madam —In a surprising coincidence, three major issues have simultaneously bounced to centre stage causing anxiety in the southern states. These issues are the linguistic burden placed upon them by the National Education Policy 2020, the upcoming report of the 16th Finance Commission and the delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies in 2026. The explicit and implicit support for Hindi, along with its aggressive promotion, is perceived as a calibrated effort to impose the language on the non-Hindi-speaking states. The subtle manoeuvres in the Hindi heartland to replace English with Hindi, labelling the former as a colonial legacy and imbuing the exercise with nationalist sentiment, reinforce the suspicion. Ironically, India is the second-largest English-speaking nation in the world and some estimates suggest it may soon become the top nation. The percentage of people who can speak at least some English is higher in the South, where more people are now inclined to acquire proficiency. Revenue allocations from the central divisible pool to southern states have been scaled down. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent assurance to the southern states that "not even one seat is reduced pro-rata" could be considered a mollifying statement, at best. India's unity lies in addressing all regional linguistic aspirations, celebrating diverse cultures and sharing resources fairly.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

### HIMACHAL PRADESH APPLE GROWERS FEAR US TARIFF THREAT

The adverse impact of trade war will be visible in Himachal Pradesh if the apple of the United States (US) is allowed to enter in India. Here it is worth mentioning that a few years back there was proposal of entry of dairy products from Scandinavian countries and strong protest was lodged by the Punjab and Gujarat because the livelihood of many is dependent on these dairy products and ultimately deal was cancelled.

Now, the apples of US will pose a serious threat to the Indian growers if the deal is matured. With import duties already slashed from 70 per cent to 50 per cent in 2023, orchardists fear another cut would flood the market with cheap, high-quality American apples, devastating domestic growers. The numbers tell a sobering story. When tariffs were hiked in 2018, US apple imports plummeted from 1.28 lakh metric tonnes to just 4,486 metric tonnes by 2022-23. But after the duty was reduced, imports surged nearly 20 times.

How the import duty can adversely impact the economy of the country it can be seen in the impact on Canada where there is total fear psychosis what will happen in the near future and as per media reports many are thinking to return to own country and there is total uncertainty among the Indians settled in Canada.

All are aware that apple growers are already facing stiff competition from cheap Iranian imports and struggle with high production costs due to the rugged Himalayan terrain which makes mechanisation which ultimately adversely impact the sale in the competitive market, because the mechanisation become impossible. Whereas, the American apples benefit from highly mechanised farming and large-scale subsidies. Due to this high imbalance the India's apple industry extremely vulnerable to unregulated imports. And if the tariff is further cut without protective measures it would cripple an industry already on the edge.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

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

## Transforming education in a globalised era

True progress lies in integrating cognitive discourse, ethical values and innovative methodologies to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary demands. By fostering inclusivity and transparency, we can cultivate responsible, knowledgeable and globally competitive individuals

**FIRST**  
**Column**

The increasing liberalisation and globalisation have fostered the concept of a global village, deeply interwoven with society, markets, freedom, choice, empowerment, peace, opportunities, and political linkages. However, its far-reaching impact has also created a somewhat confusing situation. Over the years, there has been considerable debate on reforms in education. It is crucial to identify new ways to assess candidates' qualitative competence by emphasising the improvement of their analytical and observational skills. This can be achieved through cognitive discourse, exploring multiple perspectives, and formulating integrated texts and questionnaires.

Students' lives are undergoing a significant transformation, largely due to rapidly changing value systems across the globe. However, this transformation, driven primarily by acquisition rather than genuine learning, risks turning education—a highly pious institution—into a business venture, where success is measured by material possessions alone. Our traditional knowledge system has long been known for embracing values and approaches that have nurtured students' creativity for centuries. Yet, we must acknowledge the challenges posed by the increasing complexities of this transitional phase.

Despite the historical challenges posed by imperialism and colonialism, our education system has grown richer in content and more diverse in ideas. Continuous efforts have been made to expose students to the nuances of socio-economic, political, and international issues. Kudos to the Ministry of Education for consistently updating curricula, placing a strong emphasis on enhancing students' comprehension skills, and fostering their all-round personality development. The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) has provided a robust framework to upgrade, innovate, and evolve new educational methods. This ensures that our education system remains on par with the best in the world.

The inquisitiveness of the new generation is evident in their ideas and remarkable achievements globally. However, the demands of changing times and the rise of social media, coupled with its negative influences, have made students increasingly vulnerable to shortcuts, criminal activities, and anti-social elements. This has compelled policymakers to revisit the glory of our traditional education system, which is rooted in immense knowledge and wisdom. The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is a commendable initiative in this direction. Its mission aims to create a confluence between our rich traditional values and modern educational advancements. This can help cultivate a culture of liberal literature and



SUDHIR HINDWAN

nurture a spirit of selfless service and brotherhood.

Recent transformations in India's higher education system deserve applause. Efforts have been made to ensure equitable access and partnerships among institutions, demonstrating a strong commitment to empowering students and faculty members. Additionally, the NEP's emphasis on school, adult, and higher education, as well as the promotion of Indian languages and online learning, signifies a tremendous effort to enhance the overall educational landscape.

The essence of these reforms is to ensure clean governance and accountability in education while maintaining synergy among various stakeholders, particularly the youth. Establishing clear norms for structuring new educational frameworks ensures affordability and promotes social justice. Many positive changes have been implemented through fresh perspectives.

Another welcome regulation is the introduction

STUDENTS' LIVES ARE UNDERGOING A SIGNIFICANT TRANSFORMATION, LARGELY DUE TO RAPIDLY CHANGING VALUE SYSTEMS ACROSS THE GLOBE. HOWEVER, THIS TRANSFORMATION, DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY ACQUISITION RATHER THAN GENUINE LEARNING, RISKS TURNING EDUCATION INTO A BUSINESS VENTURE

of monitoring mechanisms that assess institutions based on research output, academic excellence, industry linkages, and employability. The clear framework for decision-making regarding the establishment and closure of institutions ensures transparency.

There has been considerable debate among academicians regarding selection processes in higher education.

One of the major challenges is adapting selection criteria to the contemporary context of increasing global interdependence. Recent developments have laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of politics and society.

However, modifying the examination system is crucial, without it, reforms may remain theoretical rather than practical. The strength of the higher education system lies in fostering internal dynamism and ensuring inclusive growth. Even the best systems are shaped by the people who drive change.

Tremendous efforts have been made to create a robust higher education apparatus, yet there is always room for improvement to make the sys-

tem more cost-effective and people-centric. Academicians play a vital role in this fast-changing world, which faces increasing challenges from cyber fraud, the misuse of artificial intelligence, and the influence of social media. The blurred distinction between virtual (reel) and real life is a growing concern. As beacons of wisdom and sacrifice, academicians must relentlessly pursue knowledge, contribute to society, and help students navigate the paradoxes of the transitional phase.

Students should be encouraged to engage in practical learning experiences that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications.

A constant focus on conceptualising knowledge can help students carve out a niche for themselves. Since the ultimate goal of life remains happiness and contentment, we must delve deep into the vast ocean of knowledge and retrieve the pearls of forgotten wisdom.

### Conclusion

The transformation of India's education system, driven by globalisation and policy reforms, reflects a broader shift toward a more inclusive, innovative, and skill-oriented framework. While challenges persist, including the commercialisation of education, social media's negative influence, and the evolving global landscape, the efforts to modernise learning while preserving traditional wisdom are commendable.

The National Education Policy (NEP) has laid a strong foundation for enhancing analytical skills, fostering research excellence, and improving employability. A well-balanced approach—integrating cognitive discourse, ethical values, and advanced methodologies—can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and contemporary demands.

The role of academicians remains crucial in guiding students to think critically and engage meaningfully with society. With a focus on inclusivity, transparency, and lifelong learning, India's education system is poised to create a generation of responsible, knowledgeable, and globally competitive individuals. Ultimately, education should not merely be a tool for financial success but a means to cultivate intellectual curiosity, selfless service, and a deep appreciation for knowledge.

As we continue to refine our educational policies, the goal should be to nurture individuals who contribute positively to society while upholding the rich legacy of Indian wisdom.

A holistic, student-centric approach will ensure long-term success and sustainable progress.

(The writer, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor. Views expressed are personal)

## Global AI framework: Learning from nuclear arms race and climate change

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is fast becoming the defining technology of our era, shaping everything from retail and finance to warfare and surveillance. Unlike run-of-the-mill general-purpose technologies, AI is truly path-breaking: it holds the power to transform the foundational structures of society, from how we work and learn to how we govern and secure ourselves. Much like nuclear technology and climate change, AI transcends national borders and individual interests. While celebrating technology's limitless potential, we must heed Geoffrey Hinton, dubbed the "Godfather of Deep Learning" and a 2024 Nobel laureate, who warns of the existential risks of rapidly advancing AI.

A few technocrats and major corporations now steer AI's development, potentially reshaping economies and societies. To ensure AI benefits humanity rather than endangering it, we must adopt a global governance framework akin to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

### The peril of few holding the future

Economists Daron Acemoglu and Jhonson warn that a small elite controlling technological development can lock society into pathways that primarily benefit the privileged. This echoes historical moments when narrow interests drove massive decisions: for example, Ferdinand de Lesseps undertook the Panama Canal project after his success in Suez, only to misjudge engineering challenges and trigger disastrous outcomes. By analogy, big-tech leaders might have grand AI visions but overlook ethical hazards, job displacement, or societal well-being. When vision and capital become so concentrated, even a minor misstep at the top can ripple across the globe.

Moreover, this dynamic reflects what Cornell economist and India's former chief economic advisor Kaushik Basu calls the "Samaritan's Curse." Well-intentioned or philanthropic AI solutions-like free educational software from tech giants-could still undermine local autonomy and accountability.

In this scenario, communities become dependent on external providers who extract data and set the terms for entire regions. Over time, local institutions weaken, and the global majority is left beholden to decisions made just in the tech hubs. Likewise, an overreliance on purely "rational" frameworks-common in game theory-can exacerbate these inequalities. If tech elites optimize only for short-term interests or market dominance, they risk creating suboptimal outcomes that harm societal well-being-much like a Prisoner's Dilemma, in which self-interested actions lead everyone astray.

Lessons from nuclear non-proliferation

The parallels to the nuclear age are not accidental. In the early Cold War, world leaders recognised that nuclear weapons posed an existential threat, motivating treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Although imperfect, the NPT regime has provided an institutional channel for monitoring, compliance, and the promotion of peaceful nuclear uses.

AI, too, carries existential dimensions-whether from fully autonomous weapons, large-scale manipulation through algorithmic propaganda, or poorly controlled superintelligence. If major actors pursue an "arms race" mentality, each will race to deploy ever more powerful AI systems without adequate safety checks. In this Hawk-versus-Dove dynamic, those who prefer cautious regulation (the Doves) risk being overtaken by more aggressive competitors (the Hawks).

History shows that unrestrained competition with no global oversight can lead to destabilising deployments, leaving the rest of humanity at risk.



ISHOO RATNA SRIVASTAV

### A climate governance

Meanwhile, the IPCC provides another model. By assembling scientific findings from around the world and presenting them in plain language, the IPCC has anchored climate negotiations for decades.

Although climate action remains insufficient overall, the IPCC demonstrates the value of an inclusive, science-driven body that informs international treaties and inspires national policy.

AI would benefit from a similar body-an "IPCC for AI." Such an institution could pool data, consolidate research, and highlight both the benefits and dangers of emerging AI applications. It would not, by itself, end competition or guarantee ethically deployed AI. However, it could foster a shared understanding of risks, develop transparent benchmarks for testing AI systems, and guide negotiations on international standards.

### The need for equitable participation

If we want to avoid replicating the inequities of past global governance efforts, we must ensure that developing nations and historically marginalised communities have a real seat at the table. In nuclear and climate frameworks, wealthier nations often dominate the agenda, while poorer nations struggle to make their voices heard. When it comes to AI, the stakes are just as high-

if not higher-because the technology permeates jobs, education, healthcare, and human rights.

Without equitable participation, we risk a scenario in which AI is developed primarily by and for affluent societies, leaving much of the world behind. Local languages, cultural contexts, and social needs might remain unaddressed. Worse, data could be harvested from vulnerable communities without meaningful consent, reinforcing a cycle of dependency and exploitation. Moreover, if large companies or governments leverage AI to automate industries, job losses may disproportionately impact regions lacking the resources to adapt or retrain.

### Towards a global architecture

A robust AI governance framework would combine elements of the NPT (agreements limiting destructive uses and encouraging responsible technology sharing) with the IPCC's approach (transparent, collaborative scientific assessment). Governments, industry, civil society, and academia should unite in a formal institution that:

1. Sets global standards for data governance, algorithmic transparency, and ethical AI usage.
2. Establishes monitoring and verification protocols to identify dangerous or manipulative AI deployments.
3. Facilitates capacity-building so that lower-income countries can develop or adapt AI ethically, rather than become passive recipients of technology shaped elsewhere.
4. Promotes open research on AI safety, interpretability, and fairness, ensuring that breakthroughs are not locked behind corporate or governmental secrecy.

### Conclusion

AI's immense promise should not blind us to its potential perils as AI has already transformed the planet's strategic and economic landscape. To avoid a future shaped solely by a powerful few, we must proactively craft a global governance system.

Such an institution can harness the best of AI innovation while safeguarding against misuse, exploitation, job losses, and catastrophic misjudgments.

The lesson from nuclear arms and climate policy is clear: when technology poses risks on a planetary scale, neither laissez-faire market forces nor unilateral national approaches will suffice. Instead, a cooperative international framework, informed by science and rooted in fairness, is our best hope.

(The writer is an officer of the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers and is presently pursuing MPA at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. Views expressed are personal)

## Purity and well-being: The true foundations of health

Health is Wealth is an old maxim that's relevant even today in this modern age. It's a fact that health is very essential to happy and natural living. And without good health, one does not have a feeling of stamina, suppleness and well-being. Today, nobody wants to be sick and physically distressed to spend their hard-earned money on doctors and medicines and that is why people all over the world have become more health conscious than they were a few years back.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease. Since there is an intimate connection and interaction between mind and body, most of the time a physical disease causes some symptoms of ailment in the mind and vice versa. And to treat it, there are many systems or parties as we call them. Usually, the doctors give medicine so that the symptoms of the disease disappear or, at most, the disease in its present form disappears. However, there are only very few systems that feel concerned with the eradication of the causes of the disease and with the restoration of health.

Various systems define 'disease' and its causes differently and their philosophy of health and disease is very different from that of the other systems. For example, the allopathic system of medicine is based on the philosophy that it is the virus that causes a disease and hence allopaths consider viruses as living microorganisms.

They also think that many diseases are caused by bacteria if not by viruses. So, their system attempts to kill these viruses or bacteria to help the body recover from their attack. But the hygienist school of thought or the nature curists say that viruses are not living entities and they consider viruses as the proteinaceous debris of spent cells that create a condition of intoxication, called toxemia or toxicosis. They say that which is called 'virus' is always dead, it never shows any signs of life, such as metabolism or control mechanisms.

As to the bacteria, they say that bacteria have always been with us because they are our symbiotic partners. So, according to nature curists, the real culprit is the accumulated toxic matter and hence they consider a disease not as a result of attack by viruses or bacteria but the result of the toxic matter, generated within or taken from outside, and also the result of the body attempting to throw this toxic material out of it.

So, according to them, all diseases are toxemia in origin and most diseases are a remedial effort or a struggle by the body to purify or repair itself. Now, if we consider 'disease' as the manifestation of a signal concerning the accumulated debris,

waste or toxic matter, then we will have to say that purification of the body is the mother of health. In this purification, 'purity of mind' plays a very great role because purification of the body requires fasting or less eating, avoiding toxic food, and having control over sensual pleasures that lead to waste of body-vitality.

It also means control over our behaviour and emotions, for these also lead to debility, innervation and unhealthy functioning of our nervous or glandular system. Even if we believe in the existence of viruses, bacteria or microorganisms as the causes of our disease, it would be hard to deny the fact that the main culprit is the accumulated toxic matter in our body because that provides a suitable breeding ground for the virus or the bacteria. In sum, it would be correct to say that spiritual and physical purity is the factor that promotes natural health.

Hence, without positive emotions of love, enthusiasm etc, one cannot have the vitality to maintain normal functions of all body parts because the negative emotions cause a great drain on one's vitality and debilitate the whole organism. It would therefore be proper to emphasise that purity is the main ingredient to achieve good health.

So, while doctors talk of holistic health, hypertension, psychosomatic diseases, and drug addiction, we wish that due attention is also paid to the turmoil caused by one's negative thoughts which is making the atmosphere of society polluted and unhealthy.

In conclusion, maintaining good health requires a holistic approach that encompasses physical, mental, and emotional well-being. While medical systems like allopathy focus on eliminating viruses and bacteria, natural hygiene emphasises detoxification and purification as the key to health. The debate over the causes of disease highlights the importance of keeping the body free from toxic accumulation. Furthermore, emotional health plays a crucial role in overall well-being, as negative thoughts and stress can weaken the body's vitality. True health is not just the absence of disease but a balance of mind, body, and spirit. Cultivating purity-both physically and mentally-through proper nutrition, controlled emotions, and positive thoughts is essential to achieving lasting wellness.

As society becomes more health-conscious, a shift toward preventive care and natural healing methods can help reduce dependency on medications and promote a healthier way of life. Ultimately, health is indeed wealth, and nurturing it should be a priority for all.

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



### IN BRIEF



#### Barclays Bank invests Rs 2,300 cr in India ops

British lender Barclays on Tuesday announced a Rs 2,300-crore capital infusion into India operations. The infusion by the head office into Barclays Bank PLC India must be seen as a reaffirmation of its long-term commitment to one of the world's fastest-growing economies, as per a statement. The infusion will strengthen the bank's balance sheet and help grow its businesses across the investment and private banks, it said. It will enable the bank to expand its reach to a wider client base across corporate and financial sponsor clients and ultra-high-net-worth individuals in India, the statement added. The bank last injected Rs 3,000 crore in 2021, and the latest investment takes the bank's total invested capital to over Rs 12,400 crore. "India's economic potential continues to present attractive opportunities for Barclays to grow its business," its interim head of markets for Asia Pacific and country chief executive for India Jaideep Khanna said.



#### Rupee settles 26 paise higher at 86.55 against US dollar

The rupee appreciated for the third consecutive session and registered gains of 26 paise to close at 86.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid positive domestic equity markets and a weak American currency. Forex traders said the US dollar declined on disappointing economic data from the US. Moreover, the strength of the Asian currencies also supported the rupee. However, a surge in crude oil prices capped the gains. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee witnessed high volatility. It opened at 86.71 then touched the intraday high of 86.54 and the low of 86.78 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 86.55 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 26 paise from its previous closing level. On Monday, the rupee had appreciated 24 paise to close at 86.81 against the US dollar. On Thursday, the rupee surged 17 paise to settle at 87.05 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on Friday on the occasion of Holi festival.



#### Kia India to hike vehicle prices up to 3 pc

Kia India on Tuesday said it will hike vehicle prices up to 3 per cent from April in order to offset the impact of rising input costs. The price hike, effective from April 1, 2025, is primarily due to rising commodity prices and escalating supply chain-related costs, the automaker said in a statement. "As a brand committed to providing exceptional value and quality to our customers, we have always strived to offer the best vehicles at competitive prices," Kia India Senior Vice President (Sales and Marketing) Hardeep Singh Brar said. However, due to the rising costs of commodities and input materials, the automaker will be increasing up to 3 per cent price across all models, effective from April 1, he added. "While we understand that price adjustments can be challenging, this decision has been made to ensure we can continue delivering the high-quality, technologically advanced vehicles that our customers expect from Kia," Brar said.

## RBI and Bank of Mauritius sign pact on use of local currencies

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank and the Bank of Mauritius (BOM) have signed a pact for establishing a framework to promote the use of the Indian Rupee and the Mauritian Rupee (MUR) for cross-border transactions. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra and BOM Governor Rama Krishna Sithanen G C S K, the central bank said in a statement on Tuesday.

The MoU documents were exchanged in Port Louis, Mauritius in the presence of the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Mauritius Navinchandra Ramgoolam, on Wednesday, March 12, 2025, it said.

The RBI said the MoU aims to promote the use of INR and MUR in bilateral trade. The MoU covers all current account transactions and permissible capital account transactions as agreed upon by both the countries.

The framework would

enable exporters and importers to invoice and pay in their respective domestic currencies, which in turn, would enable the development of a market in the INR-MUR pair.

Use of local currencies would optimise costs and settlement time for transactions.



"This collaboration marks a key milestone in strengthening bilateral cooperation between RBI and BOM," RBI said.

Use of local currencies in bilateral transactions will eventually contribute to promoting trade between India and Mauritius as well as deepening financial integration and strengthen the historical, cultural, and economic relations between India and Mauritius.

## Look forward to ink FTA with India in 60 days

Says New Zealand Prime Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon on Tuesday said he looks forward to signing a free trade agreement with India in 60 days, a move which is expected to increase bilateral trade by 10 times over ten years.

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.

The New Zealand Prime Minister is here on a four-day visit from March 16.

"Let's drive this relationship forward, and I look forward to Prime Minister Modi signing that agreement in 60 days time," Luxon said while addressing the India-New Zealand Economic Summit organised by industry body FICCI.

According to trade experts, the tricky point in the talks would be duty concessions on agri products like apple, kiwi, dairy, and wine.

"I can tell you that together, there's every possibility of achieving that 10x growth in the next 10 years," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said.



"...if we work in the spirit of complimentary economies ... there is hardly anything on which we compete with each other, and those few areas of sensitivity we can very easily navigate or respect each other given the different levels of development and different levels of prosperity that each country has today," Goyal said.

On dairy being a sticking point between the two nations, New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay said, "I think there are many opportunities between us to grow trade. One of the most important things we're going to do is respect our negotiators."

When asked about the ongoing trade talks with vari-

ous countries including the US, Goyal said, "Every engagement stands on its own legs, and every engagement will come up with good results in the interests of India, in the interest of the people and businesses of India, and likewise, our partner."

Responding to the New Zealand prime minister's 60-day FTA timeline comment, Goyal remarked, "We are very aspirational. I don't think any of you imagine that we could do the UAE agreement in 90 days. So we are aspirational two friends working together in a spirit of cooperation, respecting each other's sensitivities, and we will be aspiring to do this equally fast."

## Fusion CX acquires US company for USD 12 mn

PNS ■ KOLKATA

City-based firm Fusion CX has acquired US-based Sequential Technology International LLC for USD 12 million to expand its global footprint, a company official said on Tuesday.

Sequential Technology International LLC, based out of Pennsylvania in the US, provides customer support services to clients worldwide.

"We will invest approximately USD 12 million for acquiring and integrating the business of the US firm with our company."

It will also strengthen our global presence in the US, Manila, San Salvador, Gurugram and Bangalore," Fusion CX Managing Director and CEO Pankaj Dhanu said.

Operating in the customer experience space, Fusion CX provides services across several verticals like utilities, healthcare and BFSI, he said.

The US firm with an annual revenue of USD 38 million has an employee strength of almost 1,400 people, he said.

The Indian firm has a workforce of around 20,000 professionals spread across 15 locations across the globe.

## Sensex jumps over 1,100 points

Reclaims 75k-mark on firm global markets

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The BSE benchmark index Sensex jumped 1,131 points to revisit the 75,000 level on Tuesday, and the NSE Nifty surged 1.45 per cent, tracking a bullish trend in global equities and intense buying in market majors ICICI Bank, L&T and M&M counters.

Besides, lower crude oil prices in the international markets and a weak dollar against major currencies overseas also bolstered sentiment, traders said.

Rising for the second day on the trot, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,131.31 points or 1.53 per cent to settle at 75,301.26. During the day, it soared 1,215.81 points or 1.63 per cent to 75,385.76.

As many as 2,815 stocks advanced while 1,221 declined and 123 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The NSE Nifty surged 325.55 points or 1.45 per cent to 22,834.30.

Buoyancy across global equities boosted the confidence of local investors, which translated into value buying across the sectors. As markets were in a bearish mode over the past few weeks and valuations had become a bit attractive, investors seized opportu-



nity in the beaten-down sectors.

In the Sensex pack, Zomato emerged as the biggest gainer with over 7 per cent jump, followed by ICICI Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro, Asian Paints, Titan, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

In contrast, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

The BSE small-cap gauge soared 2.73 per cent, and the midcap index jumped 2.10 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher, where realty surged 2.95 per cent, industrials (2.79 per cent), consumer

discretionary (2.76 per cent), capital goods (2.44 per cent), auto (2.42 per cent), power (2.27 per cent), financial services (2.09 per cent) and bankex (1.98 per cent).

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European equity markets were trading with gains. US markets ended higher on Monday.

"The benchmarks witnessed a strong recovery, driven by favourable global trends and domestic tailwinds. Improved retail sales data from the US and China boosted investor confidence, while mid and small-cap stocks outperformed, with all major sectors registering gains."

## Alphabet to buy cybersecurity startup Wiz for USD 32 billion

PNS ■ NEW YORK

Google owner Alphabet will buy cybersecurity startup Wiz for USD 32 billion.

The all-cash deal is set to boost Alphabet's profile in the cloud computing market, a space currently led by Amazon and Microsoft. Once the transaction is closed, the company says Wiz will join Google Cloud.

"Today, businesses and governments that run in the cloud are looking for even stronger security solutions, and greater choice in cloud computing providers," Google CEO Sundar Pichai said in a statement Tuesday — adding that Google Cloud and Wiz will "turbocharge improved cloud security and the ability to use multiple clouds" together.

Wiz, a four-year-old startup headquartered in New York, makes security tools designed to shield the information stored in remote data centres from intruders.



## Gold continues record run, breaches Rs 91k level

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices climbed by Rs 500 to hit another record high of Rs 91,250 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday driven by sustained buying by stockists and retailers amid a strong trend overseas, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Monday, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rallied by Rs 1,300 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 90,750 per 10 grams.

The yellow metal of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 450 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 90,800 per 10 grams against the previous close of

Rs 90,350 per 10 grams. "Gold extended gains on Tuesday and touched a fresh record high in the international market as well as the domestic market."

However, silver prices traded flat at Rs 1,02,500 per kg, also a historic high.

Meanwhile, gold futures jumped by Rs 649 or 0.73 per cent to establish a fresh peak of Rs 88,672 in the afternoon trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

On the global front, spot gold increased to hit a fresh high of USD 3,028.49 per ounce. Similarly, Comex gold futures quoted higher to hit a record peak of USD 3,037.26 per ounce.

## LIC to buy stake in a health insurer before March 31: CEO

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Life insurance behemoth LIC is confident of buying a stake in a health insurer in the next two weeks, its chief executive Siddhartha Mohanty said on Tuesday. Without identifying the company it will be buying a stake in, Mohanty said the state-owned company is in final stage of talks and hoped that a deal gets announced before March 31.

"It is a natural choice for LIC to be in health insurance, dis-

ussion is going on at final stage," he told reporters on the sidelines of the GCA25 event here. Mohanty said LIC will not buy a controlling stake of 51 per cent or more in the target company and the exact quantum of the stake buy depends on factors like the decision of LIC board and valuations.

At present, life insurance companies are not allowed to offer health covers which include covering up hospitalization and other expenses for



the insured. There was a suggestion for a composite licence for insurers, but no announcement was made in this regard in the Union Budget.

As per some media reports, LIC is said to be eyeing a stake

in ManipalCigna in a deal pegged at Rs 4,000 crore.

In a regulatory filing issued later, the Corporation said it is in advanced talks to pick up a substantial stake in a "stand-alone" health insurer and no binding agreements have been signed so far. "The execution and ultimate consummation of the deal is subject to various factors, including approval of the Board, regulatory approvals and other approvals, if any, before executing any binding agreements."

## Singapore, India exploring pact on green digital shipping corridor

PNS ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore and India are exploring signing of a Letter of Intent (LoI) for a green digital shipping corridor (GDSC), which is expected to link the Indian marine sector to the global network.

The letter of intent is expected to be signed during shipping minister Sarbananda Sonowal's visit to Singapore next week.

Sonowal, Minister of Port, Shipping and Waterways, along with a delegation, is expected to attend the Singapore Maritime Week

(SMW), which is being held here from March 24 to 28.

"We are thinking of establishing a letter of intent with India as a start. It is something we are still working towards," said Teo Eng Dih, chief executive of Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), which is hosting the week-long maritime event.

The LoI is expected to be signed during SMW itself, but details are yet to be confirmed, MPA added.

Teo noted India is keen to export green fuel including biofuels to the region as well



The GDSC will link the Indian maritime sector to the global network through the Singapore maritime ecosystem, which has been rated as one of the largest shipping and marine trade hubs in the world, according to industry observers.

as sharing digital expertise. The GDSC will link the Indian maritime sector to the global network through

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hubs in the world, according to industry observers.

The SMW will also host maritime ministers from

Estonia, France, Portugal, Norway and the Netherlands.

The Indian minister's visit will be supported by Indian ports, shipyards and companies setting up an 'India Pavilion' at the exhibition.

The pavilion participants are: Indian Ports Association, Cochin Shipyard, Indian Maritime University, Shipyards Association of India, Swan Defence and Heavy Industries, Chowgule Shipyard, Garden Reach Shipyards and Engineers, San Marine Shipyard, Synergy Ship Builders and L&T Shipyard, according to MPA.

## Majority of Indians are long-term investors

Mkt disruptions arise from geopolitical shifts: NSE CEO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Majority of Indians are long-term investors as only 2 per cent actively trade in derivatives out of the 110 million market participants, National Stock Exchange (NSE) MD and CEO Ashish Kumar Chauhan has said.

This suggests the growing culture of disciplined, sustainable investment in the country.

"Out of 110 million market participants, only 2 per cent actively trade in derivatives. The majority are committed to long-term investing," he stated. At a recent panel discussion in Singapore, he dispelled the notion that India's stock market is driven primarily by speculative trading.

According to a statement issued by the exchange, Chauhan provided deep insights into the evolving financial landscape, the rise of technology-driven capitalism, and the increasing complexities of global markets.

He redefined conventional perspectives on financial stability, asserting that volatility is not a weakness but an inherent feature of economic progress.



Chauhan argued that market disruptions often result from geopolitical shifts rather than purely economic factors. "Geopolitics eats economics for breakfast," he remarked, highlighting how international power struggles are reshaping financial markets in unpredictable ways.

One of the most striking themes of his address was the emergence of "Capitalism without capital." Traditionally, wealth creation depended on large financial investments, but Chauhan pointed out that technological advancements are rewriting the rules.

"With AI, blockchain, and digital platforms allowing businesses to scale with minimal capital, the economic model is shifting away from traditional capital-intensive structures," he said.

## Aadar Jain breaks silence on 'Time Pass' comment controversy: Calls out 'FALSE NARRATIVES'



Actor Aadar Jain has finally addressed the controversy surrounding his latest "time pass" remark, which many speculated was aimed at his past relationship with actor Tara Sutaria. The comment, made during his pre-wedding celebrations with Alekha Advani, sparked widespread debate, with social media users and even Tara's mother reacting to it. However, Aadar has now clarified that his words were misconstrued and taken out of context. In a latest interview, Aadar opened up about the backlash, stating that false assumptions and narratives had blown the situation

out of proportion. "There are so many false narratives, false assumptions, but no fact-checkers. Unfortunately, when people make up stories, the ones who suffer are those involved and their families. From day one, a lot has been written, but out of respect, everyone remained silent. This gave people the liberty to say whatever they wanted," he said. He further emphasised that the controversy has affected not just him but also Alekha's and Tara's families. "It's unfair for her (Alekha) and her family, for me and my family and for her (Tara) and her family. There's no truth to any of it." Dismissing the allegations, Aadar reiterated that his words were misrepresented. "Whatever has been written has no truth behind it. People took 10 seconds of what I said, misconstrued it and directed it toward someone else. My parents always taught me to respect my past, my present and now my future.

I would never think of anyone else when I'm getting married," he explained. He expressed disappointment over how the situation unfolded, stating, "It's unfortunate what happened, but there's no truth behind any of it." Alekha Advani also weighed in on the controversy, calling the situation unfair. "Aadar's comment turned into an entirely different narrative, which wasn't nice or fair. Even she (Tara) knows that Aadar and I have been friends for a long time. This whole story is baseless," she said. Aadar further added that just because things don't work out in a relationship doesn't mean people should twist words or make false accusations. "Things don't work out for a reason. That doesn't mean you turn around and start saying things about people."

## Sunny Leone brings out the 'pure fire' with *Ladki Deewani*

Sunny Leone is all set to light up the dance floor with her latest track, *Ladki Deewani*. The song, featuring the actress alongside singer Neelkamal Singh, promises to be a high-energy party anthem that will have listeners grooving non-stop. Sunny Leone, who has always been a popular face in dance numbers, was instantly drawn to the song. She shared, "From the moment I heard *Ladki Deewani*, I knew it was pure fire! The energy, the beats, the vibe—it's the kind of song that just makes you want to dance." Talking about working with Neelkamal Singh, she added, "Shooting with him was such a blast! We hit it off instantly, shared so many laughs, and had the best time bringing this song to life. Working with T-Series always feels like home. Our journey goes back years, and they just know how to create magic. *Ladki Deewani* is no different—it will set the dance floors on fire! I had the best time filming this and I can't wait for everyone

to feel the same energy. So turn it up and let's get this party started!" The song boasts an electrifying collaboration of talented artists. With beats by R Jay Kang, lyrics by Ashutosh Tiwari, and choreography by Rahul Shetty, *Ladki Deewani* is set to be an unstoppable hit. Apart from *Ladki Deewani*, Sunny Leone was also seen in Himesh Reshammiya's latest *Badass Ravi Kumar*, where she featured in the song *Hookstep Hookah Bar* alongside the legendary Prabhudev. The song, composed by Himesh Reshammiya and sung by Sunidhi Chauhan with English vocals by Shannon K, has been well received by audiences.



## Pankaj Tripathi's daughter Aashi Tripathi makes her acting debut with *Rang Daaro*

Aashi Tripathi, daughter of acclaimed actor Pankaj Tripathi and Mridula Tripathi, has stepped into the world of entertainment with her debut in the music video *Rang Daaro*. The soulful track, sung by Mainak Bhattacharya and Sanjana Ramnarayan, is composed by Abhinav R Kausik and beautifully captures the themes of love and artistic expression. Currently a student at a Mumbai-based college, Aashi has long nurtured aspirations of becoming an actor. When composer Abhinav R Kausik envisioned her for the role, he approached Mridula Tripathi with the idea. Before giving the go-ahead, Mridula consulted Pankaj, who wholeheartedly supported their daughter's first step into the industry. The visually stunning music video, released by Jar Pictures, presents Aashi as a muse, delicately adorned in vibrant hues, symbolizing the essence of love and creativity. Sharing his emotions on Aashi's debut, Pankaj Tripathi expressed his joy and pride, saying, "Seeing Aashi on screen was an emotional and proud moment for both of us. She has always been passionate about performing arts and watching her deliver such natural expressions in her very first project was truly special. If this is her first step, I can't wait to see where her journey takes her." Echoing similar sentiments, Mridula Tripathi emphasised the importance of choosing projects that align with Aashi's artistic sensibilities. She shared, "When the opportunity came, I wanted to ensure that Aashi did something meaningful. *Rang Daaro* is a beautiful, soulful project and seeing her bring the emotions to life on screen was heartwarming. We are excited to see her grow and carve her own space in the industry." The music video *Rang Daaro* is now available on social media platforms and major audio streaming services, giving audiences a glimpse of Aashi Tripathi's promising start in the world of entertainment.

## Randeep Hooda undergoes intense transformation for *Jaat*



Randeep Hooda is once again proving his dedication to the craft proving that he is the ultimate shape shifter in Bollywood, undergoing a striking transformation for his upcoming film *Jaat*. Playing the role of Ranatunga, a ruthless gangster, Randeep has completely immersed himself in the character—gaining muscle weight, working on his voice modulation, the actor has gone above and beyond to bring his most menacing and evil role to life. A source close to the production revealed, "Randeep is known for his methodical approach to every role he takes on and *Jaat* is no different. From day one, he was committed to making Ranatunga a truly fearsome villain. He grew out his hair to give the character a raw mlook, worked on his physique to add a more intimidating presence. His attention to detail is unmatched, and he ensures that no aspect of his performance feels inauthentic. Whether it was *Sarbjit*, *Swatantra Veer Savarkar*, or now *Jaat*, Randeep never shies away from going the extra mile. His fans admire him for his ability to completely transform into the characters he plays, and with Ranatunga, they are going to see a version of Randeep that is darker, more menacing and truly terrifying on screen." With *Jaat*, Randeep Hooda is set to redefine cinematic villainy, bringing a never-before-seen intensity to the screen.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



#### NANCY



#### GINGER MEGGS



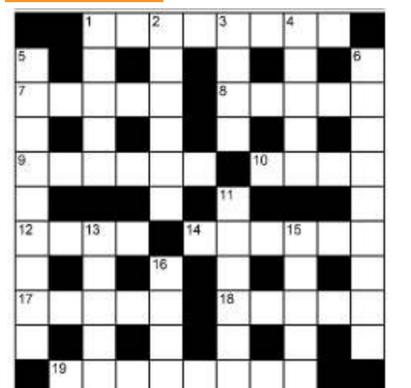
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- Graveyard
- In the lead
- Shelf
- Pay attention
- Threesome
- Yours and mine
- An old fortified building
- Racket
- Mirror reflection
- A jewellery item

#### DOWN

- A game played on a squared board
- Infuriate
- Story
- Jockey
- A type of pen
- Got well again
- Liquid always in your mouth
- Lift
- To bother or annoy someone for fun
- Feeble



## Training in an 'Akhada' gave me a warrior physique, not just muscles

In a candid conversation with *The Pioneer*, Ankit Sharma opens up about his transformative journey portraying Santaji Gorpade in *Chhaava* and dives deep into the intense physical and mental preparation he underwent, opting for traditional Indian training methods over modern gyms to capture the essence of a warrior

TEJAL SINHA  
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Ankit Sharma, known for his dedication and versatility, takes on the role of Santaji Gorpade in *Chhaava*, a film based on the life of the legendary warrior. In this exclusive interview, Ankit shares his journey into portraying one of history's greatest warriors, his preparation for the role and the challenges he faced while embodying Santaji Gorpade's strength and loyalty. Ankit recalls his initial reaction when he was approached for the role, revealing that he had always admired Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj since childhood. "I have admired Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj since childhood and he has always been my idol," he says. Initially, Ankit auditioned for the role of Dhanaji Maharaj, but fate led him to portray Santaji Gorpade. "It was an incredible feeling, a moment of pure joy," he recalls. This unexpected turn of events allowed him to step into the shoes of a warrior whose loyalty and bravery were unparalleled in Indian history. To better understand his character, Ankit turned to Shivaji Sawant's novel *Chhaava*, the inspiration behind the film. He explains how this book played a crucial role in shaping his understanding of Santaji Gorpade. "Through this journey, I got to learn a lot about my character, the Ghorpade family lineage, and the life of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj. It was a deeply enriching experience," he reflects. Taking on the role of such a legendary figure required extensive mental and physical preparation. Rather than focusing on modern gym training, Ankit chose to immerse himself in traditional Indian workout

techniques to prepare for the role. He trained in an akhada, a traditional Indian gym where warriors would train using exercises that date back centuries. "Instead of going to the gym, the choice was made to train in an akhada, following traditional Indian exercises. This helped in understanding how people trained in earlier times before modern gyms existed," Ankit shares. The focus of this training was on building a broader physique through exercises like repetitive movements and training with natural elements such as mud, unlike the muscle definition-focused approach of modern gyms. Ankit's commitment to physical transformation was no easy feat. "Indian-style training builds a broader physique. It involves exercises like sitting, standing, and repetitive movements, shaping the body using the earth itself—training with mud," he explains. This shift in his workout routine posed certain challenges, but Ankit embraced it wholeheartedly, recognising that it was essential to embody the warrior spirit of Santaji Gorpade.

In addition to physical preparation, Ankit had to master the skills of sword fighting and horse riding to authentically portray his character. The challenges were compounded by the monsoon season, which added an element of fear and danger to the intense training sessions. "The shoot happened during monsoon and it lasted for three months. We followed the traditional Maharashtrian style of sword fighting and horse riding continues even now with practice in different techniques such as riding fast, riding slow, wielding a sword in one hand, and holding a shield in the other," he says. One particular memory stands out for him: "During the rainy season, we used to go horse riding, but I always felt scared. The area was full of snakes, which made me even more nervous. Our training teacher would often mention that a snake had appeared the previous day, which only added to my fear. Even while riding the horse, I couldn't shake off the feeling of unease. Despite the fear, it was still a fun experience." Sword fighting was another skill that pushed Ankit to his limits. He recalls a particularly terrifying incident: "Once during training, a talwar almost hit my eye. In that moment, my whole life flashed before me. It was a terrifying experience that made me realise the importance of

staying fully conscious and aware, especially while shooting or performing any scene." While physical training was intense, the emotional bond formed with his fellow cast members was just as significant. Ankit had the opportunity to

collaborate with Vicky Kaushal, and he speaks highly of the experience. "It was a very good experience. He was extremely cooperative and supportive. There was a lot of fun on set, but everyone was serious when needed. When he arrived in costume and makeup, people started calling him 'Raazi' and the name stuck," Ankit recalls with a smile. He mentions Vicky's discipline as well, stating, "He would hit the gym at 4 or 5 AM, working out in his vanity. Others would just be waking up and stepping out of their vans, while music blasting from his vanity signaled that he was already there."

Throughout the shoot, he was fortunate enough to work with seasoned actors like Ashutosh Rana and Vineet Kumar, who offered valuable lessons. "I spoke to Ashutosh sir the most. We used to sit together for hours, and I call him Guruji. Many people do, but for me, it holds a special meaning," Ankit shares. Their conversations, which covered topics from acting to spirituality and politics, helped Ankit deepen his understanding of his craft. He also sought advice from Vineet Kumar, a doctor, who offered guidance on various matters. "Vineet Bhai is a doctor, so I often sought his advice on various matters. He gave me a lot of useful suggestions, which I truly appreciated."

Despite the long shooting period, his passion for the project never wavered. "The set used to be incredibly beautiful. On days when there was no shoot, I would wonder why there was a break and wish we were filming instead," he admits. His love for the set and the environment, along with the camaraderie of his fellow actors and crew members, kept him motivated.

Playing a historical figure like Santaji Gorpade left a lasting impact on Ankit, especially in terms of understanding loyalty. "The one thing that touched me was the loyalty of Santaji Gorpade. He dedicated his entire life to Shivaji and Sambhaji. Playing this character made me realize how important loyalty is," he reflects.

Looking ahead, Ankit shares his enthusiasm for playing more historical roles and real-life figures. "I enjoy playing historical characters. They feel comfortable to me, and I find them fascinating. But beyond historical roles, I would also love to portray real people in biographical films—understanding someone's life and preparing accordingly for the character excites me," he says.

Ankit is also excited about his upcoming projects, including Kannada film titled *Toxic* with Yash Raj. "The shooting for *Toxic* is happening simultaneously, and there is another project that is almost finalized, but I can't reveal details about it just yet," he teases.



## Effortless waves and slays for every occasion

Gen Z has redefined beauty standards with a bold, authentic approach that celebrates individuality. When it comes to hair, it's all about effortless styles that speak volumes without trying too hard. Effortless waves and versatile looks are at the forefront, offering a chic, low-maintenance vibe that can slay any occasion.

### THE MAGIC OF EFFORTLESS WAVES

Effortless waves are the crown jewel of Gen Z hairstyles. They exude a carefree, beachy vibe while maintaining a polished edge. The key is to strike a balance between natural texture and subtle definition. You don't need to spend hours with a curling iron—loose braids left overnight, a quick twist-and-flat-iron technique, or even scrunching damp hair with a lightweight mousse can achieve that perfect wave.

### SLAY FOR EVERY OCCASION

**Casual days:** Go for tousled waves with a middle part for an easy, laid-back look. Add a few hair clips or a colorful scrunchie for a playful touch.

**Work or school:** Sleek, soft waves paired with a half-up bun create a balanced, sophisticated style. It keeps hair off your face while showcasing volume and texture.

**Night out:** Amp up the drama with defined waves and a side part. Add some shine serum for a glossy finish and you're ready to turn heads.

**Special occasions:** Elegant, brushed-out waves with subtle accessories like pearl pins or delicate headbands offer a timeless, graceful look.

### PRO TIPS FOR MAINTAINING THE LOOK

**1. Hydration is key:** Healthy hair holds styles better. Use moisturising masks regularly.

**2. Less is more:** Avoid over-styling. Embrace your natural texture.

**3. Protect your hair:** Heat protectant sprays are non-negotiable when using hot tools.

**4. Gen Z's hair mantra is clear:** Effortless, authentic and always ready to slay. Whether you're chilling at home, acing a presentation, or hitting the town, these styles ensure your hair game stays strong.

(The author, Azeem Qamar, is a Hair Expert at Brazil Protein.)

## Why streetwear is thriving in Hyderabad!



PNS/HYDERABAD

Culture Pay allows customers to build collections through affordable EMIs, such as Yeezys at Rs 699 monthly or Jordans at Rs 499, without compromising authenticity. Our physical stores, including Hyderabad, create immersive experiences where customers interact with products that were previously only available online. We're not making luxury less exclusive—we're removing artificial barriers.

**Although Hyderabad has a long history of fine craftsmanship, it hasn't historically been thought of as a center for streetwear. Why did you decide to expand to Hyderabad?**

Despite not having a physical location, Hyderabad had one of the highest per-order values on the platform, indicating a sophisticated but underserved market. Hyderabadis understand quality and invest in it and witnessing young professionals fusing global streetwear trends with traditional aesthetic sensibilities to create something distinctively Hyderabad. The auction results confirmed this: expensive items found eager buyers, demonstrating that Hyderabad isn't just ready for luxury streetwear—it's hungry for it!

**How does it balance the seemingly opposing consumer mindsets of luxury fashion, which is frequently about classic investment pieces and streetwear?**

Because we believe that these attitudes are complementary rather than antagonistic, we have designed it to support them. The platform provides classic luxury investments as well as limited-drop hype releases. The data reveals Gen Z customers genuinely blend both approaches—they'll invest in a vintage Rolex while seeking the latest Travis Scott collaboration. The SourceX technology offers historical pricing information, authenticity verification and potential appreciation forecasts to assist customers in making well-informed decisions. This gives consumers the ability to carefully approach every purchase, whether it be as a long-term investment or a cultural moment.

**Counterfeiting is a common problem in the resale and streetwear market. How does an AI-powered verification system operate?**

The in-house AI verification system compares more than 200 data points on each product, such as material textures and stitch patterns, to our database of verified products using computer vision. Every seller is subjected to stringent KYC verification and we keep an extensive database of known distributors of counterfeit goods. With the five-step verification badge system, which is visible to all users, we have established transparency beyond technology and we guarantee the authenticity of every pur-

chase with a money-back guarantee. Building trust requires more than simply verification; it also requires continuously providing genuine goods.

**The auction during the Hyderabad launch saw frenzied bidding for sneakers, watches and collectibles. Do you see this format as a sustainable and increasing aspect of luxury retail in India?**

The core elements of luxury culture—exclusivity, camaraderie and shared passion—are tapped into via auctions. The enthusiasm during the Hyderabad auction proved that this format is quite popular in India! For rare items, we incorporated time-limited in-app auctions, setting up appointment-based bidding in our physical stores and designing "Dutch auction" forms in which prices decrease until an item is claimed. While guaranteeing fair market value, these arrangements generate excitement. In the end, auctions turn transactions into unforgettable experiences, which is precisely what emerging luxury buyers look for in brands.

**Previously unimaginable for India's sneaker and streetwear industry, the event featured an auction of a Rs 1.2 crore Patek Philippe and a Rs 22 lakh Rolex Hulk. What can we infer from these figures on the changing attitudes of Indian luxury buyers?**

These numbers show that Indians' perceptions of luxury purchases have fundamentally changed from ostentatious consumption to thoughtful collecting. Luxury buyers today conduct in-depth research, comprehend the values of the global market and view purchases as both an investment and a passion. Authenticity is more important to them than just brand names and quality is more important than quantity. Additionally, the high bidding shows that domestic luxury platforms are becoming more and more trusted. Because Indian customers trust authentication procedures and value the community experience we offer around these pur-

chases, they no longer feel pressured to purchase expensive goods overseas.

**High-profile guests at the event included Rana Daggubati, Naga Chaitanya and Sobhita Dhulipala. How important is celebrity affiliation?**

Paid endorsements are not as important to us as real ties. At our debut, the celebrities were real fans and clients who value what we're creating! Indian celebrities are increasingly influencing the fashion of high-end streetwear and local film industries are creating their own unique aesthetics. We're witnessing the emergence of fascinating partnerships between foreign businesses and Indian celebrities, producing goods that appeal to consumers locally while remaining globally competitive. In order to create an ecosystem where Indian superstars may create global trends rather than merely follow them, the website gives these influencers a safe place to interact with fans and possibly start their own collections.

**Where does Culture Circle proceed from here?**

We're deliberately expanding to four additional stores across important Indian metros within 12 months while simultaneously building our overseas presence, starting with our UAE beta that will soon go public. The future isn't online vs offline—it's seamless integration between digital and physical. Through augmented reality, we are creating technology that enables customers to virtually try on rare items before scheduling in-store fittings. Through community features, collectors will be able to interact with other enthusiasts who share their interests and virtually display their collections. With a revenue run rate of Rs 120 crore by FY25, we hope to make it India's first genuinely international luxury marketplace.

With Culture Circle leading the way and providing exclusive access to high-end labels like Dior, Fendi, Prada, Gucci and Jacquemus, as well as brands like Nike, Yeezy, Jordans and Dunk Low, the event cemented Hyderabad's status as a hub for luxury fashion and hype sneakers! Stay tuned.



**How do you strike a balance between your platform's promised accessibility and the exclusivity of high-end fashion?**

We've redefined luxury accessibility by connecting buyers with verified global sellers through our tech-driven supply chain, which eliminates unnecessary markups while maintaining product rarity.



# I always knew my strengths, abilities: Shreyas Iyer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

He fought perceptions about a so-called technical shortcoming, was "typecast", and had his contract torn up within months of being a World Cup hero but Shreyas Iyer was indefatigable through it all, trusting his sincerity and uncomplicated mind to steer him through.

The result of the perseverance has been pleasing, to put it mildly. The 30-year-old has built himself into one of India's most consistent number four batters in recent times and was declared a "silent hero" by his captain Rohit Sharma after the team's Champions Trophy triumph a few days ago. "Maybe, the perception was created or maybe I was typecast. But I always knew my strengths, my abilities and (there was also) the belief (that) I had in myself," Iyer said in an interview when asked about his perceived lack of ability to play the short ball that became a talking point in the last couple of years.

The numbers back him. In the last eight ODIs, including the home games against England and the subsequent Champions Trophy, Iyer has averaged 53 batting at number four and had only one low-scoring outing in eight knocks.

"An athlete needs to constantly evolve as the sport keeps changing its dynamics. I am glad I kept a positive frame of mind, and trusted my process," he said.

Last year, he sustained a back injury during the home Tests against England and



then lost his central contract after showing up for his then IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders' training instead of Ranji Trophy duties after his recovery.

He was stripped of his central contract as BCCI set out to assert the importance

of domestic cricket by seemingly punishing him. Iyer kept his head down and led Kolkata Knight Riders to the IPL trophy weeks later before forcing his way back into India's 50-over set-up.

His was a classic case of performance

doing all the talking for him.

"I kept my process simple. Tried not to over-think the situation and to continue doing my work honestly. I always had the belief that my performance and my sincerity will bring back the opportunity," said

the prolific batter, who will be captaining Punjab Kings this IPL season.

The difficult time also made him a better learner. "It allowed me to learn a lot, reassess the situation and prepare a routine to add additional skills in my armoury."

"Looking back, I am happy with the outcome, the way I managed the situation and importantly, belief in my abilities. Lots and lots of hard work went behind it.

"From my coach Pravin Amre sir to my trainer Sagar, everyone worked around my needs. The two of them really helped me create power and the force which you see in my batting now," he recalled.

## Number 4 is where I belong

The right-hander, who averages close to 50 (48.22) after 70 ODIs, said ever since his impressive run in the 2023 World Cup, in which he scored 530 runs, he has felt comfortable batting at number four.

He was also India's top-scorer in the Champions Trophy, finishing with 243 runs in five games.

"I feel I belong to the No.4 position. Whether it was in the 2023 World Cup or now in the Champions Trophy, I enjoyed the most coming as Number 4. It gives me a sense of belonging and that's where I am able to flourish."

Iyer had one of the most tricky jobs during the Champions Trophy and that was to manoeuvre the strike against spinners in the middle overs. And he did it quite well, proving himself to be as good a play-

er of spin as his stroke-making skipper on the slightly slow surfaces of Dubai.

"Well, basically the foundation needs to be stronger and thankfully in my case, having played in Mumbai where wickets are grassless, it helps. Besides, I think early in the career, I learned that the footwork has to be strong to play on such tracks," he explained.

Iyer said he was quite pleased with how he executed his plans during the marquee event and "provided a sense of consistency in the middle order throughout the campaign." "I will tirelessly repeat it to provide that balance in the middle order, whenever I represent India," he promised.

And to ensure that his obsessive desire to perform does not become an all-consuming routine, Iyer likes to tune out every once in a while. "...I feel it's needed, to not over-think and burn yourself out. There is life beyond cricket with family and friends, hobbies and magic tricks, and I enjoy these breaks in between," he revealed.

A limited-overs giant in the making he might be but Iyer has a decent Test record too. In 14 Tests that he has played, Iyer averages around 37 which includes a hundred and five half-centuries.

Does he think that he has a chance of making it to the squad that will tour England in June-July for a five-Test series?

"I prefer not to over-think and complicate my current process. For now, I am living in the moment to fulfil my roles and responsibilities with Punjab Kings," he concluded.

## India face Maldives in Asian Cup qualifier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Shillong

The returning Sunil Chhetri will be the cynosure of all eyes as India face Maldives in an international friendly here on Wednesday, the match serving as a dress rehearsal for the all-important AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh at the same venue in less than a week's time.

The 40-year-old Chhetri came out of his international retirement earlier this month to help the team successfully navigate the qualifiers for the continent's top football tournament, starting with the March 25 clash.

The preparatory match for Manolo Marquez's side marks a historic moment as the Blue Tigers will play in the football-crazy hill town for the first time.

It will also be India's all-time top scorer Chhetri's first match since announcing his return to international football.

**The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape**

— MANOLO MARQUEZ, HEAD COACH

In the pre-match press conference on Tuesday, Marquez said, "It is the first time we are playing here, but I have worked with a lot of coaches and players from here. I knew it's a very nice place. "I remember when I watched the Durand Cup in Shillong last year, I said, 'Wow, the ground, crowd, atmosphere, everything is nice.' I'm not joking, I said it'd be great if one day, the national team could play here."

Defender Mehtab Singh concurred with the Spaniard. Mehtab said, "We feel great to be in Shillong. It's the first time our national team will be playing here. The north-east is known for its football fan following. Football is the biggest sport here. Taking football to diverse regions is a great thing for

Indian football."

For Marquez, his first competitive match since becoming India's head coach in July 2024 is a week away, and the friendly presents a great opportunity to fine-tune his team before the crucial fixture. The Indian team, though, remains winless under Marquez with the side ending the year with a 1-1 stalemate against Malaysia in November in Hyderabad. "It's a friendly game to prepare for the Asian Cup qualifier. Obviously, we want to win. We knew that the target during the previous FIFA windows was to arrive in the best possible condition for the first competitive match against Bangladesh next Tuesday. "I don't think we will play with the same team against Bangladesh that will play tomorrow. Obviously, you can't change all 11. Some will repeat on Tuesday. I'm confident in all my players. It has to be a good game and a good preparation for Bangladesh."

Marquez also confirmed Chhetri's involvement in the friendly match that will mark his 152nd cap for India. "For sure, Sunil will play some minutes. I don't know whether as a starter or from the bench. We can use six substitutions, so 17 players can play, and I think Sunil will be one of them.

"He is the Indian player with the most goals this season. It doesn't matter if a player is 20, 40, or my grandfather at 87. If they are in better shape, they will be here. The national team is not about developing players. "Developed players have to arrive here. The main team needs to win games. And if we need to win games, we need to call players who are in better shape," said Marquez.

Chhetri had earlier hung his boots in June 2024 after a glorious international career after making his India debut in 2005. But he showed he remains a force to reckon with, in the 2024-25 ISL which has turned out to be Chhetri's most prolific season.

He has scored 12 goals from 24 match-

## Runner Archana Jadhav gets four-year ban

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's long-distance runner Archana Jadhav was on Tuesday banned for four years owing to a failed dope test in January, the findings of which she did not contest despite repeated reminders, prompting World Athletics to deem her actions as acceptance of guilt.

According to World Athletics' Athletes Integrity Unit (AIU), Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone. "This synthetic anabolic steroid promotes protein production and muscle building in the body.

The ban came into effect from January 7. Jadhav has been under provisional suspension for the duration. On February 25, she had replied to the violation charge in an e-mail to the AIU stating "I am extremely sorry sir...I welcome your decision." The AIU said its understanding of this communication was that Jadhav did not require a hearing and was "content" to get a decision from the body.

The AIU said Jadhav was nonetheless informed that she had time till March 3 to admit that she had committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations, and was reminded of the same by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) on February 28. The AIU, however, did not get any response from Jadhav.

**Jadhav's sample, which was collected at the Pune Half-Marathon in December last year, contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone**

— WORLD ATHLETICS' ATHLETES INTEGRITY UNIT

The AIU said Jadhav has also not demonstrated that the Anti-Doping Rule Violations were "not intentional".

"...The Athlete is deemed to have committed the Anti-Doping Rule Violations..." the AIU stated.

As a result, "a period of ineligibility of four years" commences on January 7.

In addition, her results on and since December 15, 2024 stand disqualified. She will have to forfeit all awards,

medals, points, prizes and appearance money for the period.

The AIU said Jadhav did not exercise her right to a 'B' sample test despite expressing a desire to do so in early communication.

She responded well past the stipulated date of January 17 to state that she was hospitalised owing to illness.

This was after she was told about the procedure and the cost involved in getting a test. The AIU said it had provided an extended deadline to the athlete.

"...On 22 January 2025, the AIU wrote to the Athlete and provided her with an extended deadline by which to make the full payment of the costs of the B Sample analysis to World Athletics..."

Jadhav was required to confirm her availability by no later than January 24.

The AIU said Jadhav once again failed to respond or make the full payment.

She had last competed in the Delhi half marathon in October 2024 in the elite Indian women's race, finishing fourth with a time of 1:20.21 behind winner Lili Das, Kavita Yadav and Priti Lamba.

## Pakistan origin cricketer dies after collapsing on field

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

Junail Zafar Khan, a club-level Pakistan-origin cricketer, has died after collapsing on the ground during a local match played in extreme heat at the Concordia College here.

In his 40s, Khan was representing Old Concordians Cricket Club in a match against Prince Alfred Old Collegians last Saturday, news.Com.Au reported.

After fielding for 40 overs and batting for seven, Khan collapsed around 4pm Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT). South Australia has been in the grip of extreme heat over and according to data from the Bureau of Meteorology, temperatures here were still above 40 degrees Celsius at the time.

Adelaide Turf Cricket Association rules state that games are cancelled if the temperature climbs above 42 degrees Celsius.

## Samson joins team practice session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Royals skipper Sanju Samson has joined his IPL team after completing his recovery from a finger surgery he underwent last month.

The 30-year-old cricketer, who finished his rehabilitation at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru, attended the Royals' first practice session on Monday ahead of the upcoming season.

Samson had suffered the injury after being struck by a bouncer from Jofra Archer during India's five-match T20I series against England. Following the injury, he underwent surgery to treat the damaged finger. "Straight from the airport to our first practice match to making everyone smile like he does!," RR said

in a post on 'X'. The RR skipper was seen interacting with his teammates, including India batter Yashasvi Jaiswal, and head coach Rahul Dravid, among others.

Rajasthan Royals, the inaugural champions, will kick off their campaign against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad on March 23. Although Samson has regained full fitness, it remains uncertain whether he will take the wicketkeeping gloves straight away. If he isn't deemed fit, Dhruv Jurel is likely to step in behind the stumps. In another boost for RR, all-rounder Rryan Parag has fully recovered from a shoulder injury that had kept him out of the T20Is against South Africa and England. Parag made his comeback in the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, scoring a half-century and bowling 26 overs against Saurashtra.



## New Zealand beat Pakistan by five wicket in T20 match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dunedin

Tim Seifert blasted 45 from 22 balls and Finn Allen hit 38 from 16 as New Zealand cruised to a five-wicket win over Pakistan on Tuesday in a rain-shortened second Twenty20 (T20) cricket international.

Captain Salman Ali Agha made 46 as Pakistan reached 135-9 in a match reduced to 15 overs per innings after a delay for wet outfield. Shaheen Shah Afridi then bowled a maiden to start New Zealand's innings. But Seifert and Allen hit seven of the next 12 balls for sixes as New Zealand launched an assault which helped them clinch the match and a 2-0 series lead with 11 balls remaining.

Seifert and Allen hit five sixes apiece as New Zealand sped towards its target. After the scoreless opening over Allen cleared the boundary on the first, third and sixth balls of the second over, then Seifert struck sixes from the first two and the last two deliveries of the next over as New Zealand raced to 44-0.

New Zealand began its innings needing 136 runs from 90 balls. By the end of the five-over power play that target had been reduced to 70 runs from 60 balls. New Zealand was 87-2 when Allen followed Seifert to the pavilion in the seventh over.

"There's not too much conversation out there to be fair," Seifert said.

"It's just about backing our skills and putting pressure on the bowlers when we can." Mitchell Hay made an unbeaten 21 to steer New Zealand home and Bracewell hit a four off Jahandad Khan for the winning runs. New Zealand won the toss and was eager to bowl first on a pitch at the University Oval which had been covered and looked fresh with patches of grass.

Jacob Duffy, who took 4-14 in the series-opener which New Zealand won by nine wickets on Sunday, removed Hasan Nawaz with the fourth ball of the match.

The New Zealand bowlers were too full at first and Pakistan reached 19-1 before Ben Sears came on in the fourth over and dismissed Mohammad Haris with his first delivery. Sears, who missed the Champions Trophy with injury, used bounce effectively and Haris sliced his first delivery to Duffy at third man.

Pakistan was 36-2 after the five-over power play. Salman took 12 runs including a 75-meter (yard) six from the sixth over bowled by Jimmy Neesham, lifting Pakistan to 48-2. But spinner Ish Sodhi dismissed Irfan Khan (11) and Khushdil Shar (2) with the fourth and sixth balls of the seventh over as Pakistan slipped to 52-4.

## Kohli to focus on playing smart cricket: AB De Villiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

South African batting great AB de Villiers believes Virat Kohli should focus on playing smart cricket and continue controlling the game this season as RCB possess immense firepower with Phil Salt expected to ease the pressure on the Indian superstar.

Despite being one of RCB's most consistent performers, Kohli's strike rate was a topic of discussion past two seasons.

However, with the Bengaluru franchise acquiring the English duo of Salt and Liam Livingstone, along with Australian Tim David and West Indian Romario Shepherd all fearless strikers of the ball de Villiers feels Kohli can play with more freedom.

"Virat seems to be enjoying his cricket. I don't think he's going to have to up his strike rate batting with Phil Salt," de Villiers said on JioStar Press Room on Tuesday. "Salt is one of the most attacking players we've ever seen. I think he's going to take a lot of pressure off Virat. Virat needs to continue what he's been doing for so many years...Control the game, play smart cricket. He's got the best instinct of any player out there. He knows when to up the ante a bit and when to lower it."

The South African, who played for RCB for 11 seasons, said Kohli needs to ensure there are no batting collapses.

"Virat needs to be the captain of the batting department in this tournament and really just keep things together, play smart cricket to make sure they don't find



those collapses in the batting order?"

The former Proteas skipper feels that Kohli has been subjected to "unnecessary criticism over the last few seasons."

"There's no doubt some of the outside noise has maybe influenced him a bit. He's

only human, he's definitely got those doubts in his head.

"But the one thing about Virat is that he's always had the ability to, when it matters most, when he crosses that line for his team, block everything out and it's busi-

ness time." With Faf du Plessis' departure, RCB enters the season with a new captain in Rajat Patidar.

De Villiers opined that Patidar's biggest challenge would be dealing with self-doubt while stepping into the shoes of past captains like du Plessis and Kohli.

"His biggest challenge will be insecurity, stepping into the big boots of the past captains like Faf and Virat... Having Virat around and constantly almost doubting yourself.

"He needs to stay true to who he is and not try to captain like Virat or like Faf. And use the experience of Virat, use the experience of Andy Flower and some of the other players."

RCB will be on the road consistently throughout the season, frequently alternating between home and away fixtures.

"Their scheduling is going to be a big obstacle. The team is balanced and that bodes well for them, especially with their scheduling, where they hop around to different venues all the time, right throughout the tournament. They've got the trickiest schedule of them all."

Despite this challenge, de Villiers believes RCB has a strong and balanced squad.

"They're only lacking an X-factor spinner, right? Krunal Pandya is a wonderful spinner. We've seen him over the years perform very consistently and he can chip in with the bat as well. They have some other options as well.

"But I mean, look at that batting lineup. It is pure power. There's a mix between power and also control."

# I BELIEVE IN SPONTANEOUS ACTING, RATHER PREPARE FOR IT: AADI SAIKUMAR

SURESH KAVIRAYANI  
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After a two-year hiatus, Aadi Saikumar is back with *Shanmukha*, a supernatural murder mystery where he plays a cop navigating a gripping investigation with a devotional twist. Set for release on March 21, the film marks his return to the big screen with a content-driven approach. In this exclusive conversation with *The Pioneer*, Aadi opens up about his role, working alongside Avika Gor, comparisons with his father Saikumar's legendary cop portrayals, and his commitment to choosing strong scripts.

Making his comeback after a two-year break, Aadi Saikumar will next be seen in the upcoming cop-film *Shanmukha*, which also stars Avika Gor. In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, he gets candid and shares insights about the film, comparisons with his father's cop films and more

He also discusses his fitness routine, future projects, and why he believes in spontaneous acting over method preparation.

"I am playing a cop in this one," Aadi begins, adding that his previous cop role in *CSI Sanatan* didn't perform well at the box office. However, *Shanmukha* brings a fresh twist by incorporating

supernatural and devotional elements.

Aadi revealed that he took his time to select the right script. "I believe in strong content. That's the key to a film's success. With *Shanmukha*, we have focused entirely on the story," he said. Unlike traditional commercial films, this one has only one song.

"We didn't want to force songs into the narrative," he explained.

Describing the film, he said, "It's a serious murder mystery that I investigate. Blending supernatural elements with a social drama isn't easy, but those who've watched it say they liked the combination. It's a risky film, but I'm confident it will mark my comeback."

Despite mixed theatrical success, Aadi's films have performed well digitally. "Some of my films may not have done well in theaters, but they've found a strong audience on OTT platforms," he noted.

Aadi's father, Saikumar, is renowned for his powerful dialogues in police-centric films, particularly his iconic role as Agni in *Police Story*. Naturally, the question arises—does *Shanmukha* have any impactful dialogues?

"There are a couple of strong dialogues, but they aren't as intense as my father's," Aadi admitted.

When it comes to choosing scripts, Aadi makes independent decisions but values his father's input. "My dad is busy with several films and is considered a lucky charm for many filmmakers. I personally decide on my scripts, but I do listen to his suggestions,"



he said. Aadi has no plans for another hiatus. "I'm currently working on three to four films. *Shambhala* is one of them, a content-driven film. Then there's *Sub Inspector Yugandhar*, another cop-based story. After this, I want to take a break from cop roles," he shared. He added, "I've done quite a few cop films, so I want to explore different genres. I've signed a romantic comedy with director Sattibabu, which will be full of entertainment. This year, I plan to release at least two to three films."

Discussing the evolving audience preferences, Aadi emphasised the importance of strong content. "Look at *Court*, which became a massive hit recently. If it had been released two or three years ago, it might not have had the same impact. Timing is crucial," he explained. He also stressed the need for aggressive promotion. "Marketing a film before its release is essential. You have to take the film to the audience and create buzz," he said.

When asked about his acting approach, Aadi said he prefers spontaneity over excessive preparation. "I ask the director for my character's backstory, but I believe in spontaneous acting rather than over-preparing. If I prepare too much, it becomes method acting. I enjoy living in the moment," he explained.

For his cop role in *Shanmukha*, he took inspiration from Suriya's performances. "I played a commando in *Operation Goldfish* and watched some of Suriya's films to understand his approach. I also took tips from my father, who is known for his cop roles," he added.

Aadi expressed his admiration for his co-star Avika Gor. "She is very talented. We were supposed to work together earlier, but it didn't happen. Now, with *Shanmukha*, we finally got the chance. Her role is very interesting and she performed exceptionally well," he said.

Aadi and his father previously worked together in *Chuttalabbayi*, which performed well. He hinted at another collaboration. "Dad is busy with multiple projects, but we are planning to work together on a fantasy film soon. We'll announce the details shortly," he revealed. With his family's strong connections to Kannada cinema, Aadi was asked about his Kannada debut. "Right now, I'm tied up with multiple Telugu projects, but I will definitely make my Kannada debut soon. My cousin, Ravi Shankar's son, is making his debut there and Ravi Basrur is composing music for it. He's also working on *Shanmukha* and his background score will be one of the film's highlights," Aadi said. Although Aadi has previously worked in web series, he isn't keen on them at the moment. "I'm currently focused on films. If a big platform like Amazon or Netflix approaches me, I'll consider it. But I don't want to do web series for smaller platforms," he clarified.

On maintaining fitness, Aadi shared that he works out for at least an hour daily. "If I'm continuously working, I do an hour in the morning. Otherwise, I hit the gym in the evening too," he said. Given the amount of action he's doing in his films, fitness has become crucial. "My father always emphasises the importance of staying fit," he concluded.



## Mohan Babu's grand b'day celebrations planned in Tirupati

Senior and versatile actor Manchu Mohan Babu is set to celebrate his 73rd birthday in a grand manner at his university today. On this special occasion, his son, Vishnu Manchu, has planned an extravagant event in Tirupati.

Mohan Babu, who is both acting in and producing the prestigious film *Kannappa*, scheduled to release on April 25, will have a special promotional video dedicated to his role as Mahadeva Shastri, which will be unveiled on his birthday. The veteran actor began his cinematic journey in 1975, but it was during the late 1970s through the early 1990s that he redefined the portrayal of villains in Indian cinema. Known for his versatility and commanding screen presence, he revolutionised the antagonist's role, making him one of the most sought-after villains of that era. While his debut as a lead actor was in *Swargam Narakam* (1978), it was his impactful negative roles that solidified his status as one of the industry's most formidable actors.

After excelling in negative roles, Mohan Babu transitioned into lead roles with blockbuster films like *Assembly Rowdy*, *Alludu Garu*, *Allari Mogudu* and several others. His 1995 hit *Peddarayudu* became a massive success, cementing his status as a superstar. In this film, he played a dual role, while his close friend Rajinikanth made a special appearance.

Mohan Babu also established himself as a

producer, debuting with *Prathigna* in 1981. Over the years, he has backed several acclaimed films, with *Kannappa* being his latest and most ambitious project.

Beyond films, Mohan Babu has made significant contributions to education. In 1992, he founded the Sri Vidyanikethan Educational Trust to provide quality education to students, irrespective of their socio-economic background. Furthering his commitment to education, he inaugurated Mohan Babu University in 2022, marking another milestone in his legacy.

In recognition of his contributions to the arts, he was honored with the Padma Shri in 2007, one of India's highest civilian awards.

With 75 films under his belt as a producer, Mohan Babu holds the distinction of being one of the few actor-turned-producers in Indian cinema to achieve such a remarkable feat. His impact as an actor, producer and philanthropist continues to shape the industry.

## ALLARI NARESH VENTURES INTO A MURDER MYSTERY

Allari Naresh is in dire need of a box-office hit, as his recent films have failed to make an impact. His previous film, *Bachchala Malli*, which he had high hopes for, turned out to be a massive disappointment. Despite his dedicated efforts, the film's weak storytelling and narration failed to engage the audience.

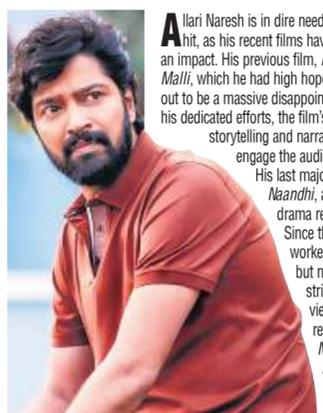
His last major success was *Nandhi*, a gripping legal drama released in 2021. Since then, Naresh has worked on four films, but none managed to strike a chord with viewers. His most recent project, *Naa Saami Ranga*, in which he shared screen space

with Nagarjuna and Raj Tarun, saw moderate success, largely due to its Sankranthi release advantage.

After experimenting with various genres, Naresh is now stepping into the murder mystery genre. According to sources, his upcoming film is titled *12A Railway Colony* and is directed by Dr. Anil Viswanath of Polimera fame.

The film's teaser has already been released, creating intrigue among audiences. While it gives off horror-thriller vibes, sources confirm that the plot revolves around a gripping murder mystery, with Naresh playing a character who races against time to solve the case before the police do.

The film's shoot is progressing at a brisk pace and the makers are planning a summer release. Naresh is hopeful that *12A Railway Colony* will finally give him the much-needed breakthrough he has been striving for.



## THAMAN REVAMPS THE RAJA SAAB MUSIC, DISCARDS INITIAL TRACKS

In a surprising move, music director S. Thaman has scrapped all the songs he initially composed for *The Raja Saab*, the highly anticipated Prabhas-starrer directed by Maruthi.

Speaking in a latest interview, Thaman revealed that although he had composed the songs when the film started, he later decided to revamp the entire soundtrack. He is now working on fresh compositions that align better with the film's evolving narrative and energy. Providing an update, Thaman stated that *The Raja Saab* is almost complete, except for the songs. He also revealed that the movie will feature a grand introduction song for Prabhas, along with several other tracks. Thaman is determined to deliver a chartbuster album, aiming to replicate the musical success of Prabhas's hit film *Mirchi*. Interestingly, *The Raja Saab* has been in production for a long time, and despite nearing completion, the makers have yet to announce a release date. Now, with Thaman completely reworking the soundtrack, the film's release could be further delayed.



## Aditya 369 to re-release on Apr 11

Re-releasing classic films has become a significant trend in Tollywood, starting with Mahesh Babu's *Pokiri* in 2022. Since then, several iconic films have returned to the big screen, and now, one of Indian cinema's finest sci-fi classics, *Aditya 369*, starring Nandamuri Balakrishna, is set for a grand re-release on April 11. The film's success is credited to the visionary direction of Singeetam Srinivasa Rao and the production efforts of Sivalenka Krishna Prasad. Legendary singer SP Balasubrahmanyam served as the film's presenter.

Widely recognized for its groundbreaking storytelling and technical brilliance, *Aditya 369* received both critical acclaim and audience appreciation worldwide upon its original release. Taking audiences back to the nostalgic era of 90s classics, this sci-fi gem is now digitally remastered in 4K resolution

with upgraded 5.1 surround sound for an enhanced cinematic experience. "Even after 34 years, the film continues to enjoy immense popularity. At the time of its release, *Aditya 369* was considered a futuristic and visionary project and even today, it resonates with audiences," said producer Krishna Prasad. He praised Balakrishna for his dual roles as Sri Krishnadevaraya and Krishna Kumar, commending his majestic screen presence and royal demeanor. "This film stands as a testament to the brilliance of Singeetam Srinivasa Rao as both a storyteller and a director," the producer added. Adding to its excellence, *Aditya 369* features music composed by Ilaiyaraaja, dialogues penned by Jandhyala, and the remarkable work of three legendary cinematographers—PC Sreeram, VSR Swamy and Kabir Lal.

## Vaccharroy from Mad Square creates a buzz among fans

Following the buzz surrounding its recently released trailer, *Mad Square* is quickly becoming one of the most talked-about films in Tollywood. Directed by Kalyan Shankar, this sequel to the hit film *MAD* is generating immense anticipation. Adding to the excitement, the third song from the film, *Vaccharroy*, has been released and is already climbing the charts. The song, composed and sung by Bheems Ceciroleo, is gaining immense popularity. Its lyrics have been penned by the talented KV Anudeep. *Vaccharroy* is a testament to Bheems Ceciroleo's signature style, known for delivering chartbusters that resonate with the masses. The track's

energetic composition makes it an instant earworm, bound to dominate playlists and dance floors alike. Bheems has already struck gold with earlier singles from the film, such as *Laddu Gaani Pelli* and *Swathi Reddy*. *Mad Square* brings back the hilarious trio of Narne Nithin, Sangeetha Shobhan and Ram Nithin as they navigate life with their signature chaos and comedy. The ensemble cast also includes Priyanka Jawalkar and Muralidhar Goud, with special appearances by KV Anudeep and a sizzling dance number featuring Reba Monica John. Produced by Haarika Suryadevara and Sai Soujanya, *Mad Square* is set for a theatrical release on March 28.

