



The Pioneer

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Maintaining balance between hard power, soft power:
Rajnath



RBI TO
UCBS: REMAIN OPERATIONAL RESILIENT



'I Wanted to Do Character ROLES'

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

No state in India has implemented the Supreme Court's ruling on SC categorisation including BJP-ruled states. I have no differences with MRPS Founder President Manda Krishna Madiga. But it is painful to see that Krishna Madiga believes Prime Minister Modi and Telangana BJP President G. Kishan Reddy more

— Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister, TG

DON'T MISS...

Man gets lifer for killing woman

A man was sentenced to life imprisonment on Wednesday for killing a woman for insisting him to marry her. The Bapatia VI th Additional District and Session Judge K Shyamababu convicted Garapati Rajasekhar to life imprisonment and also imposed Rs 10,000 fine on Wednesday. Police said that the deceased Bollipogu Rani worked as caretaker at Chaitanya College in Guntur in 2012. The convict Garapati Rajasekhar was working as an electrician. He befriended Rani and later they fell in love. Knowing her love...

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No substitute for boots on the ground

There is no substitute for "boots on the ground" as technology can only be an enabler which cannot replace people, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Wednesday, highlighting ways to deal with new-age conflicts. In an address at the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics, Gen Chauhan described imparting appropriate training to military personnel to deal with hybrid warfare along with conventional war as a big challenge for the country. For a multicultural...

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GCCs expect 9.8% salary growth

Global capability centres (GCCs) in the country are poised for 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months, as organisations adapt to evolving talent demands and navigate macroeconomic challenges, a report said on Wednesday. In India, GCCs are seen as the top payers, outpacing traditional IT services in pay parity and growth, and are expected to give 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months. 'India's Talent Takeoff - The GCC 4.0 Story' report by digital talent solutions provider NLB Services...

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'MI to approach IPL 2025 with togetherness'

Mumbai Indians (MI) captain Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said now that the contentious Impact Player rule has been extended by three years, a cricketer has to be a pure all-rounder to find place in the starting eleven. The rule allows a team to replace a player from their playing XI at a later stage of the match. The teams bring in a batting or bowling specialist as the situation demands. The BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition despite reservations from leading Indian players, including...

-SPORTS

Lokesh laments decline in educational standards

Says academic standards tumbled due to YSRCP's imprudent decisions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT and Electronics Nara Lokesh, on Wednesday, expressed deep concern that the academic standards in schools in the State have plunged deeply due to the imprudent decisions of the previous YSRCP government.

Replying to the members, Duvvarapu Rama Rao, P Ashok Babu and B Tirumala Naidu, in the Legislative Council, Nara Lokesh said that there is a decline in academic standards when compared to the 2014-2024 period during the YSRCP rule. The fifth-class students found it very difficult to read even the second grade Telugu books. "The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has clearly mentioned that while 57 per cent of the students could easily read the books in 2014, the percentage has fallen to 37.5 during the YSRCP rule," the Minister for Education said. In 2014, almost 80

"That YSRCP government had forcibly imposed imprudent decisions and unplanned reforms on parents and teachers."

per cent of the eighth standard students could easily read second grade Telugu books in 2014, this has fallen to 53 per cent by 2024, Lokesh regretted. During the YSRCP government, the total strength of government schools and junior colleges came down by a whopping 12 lakh which has now reached to a mere 33.4 lakh, the Education Minister said.

"That YSRCP government had forcibly imposed imprudent decisions and unplanned reforms on parents and teachers," he said, and felt that the students opted private schools as local issues were not taken into consideration while releasing the GO 117. Declaring that 10 to 15 radical reforms are being introduced in the academic sector by the TDP-led NDA Government to improve the educational standards, Lokesh made it clear that political interference will be totally avoided in the process of the transfer of teachers.

"With a view to getting the best outcome, the Cabinet passed the Teachers Transfers Act, which was presented before the Assembly on Wednesday and will come before the Upper House on Thursday," the Education Minister said. *Continued on Page 2*

AP to focus on leveraging tech for public welfare

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/NEW DELHI

The Government of Andhra Pradesh (GoAP) and the Gates Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in New Delhi on Wednesday to collaborate on leveraging technology for public welfare. This partnership will focus on integrating cost-effective, scalable solutions across key sectors, including healthcare, medtech, education, and agriculture.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Bill Gates, Chair of the Gates Foundation, who is currently visiting India. This formalised collaboration will see the Gates Foundation support implementation partners, co-identified with the Government of Andhra Pradesh, for targeted interventions within State-driven programmes.

The partnership aims to apply AI for predictive health analytics and automated diagnostics. In agriculture, it will introduce AI-driven advisory platforms and satellite-based systems for precision farming and resource management.

The Chief Minister expressed gratitude to the Gates Foundation for its support and reiterated his commitment to harnessing technology for the State's development. "Our partnership with the Gates Foundation will be pivotal in advancing Andhra Pradesh's develop-

STATE GOVT, GATES FOUNDATION JOIN HANDS



This partnership will focus on integrating cost-effective, scalable solutions across key sectors, including healthcare, medtech, education, and agriculture.



Our partnership with the Gates Foundation will be pivotal in advancing Andhra Pradesh's development goals. By leveraging AI-driven governance, human capital development, and technological innovations in health, agriculture, and education, this MoU will deliver transformative outcomes that will benefit not just our State, but also create scalable models for broader impact.

ment goals. By leveraging AI-driven governance, human capital development, and technological innovations in health, agriculture, and education, this MoU will deliver transformative outcomes that will benefit not just our State, but also create scalable models for broader impact," the CM said. Bill Gates, commenting on the Chief

Minister's vision to position Andhra Pradesh as a leader in data-driven innovation, expressed his optimism about the partnership. "I'm encouraged by the potential of our collaboration—especially in providing cost-effective, locally produced diagnostics and medical devices to improve the lives of vulnerable populations. By using AI and

technology solutions to address key sectors like health, agriculture, and foundational learning, we can create replicable models for other regions in India and beyond," Gates said. Key officials from the Andhra Pradesh Government and representatives from the Gates Foundation were also present during the signing ceremony.

Will bring alternative to GO 117: Lokesh

Says efforts on to increase admissions in Govt schools

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education and IT Nara Lokesh, has stated that the government will bring in an alternative to GO 117.

Lokesh was responding to questions raised by members of the Legislative Council on Wednesday about the rationalisation of schools and teachers.

He stated that GO 117 resulted in 10,49,596 students from first to tenth grade staying away from government schools.

He highlighted that the number of schools with less than 10 students increased from 1,215 in 2021-22 to 5,312, a fourfold rise. Similarly, the number of schools with less than 20 students increased from 5,520 to 14,052. There were also 12,512 schools with single teachers. As promised during the padayatra (foot march), the government is working on bringing an alternative to GO 117 and will not close any schools.

The Minister said the government is working towards increasing admissions in government schools by involving everyone in the process.

"If there are more than 60 students, we are ensuring one teacher per class. We plan to establish 7,000 to 8,000 model primary schools. We aim to provide a model school in every panchayat," said the Minister. *Continued on Page 2*

MSMEs' role key in economic growth: Min

Says Swarna Andhra 2047 aims to strengthen exports and industrial development

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for MSME, SERP, and NRI Empowerment & Relations, Kondapalli Srinivas, has reaffirmed the crucial role of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in generating employment and driving economic growth in Andhra Pradesh. Speaking at a one-day workshop on "Empowering MSMEs for Export-Led Growth and Innovation" in Visakhapatnam, he highlighted the government's commitment to fostering MSME development through sustained policy initiatives.

The Minister emphasised that the Swarna Andhra 2047 vision document incorporates 10 core strategies aimed at enhancing MSME competitiveness and expansion. He pointed out the policy continuity that has



facilitated industrial growth, citing the Single Window Act introduced in 2001 as a key reform that has streamlined industrial permits. This policy has significantly contributed to Andhra Pradesh's top ranking in Ease of Doing Business (EODB). The Minister also highlighted the State's impressive export performance, revealing that Andhra

Pradesh achieved exports valued at Rs 1,63,000 crore during the 2023-24 fiscal year.

To further stimulate exports, the government is committed to promoting product standardisation and enhancing global competitiveness. Srinivas stressed that the "Swarna Andhra 2047" initiative is aligned with the Central Government's "Viksit Bharat 2047" roadmap, focusing on grassroots industrial development to ensure long-term economic sustainability.

Tammireddy Siva Sankara Rao, Chairman of the AP MSME Development Corporation, commended the resilience of the State's entrepreneurs and reaffirmed the government's pledge to support export-oriented growth through simplified regulations. *Continued on Page 2*

₹2,361 cr approved for Samagra Shiksha project

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Government of India has approved a budget of ₹2,361 cr for the Samagra Shiksha project in Andhra Pradesh and ₹454 cr under the PM SHRI scheme, said Samagra Shiksha SPD, B Srinivasa Rao.

These funds will be utilised for strengthening the ongoing programmes under Samagra Shiksha, enhancing Bhavita Kendras and setting up 125 specialised centres across the State for differently-abled students

facing autism-related challenges. Andhra Pradesh is the first State in the country to take such an initiative, which has been lauded by Central government officials. They have expressed their intent to study the programme post implementation and consider extending it to other States.

To promote vocational education in schools, the government is planning to establish four zonal centres (Regional Vocational Hubs) to provide training for vocational teachers. *Continued on Page 2*

Nimmala slams YSRCP over Handri-Neeva Project

P2

City blood banks face alarming shortage as donations plummet

Early seasonal dip creates critical supply gap

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The city's blood banks are facing a severe shortage, with donation numbers dwindling far earlier than anticipated. Traditionally, the most challenging period for blood supplies occurs in May and June, but this year, the crisis has emerged with alarming speed in March.

The district's 20 blood banks, which collectively cater to roughly three-quarters of the city's blood requirements, are struggling to maintain adequate stock. This has resulted in a growing burden on families, who are increasingly forced to source donors independently. A combination of rising temperatures and ongoing student examinations has dramatically reduced the num-

ber of people willing to donate. Where blood banks once reliably collected over 400 units daily, they are now struggling to reach 300, with some major facilities reporting a precipitous drop in daily collections. One prominent city blood bank, which previously supplied 15 units a day, is now barely managing five or six.

"The situation is becoming critically unstable," a senior blood bank official warned. "We are making an urgent plea to the public to donate and help alleviate this critical shortage. City hospitals require approximately 400 units daily, a demand that is expected to surge to 500 during the peak summer months." *Continued on Page 2*

Sunita Williams back on Earth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

For NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, an eight-day mission to the International Space Station turned out to be a challenge of a lifetime as problems cropped up on their Boeing space flight that stretched her stay in orbit to over nine months.

Williams and fellow astronaut Butch Wilmore bid farewell to the International Space Station, their home since last June, departing aboard a SpaceX capsule alongside two other astronauts.

The capsule undocked from the space station on Tuesday and splashed down off the Florida coast on Wednesday morning, after clocking 286 days in space. This was Williams' third space flight and she has clocked a cumulative 608 days in space.



A former US Navy captain, Ursuline Bonnie Pandya, on September 19, 1965 in Euclid, Ohio. Proud of her multicultural roots, Williams has carried symbols of

her heritage to space "including samosas, a Slovenian flag, and Ganesha idol during previous missions. On her third mission to the International Space Station in June last year along with Butch Wilmore, which lasted for 286 days, Williams also created history by setting a record of most time spent spacewalking by a woman. Williams now has 62 hours and nine minutes of extra-vehicular activity, surpassing former astronaut Peggy Whitson's record of 60 hours and 21 minutes, a feat Williams achieved on January 30. Williams had an aptitude for science since her childhood, but her dream was to be a veterinary doctor. A visit to the US Naval Academy, where her brother Jay was enrolled, got her attracted to becoming a naval officer.

Nation lauds Sunita's achievement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined celebrities, politicians, scientists and others on Wednesday to celebrate the return of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams to Earth after nine months, terming her an inspiration for generations to come and lauding her determination. *Continued on Page 2*



Nimmala slams YSRCP over Handri-Neeva Project

YSRCP obstructing development projects at every step

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A heated discussion took place in the Legislative Council on Wednesday regarding the Handri-Neeva project. Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu strongly reacted to YSRCP members' criticism of the lining work of the Handri-Neeva canal. He accused the Opposition party of not supporting the development of Rayalaseema and said, "You don't need lining, and you don't need the development of Rayalaseema. If the people of this region prosper, it will expose your corruption and you're afraid of that."



CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, who did nothing for the project," he said, criticising the lack of action under the previous administration.

The Minister also raised concerns over Jagan Mohan Reddy leaving the Handri-Neeva project work incomplete despite issuing a GO to release 6,200 cusecs of water. He criticised the hypocrisy of those opposing the lining now, but

accepting the proposals when Jagan Mohan Reddy was in power.

Highlighting the previous contributions of the TDP government, he pointed out that the 3850 cusec capacity pumps installed by Chandrababu Naidu were left unused by the YSRCP, unable to bring water into the Handri-Neeva canal. "The YSRCP has no right to talk about Handri-Neeva," he

said. Nimmala said that all major projects in Rayalaseema, including the Handri-Neeva project, were completed by NTR and Chandrababu Naidu. "Chandrababu started the 798-foot lift for the Muchumarri Lift Irrigation Project, but Jagan ignored it," the Minister added, expressing concern over how the rights to Krishna, Tungabhadra and Godavari water were transferred to the Central government due to the negligence of the YSRCP.

Minister Nimmala further stressed the commitment of the current government to the Handri-Neeva project, describing it as a lifeline for Rayalaseema. "Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu allocated Rs 3,240 crore in the State budget for the project and the works are progressing smoothly, and we will ensure water reaches all constituencies in Kurnool, Anantapur and Chittoor districts," he affirmed.

AP aims to develop into key global maritime centre: Minister

Praises Modi for robust infrastructure development and growth of maritime industry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister BC Janardhan Reddy represented Andhra Pradesh at the fourth National Sagarmala Apex Committee (NSAC) meeting held in Delhi on Wednesday. The meeting was chaired by Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, and attended by key leaders including Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Roads, Transport & Highways, Shantanu Thakur, Union Minister of State for Ports, Shipping & Waterways and several chief ministers, ministers and senior officials from coastal States.

During the meeting, Minister Janardhan Reddy stressed the importance of the Central government's role in uniting coastal States for the development of India's maritime sector. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for the robust infrastructure development and growth of the maritime industry, which has positioned India as a global maritime powerhouse.

Janardhan Reddy highlight-



ed Andhra Pradesh's commitment to becoming India's maritime hub. Under the Swarna Andhra @ 2047 initiative, the State aims to develop into a key global maritime centre while growing its economy to a \$1 trillion GDP by 2047. He also acknowledged the leadership of Chandrababu Naidu in implementing crucial measures for the development of Andhra Pradesh's maritime sector.

The State is investing Rs 17,000 crore to develop four greenfield ports at Ramayapatnam, Machilipatnam, Kakinada and Mulapet. Additionally, Rs 3,520

crore is allocated to develop ten fishing harbours in the region. Reddy stressed the need for skilled labour in the maritime industry and announced the establishment of a skill development centre at the Ramayapatnam Port, for which technical approval has been received from the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways.

Andhra Pradesh is also working on its State Maritime Waterways Master Plan (SMWMP) and has identified several projects under the Sagarmala program. Janardhan Reddy requested the Central government's support in fund-

ing these projects to further the development of the State's maritime sector.

In addition to his participation in the NSAC meeting, Minister Janardhan Reddy presented a memorandum to Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal requesting the establishment of a greenfield port and shipbuilding centre in the Motupalli-Pedaganjam area of Bapatla district. He stressed that this initiative would not only boost regional development, but also create significant employment opportunities for the local youth.

Before the meeting, Janardhan Reddy also held discussions with Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and Karnataka Ports Minister MS Yediyurappa regarding ongoing efforts to enhance port development in their respective States.

Andhra Pradesh's Secretary of Investments and Infrastructure, Yuvraj, AP Maritime Board Chairman Damacharla Sathya and Maritime Board CEO Praveen Aditya were also present.

Assembly nod for Private Universities Bill

Private varsities will be encouraged in State: Nara Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Minister for Education, IT and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, on Wednesday announced in the Assembly that private universities will be encouraged in the State. Introducing the Establishment of Private Universities and Regulation Second Amendment Bill-2025 in the Assembly which was passed in the House, Lokesh informed the members that Centurion University has been brought into the State despite certain issues with regard to technical aspects. The Education Minister declared that the State Government is keen on encouraging private universities.

"Discussions are already over with regard to Greenfield University and when it was desired to be recognised as a pri-

vate university under the Brownfield, VVIT has made a request to be recognised as a private university as per the Central and the State regulations. They own 50 acres of land and 4,75,278 feet build-up area besides having a Centre of Excellence and incubator," Lokesh told the House.

It also has 11 under-graduate and postgraduate courses along with 700 staff members with a student strength of 9,200. This society is ready to invest heavily, Lokesh said and stated that the VVIT wants to be converted into VVITU under the provisions of 2106 legislation. The Education Minister explained that as per this Act of 2016, Greenfield means a new university while Brownfield means conversion and VVIT wants to be converted into Brownfield University.

Will ensure welfare of ITDA contract employees: Minister

In 235 vacant positions, 301 outsourcing employees have been appointed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Tribal Welfare and Women & Child Welfare, Gummidandi Sandhya Rani, has stressed the government's commitment to improving the security and welfare of contract and outsourcing employees in Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), by recognising their importance. She made the announcement during the Question and Answer session in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council



on Wednesday.

The Minister said a total of 428 posts have been sanctioned in all ITDAs, with 193 individuals working as regular employees. In the remaining 235 vacant positions, 301 outsourcing employees have been appointed. Currently, there are 494 employees working in the 428 posts, said the Minister.

The government will take

immediate action to enhance job security for the contract and outsourcing workers serving in ITDAs, acknowledging their services with respect. The recruitment process will be examined in accordance with legal standards, considering eligibility and service tenure. The government also plans to strengthen the management of human resources in ITDAs to enhance the efficiency of these institutions.

Minister Sandhya Rani reiterated the government's firm resolve regarding tribal welfare and assured that all necessary measures would be taken to protect the rights of contract and outsourcing employees in the ITDAs, during the Legislative Council session.

98.97% students attend Class 10 Second Language exam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the ongoing Class 10 public examinations in Andhra Pradesh, 6,12,983 students out of the total 6,19,388 candidates (98.97 per cent) appeared for the Second Language examination, while 6,405 students were absent, said School Education Director Vijay Rama Raju V on Wednesday. He stated that examinations are being conducted at 3,450 centres and 1,574 centres were inspected by flying squads.

He also reported that a student in Kadapa district was caught indulging in copying and was subsequently debarred, while the invigilator involved was suspended. Apart from this incident, the examinations were conducted smoothly across all other centres, with necessary precautions taken to prevent

any irregularities. Action taken against 10 teachers

Meanwhile, as part of the Open School examinations, the English exam was conducted at 471 centres across the State. Out of 26,677 registered candidates, 22,460 (84 per cent) attended the exam, while 4,217 students were absent. A total of 117 flying squads inspected 335 examination centres.

During inspections, irregularities such as booklet swapping, use of prohibited materials, malpractice and mass copying were detected at the TRR Government Junior College and Sri Chaitanya High School (Kotareddy Nagar, Kandukur) in Kandukur mandal, Nellore district. In response, strict action was taken against 10 irresponsible teachers involved in these violations.

City blood...

Continued from Page 1

A significant portion of the region's blood supply traditionally comes from donation drives at educational institutions, where 10 to 15 units are typically collected per event. However, organizers report a sharp decline in donations in recent weeks. With schools and colleges soon closing for summer break, this trend is expected to worsen dramatically. "Nearly 70 per cent of our donors are under 30, so the current exam period and upcoming vacations are a major obstacle, a local blood donation volunteer explained. "While we hope to see an increase in older donors, their numbers alone may not be enough to bridge the gap."

Medical experts are emphasising the urgent need for district authorities to intervene and mitigate the crisis. Vulnerable populations, including pregnant women, accident victims, and patients with conditions like thalassemia and anemia, depend on a consistent blood supply.

Experts warn against privatisation of medical education

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A proposal to introduce the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model in medical education has sparked strong opposition from civil society groups and healthcare experts, who warn it could push medical training further out of reach for disadvantaged students.

At a round table discussion organized by Alluri Vignana Kendram, T. Kameswara Rao, State general secretary of Praja Arogya Vedika (PAV), led the charge against the State government's plan, with participants unanimously calling for its withdrawal. Representatives from various organisations expressed concerns that the move would effectively hand over control of

government medical colleges and affiliated hospitals to private entities, prioritising profits over public welfare.

Critics also pointed to the State's failure to complete construction of 17 medical colleges sanctioned by the Central government, questioning its commitment to expanding public healthcare infrastructure. They warned that privatisation would lead to higher tuition fees, reduced access for students from lower-income backgrounds, and a shift in healthcare services towards commercial interests.

"The government should prioritise strengthening public healthcare instead of pushing privatisation," said Kameswara Rao. "The PPP model will not only deprive poorer communi-

ties of crucial medical services, but also drive up healthcare costs."

Dr. N.N. Raju, former Principal of Andhra Medical College, echoed these concerns, arguing that privatisation would create further barriers for students from economically weaker sections. "Medical education should remain accessible and affordable. This policy risks deepening inequalities in the sector," he said.

The meeting concluded with a resolution urging the government to withdraw the proposal, provide free medical education for disadvantaged students, and implement policies that ensure affordable healthcare remains a fundamental right rather than a privilege.

Lokesh laments decline...

Continued from Page 1

Technology will be incorporated into teaching, he said, adding that after the lessons are taught the teachers should present a 60-second video to sum-up the lessons and the students will be assessed later with the help of Clicker Technology.

Then prescriptive homework will be given, he said.

Maintaining that a mega teacher meeting has already been conducted, Lokesh said that this kind of meeting will be conducted twice in the coming academic year. An excellent progress card has also been designed for an

interaction among the teachers, parents and students. The NDA government is making every effort to extend quality education to students through Model Primary School concept by appointing one teacher for a class which has over 60 student strength, the Minister said.

State records peak demand...

Continued from Page 1

"Under the leadership of CM Nara Chandrababu Naidu and Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravi Kumar, AP power utilities remain focused on ensuring uninterrupted, affordable, and clean energy for all consumers," he said. He stressed the need for continued improvements in generation, transmission, distribution and consumer service to build a more resilient and sustainable power sector. He further said that the consumer complaint resolution reports indicated a high-resolution rate across various service categories, including supply failures, voltage issues, and meter-related complaints while the industrial sector's power interruptions were minimal, with most feeders maintaining supply as per schedule. MD APGENCO KVN Chakradhar Babu, JMD APTRANSCO Kirithi Chekuri and CMD APCPDCL & Director APTRANSCO AKV Bhaskar, APGENCO Director Thermal P Ashok Kumar Reddy, APTRANSCO Chief Engineer Rajendra Prasad and SE KG Srinivas and other senior officials participated in the review.

MSMEs' role key in economic...

Continued from Page 1

Sanjeeth Singh, an advisor at NITI Aayog and keynote speaker, acknowledged Andhra Pradesh's progressive, technology-driven governance since 2001 and its globally competitive business community. He underlined the critical need for ongoing innovation, skills development, and accessible finance to accelerate MSME expansion.

Vishwa M, CEO of the AP MSME Development

Corporation, detailed the State's strategic measures to support MSMEs, emphasising the importance of workshops like this in addressing specific industry challenges and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Panel discussions involving senior government officials highlighted the importance of enhancing infrastructure, skills training, and innovation to strengthen the industrial landscape.

Nation lauds...

Continued from Page 1

NASA astronauts Williams, Nick Hague and Butch Wilmore and Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov returned early Wednesday on board SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft, which splashed down in the sea off the coast of Tallahassee, Florida.

For Williams and Wilmore, test pilots for Boeing's new Starliner capsule, an eight-day mission stretched to more than nine months as a series of helium leaks and thruster failures deemed their spacecraft unsafe.

'2,361 cr approved...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, all Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) in the State will be equipped with solar geysers, and CCTV cameras will be installed in KGBVs and PM SHRI schools to ensure the safety of girl students.

Furthermore, steps are being taken to appoint Career and Mental Health Counsellors in 679 mandals across the State, B Srinivasa Rao added.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
Nos. 03/2024-25 to 07/2024-25. Date: 18-03-2025
Tenders are invited in e-procurement platform for the 5 (Five) works for providing drinking water facilities to the needy habitations in Aluri Sitarama Raju (3 works), East Godavari (1 work) and West Godavari (1 work) Districts with a total estimated cost of Rs. 4269.86 Lakhs. (1st call for 5 works) under JRM Programme. Tenders can be downloaded from the e-procurement platform (i.e. www.tender.approcurement.gov.in) from 24.03.2025 to 07.04.2025 up to 3.00 PM for the above Tender Notice Nos.03/2024-25 to 07/2024-25, dated: 18.03.2025. Name and address of the officers concerned: Superintending Engineer, RWS&S Circles, Visakhapatnam, Eluru and Kakatula. The Contractors are requested to furnish their experience and other details in ZIP format. Further details can be obtained from e-procurement market place on www.approcurement.gov.in. Sd/- Chief Engineer-R, RWS&S Department, Godepur, Vijayawada.
BPR No. No. 18550/CL/MD/17/1/2024-25, Dt.18.03.2025

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
No. 31-98/2024-25. Date: 15-03-2025
Tenders are being invited from qualified contractors for execution of 68 drinking water works during 2024-25 with JRM grant of Rs 4355.40 lakh in Srikakulam district. Availability of tender schedules commencing from: 11.00 am on 21-03-2025. For other details, contact e-market place www.approcurement.gov.in or contact mobile phone 9100120602. Sd/- Superintending Engineer, RWS&S Division, Srikakulam
BPR No. No. 18550/CL/MD/17/1/2024-25, Dt.15.03.2025

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION,
CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR
E-Tender Notice 2024-2025
Tender Notice
E-Tender in B-1 form for the following work invited by Municipal Administrator, Municipal Corporation, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Phone No. 0240-2333556-60) from Government Registered Contractors / Companies / Firms of Appropriate Category:
Sl. No. Name of Work Tender Amount Rs.
1 Construction of Concrete Road At Gut No. 38, Vinayak Nagar, Ikkhada in Zone-10. 84,57,107/-
2 Construction of Concrete Road At GutNo. 112, Ravi Nagar, Nalshaharwadi in Z-10 1,29,72,705/-
3 Construction of Concrete Road At Jewau Society main Route in Ward no 13, Bhimnagar, Bhimnagar. 1,31,23,424/-
4 Construction of Concrete Road At Gut No.5, Nalshaharwadi in Zone No. 10. 64,38,926/-
5 Construction of Concrete Road At Pathe Nagar Layout & Saket Nagar, Budha Vihar in Ward-13,Zone No. 01 6,43,29,263/-
6 Construction of B.T. road from goat Farms to GutNo. 62 Padegon to Gut No. 63 Padegon (L Shape). 4,05,21,642/-
7 Construction of B.T. road from Gut No. 47 Padegon to Gut No. 61 Padegon to 59 Padegon (L Shape). 45,66,239/-
8 Construction of B.T. Road From Padegon Substation to Safari Park 30M Wide DP Road. 14,18,00,359/-
Details regarding the tender for the said works will be available on http://mahatenders.gov.in From, dt 19/3/2025. Administrator, Municipal Corporation, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar reserves all the rights to reject/cancel any or all tenders without assigning any reason.
Executive Engineer-Roads
0240-2333556/60/61/62/63/64/65/66/67/68/69/70/71/72/73/74/75/76/77/78/79/80/81/82/83/84/85/86/87/88/89/90/91/92/93/94/95/96/97/98/99/100

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Lokesh launches Ashok Leyland bus manufacturing facility

Located in Malavalli, the state-of-the-art facility spans 75 acres

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister of Information Technology, Electronics and Communications Nara Lokesh inaugurated the Ashok Leyland bus manufacturing facility near Vijayawada on Wednesday. During the inauguration ceremony, Ashok Leyland and the Hinduja Group presented the keys of the switch electric double-decker bus to the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Located in Malavalli, 40 km from Vijayawada, the state-of-the-art facility spans 75 acres and integrates advanced manufacturing technologies to produce Ashok Leyland's diesel buses and Switch Mobility's electric buses. The plant has an annual production capacity of 4,800 buses and includes modern training centres for skill development and service training.

Nara Lokesh observed, "This is a prestigious occasion for Andhra Pradesh. We are delighted to welcome Ashok Leyland to our growing industrial ecosystem. This plant strengthens our reputation as an emerging manufacturing hub



and will play a crucial role in providing employment, enhancing skill development, and boosting the overall economy of the State."

Dheeraj G. Hinduja, Chairman, Ashok Leyland said, "Inspired by the vision of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who has crafted a progressive industrial policy for the State, we are excited to be in Andhra Pradesh and our relationship with this State has been over sev-

eral decades now through Ashok Leyland and other Hinduja Group entities. The inauguration of the new plant marks the beginning of yet another chapter for Ashok Leyland in this vibrant State, where our Group is committed to explore more opportunities for driving economic growth, creating employment opportunities, and generating prosperity in the region."

Shenu Agarwal, MD & CEO,

Ashok Leyland added, "With inauguration of the new plant, Ashok Leyland will further consolidate its position as #1 bus brand in India and among the top 5 globally. This facility will help us cater to the growing demand for fully built buses in India. Production in the new plant has just commenced and owing to our large order book, the plant will start operating at 100 per cent capacity from day one. The new plant is equipped

with state-of-the-art equipment with high levels of automation signifying our commitment to making products of highest quality standards."

The event was attended by M Ram Prasad Reddy, Minister of Transport; TG Bharath, Minister of Industries; V Balashowry, MP, Krishna District; and Y Venkata Roy, MLA, Gannavaram, along with Ashok P Hinduja, Chairman of the Hinduja Group - India.



100 pc subsidy for horticulture, floriculture in NTR district

DWAMA cultivating fruits, flowers, and drumstick on 1,300 acres in district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has stated that the State government is providing 100 per cent subsidy under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS), popularly known as the Upadhi scheme, to farmers interested in cultivating horticultural crops, and flower cultivation to strengthen their financial position. He said the District Water and Management Agency (DWAMA) has taken up the scheme to cultivate horticulture crops such as fruits, flowers, and drumsticks on around 1,300 acres in the district this year.

The Collector visited dragon fruits and lemon gardens that are being cultivated with the support of the MGNREGS at Muppalla of Chandralapadi mandal in the district on Wednesday. He conducted meetings with the beneficiaries and enquired about their earnings. Beneficiaries Kanangi Bharathi and Tirupattamma said all the expenses of cultivating gardens right from digging holes, plant purchasing, plantation of saplings, fertilisers, irrigation water and others were released from the MGNREGS.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Dr Lakshminsha said that the State government is encouraging farmers to cultivate horticulture, flower cultivation and vegetable crops. Under the scheme mango, guava, lemon, sapota, orange,



dragon fruit and other crops are being cultivated in the district. Small and marginal farmers could use this scheme to strengthen themselves financially. The government is ready to support those farmers who are interested in cultivating horticulture, flower cultivation and vegetables, he added.

Meanwhile, the Collector inspected the crops which were damaged by the wild cows at Veladi of Chandralapadu mandal along with Nandigama RDO K Balakrishna, DFO G Satish and other officials. He observed the wild cows which are roaming in the forest using a drone. Also, he held discussions with the crop loss farmers along the coast of the river Krishna. Farmers requested Lakshminsha that these wild cows destroy their crops during the night times and urged

him to take the appropriate steps to protect their crops.

The Collector said that the district administration would take all necessary steps to protect the crops. Also, they are planning to shift those wild cows to Gosala. He directed the officials concerned to capture pictures of the wild cows roaming the area, and asked for a detailed report for taking further steps. Following this, the Collector inspected the land re-survey process at Ustepalli and gave appropriate suggestions to the staff for conducting the accurate survey.

Nagarjuna Sagar Left Canal Project Committee Chairman Kota Veera Babu, DWAMA PD A Ramu, Chandralapadu Tahsildar Paul, Survey Assistant Director T Trivikrama Rao, MPDO SV Nancharaiha, District Plantation Manager K Usha Rani, and others were present.

Minister Subhash congratulates Sunita Williams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Labour, Vasamshetti Subhash, extended heartfelt congratulations to Sunita Williams for successfully completing her 286-day space mission and returning safely to Earth this morning. The Minister praised Sunita

Williams for her dedication and exemplary achievements, calling her an inspiration for humanity.

Speaking on Wednesday, Minister Subhash said that Sunita Williams' space journey is a beacon of inspiration to the entire world. He highlighted the courage and determination she demon-

strated throughout her time in space, especially in the field of space research. Her persistence and willingness to face extreme challenges, even putting her life at risk, were commendable, he added.

Minister Subhash also expressed joy that two astronauts safely returned to Earth, recognising their remarkable

achievements. He lauded Sunita Williams for representing women's determination and dedication, which makes the world proud.

After a long wait of nine months, Sunita Williams, the astronaut of Indian descent, successfully returned to Earth from space.

Officials asked to ensure availability of fertilisers

Stress importance of advanced strategy, alertness, and preparedness in managing fertiliser supply to avoid shortages

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

On Wednesday, Dr S Dilli Rao, the Director of the Agriculture Department, held a video conference with all District Agriculture Officers (DAOs), District Markfed Managers, and Railway Wagon Rake Point Officers across the state. The Kharif season will be commencing in April, he outlined the responsibilities of various roles, emphasising the crucial duties of the Village Agricultural Assistants (VAAs) of the Rythu Seva Kendras, Mandal-level Agricultural Officers, and State-level officials in ensuring the availability of fertilisers.

While speaking at the video-conference, Dilli Rao said that Agricultural Officers are expected to develop action plans tailored to crop conditions in the field to ensure fertilisers are accessible. He stressed the importance of an advanced strategy, alertness, and preparedness in managing fertiliser supply to avoid shortages. He noted that despite an abundant supply of fertilisers during the last Kharif season, there were shortages of urea in



certain areas, which caused difficulties for farmers.

Furthermore, he directed that to prevent such issues in the future, he instructed district-level officials to closely monitor the various stages of fertiliser supply. Additionally, he instructed the officials to assess the extent to which supplies reached wholesalers, retailers, cooperative societies, and farmer service centres from where fertilisers were initially distributed. He emphasised the need for effective internal fertiliser supply management to ensure that farmers experience no inconvenience concerning supply, prices, and availability.

Subsequently, Dr Dilli Rao mentioned that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has

proposed to the Union Minister the establishment of three railway wagon rake points to facilitate fertiliser transport via railways to Visakhapatnam, Annamayya, and Sathya Sai districts, where transportation costs are high. He noted that the country uses an average of 140 metric tons of NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium) per hectare, while our State utilises 255 metric tonnes per hectare. In the Guntur district alone, the usage reaches 625 metric tonnes of NPK, he added.

Due to this high usage of fertilisers, soil becomes depleted. He urged agricultural staff to educate farmers on using fertilisers only according to the needs of their crops. He recommended reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and focusing on alternatives such as green manure, vermicompost, and cattle manure.

Sridhar, Additional Director, Kripadas, Joint Director (Fertilisers) GV Srinivas, Deputy Director of Agriculture, and GM Srinivas from Markfed also participated in the meeting.

Minor girl gang-raped

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A minor girl (14) has been gang-raped by eight youngsters including a minor boy near Gannavaram of Krishna district. The victim was lured under the pretext of dropping her at home and was held captive for four days and was gang raped.

Sub-Inspector of Atukur Ch Suresh said, the victim along with a girl who is her neighbour visited the latter's relatives' residence on March 9 near Gannavaram. Following a dispute, on March 13, the victim ventured out alone during the night. Two among the victims consuming alcohol noticed her alone and asked about her whereabouts, lured and took her with them under the pretext of dropping her at her home in G Konduru. They along with their friends held captive for four days and raped

her repeatedly. The accused in the rape were identified as Razak, Jithendra, Harshavardhan, Anil Kumar and others along with a minor boy. On Tuesday, the miscreants brought the girl to the Machavaram area in Vijayawada and abandoned her on the roadside.

An auto driver noticed the girl and took her to the Machavaram police station. The girl was brought to the Atkuru police station and her parents were informed. A case has been registered and police reportedly took all the eight boys including a minor into their custody. Police found the accused based on the details of the CCTV cameras. Police, after collecting the details from the girl, took her to the Vijayawada Government Hospital for medical examination.



'CM's Polavaram blunder deprives Rayalaseema of 40 TMC ft water'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former MLA Topudurthi Prakash Reddy has criticised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for undermining the interests of the Rayalaseema region. He criticised Chandrababu's decision to reduce the height of the Polavaram project, labelling it a historic blunder that has resulted in 40 TMC feet of water being denied to Rayalaseema. Prakash Reddy stated that this move has effectively turned Polavaram into a barrage, causing severe injustice to both North Andhra and Rayalaseema. He highlighted that former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had envisioned developing Rayalaseema through the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation project, but claimed that Chandrababu halted the initiated works. Consequently, approximately 6 lakh acres of cultivable land are now left without water, sparking widespread anger among the people of Rayalaseema.

Prakash Reddy further stated that YS Jagan introduced the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation project to ensure the region could utilize water rightfully due from Srisailem.

However, he accused Chandrababu of orchestrating legal cases through his party members to stall these efforts. He condemned Chandrababu for displaying a stepmotherly attitude toward Rayalaseema, in collusion with his protégé, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, Chandrababu is diverting water meant for Rayalaseema to Telangana.

Transwoman's brutal murder sparks outrage

Transgender groups stage protest, accuse victim's live-in partner of committing murder

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

In a swift breakthrough, the police successfully identified the victim of a gruesome murder in Bayyavaram, Kasimkota, as a transwoman named Deepu. The horrific incident has sent shockwaves throughout the district, prompting widespread protests from the transgender community. Upon discovering the dismembered body, the police launched an immediate investigation and reportedly detained a young man suspected of involvement in the crime. Further searches led to the recovery of more body parts, including the victim's head and left hand, from a drain in Anakapalli Town on Wednesday morning.

As chilling details of the crime emerged, transgender groups and unions in Anakapalli staged protests demanding justice. They

organised a rally, formed a human chain, and held a sit-in demonstration at NTR Hospital, where Deepu's remains have been kept for postmortem examination. During the protest, community members accused a man named Bunny of committing the brutal murder. According to protestors, Bunny had reportedly been in a live-in relationship with Deepu for several years.

"This is a heinous act, and no one should suffer such a fate. We demand strict action against the accused or that he be handed over to us," a protestor asserted. The police have assured that a thorough investigation is underway and vowed to ensure justice is served. The shocking incident has raised serious concerns regarding the safety and rights of transgender individuals, fuelling demands for stricter laws and better protection measures for the community.



Excise dept strengthens de-addiction efforts

Officials stress department's commitment to tackling addiction and helping individuals recover

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Excise Department is taking strong steps to combat addiction and improve rehabilitation services. As part of this effort, Nishant Kumar, Director of Prohibition & Excise and Rahul Dev Sharma, Director of Enforcement, Excise Department, visited de-addiction centres at Guntur Government General Hospital and AIIMS, Mangalagiri. Their visit stressed the department's commitment to tackling addiction and helping individuals recover.

During their visit, the officials interacted with patients, listened to their experiences, and tried to understand the root causes of their addiction.



They also discussed ways to improve treatment with medical staff, focusing on better counselling, advanced medical equipment, and the availability of essential medicines. The Excise Department has

pledged to strengthen its network of 25 de-addiction centres. Plans are in place to upgrade infrastructure, introduce better medical equipment, and develop an IT system to track patient progress.

The department is also working to enhance the existing web application for smoother management of de-addiction services.

To support these initiatives, the department has

introduced a two-per cent cess on the landed cost of liquor under its new excise policy. This move aims to generate funds for public health while addressing addiction-related challenges.

Bankers asked to reach targets, extend loans to tenant farmers

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetri Selvi asked the bankers to reach the targets in sanctioning loans and extend loans to the tenant farmers liberally.

The bankers meeting was held here on Wednesday presided over by the Collector. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Vetri Selvi said that farmers and beneficiaries of government schemes should be provided with large loans to help them in their development. She suggested that loans should be extended to tenant farmers who have CCRC cards and cultivate crops.

The Collector made it clear that Rs 142.85 crore has been extended to 23,314 tenant farmers with CCRC cards in the district so far, and at the same time, every tenant farmer with CCRC cards should be extended loans. She instructed the bankers to extend financial assistance by providing loans to tenant farmers, fishermen, and small and marginal farmers for animal husbandry.

She explained that Rs 6,639 crores have been provided in short-term agricultural loans till December for the current financial year. "Out of Rs 15,778 crores for priority sectors, 13,277 crores (84.15%) have been provided so far and the target of 100% has to be achieved by the end of March. According to RBI regulations, the CD ratio standard should be at least 60 percent, while in Eluru district it



is 199 percent," she observed. She highlighted that in the current financial year, various banks in the district have provided Rs 90.63 crore as education loans and Rs 618.63 crore as housing loans, and the Collector suggested to the bankers to expand these further.

Collector Vetri Selvi asserted that an action plan should be prepared for full implementation under the "Pradhan Mantri Suryaghar Mukti Bijli Yojana" with the highest priority. She also highlighted that out of 1447 applications in the district, 715 people have been sanctioned rooftop solar units so far, and another 305 are under consideration, adding that the 415 applications rejected for various reasons should be re-examined and necessary steps should be taken.

The Collector directed the fisheries officials to create widespread awareness about the provision of unsecured loan facilities of up to Rs 2

Collector Vetri Selvi calls on Nara Lokesh

ELURU: District Collector K Vetri Selvi called on IT Minister Nara Lokesh at Hanuman Junction on Wednesday. As part of Krishna district visit, Nara Lokesh visited the famous Hanuman temple at Hanuman Junction. Collector Vetri Selvi went there and met Nara Lokesh. Meanwhile, Nara Lokesh was accorded a warm welcome when he arrived at Sitarampuram village by a large number of TDP activists led by Housing Minister K Parthasarathy.



lakh under marketing capital to fishermen.

LDO P Purnima revealed that in accordance with RBI norms, 18 percent of the total loans for the year 2024-25

should be given to agriculture and 40 percent to priority sectors, while in Eluru district, 57.41 percent of loans were given to agriculture and 72.07 percent to priority sectors,

exceeding these targets. Union Bank of India regional head N Srinivas, LDM D Neeladri and NABARD DDM Anil Kanth were among those who attended the meeting.

Farmers asked to sell their paddy produce in purchase centres



PNS ■ NELLORE

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has asked the farmers to sell their paddy produce at the paddy procurement centres only to get remunerative price.

Ministers and MLAs of Nellore district, accompanied by Nellore district Collector, met Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar in his chamber in the Secretariat in Amaravati on Wednesday and discussed various issues. The meeting discussed the problems faced by farmers in Nellore district regarding the purchase of paddy.

The Minister and MLAs of Nellore district brought to the attention of Civil Supplies minister Nadendla Manohar the fact that the previous government had not paid attention to the purchase of paddy produce from farmers in Nellore district for the last two years, resulting in the farmers being cheated by selling paddy produce to middlemen.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Nadendla Manohar asked the paddy farmers not to be deceived by trusting middlemen and selling their paddy at low rates. The Minister pointed out that 46% of the paddy harvest has already been completed in the district, adding that farmers should sell the harvested paddy at the paddy purchase centres only, set up by the government and get money within 24 hours. He assured that the coalition government will stand by the farmers.

Minister Manohar highlighted that a control room has been set up in the district for the purchase of paddy produce from the farmers and five lakh bags have been made available to them. The Minister said that the public representatives should visit the field level and take the initiative to resolve any problems. The Minister directed the officials to take steps to ensure that there are no problems in transportation of paddy produce.

Moreover, the Minister made it clear that the revenue staff has been deputed to each rice mill to monitor the paddy purchase process. Stating that the paddy procurement is going on in full swing in Nellore and Kovvur areas of Nellore district, the Minister reiterated that the money will be credited into bank accounts of farmers within 24 hours of paddy procurement.

The Minister instructed the officials concerned to talk to the Rice Millers Association and take steps to do away with the involvement of middlemen.

Endowment Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Nellore district in-charge Minister N M Farooq, MLAs Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy, Vemireddy Prasanthi, K Ramakrishna, Krishna Reddy and Nellore district Collector O Anand were among those who met Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar.

Collector assures of purchasing red gram from farmers

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district Collector A Thameem Ansariya has assured of purchasing red gram produce from the farmers through the AP MarkFed and asked the farmers to avail the opportunity.

The Collector, accompanied by Joint Collector R Gopal Krishna, visited the red gram procurement centre, set up on the Agriculture Credit Society godown premises at Chimata village in Marripudi mandal on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that the Government had taken steps to provide remunerative price to the farmers for their red gram produce as part of it, the red gram produce is being procured through the AP MarkFed. The Collector inspected the



red gram procurement process from the officials and knew the details. AP MarkFed General Manager Hari Krishna apprised the Collector that so far 126 Metric Tonnes of red gram produce had been purchased from the farmers so far in the district. He also informed the Collector that 35 Metric Tonnes of red gram had been purchased by the Chimata procurement centre so far in two days.

Collector Thameem Ansariya spoke to the farmers and inquired about how many acres of red gram were sown, how much yield was obtained per acre, and whether there were any difficulties at the red gram purchase center. The Collector instructed the Markfed officials to take steps to ensure that the red gram produce is purchased without any inconvenience or difficulty to the farmers.

The Collector revealed that the government's goal is to pay remunerative prices for farmers' products, and as part of that, the state government is purchasing red gram produced in the district at a support price of Rs 7,550 per quintal from farmers through the AP Markfed and she asked the farmers in the district should take advantage of this opportunity.

On the occasion, the villagers of Chimata brought the drinking water problem and the burial ground issue in the village to the attention of the District Collector. She, along with Joint Collector Gopala Krishna, inspected the places and promised the villagers of taking steps to resolve the problems. RDO Keshavardhan Reddy, Agriculture Department JD Srinivasa Rao, Markfed GM Hari Krishna were present.



Youth drowned while taking selfie in Sangameswar rivulet

PNS ■ NANDYALA

Taking a selfie photo with a mobile phone led to the drowning of youth in the backwaters of Srisaalam project at Sangameswar temple on Wednesday.

Police said that the deceased Maddileti Sandeep (23) was studying graduation. He along with his friends went to the Sangameswara temple, located at AP-Telangana states border area.

As the water has receded in the river Krishna, most of the Sangameswara temple has surfaced from the water. The priest of the temple was going to the temple which is still in four feet of water. The deceased Sandeep started wading through the water towards the temple while his



friends were taking a video. However, Sandeep suddenly drowned as he fell into a deep pit in the river. The local fishermen brought him to the shore but by the time he died. The deceased belonged to Mandlem village. The parents rushed to the place and they were seen grieving inconsolably. The police registered a case and shifted the body to the GGH in Atmakur.

50 quintals of dried chillies set on fire by miscreants

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Unidentified miscreants set on fire 50 quintals of dried chillies which were left at the field after harvest at Lakshminipuram village in Karempudi mandal on the night of Tuesday.

Victim Vajrala Suresh Reddy told the media that he had taken five acres of agricultural land on lease and raised the chilli crop. He left the harvested chilli crop at the field for the drying

purpose. Some miscreants set fire to the chilli produce. The five quintals dried mirch completely gutted the mishap. The destroyed chilli produce was worth Rs 6 lakh.

The farmer said that he was planning to take the chilli produce to the market yard on Thursday to sell but the miscreants set the produce on fire. He appealed to the government to extend help. The police registered a case.



Light to moderate rain in Coastal AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are likely at a few places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh from March 22 to 25 and in Rayalaseema from March 22 to 24.

A trough extending from central parts of Odisha to South Vidarbha across South Chhattisgarh at 0.9 km above mean sea level persists, Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

Thunderstorms accompanied with lightning are likely to occur at isolated places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema on March 22 and 23. Dry weather is expected to prevail in Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next three days, while the same situation will prevail in Rayalaseema and on March 25.

In its daily weather report here, it said that a trough or wind



discontinuity from Marathwada to the cyclonic circulation over south Tamil Nadu, passing through interior Karnataka at 0.9 km above mean sea level, also persists.

Additionally, strong surface winds with speed ranging between 30-40 kmph are expected at isolated places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the same period.

Man gets life imprisonment for killing woman

PNS ■ BAPATLA

A man was sentenced to life imprisonment on Wednesday for killing a woman for insisting him to marry her.

The Bapatla VI th Additional District and Session Judge K Shyambabu convicted Garapati Rajasekhar to life imprisonment and also imposed Rs 10,000 fine on Wednesday.

Police said that the deceased Bollipogu Rani worked as caretaker at Chaitanya College in Guntur in 2012. The convict Garapati Rajasekhar was working as an electrician. He befriended Rani and later they fell in love. Knowing her love affair with him, the Chaitanya College management sacked her from the job. Later she joined the NRI College as

student in-charge. The convict Rajasekhar took the deceased Rani to an abandoned quarters of fisheries department on March 22, 2013. She insisted on marrying her which led to heated arguments between them. Furious over this, Rajasekhar stabbed her repeatedly and she died at the place. The police found the body on March 23, 2013 and the then SI Y Koteswara Rao registered a case and CI Y Rama Rao investigated it.

As the prosecution succeeded in probing the case before the court, the judge sentenced him to life imprisonment. SP Tushar Dudy appreciated the police officials for probing the case and getting the accused punished by the court.

Efforts being made to rectify injustices done to SCs: CM

KOLISHETTY VENKATESHWARLU
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■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that efforts are being made to rectify the injustice done to SCs and that the SC classification was not done against anyone. The Congress government aims to do justice to SCs through classification, the CM said.

The meeting was held on Wednesday and leaders of SC communities met Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in the Assembly Committee Hall to express their

gratitude after the Assembly approved the SC Classification Bill. Addressing the meeting, the CM said the government had appointed a one-man commission to ensure that there are no legal implications in future. "The one-man commission has given a 199-page report. We are providing reservations while dividing SCs into three groups," the CM said.

"When we demanded a classification resolution at that time, we were suspended from the House. We solved the problem that was not solved in 10 years



SC leaders including SC MLAs extends thanks to the CM A Revanth Reddy on Wednesday for passing SC Classification Bill in the Assembly

in the first year itself after coming to power. We argued strongly in the Supreme Court and

worked hard to get a verdict favouring classification. The Supreme Court verdict has not

been implemented in any state in the country. The Supreme Court verdict has not been implement-

ed in any state where the BJP is in power. But we have started the process of implementation. We

wanted to solve the problem of legal rights. Now we have achieved it," the CM said.

The CM said the Congress government appointed the son of Madiga Kumar as the Vice-Chancellor of Osmania University like never before in its 100-year history. The government also appointed Prof. Qasim as the Principal of the Arts College. The government also gave priority to Madigas in higher education, the Public Service Commission and the Education Commission.

"If you uphold this opportunity more opportunities will come in future. This is a great opportunity. I want to make it useful for some people. I have no other intention than to do good for you. Control your emotions and use your logic. Make the most of the available opportunity," the CM said.

The CM appealed to SC leaders to thank Rahul Gandhi and not him. He said that he would not have had enough strength to find a solution to SC Classification if not for Rahul Gandhi.

ACROSS THE STATES



Uttar Pradesh's forest cover expands by 559 sq km

Uttar Pradesh has recorded a significant increase in its forest cover, with the Indian Forest Status Report 2023 noting a 559.19 sq km expansion. The state government has credited this achievement to large-scale plantation drives, including the 'Ped Lagao, Ped Bachao Jan Abhiyan-2024', under which 36.80 crore saplings were planted in a single year, according to an official statement. The total forest cover in the state now stands at 15,045.89 sq km, a senior UP government official said on Wednesday. Over the past eight years, the state government has overseen the plantation of over 204 crore trees. While doing so, the state's Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department has also generated employment by recruiting thousands of youth into the department, it stated. Additionally, UP has become the first state in India to implement carbon credit payments for trees grown on private farmland, providing financial benefits to farmers, the statement emphasised.

Maintaining balance between hard power, soft power: Rajnath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is maintaining a balance between its hard power and soft power amid the prevailing uncertainties in a "multipolar world" today, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday.

And, it is a matter of great pride that India has strengthened its global position, he said at a memorial event here for Major Bob Khathing.

He termed Major Khathing a "great son of India" who left an indelible mark in the country's history through his bravery in the battlefield and skill in diplomacy.

It is the responsibility of the people to adopt the ideals and principles of such great personalities, the Union minister said.

"Today, India is maintaining a balance between its hard power and soft power amidst the prevailing uncertainties in the multipolar world. It is a matter of great pride that India has strengthened its global position. A new, strong and organised India has emerged before the world. There was a time India



was not taken seriously on international forums. But today, when we speak, the world listens. This is inspired by the ideals of Major Khathing," he said.

Singh also recalled he virtually inaugurated the Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing Museum of Valour at Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh last year.

The defence minister pointed out the government's foreign policy has been also shaped by the diplomatic skills of personalities such as Major Khathing.

Singh called upon people to

always put the nation first, remain united, discharge their duties with honesty, and move fearlessly towards achieving their goals, which were the core principles of Major Khathing, an extraordinary figure who made invaluable contributions to the northeast region and the national security.

Paying glowing tributes to him, the minister asserted India has been fortunate that it is home to such prominent personalities for whom security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation is para-

mount. The fifth edition of Major Bob Khathing memorial event, jointly organised by the Indian Army, Assam Rifles and think-tank United Services Institution of India (USI) at Delhi Cantonment, honoured the life and legacy of the legendary figure.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, Member of Parliament Alfred Kanngam Arthur, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, Director General Assam Rifles Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera and DG, USI Maj Gen B K Sharma (retd), were also present on the occasion.

The defence minister commended Major Khathing's role in integrating, developing and rebuilding not only Tawang but the entire northeast region.

"Major Bob Khathing made a significant contribution in strengthening national unity. The work he carried out for the northeast is similar to what Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did at the national level," he was quoting as saying in a statement by the defence ministry.



India shaping global climate action with bold policies: Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is not just responding to the climate crisis but shaping the global agenda with decisive action and innovative policies, Union minister Kirti Vardhan Singh said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the inauguration of the 'India 2047: Building a Climate-Resilient Future' conference, organised by the environment ministry in collaboration with Harvard University, Singh said India is not only committed to fight-

ing climate change but also leading with proactive measures and sustainable development.

"We are not merely responding to the climate crisis but we are shaping the global agenda with decisive action and innovative policies," he said.

Singh said that India's emissions per unit of GDP fell by 36 per cent between 2005 and 2020, keeping the country on track to meet its target of a 45 per cent reduction by 2030.

No substitute for boots on the ground: CDS Gen Chauhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There is no substitute for "boots on the ground" as technology can only be an enabler which cannot replace people, Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan said on Wednesday, highlighting ways to deal with new-age conflicts.

In an address at the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics, Gen Chauhan described imparting appropriate training to military personnel to deal with

hybrid warfare along with conventional war as a big challenge for the country.

For a multicultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like India, disinformation and internal strife could be a major challenge, he observed.

Disinformation is a battle of minds or cognitive warfare and it could be a major challenge, he argued.

Gen Chauhan was speaking at a session titled 'Verses and Wars: Navigating Hybrid Theatres'.



The chief of defence staff also identified cyber space, disinformation, and economic coercion as essential elements

of contemporary warfare.

I think the global security environment is marked by two challenges -- one is uncertainty and other is rapid amount of change, he said.

"The biggest challenge that we face is to train people for hybrid kinds of wars as well as conventional war," he said.

Elaborating on it, Gen Chauhan cited the rapid pace of technological advancement and said to train people on technology absorption is a challenge.

Delving into various nation-

al security challenges, the CDS said India has been facing the "asymmetric threat". Though he did not name any adversary, his comments were seen as a reference to Pakistan.

"We have always called it a sub conventional kind of a conflict. We invented this particular term much before the West invented terms like global war on terror or asymmetric warfare or fourth generation warfare or hyper conflicts," he said.

"We have called it conflict below the threshold of conven-

tional conflict and the lesson is that there is no substitute for boots on the ground," he said.

Gen Chauhan said technology can only be an enabler but it cannot replace people. "I think that is very important."

The CDS also talked about new-age combat zones.

"In conventional conflicts, you shape the battlefield with fire. Over here, we are looking at shaping the mindscape not the landscape. The battle of the mind becomes important as far as hybrid warfare is concerned," he said.



RSS condemns Nagpur violence

The RSS on Wednesday condemned the recent violence in Nagpur, saying any form of violence is detrimental to the society's well-being and described the 17th-century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as "irrelevant". The remarks were made by RSS chief spokesperson Sunil Ambekar during a press meet on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's upcoming three-day national meet. The meet of Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha (ABPS) is scheduled for March 21-23 here. "Any type of violence is not good for the health of the society and I think police have taken cognizance of it and so they will get into the details," the RSS communication chief said in response to a question on the outfit's stance on the unrest. Asked whether Aurangzeb's tomb should be relocated and is the Mughal ruler relevant today, he replied, "No, it's not relevant." Violence erupted in central Nagpur on Monday, with stones hurled at police amid rumours that the holy book of a community was burnt during an agitation by a right-wing body demanding the removal of 17th century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district.



'Rape and molestation cases count surged'

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis on Wednesday said rape and molestation cases have gone up in the state, which he attributed to the amended legal provisions post the Nirbhaya case. He said crime against women has not declined even after laws were amended in 2013 following the Nirbhaya rape case, noting that "molestation cases are also charged as rape cases". Fadnis said the state government is working to achieve the target of 75 per cent conviction rate. Replying to a debate on the Home department's budgetary demands, Fadnis, who holds the Home portfolio, said 90 per cent of sex assault offenders are known to the victim women. He said police registered an FIR and filed a charge sheet within 24 hours after a woman was assaulted in Raigad district. "In the next 24 hours, the court handed the sentence to the accused," he added. Fadnis said the state government is working to achieve the target of 75 per cent conviction rate, which improved from 9 per cent in 2013 to 50 per cent in 2024.

Four employees charred to death as company bus catches fire near Pune

PNS ■ PUNE

Four employees of a graphics designing firm were charred to death and six others injured as a company minibus caught fire near Pune city on Wednesday morning, police said.

The emergency exit door at the rear side of the bus could not be opened, leading to casualties, said an official.

The incident took place in Hinjewadi area in the Pimpri Chinchwad municipal limits around 7.45 am, he said.

The bus was ferrying 14 employees of Vyoma Graphics from Warje to Hinjewadi.

The deceased were identified as Shankar Shinde (63), Rajan Chavan (42), Gurudas Lokare (45) and Subhash Bhosale (44), residents of Kothrud, Warje



and Wadgaon areas of Pune. They worked as a supervisor, printing machine operator, courier person and paper cutting operator, respectively, the police said.

When the vehicle was near Dassault Systems, a fire broke out near the driver's feet. Driver Janardan Hambaridkar brought

the bus to a halt as the flames spread, said Kanhaiya Thorat, senior inspector of Hinjewadi police station.

The driver and some of the employees got down immediately, while the four deceased who were in the rear of the bus tried to escape through the emergency exit near them.

Jaishankar flags concern over weaponisation of trade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The world is witnessing "greater weaponisation" of tariffs, sanctions and export controls and India must navigate the challenge by working with partners who are trustworthy and present fewer risks, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday.

His remarks at the Raisina Dialogue came amid growing global concerns over US President Donald Trump's threat of imposing reciprocal tariffs on its partners and other nations.

However, the external affairs minister made no mention of Trump's threat of tariffs.

"Tariffs, sanctions, export controls -- whether we like it or not, they are a reality, coun-



tries use them," he said speaking at a session titled "Commisars and Capitalists: Politics, Business and New World Order."

"If one looks at the last decade, we have seen a much greater weaponisation of pretty much any kind of capability or any kind of economic activity," he said.

The external affairs minister also talked about ways to deal with the situation arising out of weaponisation of trade.

Explaining, he said staying on the "right side" of the weapon so you don't "get hit", and finding partners who are more "trustworthy" and present fewer risks.

"The world today makes business decisions factoring in national security in a manner in which it did not do so before, especially in the digital era," he said.

"In the digital era, it's not just about cost, it is about comfort and trust. If you are today looking at a strategic level, the business conversations you keep hearing (are about) resilience, reliability, trust, transparency."

Supreme Court: Advocates don't have right to appear, mark presence sans authorisation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday held advocates did not have an "indefeasible right" to appear and get their appearances marked in judicial records without the authorisation to represent litigants.

The verdict of a bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma came on the plea of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and the Supreme Court Advocates-on-

Record Association (SCAORA) seeking modification of the September 20, 2024 directions.

The top court had last year allowed advocates-on-records (AoR) to mark appearances of only those advocates who were authorised to appear and argue the case on the particular day of hearing.

"Such names shall be given by the AoR on each day of hearing of the case as instructed in the notice. If there is any change in the name of the arguing advo-



cate, it shall be the duty of the advocate-on-record concerned to inform the court master concerned in advance or at the time of hearing of the case," it said.

The bench did not allow the pleas and said the Supreme

Court rules, having the statutory force, needed to be adhered to by all the court officers and lawyers.

Justice Trivedi's 26-page verdict said, "The Supreme Court being the highest court of the country, the practice and procedure being followed in the Supreme Court proceedings by the advocates and officers of the Supreme Court have to be strictly in accordance with the statutory rules framed by it, and not de hors the said rules."

'India steadfast in its 'zero-tolerance' policy towards terrorism'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India remains steadfast in its "zero-tolerance" policy towards terrorism and robust domestic mechanisms and strong regional cooperation are needed to effectively combat the menace, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said on Wednesday.

Singh was speaking at the inaugural session of a two-day conclave of 10-nation ASEAN grouping and some of its dialogue partners, hosted by India in the national capital.

The defence secretary said threats of terrorism are increasingly transcending borders, and the use of advanced technology, cyber tools and unmanned systems by terrorist groups necessitates a cohesive and action-oriented approach to combat the challenge.

The Indo-Pacific region, given its geopolitical and economic significance, is particularly vulnerable to transnational terrorism and violent extremism, which calls for a comprehensive, adaptive and deeply collaborative response, he said.

The conclave of the experts working group (EWG) on counter-terrorism under the



framework of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) mechanism is deliberating on the evolving regional security challenges.

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

"India remains steadfast in its zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism and believes in an approach that combines robust domestic mechanisms, enhanced intelligence-sharing and strong regional cooperation," Singh said.

Sunita's ancestral Gujarat village over the moon

PNS ■ MEHSANA

Residents of NASA astronaut Sunita Williams' ancestral village Jhulasan in Gujarat's Mehsana district on Wednesday celebrated her safe return by bursting firecrackers, distributing sweets, dancing and offering prayers to the local deity.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel also extended congratulations through X to "our very own Sunita Williams" and said people in India take immense pride in her connection to "our" land, celebrating her as a "shining example of our shared heritage and aspirations". As soon as a SpaceX capsule

carrying Williams and astronaut Butch Wilmore splashed down near the Florida coast in the US after their nine-month stay at the International Space Station (ISS), the villagers erupted in joy, bursting firecrackers, dancing and chanting "Har Har Mahadev".

The villagers had organised a 'yagna' praying for Williams' safe return. They said their happiness knew no end and hoped to see Williams visit her ancestral village soon and inspire school students who are already filled with curiosity and follow in her footsteps.

Students of the local government school gathered to cele-



brate the occasion by performing garba, a traditional Gujarati folk dance, and took out a procession with Williams'

photo to the nearby temple of goddess Dola Mata.

As the procession made its way from the school premises

to the temple of goddess Dola Mata, the students danced and sang and distributed sweets on their way.

Editor's TAKE

The quicksand of communalism

Clashes have erupted over Aurangzeb's tomb, exposing the deep historical roots that gnaw away at the socio-cultural fabric of our nation

In India, the spectre of communalism rears its ugly head every once in a while, often serving as a convenient political tool for those ascending the stairway to power. Grievances left behind as relics of history in a country as religiously diverse as India are manipulated for political gains to fuel unrest and keep the communal cauldron burning. Maharashtra has often been the epicentre of such clashes, the recent one adding yet another bleak chapter to a deeply riven society. The past few days have witnessed a surge of violence as Hindu nationalist groups demanded the removal of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's tomb, reigniting age-old conflicts. The ensuing agitation led to arson, stone-pelting, and clashes in Nagpur, forcing authorities to impose a curfew. However, to limit introspection on an issue so raw to the bone Maharashtra alone would indeed be a fatal mistake, both for our political classes and the masses. The latest incident displays how historical narratives can be weaponised to serve regional political aspirations, and expose an already vulnerable society to centuries of wrongs committed in the name of religion.

Aurangzeb, the sixth Mughal emperor, remains a divisive figure in Indian history. His reign was marked not only by brutal territorial expansions but also by policies that amounted to a brazenly oppressive attitude toward his Hindu subjects. He imposed a crushing jizya tax on non-Muslims, dictated temple demolitions through royal firmans, and mercilessly butchered Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, silencing every voice raised against him and decapitating every hand that rebelled against his atrocities. Aurangzeb invoked the Mughal Empire's ulema to sentence Sambhaji to death for his apparent acts of atrocities on Muslims. In essence, the foreign invader, much like his British successors, wanted to leave behind a legacy that disinherited India's indigenous inhabitants. Admittedly, he employed Hindus in high administrative positions, patronised some temples, and engaged in diplomatic relations beyond religious boundaries. However, it is his relentless religious persecution of Hindus that feels what is unfolding in Maharashtra today.

Here, it would be prudent to bear in mind that howsoever burdened by historical injustice one may be, violence by any community must be condemned and controlled. The recent violence in Maharashtra is to be seen as much in the present context as in the past. Hindu right-wing groups have long called for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, arguing it stands as a symbol of historical oppression. A contemporary Indian film, Chhaava, portraying the brutal torture of Sambhaji by Aurangzeb, is now being cited by some analysts as the reason behind the reignited anger against the Mughal emperor. However, this is too facetious a premise to debate upon a historical wound still dangerously raw. The truth is that the current controversy intensified after statements by politicians, particularly Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Azmi's remarks, on Aurangzeb's rule, which were seen as attempts to whitewash a bloody history, an argument his party members were quick to distance themselves from. The question of the hour is how to put this monster to rest. Indeed, educating people about the nuances of history can prevent the glorification or demonisation of historical figures. But that is easier said than done. The problem is that nobody wants to read history, let alone understand it, yet everyone remains opinionated. Aurangzeb was neither evil nor benevolent — his autocratic reign and religious chauvinism must be studied in the context of his times, the fact that he was last in the line of a foreign dynasty that had ruled India for centuries with an iron hand. For one, political leaders and groups would do well to desist from exploiting historical grievances for limited gains. Strict action should be taken against those inciting communal hatred.

Weathering the storm of US trade winds

The global economy is at a crossroads as the US introduces a disruptive reciprocal tariff model, challenging the foundation of global trade. This shift threatens developing nations, including India, by undermining WTO principles

The world is facing an uncertain and challenging time. The reciprocal tariff model introduced by the new Trump administration's economic policies has disrupted the seamless flow of global trade and commerce. This poses a significant economic challenge for developing nations, as it undermines the World Trade Organization (WTO) model, which upholds the principle of higher tariffs imposed by developing nations on imports from developed nations to protect their domestic industries.

The immediate consequences include the crippling of these industries, creating an unequal playing field. Rising unemployment and a slowdown in export-driven growth appear inevitable. India is not immune to this trade war, where global cooperation is being overshadowed by forced trade negotiations favoring the stronger party. A new world order is taking shape, and India must navigate this landscape not cautiously, but courageously.

Between April 2024 and November 2024, India, the second-largest trading partner of the US, exported goods worth USD 52.89 Billion while importing USD 29.63 Billion, resulting in a trade surplus of USD 23.26 Billion in India's favor. This trade imbalance is at the heart of the issue. India's key exports include diamonds, medical appliances and accessories, jewelry, agricultural products, refined petroleum, rice, textiles and apparel, automotive components, chemicals and petrochemicals, and machinery. Meanwhile, India's imports from the US primarily consist of mineral fuels and oils, pearls, precious and semi-precious stones, nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, electrical equipment, crude petroleum, petroleum products, electronic components, and gold.

A closer look at these product categories reveals that India has room to further expand its market share in these sectors by enhancing cost efficiencies and quality standards. In contrast, the US has limited options for increasing its exports to India, apart from pushing crude oil and defense products—both heavily supported by the US government. This is due to the cost and consumption limitations of US goods in the Indian market. Consequently, the US, in its bid to reduce the trade deficit, will likely attempt to penetrate new segments currently dominated by Indian domestic industries, such as automobiles.

This is not just a trade negotiation, it is a full-fledged trade war aimed at capturing market share with little regard for global cooperation or diplomatic considerations. The reciprocal tariff strategy is a veiled attempt to lower tariffs and open new markets for the US.



The true agenda is now apparent.

The concept of reciprocal tariffs, introduced under the Trump administration's "Fair and Reciprocal Plan," seeks to impose high import duties on trade partners in an effort to reduce trade deficits. The administration argues that exporting countries impose high tariffs on US products. However, this is not a product-to-product reciprocity but a nation-to-nation policy. The term "reciprocal" itself is misleading, as there is no defined framework governing its application. Instead, it grants the US government the flexibility to impose tariffs arbitrarily, leaving exporting countries guessing about their potential impact and forcing them to react after the tariffs are already in place. In a world marked by unequal wealth distribution, economic development, and technological progress, these tariffs are more punitive than reciprocal, disproportionately harming developing nations.

In international trade, the true meaning of reciprocal tariffs, as governed by the WTO, differs significantly from what the US administration is advocating. Under Article 22.4 of the WTO's Dispute Settlement Understanding, reciprocity serves as the basis for tariff retaliation when a country fails to comply with a WTO ruling. Additionally, Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) establishes legal guidelines for recalibrating trade agreements and calculating compensation. What the US is currently pro-

moting deviates from these principles.

As global trade policies continue to be shaped by dominant economies, the US's reciprocal tariff strategy is expected to cause significant disruptions until countermeasures emerge to stabilise the situation. However, the key question remains: Will this retaliatory tariff policy achieve its intended goal for the US? The likelihood is low. A closer analysis reveals that the US trade-to-GDP ratio stands at just 26.9 per cent, compared to 38.4 per cent for China, 46.8 per cent for Japan, and 50 per cent for India. Moreover, US import intensity is nearly three times

higher than its export intensity. The real issue behind the US trade deficit is not high foreign tariffs but the poor performance of US merchandise trade, which accounts for only 8.3 per cent of global exports. In contrast, the US enjoys a USD 200 Billion trade surplus in the services sector, making it the global leader in both imports and exports of services. The primary constraints on US merchandise exports stem from supply-side limitations and a failure to achieve economies of scale, not unfair tariff structures. Given the strong global demand for US service exports, why should

the US merchandise trade struggle to compete?

With a population of 1.4 Billion, India must support its citizens through various welfare programs funded by budgetary allocations. These expenditures rely heavily on trade and commerce, with export-driven industries playing a crucial role. India's ability to produce low-cost goods sustains its economy and provides employment to millions. Protecting these industries is imperative.

Allowing an influx of US products into new market segments could disrupt domestic industries in the short term and erode supply chains in the long run if US manufacturers fail to achieve economies of scale in affordable segments. While India can afford to reduce its diamond exports to the US, it cannot risk destabilising its domestic industries.

It is time for India to adhere strictly to WTO guidelines and advocate for a globally accepted trade policy to counter coercive trade deficit measures. A production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme to boost domestic industries, along with stronger ties with alternative trading partners, can help mitigate the impact of reciprocal tariffs. India must remain vigilant—this phase is temporary, but its long-term economic stability depends on strategic resilience.

(The writer is an investment banker. Views expressed are personal)



MRIGANKA M BHOWMICK

A new India: A journey through the decades

SECOND Opinion



SANJAY CHANDRA

I was recently invited to participate in a panel discussion during which the young moderator posed a query — what did I think of a New India? This was an interesting subject that made me reflect.

Like most around me, I too had been engrossed in leading a routine life till about a decade back. I would also often crib about a stagnant life. It was as I turned 60 that I started indulging in self-reflections about the way my life had evolved each decade since birth.

The first decade saw our family living a more frugal life. We acquired a radio set six years after my birth and a refrigerator two years later. Even though the voltage fluctuated and light was often dim at night, we had electricity at home. Our homes had fans.

The second decade witnessed a carefree me, not much stressed about what I would do after school or college. The government had invested in the creation of innumerable public sector undertakings. There were enough jobs. We also graduated to having desert coolers at home.

The mid-third decade saw me buckling down to the onerous professional responsibilities and simultaneously getting used to married life and raising a family. Though, to be fair, it was my wife who was at home to bring up

our two daughters. I spent more time in the railway control rooms to ensure smooth running of trains. My young age and diligence made me dream about one of the topmost positions in the railways sometime towards the end of my career. My promotions ensured that I had an air-conditioned cabin in office and I was able to travel in the upper first class air-conditioned coach for office tours. But we were still happy with fans and desert coolers at home.

The beginning of the fourth decade saw me travelling for a 12-week official training to Japan. This was my first overseas trip. The money that I saved from the allowance ensured that I was able to take my family for a holiday to Goa by flights. We stayed in resorts, inexpensive, but better than the official guest houses that I had been exposed to so far. I went for my next overseas official trip to Europe. I also opted to move to Delhi in a railway public sector undertaking. It was towards the end of this decade that I came into my own professionally. I travelled extensively within India and outside for work.

I could save enough to buy one second-hand air conditioner. We slept in the single room, but it felt heavenly in the sweltering summers of north India. A home loan from the department on easier terms also ensured that we could afford to buy a decent sized house in an upcoming small-town locality.

The beginning of the 21st century was also the start of

my fifth decade. The government had hiked salaries though successive pay commissions. We no longer lived hand to mouth. We could spend lavishly by our middle-class standards and still be left with a saving. We could afford decent education for our daughters. We happily shifted to my own apartment in a condominium complex. I could afford more gadgets at home. I had the financial safety net to quit working and indulge in creative passions through writing. Life has changed, and continues to get better, for many people, be it the middle-class or the daily service providers. We do not realise it from one day to the next. If we look back each decade, or in slices of five years, or even from a year to year, it has been a new India. It is more than a slogan. It is a continuous process. And, this is how it will be — for us and the next generations.

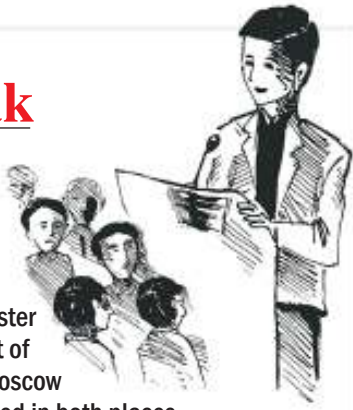
(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative. The views are personal)

Leaderspeak



India actually has a Prime Minister who can hug both the president of Ukraine and the president in Moscow two weeks apart and be accepted in both places. Therefore, India is in a position where it can make a difference to a lasting peace if it was so required, in ways that very few countries would be able to. India also benefits due to a number of factors including its distance from Europe. If it were necessary... there would be some willingness on the Indian side to consider sending peacekeepers.

SHASHI THAROOR, CONGRESS LEADER



Letters to the Editor

Silver prices goes over the top

Madam — Silver, once known as the "poor man's gold", is slipping out of the reach of the very people who cherished it the most. With prices soaring to ₹1,04,000 per kilogram, what was once an affordable metal for savings, traditions, and investment has now become a luxury. The middle-class Indian, who once celebrated festivals by buying silver coins, now finds it nearly impossible to do so. The tradition of gifting silver jewellery and utensils at weddings is weakening, and households that once prided themselves on their silverware are now struggling to keep up.

The metal that symbolised security and tradition is fast becoming a privilege of the wealthy. The rise in silver prices is not an accident, it is a direct result of global economic shifts and market manipulations.

The strengthening of the US dollar, increased industrial demand, and government policies are driving prices upward. Silver is no longer just a household commodity - it has become a critical component in industries such as electronics, solar energy, and medical devices. The increasing demand from these sectors has led to large-scale hoarding by big investors, leaving the common man out of the equation.

The Indian government, instead of providing relief, has raised import duties, further pushing silver beyond the reach of ordinary citizens.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

Education is a shambles

Madam — The article "Transforming education" (March 19) presents good points to ponder over. Every change brought in education has added to the process of commodifying education instead of improving the quality of learning process. The very fact that the government is pushed to the corner of introducing an internship scheme incentivising the youth, who are already holding a certificate or diploma or degree, to be trained again and the industries offering the training depicts the status of education that prevails in the country.

Frantic efforts are on to give an ideological quote to education instead of inculcating the scientific temper as directed by the constitution.

Government is shirking its responsibility of providing meaningful education and left it to the private players for whom education is a mere commodity to mint profits than a process of learning. It does not equip them with at least skills to be employable. We have only institutions to produce students who carry marks for their memorising ability and nothing more. The government is happy with growing number of the unemployed as it helps the employers to pay less and extract more labour. The callousness of the government could be better understood from offering the title of University of excellence while inaugurating the university itself.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Nagpur riots: A symptom of deeper issues

Madam — This is in response to the news report titled "Riots sets Nagpur ablaze" (March 19). Perhaps Nagpur forms the latest specimen reflecting the "spirit" and "unity" of "Rising India"! On the one hand environment will get shattered on the zealous shout of "vikas", on the other the society would be continuously dragged towards the past (history/epic/mythology) spanning several centuries with stories getting webbed one after another in the name of Ram Krishna Babur Aurangzeb and who not! And wherever their exist even an iota of fact, hatred gets raised without going into the social context of the concerned period (16th-17th century) and also ignoring the ultimate reality that history cannot be rewinded!

What about the Maratha Bargis who used to ransack villages after villages in Bengal in the 18th century killing innocent helpless unarmed persons and looting resources! Do the "nationalists", seething in "anger" in Maharashtra and baying for the interred bones of the "outsider" Mughal emperor (passing away more than 300 years ago), have any answer to such plunder of Bengal and Bengalis by the "insider" Maratha Bargis!

It will be better if the sleeping dogs are allowed to lie, else lot of skeletons are bound to tumble out from the cupboard of "nationalists" hailing from "proud" Hindutva vintage!

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

BAIL, NOT JAIL: SUPREME COURT MOOTS FOR REASONABLE JUSTICE

Supreme Court (SC) had again exposed its anguish on denial of bail in "not very serious cases despite the completion of probe and further said a democratic country must not function like a police state where law enforcement agencies exercised arbitrary powers to detain individuals without genuine necessity and such type of actions of the police should be brought to the notice of public so that they may be discouraged to follow such undemocratic attitude which downgrade the democratic values of the country.

The SC further said "do not burden top court "bail matters in cases triable by magistrates are being brought before us because people are not getting bail when they should and moreover "It is shocking that the Supreme Court is adjudicating bail pleas in cases that should be disposed of at the trial court level and the system is being burdened unnecessarily "The Supreme Court also noted that two decades ago, bail pleas in smaller cases

rarely reached high courts, let alone the SC.

And it is unfortunate that bail matters in cases triable by magistrates are being brought before the Supreme Court and we are sorry to say that litigants are approaching the highest court whereas such cases should have been easily disposed of at the lower level and also said that granting bail to a cheating case accused who remained in custody for more than two years and it shows that natural justice is being denied to an accused.

Here in this case both the trial court and the Gujarat High Court had rejected his bail plea, despite the fact that the chargesheet had already been filed after completion of the probe.

The top court has been repeatedly asking trial courts and high courts to be liberal in granting bail, particularly in not so serious cases.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

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

Mid-level officers: The backbone of India's defence

India's evolving security landscape demands proactive empowerment of mid-level tactical communication and engineering officers. These officers are the operational backbone and technological brain of India's modern military, translating national defence strategies into battlefield readiness

FIRST
Column

India's defence capability and strategic dominance in modern warfare are not solely dependent on high-ranking commanders or frontline soldiers. A critical yet often underappreciated element lies in the mid-level officers, tactical communication specialists, and engineering officers who serve as the vital link between strategic planning and operational execution. Their expertise ensures that India's military maintains technological superiority, robust battlefield communication, and seamless multi-domain operations. This analysis delves into their indispensable contributions across the Army, Navy, and Air Force, emphasising their roles in engineering innovation, cyber and electronic warfare (EW), and actionable policy measures needed to strengthen and empower them.

Mid-level officers-including majors, colonels, wing commanders, group captains, commanders, and technical or engineering specialists-are the core leadership managing battlefield dynamics. They oversee unit command, tactical communications, and the integration of cutting-edge technologies into operations. Despite being pivotal in India's AI-driven, network-centric warfare structure, their contributions are often overshadowed by senior leadership. Recognising and institutionalising their roles is vital to ensuring success in modern combat.

Indian Army

The Corps of Signals, led by mid-level officers, enables real-time, encrypted communication, battlefield networking, and electronic warfare capabilities. Their responsibilities include securing tactical communication during high-intensity and joint operations, integrating EW and cybersecurity measures, and managing communication networks within Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). The organisational structure comprises signal companies led by majors and signal regiments commanded by Colonels, with specialised trades such as Operator Radio and Line (ORL) and Technician Electronics and Systems (TES). Engineering officers play a crucial role in combat engineering, rapid construction of strategic infrastructure, and executing counter-mobility tactics. They deploy AI-based Battlefield Surveillance Systems (BSS) and robotics to enhance warfare efficiency. A notable example is the India-China standoff (2020-21), where Signals Officers maintained encrypted communications in high-altitude conflict zones while engineering officers constructed operational infrastructure like bridges and logistics hubs under extreme conditions.

Indian Air Force

The communication engineers of the Indian Air Force (IAF) are integral to maintaining a state-of-the-art, in-house communication network. These skilled



professionals ensure seamless, secure, and resilient connectivity by leveraging advanced technologies such as Software-Defined Networking (SDN) and 5G. Their expertise supports real-time situational awareness, mission-critical data exchange, and robust cybersecurity, enabling uninterrupted operations in high-intensity scenarios. By continuously adapting to evolving technologies and threats, IAF communication engineers strengthen air defence operations, enhance operational readiness, and uphold national security while setting new standards in military-grade communication technology.

Mid-level IAF communication officers ensure uninterrupted and secure communication for air defence and combat operations. They manage Air Defence Control Units (including S-400, Akash, and SPYDER systems), UAV and satellite networks, and cyber defences for air assets.

IAF engineers specialising in Aeronautical, Electronics, and Mechanical fields oversee aircraft readiness, system maintenance, and the integration of missile systems, radars, and EW platforms. Their expertise has been crucial in indigenous system development, such as the LCA Tejas and AMCA. During the Balakot Airstrike (2019), Communication Officers ensured real-time,

THE COMMUNICATION ENGINEERS OF THE INDIAN AIR FORCE (IAF) ARE INTEGRAL TO MAINTAINING A STATE-OF-THE-ART, IN-HOUSE COMMUNICATION NETWORK. THESE SKILLED PROFESSIONALS ENSURE SEAMLESS, SECURE, AND RESILIENT CONNECTIVITY BY LEVERAGING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES SUCH AS SOFTWARE-DEFINED NETWORKING (SDN) AND 5G

encrypted communication for operational secrecy, while engineers guaranteed the operational

readiness of Mirage-2000 aircraft, including EW systems and radar evasion measures.

IAF vs Chinese PLAAF mid-level officers

A comparison between India's IAF and China's PLAAF reveals key operational differences. Indian mid-level officers, including Squadron Leaders and Wing Commanders, are empowered for independent decision-making and multi-platform management. In contrast, Chinese officers operate under a centralised command model, limiting battlefield initiative. Reports from RAND Corporation and the Pentagon (2020-22) highlight that PLAAF officers face systemic challenges in joint operations and adaptive warfare. In contrast, Indian officers, seasoned through real combat experiences, lead the integration of advanced indigenous and Western technologies, whereas PLAAF officers primarily operate evolving domestic platforms with less proven combat capability.

Indian Navy

Naval communication officers manage secure ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication, Blue Water Communication Systems (BWCS) for long-range coordination, and encrypted submarine and stealth platform communications.

Naval engineers oversee the maintenance and readiness of warships, submarines, and aircraft

carriers. They also integrate sophisticated weapons such as BrahMos missiles and torpedoes while managing stealth and radar-evading systems. A case in point is the anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, where communication officers coordinated multi-national, encrypted communication while engineers maintained operational readiness of naval platforms throughout extended deployments.

Mid-level officers play a pivotal role in coordinating tri-service communication and operational integration, ensuring seamless joint missions across land, air, and sea. Mid-level officers are at the front-line of cyber and EW defence.

Communication officers ensure robust cybersecurity frameworks, while engineers lead the design and operation of AI-based EW platforms and cyber-resilient technologies. These officers spearhead the induction and field application of indigenous defence systems like BrahMos, Akash, and AI-driven surveillance. They work closely with DRDO, BEL, and private defence innovators to enhance technological self-reliance.

Empowering India's defence backbone

To strengthen mid-level officers, the government should implement AI, Cyber, EW, and space warfare training, conduct integrated tactical communication-engineering exercises, and facilitate global exposure through collaborations with allies like the US, France, and Israel.

National awards should be introduced to recognise excellence in tactical communications and engineering. Defence technology fellowships should be launched for innovation leaders in these domains. Mid-level officers should have representation in defence technology boards and policy-making bodies to ensure that operational insights shape defence strategies. Promotions should be fast-tracked for excellence in emerging tech domains like EW, AI, and Cyber.

Additionally, foreign exchange programs and specialised leadership incentives should be introduced. Collaboration with DRDO, clean startups, and established industries should be strengthened. Mid-level officers should play an active role in innovation ecosystems like iDEX to foster indigenous technological advancements.

Conclusion

India's evolving security landscape demands proactive empowerment of mid-level Tactical Communication and Engineering Officers. These officers are the operational backbone and technological brain of India's modern military, translating national defence strategies into battlefield readiness.

(The writer is an eminent expert in counter-terrorism and national security and a defence advisor to several Middle Eastern and West Asian countries. Views expressed are personal)



NISHAKANT OJHA

India's green growth: Balancing carbon sequestration with development

As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, tree plantation and carbon sequestration have emerged as indispensable tools in promoting environmental sustainability.

For India, an emerging global economy with a significant reliance on carbon-intensive industries, transitioning to greener practices is not just an option-it is an imperative.

India's current forest and tree cover stands at 25.17 per cent, falling significantly short of the 33 per cent target set by the National Forest Policy of 1988. Bridging this gap is essential to counter the effects of deforestation, urban expansion, and surging greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Tree plantations serve as natural carbon sinks, capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide, which is crucial in mitigating the impacts of global warming.

Recent initiatives, including the National Agroforestry Policy of 2014 and the Trees Outside Forests in India (TOFI) program, have sought to encourage private landowners, farmers, and industries to actively participate in plantation activities.

These efforts aim to reduce dependency on natural forests, address ecological degradation, and create employment opportunities in rural areas. By integrating agroforestry with tree-based enterprises, India can ensure that environmental restoration goes hand in hand with sustainable livelihoods.

Global pressure on Indian industries

Indian industries are increasingly feeling the heat of stringent global carbon footprint regulations. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), set to take effect in 2026, will impose tariffs on carbon-intensive imports such as steel, cement, and chemicals. In 2023, trade between India and the EU reached €124 Billion, making the potential impact of these tariffs on Indian exports substantial.

To adapt, industries are looking toward carbon-offset projects, including large-scale tree plantations, as a viable solution. Investments in such initiatives not only help companies align with international sustainability benchmarks but also provide opportunities to secure carbon credits under globally recognised schemes like the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) or the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). These credits can offset industrial emissions, enabling businesses to comply with international regulations while maintaining their competitiveness.

Economic and social advantages

Beyond their environmental benefits, tree plantations significantly contribute to

economic and social development. Agroforestry, in particular, creates opportunities for farmers and marginalised communities by offering income from multipurpose tree species that yield both ecological and economic returns. This dual approach addresses rural poverty while promoting environmental restoration.

Active community participation in plantation projects enhances their success and sustainability. Involving local stakeholders fosters a sense of ownership and ensures long-term viability. Training and capacity-building initiatives further empower communities with the knowledge and skills required to manage these projects effectively.

While tree plantations offer a promising path forward, several challenges remain. The rising cost of carbon credits poses a significant financial obstacle for industries. For instance, in 2023, carbon credit prices under the European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) averaged €83 per tonne of carbon dioxide, with projections suggesting a rise to \$238 per tonne by 2050. For Indian businesses, investing in tree plantations presents a more cost-effective alternative to purchasing expensive credits from international markets.

India also needs a robust and transparent carbon trading policy to engage in global carbon markets effectively. Under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, countries can trade carbon credits to meet their emission reduction goals. Establishing credible policies and governance mechanisms is critical for India to attract international investments and solidify its position in these markets.

Toward sustainable development

Strategic partnerships and innovative project designs offer a way to tackle the dual challenges of environmental degradation and industrial sustainability.

Collaborations between industries, government agencies, and local communities can lead to scalable plantation models that integrate agroforestry, address climate change, and enhance rural livelihoods.

As India strives to achieve its net-zero emissions target by 2050, tree plantation and carbon sequestration will play pivotal roles in bridging the gap between policy objectives and on-ground realities. These initiatives align economic growth with environmental stewardship, offering a roadmap for a greener future.

Tree plantations are no longer an optional

solution but a necessity in combating climate change. They provide a scalable and impactful strategy to reduce carbon footprints while improving rural livelihoods. With tightening global regulations and the rising costs of inaction, Indian industries must embrace sustainable practices and invest in carbon offset projects.

By prioritising tree plantation and carbon sequestration, India can balance its industrial growth with ecological preservation, paving the way for a sustainable future that benefits both the economy and the environment. Integrating these initiatives into national policies and industry strategies will ensure that India remains a key player in the global fight against climate change.

Conclusion

India stands at a crucial juncture where economic growth and environmental responsibility must go hand in hand.

Tree plantations and carbon sequestration offer a viable path to achieving sustainability while ensuring industrial competitiveness in a carbon-conscious global market. The nation's commitment to expanding forest cover, promoting agroforestry, and engaging in carbon trading mechanisms will determine its success in mitigating climate change and meeting international sustainability benchmarks.

Strategic investments in large-scale afforestation projects and partnerships between industries, policymakers, and local communities are essential for achieving meaningful progress. These initiatives not only enhance carbon capture but also create economic opportunities, particularly for rural populations.

By integrating tree-based enterprises into national development strategies, India can harness the economic potential of sustainability while addressing pressing ecological concerns. As global climate regulations become increasingly stringent, Indian industries must proactively invest in carbon offset initiatives, including afforestation and reforestation programs.

Establishing a transparent and efficient carbon trading policy will further strengthen India's position in international markets.

The road ahead requires a multi-faceted approach that aligns industrial growth with environmental stewardship. By prioritising tree plantation and carbon sequestration, India can strike a balance between economic development and ecological preservation, ensuring a sustainable and resilient future for generations to come.

(The writer is chairman Foundation for Organisational Research and Education (FORE) and FORE School of Management and former Chairman and Managing Director, MMTT Ltd. Views expressed are personal)

The confidence crisis holding back a talented team

The South African cricket team, is blessed with expansive talent and are successful champions in the various formats of the game. However, for impenetrable reasons they are unable to deliver something startling during the ICC tournaments.

Why does this happen? Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican entrepreneur and politician wrote, "If you have no confidence in self, you are twice defeated in the race of life."

Many years ago, in the Meiji era lived a wrestler known as the Great Waves, who possessed the uncanny ability to defeat even his teacher. However, in official tournaments, he was vanquished by opponents much inferior, which sullied his estimable reputation following every bout. There appeared to be a psychological problem.

To circumvent this unenviable state, he approached a Zen Master. The Master directed his new tutee to meditate in a Buddhist temple that night, which was located on the seashore and guided him to focus only on his breath and swallow even the greatest of waves that would arise from the depths of the sea. As night fell, there were high tides in the sea and the waves assumed gargantuan proportions and subsumed everything in its trajectory. Even the reclining Buddha was not spared and was inundated by the spectre that followed the path of the tidal waves. The waves had run amok, obliterating every object in the way.

But Great Waves, following the instructions of the Master, focused his attention on his breath and meditated passionately and with total concentration.

The next morning the Zen Master was a witness to both the destruction as well as the poise maintained by his stolid student. He merely said, "Upon conquering your wavering mind, be confident of sustained success in all the wrestling engagements and bouts."

To be confident, individuals, entrepreneurs, corporates, spiritual seekers, political leaders and parties, sportspersons and teams all need to metamorphose their thinking patterns from, "It is not possible," to a mental state of confidence that "It is very much within the realm of possibility."

The bedrock of success follows a pattern which is based on optimism, self-belief and self-motivation, leading to confidence. Talent and endurance alone are not adequate to ensure confidence and unalloyed successes. It is quite possible that these could be mere flashes in the pan. It is exigent upon an individual or an organisation to harness the trait of self-belief and self-confidence.

Paradoxically, while hard work alone does not boost confidence levels, it is impinging upon an individual not to resort to shortcuts, as deep within it leads to an inferiority complex and the person would not be technically sound to adapt or to take up chal-

lenges.

The 3 Cs — Confidence, Credence and Conviction in a leader develops the personality to enhance latent potential, and to view muddled-up situations holistically.

Negative emotions like guilt, skepticism, being over critical of self and colleagues, self-pity, shame, lack of humility, idolising individuals without any concrete results, extreme laziness, a depressed state of mind, team members not trusting one another or excessive pride act as impediments in the progress of an individual or an organisation, consequently reducing the levels of confidence and achievement.

Buddha's prescription for such indolent individuals is to meditate on the purification of the mind, meditate on the impermanent nature of existence, meditate on the vast emptiness that surrounds us and simultaneously vow to develop self-esteem.

It is universally agreed by sages, philosophers and psychologists that life is full of vicissitudes and filled with challenges. Optimism and self-confidence can be developed by practising breathing techniques like Sudarshan Kriya, practising pranayama, meditating and observing the self.

Conclusion

The South African cricket team's struggles in ICC tournaments may not stem from a lack of talent but from the absence of unwavering confidence. Just as Great Waves, the wrestler, needed to conquer his mind before achieving victory, teams and individuals must cultivate a deep-seated belief in their abilities. Confidence is not merely a byproduct of skill or endurance but a mental state shaped by optimism, self-motivation, and conviction. The 3 Cs—Confidence, Credence, and Conviction—enable leaders, athletes, and organisations to navigate challenges with clarity. Negative emotions like self-doubt, excessive pride, and lack of trust within a team can erode confidence, stalling success. Buddha's wisdom encourages individuals to purify the mind, embrace impermanence, and cultivate self-esteem.

For the South African team to break their ICC tournament jinx, they must transform their mindset from doubt to certainty, from hesitation to resilience. Meditation, breathing techniques, and self-awareness can help instill the mental fortitude needed to thrive under pressure. True champions are not just skilled but also possess unshakable confidence. With the right psychological approach, South Africa can harness its immense potential and turn promise into triumph on the world stage.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Hyundai, Honda to hike vehicle prices from April

Hyundai Motor India and Honda Cars India on Wednesday joined the list of automakers planning to hike prices of vehicles from April, second time this year, to partially offset the impact of rising input costs and higher operational expenses. In a statement Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said it will hike prices of its vehicles by up to 3 per cent effective in April 2025. The quantum of price increase will vary based on the variants and models. The price increase is due to rising input costs, increased commodity prices and higher operational expenses, amongst other reasons, it added. "At Hyundai Motor India Ltd, we strive to absorb rising costs to the extent possible, ensuring minimal impact on our customers. However, with the sustained increase in operational expenses, it has now become imperative to pass on a part of this cost escalation through a minor price adjustment," HMIL Whole-time Director and Chief Operating Officer Tarun Garg said. The price increase will be effective in April 2025, he said, adding, "We remain committed to making consistent internal efforts to minimise any future impact on our valued customers."



In a first, Coal India monetises Dugda Coal Washery

The Dugda Coal Washery of Coal India Ltd (CIL) has become the first project of its kind to complete the monetisation process, an official statement said on Wednesday. The coal washery, with a capacity of 2 million tonnes (MT), is located at Bokaro in Jharkhand, the Ministry of Coal said in a statement. Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), a CIL subsidiary, has achieved a historic milestone by successfully monetising the Dugda Coal Washery. "This first-ever monetisation of a coal washery in India marks a transformative step in coal sector reforms, reinforcing the country's commitment to enhancing efficiency, asset optimisation, and energy security," the ministry said. On the importance of monetisation, the statement said the ministry will optimise underutilised assets and encourage private participation. Besides, the initiative will enhance coal beneficiation and help in revenue generation. The successful auction of BCCL's Dugda Coal Washery represents a significant shift towards a more dynamic and efficient coal sector, aligning with the government's policy of asset monetisation.



Wipro, Tech Mahindra, L&T Tech partner with Nvidia

IT services firms Wipro, TechMahindra, and L&T Technology on Wednesday announced individual partnerships with chipmaking giant Nvidia for AI-based solutions for various industries. These software firms are showcasing the solutions leveraging Nvidia technologies at the US-based chip major's ongoing annual GPU Technology Conference (GTC) in California. Tech Mahindra has unveiled an autonomous pharmacovigilance (PV) solution powered by Nvidia AI software to enhance drug safety management. By leveraging agentic AI and automation, the solution improves the speed, accuracy, and efficiency of PV processes, addressing challenges like manual delays and data overload. It integrates Nvidia AI Enterprise tools, including NeMo, NIM microservices, and AI Blueprints, to optimise case intake, data transformation, quality control, and compliance.

India's structural strengths provide strong foundation for growth: RBI

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sound fiscal policies, a well-calibrated monetary framework, and digital transformation initiatives are expected to provide a strong foundation for long-term sustainable economic growth, said RBI March Bulletin released on Wednesday.

It also said that macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong, and economic growth is poised to sustain momentum driven by robust domestic demand, steady investment activity, and ongoing policy-driven infrastructure development along with a pick-up in government spending.

An article on 'State of the Economy' published in the Bulletin noted that the resilience of the global economy is being tested by escalating trade tensions and a heightened wave of uncertainty around the scope, timing, and intensity of tariffs.

While engendering heightened volatility in global financial markets, these have also caused apprehensions about the slowdown in global growth.

"Amidst these challenges, the Indian economy continues to demonstrate resilience as evident in the robust performance of the agriculture sector and improving consumption," the article said.

The reverberations of a tumultuous external environment, however, are being

reflected in sustained foreign portfolio outflows, it added.

The article further said high frequency indicators suggest that aggregate demand continued to remain resilient in Q4:2024-25.

"Activity indicators such as E-way bills and toll collections recorded double digit (y-o-y) growth in February 2025," it said.

Also high frequency food price data for March so far (up to 17th) show an increase in cereal prices, both for rice and wheat. Edible oil prices have firmed up as well - mainly driven by palm, soybean and sunflower oil. Pulses prices, on the other hand, continued to show broad-based moderation.

Prices of key vegetables including potato, onion and tomato witnessed further correction.

According to the article, India's financial landscape is also navigating these external risks manifested through various channels while addressing domestic funding needs.

"The Reserve Bank has remained agile, swiftly tackling liquidity shortages triggered by government tax flow dynamics, currency leakages and foreign portfolio investor (FPI) outflows," it said.

The RBI has deployed a strategic mix of interventions, including open market operations (OMO), daily variable rate repo (VRR) auctions, and dollar/rupee buy-sell swap auctions.

RBI to UCBs: Remain operationally resilient

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday asked urban cooperative banks to remain operationally resilient against IT and cyber-related risks.

The Governor held a meeting here with the chairmen, managing director and chief executive officers of select Urban Cooperative Banks (UCBs) across all tiers operating in different parts of the country.

In his opening remarks, the Governor acknowledged the important role of UCBs in serving the people at the grassroots level and deepening financial inclusion, RBI said in a release.

Malhotra stated that the Reserve Bank will continue to support the sector in its growth ambitions and emphasised that UCBs also need to be mindful of their responsibilities, particularly in view of the trust reposed on them by the depositors.

"He stressed the importance of maintaining high standards of customer service to build and retain trust. UCBs were also advised to ensure that they remain operationally resilient including against



IT and cyber-related risks," RBI said.

The participants shared their feedback and gave various suggestions during the interactive session of the meeting.

The representatives from industry bodies -- National Urban Cooperative Finance and Development Corporation Limited (NUCFDC) and National Federation of Urban Cooperative Banks & Credit Societies Limited (NAFCUB) also participated in the meeting.

Govt enhances outlays to Rs 6,190 cr to boost milk production

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday enhanced outlays to Rs 6,190 crore for two schemes aimed at increasing milk production.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed that the Union Cabinet has approved the revised Rashtriya Gokul Mission (RGM) and National Program for Dairy Development (NPDD).

Both the schemes, which seek to enhance milk production and raise farmers' income, will now have a total outlay of Rs 6,190 crore.

Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the revised RGM to boost growth in livestock sector, the minister said.

Implementation of revised RGM, as central sector component of development programmes scheme, is being done with an additional outlay of Rs 1,000 crore, taking the total

Rs 3,400 crore during 15th Finance Commission cycle from 2021-22 to 2025-26.

The revised NPDD, a central sector scheme, has been enhanced with an additional allocation of Rs 1,000 crore, bringing the total budget to Rs 2,790 crore for the period of the 15th Finance Commission cycle (2021-22 to 2025-26).

The initiative focuses on modernising and expanding dairy infrastructure, ensuring the sector's sustained growth and productivity.

With the implementation of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and other efforts of the government, milk production has increased by 63.55 per cent in the last ten years, an official release said. Also, the availability of milk per person, which was 307 grams per day in 2013-14, has increased to 471 grams per day in 2023-24. Productivity has also increased by 26.34 per cent in the last ten years, it added.



MKTS TAKE RALLY TO 3RD DAY

Investors' wealth soars Rs 13.82 lakh cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth surged Rs 13.82 lakh crore in three days of market rally after last week's correction faced by benchmark indices.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.79 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 75,449.05.

In three days, the BSE benchmark gauge has jumped 1,620.14 points or 2.19 per cent.

Tracking firm trends in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms soared Rs 13,82,485.7 crore to Rs 4,05,00,918.63 crore (USD 4.68 trillion). After almost a month, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms regained the Rs 400 lakh crore-mark.

"Benchmark indices posted gains for the third straight session on Wednesday, in continued relief rally so far this week. Broader mid and small-caps outperformed posting sharp gains for the session," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said. Bargain buying and hopes of



a rebound lifted sentiment, while foreign investors turned net buyers on Tuesday, easing recent sell-off pressure, he said.

"Focus now shifts to the Federal Reserve's policy decision, with rates expected to remain unchanged but investors will be keen to parse through updated economic projections for clues on rate cut path and to gauge central bank thinking on tariff impact," Aluri added.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Zomato, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, IndusInd Bank, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, NTPC, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries

were among the major gainers.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC, Infosys, HCL Tech, Sun Pharma, Maruti and Nestle were among the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge jumped 2.28 per cent and smallcap index climbed 2.17 per cent.

Among the BSE sectoral indices, realty surged 2.75 per cent, industrials (2.55 per cent), services (2.48 per cent), power (2.30 per cent), utilities (2.16 per cent), telecommunication (1.48 per cent) and commodities (1.44 per cent). BSE Focused IT, IT, tech and FMCG were the laggards.

As many as 3,018 stocks advanced while 1,033 declined and 115 remained unchanged on the BSE.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Tuesday as they bought equities worth Rs 694.57 crore, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DII) also bought equities worth Rs 2,534.75 crore.

Gold rallies Rs 700 to hit fresh record high of Rs 91,950/10g

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices advanced Rs 700 to reach a new lifetime high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday on the back of continued buying by jewellers ahead of wedding season, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Besides, increased tensions in the Middle East and concerns about the US economic slowdown have kept the demand for safe-haven assets intact.

The precious metal prices of 99.9 per cent purity soared by Rs 700 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams. It had concluded at Rs 91,250 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Gold prices of 99.5 per cent purity also rallied by Rs 700 to hit a record high of Rs 91,500 per 10 grams.

Traders said increased buying by local jewellers to meet festive and wedding season demand and a firm trend in the overseas markets mainly

lifted gold prices to this year's highest level.

In futures trade, gold futures for April delivery rose by Rs 19 to Rs 88,745 per 10 grams. In the morning trade, it climbed Rs 288 to breach the psychological level of Rs 89,000 per 10 grams.



"Gold prices maintained an overall upward trend but remained range-bound ahead of the highly anticipated Fed policy and statement tonight," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold rose 0.15 per cent to USD 3,039.22 per ounce. During the session, it hit a record high of USD 3,045.39 per ounce.

6 pc of country's GDP should be spent on education: CII

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Leading industry body CII on Wednesday said that six per cent of the country's GDP should be spent on the education sector.

CII president Sanjiv Puri said that India's projected 6.5 per cent growth rate is a reasonable expectation.

As a major hub for global capability centres (GCC), India is well positioned to drive growth, Puri said at an event here.

"Six per cent of the national GDP should be spent on the education sector," Puri, also ITC chairman and managing director, said.

He said there is a need for free trade agreements (FTAs) and streamlining tariff structures.

"The FTA with the EU holds significant importance for India and more such agreements with other countries are expected to be in place soon," Puri said.

Cabinet approves Rs 1,500 crore to incentivise low-value UPI transactions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an incentives scheme worth approximately Rs 1,500 crore to promote UPI transactions below Rs 2,000 for 2024-25, an official statement said.

Under the scheme, the government will bear MDR (Merchant Discount Rate) expense for payment of less than Rs 2,000 made by a person to a merchant.

"The Union Cabinet chaired



by Prime Minister Narendra Modi today approved the 'Incentive Scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions Person to

Merchant (P2M)' for the financial year 2024-25," the statement said.

The incentive scheme for the promotion of low-value

BHIM-UPI transactions (P2M) will be implemented at an estimated outlay of 1,500 crore from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025.

Only the UPI (P2M) transactions of up to Rs 2,000 for small merchants are covered under the scheme.

"Incentive at the rate of 0.15 per cent per transaction value will be provided for transactions up to Rs 2,000 pertaining to the category of small merchants," the statement said.

Agri ministry to support proposals related to organic and natural farming

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Agriculture on Wednesday said it will support all proposals related to the promotion of organic and natural farming.

A two-day National Seminar cum Exhibition on Organic Farming was organized by the National Centre for Organic & Natural Farming (NCONF), Ghaziabad, on March 18-19, according to an official statement.

The programme and exhibition were inaugurated by K M S Khalsa, Director (Finance), Union Ministry of Agriculture along with Gagnesh Sharma, Director of NCONF and A K Yadav, Advisor, Ministry of Agriculture.

Khalsa emphasized the significance of organic farming and its growing importance in today's world.

He assured support for the promotion and implementation of proposals related to organic and natural farming will be considered on priority.

Gagnesh Sharma outlined the current status and achievements of NCONF in the domain of Organic and Natural

Farming. He discussed the importance of certification, and organic input quality management, and highlighted the potential opportunities for marketing organic and natural products to help boost the income of farmers.

Yadav shared insights on the status of organic farming in India and motivated farmers and stakeholders to participate

in the production and processing of organic produce for both domestic and international markets.

Padmashree Dr Bharat Bhushan Tyagi spoke about the

promotion of organic farming at the village as a cluster based approach. He emphasized moving beyond a cluster-based approach to improve the adaptability of organic farming and bring more land under organic certification.

Gopal Bhai Sutariya from Bansri Gir Gaushala, Ahmedabad, spoke about the importance of cow-based natural farming and its potential. He introduced the "Gaukripa Krishi" model, explaining how farmers can adopt natural and organic farming practices.

GCCs expect 9.8 pc salary growth in next 12 months

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Global capability centres (GCCs) in the country are poised for 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months, as organisations adapt to evolving talent demands and navigate macroeconomic challenges, a report said on Wednesday.

In India, GCCs are seen as the top payers, outpacing traditional IT services in pay parity and growth, and are expected to give 9.8 per cent salary growth over the next 12 months, 'India's Talent Takeoff - The GCC 4.0 Story' report by

digital talent solutions provider NLB Services said.

"With India hosting over 55 per cent of the world's GCCs and projected to reach a market size of USD 110 billion by 2030, these centres have become critical nodes for organisations seeking agility, cost efficiency, and access to a vast talent pool. This growth trajectory is now translating into significant salary increases for employees, especially for specialised skills which are commanding higher premiums than ever before," NLB Services CEO Sachin Alug said.



However, he said, despite this strong momentum, gender-based disparities still require attention, with women earning approximately 75-85 per cent of male salaries on

average, a gap which further widens at senior positions, reflecting the limited representation in leadership roles.

with roles like Risk Analysts, Compliance Associates, Senior Risk Managers, FRM Leads, Heads of Compliance, and Global Finance Directors, commanding salaries in the range of over Rs 6-90 LPA. Specialised skills in Risk and FRM are also yielding a 25-40 per cent salary premium over traditional roles, underscoring the sector's focus on talent retention and leadership. Demand for finance domain expertise is also expanding beyond core sectors, creating new opportunities," he added.

The 'India's Talent Takeoff - The GCC 4.0 Story' report is based on insights from 207 GCC decision-makers across six major cities and spanning 10 diverse sectors.

The report further revealed that GCCs are seen as top payers in Hyderabad (19 per cent) and Mumbai (19 per cent), especially in IT Software and Consulting (22 per cent) and Banking/Financial Services (18 per cent).

Meanwhile, Delhi/NCR (21 per cent) and Bengaluru (24 per cent) showed strong salary competitiveness, with notable parity in Telecom and Internet Services (12 per cent), it stated.

'GHOOMER IS NOT JUST A FILM, IT'S AN EMOTION'

The Embassy of India in Tashkent hosted a grand Film Festival in celebration of International Women's Day, spotlighting powerful women-centric films that inspire and shape societal perspectives. Among the distinguished lineup, R. Balki's *Ghoomer*, starring Saiyami Kher and Abhishek Bachchan, received a special screening—further cementing its impact on global audiences. Saiyami Kher, who delivered a compelling performance as a determined, differently-abled sportsperson in *Ghoomer*, attended the festival to witness the film's international recognition firsthand. Speaking about the occasion, she shared, "*Ghoomer* is not just a film for

me; it's an emotion. Playing a character who defies all odds to chase her dreams was a transformative journey. Seeing the film continue to resonate with audiences, even a year and a half after its release, is truly special!" The actress also reflected on her experience in Uzbekistan, where Indian cinema holds a special place in people's hearts. "The love for Indian films here is incredible. This festival is not just about screenings—it's about celebrating storytelling that empowers and inspires," she added. With *Ghoomer* continuing to make waves internationally, its inclusion at the Uzbekistan Film Festival highlights the film's enduring relevance and impact. The event not only brought together film enthusiasts and industry professionals but also strengthened cultural ties between India and Uzbekistan, underscoring the power of cinema in championing women's stories.

When Hrithik Roshan 'locked himself in bathroom' just to say 'Thankyou Dubai'

Veteran filmmaker Rakesh Roshan opened up about his son, actor Hrithik Roshan's struggle with stammering and the immense effort he put into overcoming it. In an interview with ANI, Rakesh shared an emotional incident from Hrithik's past, recalling how the actor once struggled to say a simple phrase on stage and even locked himself in the bathroom to practice.

Recalling a particular incident in Dubai, Rakesh Roshan said, "He wanted to say 'thank you, Dubai,' but he got stuck on the word 'D'. He locked himself in the bathroom just to

practice saying those two words. It was heartbreaking to see him struggle when he had so much intelligence and knowledge to share with the world." Despite these challenges, Hrithik worked relentlessly to overcome his speech impediment. His father revealed that he dedicated hours every day to improving his speech, reading newspapers in multiple languages—English, Hindi, and even Urdu.

"He worked so hard on it. Every morning, he would read for an hour to train himself. And today, for the last 12 to 14 years, he doesn't stutter anymore," Rakesh proudly stated.

Hrithik has previously spoken about his stammering struggles, recalling the difficulties he faced in school and how it affected his confidence. His journey of perseverance has inspired many, proving that with determination, even the toughest battles can be won.



Injection brings Nikki Tamboli to Punjabi cinema and she's thrilled!

Actress and former *Bigg Boss 14* contestant Nikki Tamboli has ventured into the Punjabi entertainment industry with her latest track, *Injection*. The song, performed by the renowned Sunidhi Chauhan, is part of the recently released romantic drama *Badnaam*, which hit the screens in February.

Talking about her excitement over this new milestone, Nikki shared, "I'm absolutely thrilled to make my debut in the Punjabi industry and be a part of *Badnaam*! *Injection* is a song that will make you want to get up and dance and I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work with such an amazing team."

The film *Badnaam* features Jayy Randhawa, Jasmine Bhasin and Mukesh Rishi in pivotal roles and has been receiving positive attention for its engaging storyline and foot-tapping soundtrack. Nikki's energetic performance in *Injection* adds a vibrant touch to the film's music, making it a must-listen for Punjabi music lovers.

Nikki Tamboli first gained recognition as a model before transitioning into films. She made her acting debut in 2019 with the Telugu horror-comedy *Chikati Gadilo Chithakotudu*. She later appeared in the Tamil action-horror hit *Kanchana 3* as Divya and followed it up with a role in the Telugu film *Thipparaa Meesam*.



ANURAG KASHYAP SLAMS NETFLIX INDIA, CALLS OUT 'HYPOCRISY' IN CONTENT SELECTION

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has openly criticized Netflix India, accusing the streaming giant's top executives of hypocrisy when it comes to approving content for the Indian audience. In a strongly worded Instagram post, Kashyap expressed his frustration after watching the British Netflix drama *Adolescence*, which he praised for its daring storytelling and compelling performances.

Sharing his thoughts on Instagram, Kashyap described *Adolescence* as a groundbreaking show that left him feeling "numb, envious, and jealous." He particularly praised child actor Owen Cooper and co-creator Stephen Graham, who also plays the father in the series.

"The amount of hard work that has gone into this show is unbelievable. I can't even imagine the rehearsals and prep they did to be able to shoot every episode in a single shot," he wrote.

In a follow-up comment, Kashyap directly called out Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos and Chief Content Officer Bela Bajaria, accusing them of double standards. He pointed out how Netflix globally supports bold and boundary-pushing content while its Indian division allegedly operates with extreme caution and creative restrictions.

"Ted Sarandos posted about how some shows push creative limits and feature career-defining performances. I hope he means it because Netflix India is doing the exact opposite. If *Adolescence* had been pitched here, they would have either rejected it outright or forced it into a 90-minute film—if at all, considering it doesn't have a clear black-and-white ending." Reflecting on his own experience, Kashyap revealed the challenges he faced while working with Netflix post-*Sacred Games*. He accused the streaming platform's Indian team of lacking vision, courage and empathy, claiming that their leadership keeps changing due to frequent firings.

"Having gone through the process twice after *Sacred Games*, I've dealt with a total lack of empathy, immense insecurity and sheer dumbness from the series head and the team. It's frustrating! How do we create something powerful and honest when Netflix India is run by the most dishonest and morally corrupt people, backed so strongly by the bosses in LA?" he wrote.

Sharad Kelkar calls voicing Raavan in The Legend of Hanuman a 'Deeply Personal Journey' as season 4 announced

On the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, the makers of *The Legend of Hanuman* officially announced the arrival of its fourth season, much to the excitement of fans. The animated series, which has captivated audiences with its retelling of mythological tales, continues to expand its narrative with new dimensions of storytelling. Actor Sharad Kelkar, who voices the formidable Raavan in the series, shared

that his journey with the character has been an enriching and personal experience. Speaking about his role, Kelkar said, "Voicing the demon king, Raavan, in the new season of *The Legend of Hanuman* has been a deeply personal journey for me. The show is based on legendary lore, and through this, I have discovered many-layered stories myself, which kept me hooked to know more."

The actor also expressed gratitude for the immense support from the audience, which has been instrumental in the show's success. "I believe our audiences felt the same way as they've shown constant support to us. I cannot wait for the audiences to be entertained by the greatness of animation yet again with the new season of *The Legend of Hanuman* on Disney+ Hotstar," he added.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



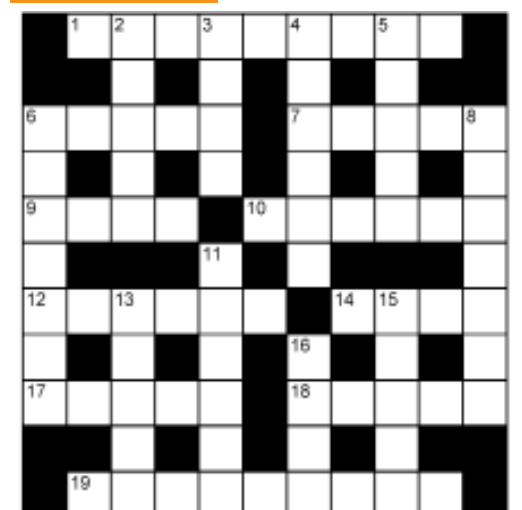
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



SUDOKU

1		3	9	6				
2		7					5	
	9		2					
8	7	2						
3	1					4	6	
							2	8
			1				3	
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Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- Hair on the upper lip
- Fortunate
- Boggy land
- A rower pulls these
- Cold region around the North Pole
- Quantity
- Wicked
- Used a car
- Helped
- A holder for mail
- A large spotted wild cat
- Preserved in vinegar
- Six-legged creature
- A gas layer high above the Earth
- TV recorder
- Two matching items

DOWN

- An American film award
- Speaks out loud
- Ridiculous
- A body organ



Making yoga a daily habit, not just revolution



TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

If you've ever scrolled through social media looking for motivation to start yoga, you might have surely come across Saurabh Bothra's videos. Simple yet powerful, his approach isn't about complicated poses or unrealistic fitness goals—it's about showing up every single day. As the founder of Habuild, Bothra has built a movement that makes yoga a habit, not just an occasional resolution. His virtual yoga sessions have brought millions together, even setting a world record for the largest online yoga class. But for him, the real success isn't in breaking records—it's in helping people stay consistent and experience the life-changing benefits of small, daily actions.

From being an IIT-BHU graduate to travelling across India teaching yoga and now leading one of the largest digital wellness communities, Bothra's journey is all about persistence, impact and making ancient wisdom accessible in today's fast-paced world. In this conversation with *The Pioneer*, he opens up about his inspiration, the power of habit-building and why he believes yoga should be as natural as brushing your teeth. Yoga has been a part of Bothra's life since his IIT days. What started as just a few rounds of Surya Namaskar every day turned into a practice that completely transformed his energy and health. Over time, he realised that true fitness wasn't about pushing oneself hard occasionally but about showing up every single day, no matter what.

"Most people set ambitious fitness goals but struggle to stay on track. That's where Habuild makes a difference. We don't just give people knowledge, we help them take real action. By focusing on small, daily habits, we turn wellness into a way of life rather than a temporary goal. When habits are built the right way, results follow naturally," he explains.

In a remarkable achievement, Bothra set a world record for the largest virtual yoga class. However, executing such a large-scale event came with its challenges. From ensuring the technology could handle thousands of participants to coordinating an entire team and keeping the community motivated, it required immense planning and effort. "Pulling off a world record event is not easy but also

not impossible when your intent is clear. Thanks to an amazing team and an even more amazing community, we made it happen! And we're just getting started," he says. As for the next big milestone, Habuild aims to make yoga even more personal and accessible. "There's less to reveal as of now, but safe to say that all our plans lead to the one big goal of bringing yoga into every home," he shares.

In an era of digital distractions and sedentary lifestyles, making an ancient practice like yoga engaging and accessible is a challenge. However, Bothra and his team have embraced technology to bridge the gap. "We live in a fast-paced world where people want convenience, so we designed Habuild to fit into their daily routines. Our approach includes habit tracking to keep users accountable, accountability partners for support, 'One Habit Challenges' to make self-improvement fun, daily WhatsApp nudges for motivation and reward systems to celebrate small wins," he elaborates.

This focus on simplicity and practicality has helped thousands of people stay consistent with yoga for years. At the core of Habuild's philosophy is consistency and discipline. But forming lasting habits, especially in fitness and wellness, requires a fundamental shift in mindset. Bothra believes the key is to start small, track progress, embrace imperfection and focus on the process rather than just the results.

"Even five minutes of movement matters. The key is to begin, no matter how tiny the step. Track your streak—seeing progress builds momentum. Missed a day? That's okay! What matters is getting back on track the next day instead of giving up," he advises.

A mantra he often repeats in Habuild's daily yoga classes is: "Count the

number of yoga days, not the number on your weighing scale." He also emphasises the importance of surrounding oneself with the right people. "A positive, like-minded community keeps you motivated and accountable. Once you shift from chasing 'big results fast' to embracing 'small steps daily,' everything changes. That's how lasting habits are built."

Bothra's transition from IIT-BHU to launching a wellness platform was not as challenging as one might assume because yoga was already an integral part of his life. However, the real challenge lay in convincing others to trust the process.

"When I started teaching yoga online in 2020, my goal was simple: reach 1,000 people. That took 1.5 years. Then it took two years to reach 5,000. After that, growth exploded—10,000, 50,000 and now, nearly 300,000 members in just five years," he recalls. The biggest lesson he learned? "Progress doesn't always feel visible in the moment, but every small step adds up over time."

Before launching Habuild, Bothra travelled across India, teaching yoga. The experience gave him deep insights into people's struggles and aspirations.

"People's struggles may vary, but at the core, everyone seeks balance and health in life. There's no way to reach a big goal and sustain it without habit-building. Small, daily habits may seem insignificant at first, but over time, they create a ripple effect that transforms overall lifestyle," he shares.

He also emphasises the profound connection between mind, body and breath. "When these three elements align, one experiences true inner harmony, reduced stress and better health." While yoga is an ancient practice, Bothra sees technology as a

tool to make it more accessible rather than a distraction. "Technology is often blamed for distractions, but we use it to build healthy habits. The biggest challenge with yoga is accessibility; so we meet people where they are—on WhatsApp. By using WhatsApp for communication, motivation and tracking, we make yoga easy to fit into daily life," he explains.

Additionally, social media plays a crucial role in spreading awareness and inviting more people to try out their programs. "The future of wellness will have more tech-driven solutions, but the key is to use technology to support human connection, not replace it."

Like any entrepreneurial journey, building Habuild came with its share of hurdles. Scaling without losing the personal touch, understanding what people truly need, building and retaining a strong team and keeping up with tech changes were some of the biggest challenges.

"Overcoming these challenges meant constant learning, adapting and staying true to our mission," he says. With increasing awareness around health and wellness, Bothra believes yoga is no longer just an ancient tradition—it is the future of holistic wellness. "It's already booming across the world and it's only going to grow further as more people experience its benefits physically, mentally and emotionally," he notes.

As for Habuild's role in this transformation, he envisions a future where yoga becomes as natural as brushing one's teeth. "To do that, we're focusing on making our offerings more personalised and detailed so they create meaningful and lasting change in people's lives." In his words, "We are in this for the long run. I hold the vision of yoga being a household routine activity, and Habuild is steadily moving towards it."

In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, Saurabh Bothra, founder of Habuild, opens up about his mission to make yoga a daily habit for millions. With a no-fuss, habit-first approach, Bothra is redefining how people connect with yoga—making it simple, accessible and impossible to ignore



BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF 2 MILLION+ PEOPLE

Growing a thriving wellness community requires strong leadership, and Bothra credits a few key strategies:

- Focusing on impact, not selling.
- Keeping things simple—no complicated apps, just easy, WhatsApp-based learning.
- Building a strong community where people feel connected.
- Making it fun with One Habit Challenges that keep members engaged.

"When people feel supported, motivation becomes effortless," he states.

Designing for impact!

PNSHYDERABAD

At the forefront of innovation, where design meets artificial intelligence, stands Keerthana Pareddy, a trailblazing specialist in interaction design and artificial intelligence, who is transforming the IT industry with her inventive works at the cutting edge of innovation, where design and AI collide. Her reputation as a leading interaction designer in the AI space has been cemented by her work being highlighted in prestigious publications and her track record of creating innovative solutions. Her innovative invention, which was featured on "Experiments with Google," allowed disadvantaged youngsters to communicate nonverbally and was recognised by Digital Trends and Fast Company.

In her role as lead designer for a very popular voice assistant, she oversaw the creation of proactive features for it. Her strong resume also includes positions as founding designer of Byju's and at Ford, where she designed futuristic road-sign projection headlights. Her significant influence on the nexus of design, technology and social change is demonstrated by her inventive exhibitions, which have been displayed at the World Maker Faire. She is a highly sought-after expert whose knowledge and ideas are highly valued, making her a go-to source for both tech aficionados and media outlets. So let's use this exclusive interview to learn more about her!

At a time when the discipline is experiencing profound changes, your work crosses the boundaries of AI and interaction design. How do you create AI-powered experiences that aren't robotic?

When AI facilitates cooperative discussions in which users maintain control instead of being passively anticipated, it seems natural. Designing the "seams"—the points at which users comprehend why the system acts in a particular manner—to provide them with just enough information without being overbearing is crucial to this. When assistants like Alexa or Siri recommend a course of action, for instance, they may provide a succinct justification such as "Based on your meeting schedule," which fosters trust and demystifies the reasoning. In voice-based AI, where information must be presented in rhythmically timed, semantically grouped sentences that correspond with how humans perceive auditory information, controlling cognitive load is particularly crucial. Another crucial idea is to empower users while preventing overwhelm by providing them with clear, guided choices.

What moral conundrums do you encounter as a designer when AI gets more and more integrated into our everyday interactions?



The main moral conundrum I encounter as AI gets more and more ingrained in daily life is striking a balance between privacy, autonomy and personalisation. AI can easily influence behavior, but there is a fine line between empowering and controlling individuals. I emphasise openness, allowing consumers to make informed decisions and take charge of their experiences. This entails giving consumers real options rather than just one option, explaining to them why the AI is suggesting particular things and honouring their right to opt in—or out—at any time. By creating AI to serve user goals rather than directing behaviour without users' knowledge, the ultimate goal is to foster trust.

Significant recognition was given to your Experiments with Google project, which allowed impaired children to communicate nonverbally. How has that experience influenced your larger approach to accessible design?

It reaffirmed that accessibility is essential to excellent design and not an add-on. My conviction that inclusive design meaningfully empowers actual people was formed by that experience. It was a moving experience to watch someone use my creation in real life, particularly Ben implementing the Morse project at home. It brought the impact of deliberate design to life. It helped me understand that well-considered, inclusive design can foster true freedom and connection in addition to usefulness and aesthetics. I'm still reminded by that event of the duty and ability we designers have to truly impact people's lives.

As a pioneer in AI-driven design, do you think AI will ever be able to create experiences as intuitively as humans, or will it always be a tool for collaboration? AI, in my opinion, is a potent partner rather than a substitute for human innovation. AI lacks human intuition, which is the empathy, context and lived experience that create meaningful design, even while it is capable of large-scale pattern analysis and idea generation. When we combine human



constraints. Larger companies, on the other hand, have specialised teams that allow designers to concentrate on particular tasks, such as designing and delivering interactions at scale, while also having to worry about upholding consumer confidence. This scale is best demonstrated by voice assistant's notifications system and allows companies like Domino's, CNN, Fox News and Uber Eats to provide 160 million American users with timely updates.

How does your approach to creating AI interactions change depending on the cultural context?

In the end, it comes down to empathy and inclusivity—ensuring that AI is understandable, considerate and useful to everyone, regardless of background. A fundamental aspect of the interaction design process already involves using research to understand users in order to inform design. The data set used to train the models is one aspect of AI that varies. It's critical to be mindful of any biases in the training data that can unintentionally perpetuate stereotypes. To make sure the experience is inclusive, free from bias and appealing to consumers from a variety of backgrounds, this entails creating varied datasets and thoroughly testing AI behavior across ethnic groups.

Do you think there will be a day when interaction design itself will alter as AI advances?

The nature of interface design is already beginning to change as AI advances and becomes more pervasive in daily life and I believe this trend will only pick up speed. Designers are increasingly creating dynamic, conversational experiences that feel more like relationships than tools, rather than just creating interfaces like buttons and screens. This means that we are establishing the AI's personality, tone, actions and even its value system, in addition to how humans interact with it. The guardrails for these systems are also being defined by designers, who are putting down precise guidelines for what AI can and cannot do and making sure that interactions are morally righteous, considerate and consistent with human values. This entails protecting against prejudice and unforeseen effects while designing with transparency, privacy and trust in mind. By influencing both the experience and the guiding principles of responsible AI, we are essentially taking on the role of stewards. Yes, I do envision a time when creating ethical frameworks and emotional intelligence will be just as important to AI design as traditional user experience. The position is growing, and it comes with a lot of responsibility in addition to excitement.

Navigating the housing market in 2025

The years after Covid have seen huge fluctuations and price inflation in the Housing Market. 2025 is going to come with its own nuances, with new opportunities and challenges for homebuyers and investors. With evolving buyer preferences, changing interest rates, dynamic market cycles and emerging micro economies and real estate hotspots, making informed decisions is more crucial than ever.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC CONTEXT: NAVIGATING GEOPOLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

The current global landscape is marked by significant geopolitical tensions, including ongoing trade conflicts and international wars, which are creating ripple effects across international markets. While the US-China trade war and conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war and Gaza crisis have caused considerable volatility in global markets including gold, stocks and real estate, India presents a unique and resilient scenario. The Indian real estate market stands out due to its robust internal consumption dynamics. Unlike many countries experiencing market stagnation, India's domestic demand continues to drive economic momentum. This internal strength provides a buffer against global economic uncertainties, making the Indian real estate sector an attractive investment destination.

DETAILED MARKET NAVIGATION GUIDE

Understand market trends

The high demand seen in past years will continue to be seen in 2025, in both Tier-1 and developing areas. Metro cities like Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune remain attractive for job seekers, while Tier-2 cities like Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh and Indore are gaining momentum due to improved infrastructure and affordability.

Expert tip: For anyone looking to buy a house in 2025, they need to monitor price trends in the areas they're looking to purchase, how the prices have changed in the past year, the developments happening in the area and what it might mean for the future.

Real estate price growth insights:

Tier-1 cities have witnessed significant price appreciation, with some markets seeing growth rates between 15-25% in the past two years. While growth might moderate in 2025 due to the substantial rally in previous years, the fundamental demand remains strong.

Interest rates and financing

Government policies and decisions can have a significant impact on property buying decisions. With fluctuating RBI repo rates, home loan inter-

est rates may see some variations. A stable or slightly lower interest rate could make home buying more affordable.

Actionable step: Compare home loan offers from multiple banks and consider fixed vs. floating rates based on your risk appetite. Government banks generally tend to offer cheaper rates but are stringent in terms of property selection and documentation.

Rise of smart homes & sustainable living

Smart tech has made its way into homes and properties we purchase. Buyers today are prioritizing tech-integrated homes and sustainable living.



jects with solar power, EV charging stations, and rainwater harvesting. Developers are responding by offering projects that align with these preferences.

Actionable step:

Look for IGBC-certified green buildings or homes with automation features for long-term value.

Rental market boom

With rising property prices, renting will remain a strong alternative in 2025, particularly in metro cities. Job seekers and students prefer areas close to business hubs, IT parks and educational institutions, thus creating strong rental demand.

Expert insight: If you're an investor, focus on rental yield potential along with appreciation. Locations near employment centers tend to perform better.

Expert guidance

Real Estate, like any other investment, has many technicalities and requires expertise that everyone might not possess. Therefore, taking guidance from an industry expert is paramount and can make the difference between a successful investment and an unsuccessful one.

Expert insight: Like you might have a CA or physician you usually consult, find yourself a real estate consultant who can guide you whenever you plan to buy a property.

(The author, Sahil Verma, is the COO of Shray Projects.)

MI to approach IPL 2025 with togetherness: Hardik

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians (MI) captain Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said now that the contentious Impact Player rule has been extended by three years, a cricketer has to be a pure all-rounder to find place in the starting eleven.

The rule allows a team to replace a player from their playing XI at a later stage of the match. The teams bring in a batting or bowling specialist as the situation demands.

The BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition despite reservations from leading Indian players, including Rohit Sharma who said the Impact Player strategy was holding back the development of Indian all-rounders with teams replacing them with an extra batter or bowler during the game.

"In the current scenario, it becomes difficult if you are not completely a 50-50 all-rounder to find your place. Going forward this can change or will change, we will have to see. But yes, definitely if you want to encourage more all-rounders they will need a fix spot for them to develop over the years," said Pandya during the season-opening media interaction.

Pandya will miss MI's opening game on Sunday due to one match suspension for over-rate related offences last year. Surya Kumar Yadav will lead the side.

Sitting next to him, head coach Mahela Jayawardene also had his say on



Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya during a press conference ahead of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025, in Mumbai

the matter.

"It has given a different set of challenges. So we have to adapt and get better. My only concern at that time was that sometimes you have a pure all-rounder and they have a specific role to play but the other all-rounders are taken out of the game because you can get a genuine bowler or batter, that is something we have to see in the long term," reckoned the Sri Lankan great.

Pandya upbeat about Mumbai Indians' revival after memorable 12 months

Pandya's return to Mumbai Indians last season was not the smoothest as the storied franchise finished last among 10 teams. He was also booed by the home fans. Considering their five IPL titles, Mumbai Indians have had a dry run since 2021. The premier all-rounder said he will carry the confidence of winning two ICC titles with India over the past year.

"Playing for India has always been prideful. It has also been my number one priority, winning two trophies is very close to our hearts and that joy will carry forward to the IPL.

"Last four seasons have been dry for Mumbai Indians. This season we will approach the season with joy and togetherness," said Pandya who linked up with his IPL team hours after winning the Champions Trophy in Dubai.

Pandya believes that he is constantly evolving as a cricketer notwithstanding his "unshakeable" confidence.

Considering the rollercoaster last 12

months, his focus will be to help youngsters excel.

"My life has been about ups and downs. I have enjoyed the learning. It has taught me about sport as well as life over the years. It is a fresh year. Lot of things have changed. Every year there is .0 added. Hardik 3.0, if you want to call that, there will be passion, grit and challenges which I love.

"For me the crucial part is to make sure, if the challenges are thrown at boys how I can help them and add value."

On his own batting position, he added: "I like to play situations and entry points, specific batting number, it has gone from my cricketing journey."

Mumbai's core group remains intact despite the low returns over the past four seasons. Besides Pandya, the team has India captains in Rohit Sharma and Suryakumar Yadav. Jasprit Bumrah has also captained India.

Mahela stressed on the importance of maintaining the core group.

"We have relied on our core group for the all the titles we have won. Winning IPL is not easy. With the core group, we have added more experience (with Bould and Deepak Chahar coming in).

"Trent has been a big part in our success. Also, we have not won our first game since 2012, so there is a big challenge ahead of us. "I had a good chat with Rohit on the season. With Bumrah and Hardik not starting, we will decide the combination when we get to Chennai."

Suryakumar Yadav to captain Mumbai Indians in IPL opener

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Suryakumar Yadav will captain Mumbai Indians (MI) in their opening IPL match against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday as regular skipper Hardik Pandya will be forced to sit out due to a one-match suspension for over-rate offences committed by the team last season. Suryakumar is the national T20 captain and recently led the side to a 4-1 triumph over England at home.

However, his batting form wasn't particularly impressive and he managed just 38 runs in the five outings during the series. "Surya leads India as well. When I am not there he is the ideal choice," Pandya said during MI's pre-season press conference here.

MI head coach Mahela Jayawardene said the BCCI has communicated the one-match ban on Pandya to the team owing to three slow over-rate violations by his team last season.

MI had finished at the bottom of the heap, managing just four wins against 10 losses in 2024, which was Pandya's debut year as captain.

Assam boxers, including Lovlina, being stopped from competing in Nationals, says BFI President

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh on Wednesday alleged that Assam boxers, including Olympic bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain, are being stopped from participating in the National Championships by suspended BFI secretary general Hemanta Kalita, who refused the charge.

In an "emergency press conference" here, Singh said that the Tokyo Games medallist in the 69kg category is keen to participate in the marquee domestic event starting Thursday in Greater Noida but has been asked to withdraw by Kalita. Kalita, who has been found guilty of financial mismanagement in an inquiry conducted by former Delhi High Court judge Sudhir Kumar Jain, holds the secretary's position in the Assam body.

"Assam is discouraging players from participating in the women's Nationals," Singh said. "Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate. Because she owes a lot to Assam boxing, she is reconsidering her participation. "We have been hearing that a lot of tickets are being cancelled (both) train and air," Singh added.

However, Kalita said the charges were

baseless and the dispute was over the dates of the tournament.

"This is all being done to malign me. I have done no such thing. Since the beginning, state units were unhappy with the dates of the women's nationals. Several states had written to BFI as well," Kalita told PTI.

The BFI has received entries from 22 states but it remains to be seen how many boxers turn up for the National

Lovalina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate

— AJAY SINGH, BFI PRESIDENT

Championships, being held after close to two years. Talking about his suspension, Kalita maintained his innocence and said he will be contesting the decision.

"I will be challenging this. If any misappropriation of funds has occurred, the president should be held guilty, as he is the one who signs all the cheques.

"Additionally, it was agreed during the Executive Committee meeting that the Ethics Committee would investigate the matter. Why, then, was a judge appointed for the task?" he questioned.

Singh, however, insisted that he was well within his rights to call for an investigation. "When I was asked by the SAI (Sports Authority of India) to look into the complaint, I took the matter to the Executive Committee and said we need to have a proper investigation and they (secretary and treasurer) agreed. They were part of the meeting and agreed.

"The minutes of the EC meeting are available and there was no request for the inquiry to go to the Ethics Commission," Singh said. Kalita was among the four candidates for the president's post in the soon-to-be-held BFI polls but his nomination was rejected on the grounds that he needs to undergo a cooling off period after serving two terms, in different roles, in the body. In another development, the Delhi High Court stayed BFI's order allowing only elected members of its affiliated states to represent their respective units in the polls. Singh said BFI will appeal against the decision.

Former sports minister Anurag Thakur had been deemed ineligible to contest for the presidential election because of the March 7 notice. Thakur's name was brought into reckoning by the Himachal Pradesh body but it was rejected as he was not an elected member, according to the March 7 order.



Openly gay soccer player still faces online death threats

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Adelaide

The first openly gay man to play in Australia's domestic soccer league says he's still subject to death threats four years after going public about his sexuality. Josh Cavallo, who plays for Adelaide United in the A-League, told the FIFPro Footballers Unfiltered podcast that "in a world of football, being a gay ... Player is a very toxic place."

"I still think we're a very, very long way from being accepted in this space, unfortunately," he said. Cavallo was 21 in 2021 when he decided to come out, acknowledging his video message "took the world of football for a shock." He still regards it as "the best move and decision" he's made, but warns that there's "mountains of downside." In the podcast, he asked rhetorically: "Why has no one ever come out to be themselves and be successful and play?"

"And I understand that now looking back all the negativity, all the things that come your way, there's multiple, multiple, multiple death threats that come my way daily, still, and it's quite sad to see."

Cavallo didn't detail the online threats. He continues to train and play as a professional footballer every week.

"I have a very strong support network, I have my good days, I have my bad days, but I'm free," he said. "I go to bed, I put my head on the pillow and I'm happy. I'm Josh Cavallo, I'm the footballer ... The gay footballer, and I'm super proud to say that." Cavallo told the Australian

Broadcasting Corp. On Wednesday that he still has positive experiences of meeting people who tell him they've been encouraged and inspired by his advocacy. In his "everyday life," he said, people had approached him and "know who I am and speak to me and say how I guided them and how I give them the courage to come out at school." "On the other side," he added, "opening my social media this morning, it was quite disturbing reading the comments that got sent my way."

He said when his club published a video of his announcement in 2021 it changed perspectives around the world, but there's still a long way to go for the sport to help remove the fear of public backlash for other players coming out.

"It's obviously ... influenced a lot of people and made so much progression within the game," he said of his life story, "and I wouldn't trade it for anything."

In 2022, he reported homophobic abuse during a game and he said it continues on social media.

"I don't really like to show this side of things because I feel like it's going to put fear into people who are thinking about coming out," he told the ABC. "What I did in 2021 was fantastic and great for myself and for the wider LGBTQ+ community, but ... We're four years on now and we're still getting (homophobic abuse) on a daily" basis. Peter Malinauskas, premier of South Australia state where the Adelaide United club is based, said the vitriol Cavallo has faced is "beyond awful it's unacceptable."

We will get to see glimpses of Dhoni's brilliance in IPL 2025: Uthappa

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

The cricket fans may get to see glimpses of MS Dhoni's brilliance in the upcoming IPL season as the former skipper may bat at Number 7 or Number 8 in the batting order and it will allow him to extract maximum results out of minimum deliveries, reckons former India batter Robin Uthappa.

Dhoni, now 43, exhibited his readiness for IPL 2025 while smashing the bowlers around at the Chennai Super Kings net session on Tuesday. He even launched pacer Matheesha Pathirana's searing yorker on off-stump over the bowler's head for a six with a helicopter shot.

"As far as Mahi is concerned, I think we will get to see glimpses of his brilliance

because I have a feeling that he might bat at number 7 or number 8. Very much like last year, and we will see him bat between 12 and 20 balls through the season," said Uthappa. So, will Dhoni walk away after

I don't think the passion ever dies. MS' love for the game has not dwindled at all. I think his passion for the game keeps him going

— ROBIN UTHAPPA, FORMER CRICKETER

this season? Uthappa wasn't ready to predict the road ahead for the five-time IPL winning former CSK captain.

"I don't think the passion ever dies. MS' love for the game has not dwindled at all. I think his passion for the game keeps him

going. At 43, I think he's got the fastest hands in the world as a wicketkeeper.

"And if you've got those skills and if you've got the passion to keep going. I don't think anything should stop you. I won't be surprised if he retires at the end of the season. But I won't be surprised if he even goes on to play for another four seasons after this," said Uthappa, the JioStar expert, while addressing the media prior to the 18th edition of IPL.

Good season for Kohli, Rohit

Veteran batters Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma too will return to the T20 format for the first time after winning last year's T20 World Cup 2024. Uthappa felt that both Kohli and Rohit will have fantastic season. "I don't think they'll have even an

iota of issues to come out there and smash the living daylights out of bowlers. Virat has really come through in good form. He's familiar with conditions in Bangalore that he's always going to thrive there," he said. "In the recent past, Rohit hasn't lived up to his potential as the incredibly dynamic batter that he is in the IPL. But it looks like everything is going his way at this point in time. So, I wouldn't put it past him to have one of his best seasons in the IPL," he added.

Franchises like Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru will go in with first-time captains in Axar Patel and Rajat Patidar in this edition of the IPL.

Uthappa said it will be challenging for them, and expressed confidence that they can adapt to the role.

Players' association files antitrust suit against tennis organisers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

Calling the groups in charge of professional tennis "a cartel," the co-founded by Novak Djokovic filed an antitrust lawsuit against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency in federal court in New York.

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association says the organizations that run the sport hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions" and their setup constitutes "text-book violations of state and federal law" that "immunise professional tennis from ordinary market forces and deny professional tennis players and other industry participants their right to fair competition." The lawsuit seeks a jury trial and wants players to gain access to more earnings, arguing that the governing bodies that oversee the four Grand Slam tournaments Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, the French Open and the Australian Open — and other professional events "cap the prize money tournaments award and limit players' ability to earn money off the court." On top of the case in U.S. District Court, the PTPA made filings with the European Commission in Brussels and the Competition Markets Authority in London. "There is a complete and utter

lack of competition that exists in professional tennis, and we believe by filing these actions, we will ultimately inject the kind of competition that will be fair to the players, to the fans and actually to the people (who) operate the system," said Jim Quinn, a lawyer working with the PTPA. "It's going to require a restructuring," Quinn said.

The WTA Tour and ATP Tour issued separate statements Tuesday saying they would "vigorously" defend themselves.

The WTA said it has "committed to a \$400 million increase in player compensation" in recent years and labeled the PTPA action a "baseless legal case" that is "regrettable and misguided." The ATP touted a "major increase in player compensation" that created a jump of "\$70 million in the past five years," and called the PTPA's case "entirely without merit."

"The PTPA has consistently chosen division and distraction through misinformation over progress," the ATP's statement said. "Five years on from its inception in 2020, the PTPA has struggled to establish a meaningful role in tennis, making its decision to pursue legal action at this juncture unsurprising."

The International Tennis Integrity Agency — which investigates and adjudicates doping and corruption — said it noted the PTPA's action but did not offer



any direct reaction to the case itself.

A spokesman said the ITF "will take the appropriate time to consider our response." The PTPA was founded by 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic and Vasek Pospisil in August 2020, aiming to offer representation for players who are independent contractors in a largely individual sport. One of the goals made clear

along the way was to become a sort of full-fledged union that negotiates collective bargaining agreements like those that exist in team sports.

"Beyond just the economics, we see ... Player welfare is completely disregarded in everything, from the tour schedule to anti-competitive practices, to abusing our rights around name, image, likeness,

Pospisil said. He is one of the players listed as a plaintiff; Djokovic is not. Players whose names are attached to the U.S. lawsuit include 2022 Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios, Sorana Cirstea, Varvara Gracheva, Reilly Opelka, Tenny Sandgren and Nicole Melichar-Martinez.

PTPA executive director Ahmad Nassar said Djokovic is "certainly very involved, very up to speed. He is still a sitting member of our executive committee at the PTPA. ... This is about much more than one player."

The PTPA said it met with more than 250 players women and men, and a majority of the top 20 in the WTA and ATP rankings before going to court.

"We've seen the Grand Slams try to change some things unsuccessfully. We've seen the tours themselves try to change things unsuccessfully. We've seen outside money try to come in and change things unsuccessfully. And so we really think this is the only path forward, and we don't do this lightly, whatsoever," Nassar said. "But we think it was necessary, because the players really do demand to be heard, to have their issues taken seriously, to address these structural issues that plague tennis and really choke it as an international sport, and to create a system that brings balance and equality and fairness to really the entire business of tennis."

Not having Bumrah is a challenge: MI coach Jayawardene

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene did not give a time frame for Jasprit Bumrah's return to competitive cricket and said the pace spearhead's absence will be a massive "challenge" for his side in the IPL 2025.

Bumrah will miss a few initial games of the tournament as he is currently recuperating from a back injury at the BCCI Centre of Excellence at Bengaluru. "Jasprit Bumrah is at the NCA. We have to wait and see their feedback on him. At the moment it is going well, the progress is on a day to day basis," said Jayawardene. "He is in good spirits, and not having him is a challenge. He is the best bowler in the world," he added.

Bumrah has been sidelined since the final Test against Australia at Sydney in early January, when he could not bowl in the second innings as the hosts chased down 162 to seal a 3-1 series victory. Bumrah's return is shrouded in uncertainty but MI skipper Hardik Pandya said having an experienced campaigner like the 30-year-old in the dressing room will help him. Bumrah is expected to link with Mumbai colleagues in the first week of April and could continue his rehabilitation with the team.

'I WANTED TO DO CHARACTER ROLES'

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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Popular Telugu comedian Saptagiri, who has also played lead roles in films like *Saptagiri Express*, *Saptagiri LLB* and *Vajra Kavachadhara Govinda*, is now back as the protagonist in *Pellikani Prasad*. Unlike his previous lead roles, where he tried to convey a message, Saptagiri describes this film as a pure entertainer.

"In my earlier films, I aimed to deliver a message, but *Pellikani Prasad* is all about fun and entertainment," he shared.

Saptagiri expressed his confidence in the script, stating that director Abhilash and his team presented a complete script along with dialogues. "When they narrated the story, I couldn't stop laughing. I believe this film will definitely work for me," he said. He also clarified that the title, *Pellikani Prasad*, was the director's choice.

The title originates from an iconic dialogue in Venkatesh's *Malleswari*. Saptagiri assured fans that they had done justice to the legacy of the phrase. "We didn't spoil the essence of the dialogue; instead, we have enhanced its recognition," he said.

During production, the team sought guidance from filmmaker Maruthi, who provided valuable suggestions. "We met him with our doubts, and after watching the first copy, he appreciated the film," Saptagiri revealed. The film has gained momentum with

backing from popular producer Dil Raju and his brother Sirish, who decided to release it under their banner, SVC. Saptagiri recalled how Sirish initially agreed to watch only the first 30 minutes of the film but ended up staying until the end, ultimately deciding to support the project.

Saptagiri credited his goodwill for boosting the film's promotions. "Prabhas anna released the teaser, Venkatesh sir launched the trailer and I have been continuously promoting the film. Now, it is in the audience's hands," he said.

He acknowledged that the storyline is simple but emphasises entertainment. "Though the film touches upon the dowry issue, we have narrated it in a fun way," he explained. However, he also revealed that many actresses declined to play the female lead opposite him. "It's not new, but in this film, the female lead is very dominant and has a significant role," he said.

Looking ahead, Saptagiri expressed his desire to transition from comedy to character roles. "I have done numerous comedy roles, but now, I want to take up character-driven performances. If needed, I am willing to audition for such roles," he stated. He cited actor Sunil as an inspiration, noting how he transitioned from comedian to lead actor and now plays character roles in Pan-India films. "Sunil anna is now doing Pan-India films in strong character roles and I want to follow that path," Saptagiri concluded.

Popular Telugu comedian Saptagiri, is now back as the protagonist in *Pellikani Prasad*. Ahead of the film's release, he shares more insights about the film.



SSMB29 team returns to Hyd after Odisha shoot

Superstar Mahesh Babu and director SS Rajamouli, who are collaborating on the much-anticipated film *SSMB29*, have successfully completed an extended shooting schedule in Koraput, Odisha. The schedule featured key scenes involving Mahesh Babu, Priyanka Chopra and other cast members. With this phase wrapped up, the team has now returned to Hyderabad. Photos from the shoot have gone viral on social media, with Mahesh Babu seen posing alongside Odisha officials. Even Rajamouli and Priyanka Chopra meeting local authorities and a handwritten note by Rajamouli appreciating the region's support during filming has been widely shared. This marks the first time that Rajamouli has shot in the Koraput region.

Despite tight security measures, a video from the set was leaked online, causing a stir. The makers immediately took legal action, issuing notices to those who shared the footage and demanding its removal.

Malayalam actor Prithviraj Sukumaran plays a significant role in the film. While most of the team returned to Hyderabad a day earlier, Rajamouli, Mahesh Babu, and Priyanka Chopra left on Wednesday



morning, according to sources. Rajamouli has frequently spoken about the film's adventurous theme, comparing it to Indiana Jones. Produced by KL Narayana, *SSMB29* is set to be one of the most ambitious projects in Indian cinema.

MOHANLAL-PRITHVIRAJ'S

L2E:Empuraan set for a grand March 27 release

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal and director-actor Prithviraj Sukumaran, who delivered the blockbuster *Lucifer*, are back with its highly anticipated sequel, *L2E: Empuraan*, releasing on March 27. Alongside Mohanlal and Prithviraj, the film features Tovino Thomas and several other key actors from the original.

Prithviraj has been aggressively promoting the film, recently meeting Tamil superstar Rajinikanth and showing him the trailer. As a self-proclaimed fan of Rajinikanth, Prithviraj has long expressed his desire to direct him in a film, a dream he still hopes to fulfill.

Adding to the anticipation, the makers have announced that the theatrical trailer will be unveiled online today at 1:08 PM. The trailer

launch will be a grand affair, with a special screening in Mumbai. Notably, *L2E: Empuraan* will make history as the first Malayalam film to have an IMAX trailer launch and an official IMAX release worldwide.

This film is the second installment in a planned three-part series. Adding to its international appeal, *Game of Thrones* actor Jerome Flynn is making his Indian cinema debut with this project. Apart from Malayalam, the film will be released in Telugu, Hindi, Kannada and Tamil. In Telugu states, top producer Dil Raju's SVC Cinemas has secured the distribution rights, ensuring a grand release across multiple regions. With its groundbreaking promotions and high expectations, *L2E: Empuraan* is set to be one of the biggest releases of the year.



Thammareddy Bharadwaj joins *O Andala Rakshasi*

Sherad Mehdi is not only the lead actor in *O Andala Rakshasi* but also its director. The film features Vihanshi Hegde and Kriti Varma as the female leads, while renowned director and producer Thammareddy Bharadwaj plays a key role.

"Writer Bhashya Shree approached me with this story and asked me to play a role. I demanded a high remuneration, thinking they might not agree, but to my surprise, they accepted. This was the first time I witnessed such a gesture," said Thammareddy.

Praising the script, he added, "The story, which revolves around women, is truly engaging. I loved the script. Small films like this deserve big success. The writing by Bhashya Shree and the direction by Sherad Mehdi are both excellent."

Produced by Surinder Kaur, the film is set to release this Friday. Director Sherad Mehdi expressed confidence in its potential. "This is a small film, but once released in theaters, I believe it will make a big impact," he said. Emphasizing the importance of discipline in the film industry, he added, "I have maintained discipline throughout my career, and I will continue to do so in the future."



KAYADU LOHAR RISES TO FAME, BECOMES SOUTH INDIA'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER ACTRESS

A single hit film can catapult an actress to stardom, and that's exactly what has happened with Kayadu Loхар. Following the success of *Return of the Dragon*, where she starred alongside Pradeep Rangarajan and Anupama Parameswaran, she has become one of the most sought-after actresses in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam cinema. Kayadu has already wrapped up shooting for the Telugu film *Funky*, where she stars opposite Vishwak Sen. Reports suggest she has also signed another Telugu project alongside Ravi Teja. In Tamil cinema, she has bagged a role opposite Simbu in a film directed by Ram Kumar. Additionally, she is set to star opposite Atharvaa in *Idhayam Murali*, where music composer SS Thaman plays a significant role. The actress has also landed a Malayalam film opposite Nivin Pauly, marking her presence across multiple industries. Her rise to fame has been swift, with filmmakers lining up to cast her in their projects. Interestingly, Kayadu made her Telugu debut in *Alluri* opposite Sree Vishnu a few years ago, but the film went unnoticed and her role was minimal. Now, after a few years, she is in high demand across the South Indian film industry.

Kyle Paul calls *Toxic* his best on-set experience

Following *Game of Thrones* actor Jerome Flynn's Indian cinema debut in *L2E: Empuraan*, another American actor, Kyle Paul, is set to make his mark in Indian cinema. He plays a key role in Yash's upcoming action thriller *Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-ups*. Paul recently shared his excitement on social media, calling it "the best experience I ever had on set." Speaking about the challenges he faced, he said, "For this scene, I needed to have really high emotions while speaking in Kannada, which was completely new to me. I had to be emotional yet logically think about the words I barely understood. It just wasn't working in my head!" Despite the challenge, Paul credited director Geetu Mohandas for her encouragement. "The director—her name is Geetu—is freaking adorable. Every time I was struggling, she kept cheering me on,

saying, 'You got this!' and 'Take your time, we're here for you.' It was truly the best experience I've ever had on set," he added. *Toxic* is the first large-scale Indian project to be conceptualized, written, and filmed in both English and Kannada, serving as a cultural bridge between Indian storytelling and international audiences. The film is jointly produced by Venkat K. Narayana and Yash.

