



The Pioneer

Paper with passion since 1864

RNI No.APENG/2018/76468

*LATE CITY VOL. 7 ISSUE 137 I *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

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

No one can dare carry out blasts now: Shah

CONSTRUCTING A BETTER TOMORROW

Chiranjeevi calls out unauthorised fan meeting CHARGES IN UK

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

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

-Konda Surekha, TG Minister

DON'T MISS...

Rs 600 cr released for fee reimbursement

The State government has reaffirmed its commitment to the timely disbursement of tuition fees to educational institutions, with Rs 788 crore already released for fee reimbursement in the current academic year 2024-25. An additional Rs 600 crore was released on Wednesday, while another Rs 400 crore will be disbursed soon. Officials stated that the government is also working towards clearing pending dues from the previous administration in a phased manner. Educational institutions have been ...

-PAGE: 3

Treatment of deportees flayed

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

-PAGE: 5

India crosses 1 bn tonnes coal output

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

-PAGE: 8

New rules, saliva ban reversal for IPL

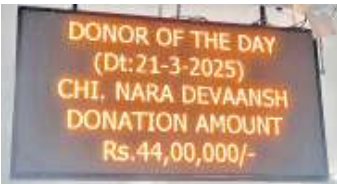
New rules and new captains will be in focus but the razzmatazz will be pretty much the same when the 18th Indian Premier League kicks off here on Saturday with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders taking on perennial underachievers Royal Challengers Bengaluru amid a looming threat of rain. There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

-SPORTS

VENKATESWARA TEMPLES IN VILLAGES

Special Trust in the offing

CM announces plans to build Srivari temples in all State capitals



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced the formation of a special trust to mobilise funds for constructing temples dedicated to Lord Venkateswara in villages across the state where no such temples exist.

Speaking to the media in Tirumala after offering prayers at the temple, Naidu said this initiative would be the third major programme following Anna Danam (food distribution) introduced by the late NT Rama Rao and Prana Danam (life donation) launched under his leadership. He emphasised that the trust would be created solely for religious service.

The Chief Minister criticised the previous government for permitting commercial projects near the temple premises. He pointed out that approvals had been granted to Mumtaz, Emaar, and Devlok hotels for projects covering 35.32 acres of land near the Hills. Stating that such developments compromised the sanctity of Tirumala, he announced the revocation of these permissions and reiterated that no commercial activity would be allowed in the area.

Naidu assured that the funds raised through the trust would be utilised transparently. He also warned of strict action against those illegally occupying lands belonging to Lord Venkateswara.

Marking his grandson Devansh's birthday, Naidu, accompanied by his family, visited the temple and personally distributed food to devotees at the Anna Vitharana Kendram. He said serving food to devotees at Tirumala on Devansh's birthday had become a family tradition. Recalling

- CM says the initiative would follow Anna Danam and Prana Danam, focusing purely on religious service.
- Previous govt criticised for allowing commercial projects near the temple
- Permissions granted to Mumtaz, Emaar, and Devlok hotels for 35.32 acres of land near the Hills revoked.
- Funds raised through the trust to be utilised transparently.
- Marking his grandson Devansh's birthday, Naidu and his family distributed food to devotees at the Anna Vitharana Kendram, continuing their family tradition.
- CM stresses that no commercial activity should take place in the sacred area.



● Recalling the 2003 claymore mine attack on him, Naidu attributed his survival to divine protection.

● TTD employees urged to uphold the temple's sanctity and reiterated that only Hindus should be employed in TTD, with alternative opportunities provided for others.

● Naidu announced plans to construct Lord Venkateswara temples in capital cities across India and abroad, stating that discussions with other Chief Ministers would begin soon.

CM's family takes part in 'Annaprasada Seva'



PNS ■ TIRUMALA

After offering prayers at the Tirumala temple, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu visited the Matrusri Tarigonda Vengamma Annaprasadam Complex (MTVAC) along with his family and took part in the Annaprasada Seva.

Marking the birthday of his grandson Nara Devaansh, he donated Rs 44 lakh online to cover the one-day Annaprasadam expenses for devotees at MTVAC.

Continued on Page 2

the Anna Danam scheme introduced by NTR, he described it as a great service to humanity and said Prana Danam was initiated to con-

tinue this legacy. Reaffirming that all Seven Hills belong entirely to Lord Venkateswara, the Chief Minister

stressed that the sacred site must not be used for commercial purposes.

Continued on Page 2

Govt to resolve all pending land issues in 3 months



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government is committed to resolving all pending land-related issues within the next three months, said RP Sisodia, Special Chief Secretary, Revenue (Lands). Speaking at the State-Level Land Administration Orientation Conference in Vijayawada on

Friday, he emphasized the need for accountability, transparency, and efficiency in land governance.

Sisodia stated that all revenue-related activities would be directly supervised by Joint Collectors to ensure accuracy and prevent negligence in data entry.

Continued on Page 2

SWARNA ANDHRA @ 2047

Govt sets up vision action plan units

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has set up Vision Action Plan Units at multiple levels to drive its Swarna Andhra @2047 Vision. As per Government Order GO Rt No 36, issued on Friday by Principal Secretary (FAC) Peeyush Kumar, these units will function at the district, constituency, and Sachivalayam levels to monitor and implement development initiatives.

The District Vision Action Plan (DVAP) Units, Constituency Vision Action Plan (CVAP) Units, and Sachivalayam Vision Action Plan

Panels set up for implementation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has constituted District Level Committees to implement the Swarna Andhra @2047 Vision, aimed at long-term development. According to GO Rt No 37 issued on Friday by Principal

Secretary Peeyush Kumar, these committees will oversee the selection of personnel from Village/Ward Secretariats to support the District Vision Action Plan (DVAP), Constituency Vision Action Plan (CVAP), and Secretariat Departments.

Continued on Page 2

(SVAP) Units will track progress based on key performance indicators, ensure inter-departmental

coordination, and suggest necessary interventions.

Continued on Page 2



948 Anganwadi job vacancies to be filled

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Women and Child Welfare, Gummidi Sandhya Rani, has directed officials across all 26 districts to release 948 Anganwadi job vacancies, including positions for Anganwadi helpers and workers. The move aims to strengthen Anganwadi services while creating more employment opportunities for women.

The minister emphasised the government's focus on child nutrition and healthcare, urging officials to ensure better welfare outcomes. She conducted a review meeting on the 2025-26 budget with officials from the Women & Child Welfare and Tribal Welfare departments. Principal secretaries and department directors assessed budget allocations for various women and child development programmes.

Discussions also covered the implementation of existing women empowerment schemes and strategies to enhance child protection, nutrition, and welfare programmes.

The minister stressed the need for efficient fund utilization and impactful welfare policies, instructing officials to prioritize the effective implementation of government schemes.

Use tech to curb crime: HM Anitha



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha underscored the vital role of technology in crime prevention and directed senior police officers to ensure strict law enforcement without compromise. She emphasized the need to prioritize the safety of women and children while commending the police for their swift action in apprehending criminals.

During a review meeting at the

DGP office in Mangalagiri on Friday, Anitha stressed that advanced surveillance tools, including CCTV cameras and drones, could significantly reduce crime rates. She announced that a high-level review on law and order would be conducted every three months. The Home Minister also praised the police for maintaining tight security during the recent Legislative Assembly sessions.

Continued on Page 2

Statewide raids target drug abuse

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a massive crackdown on drug abuse, the Andhra Pradesh police launched 'Operation Garuda' on Friday morning, conducting surprise raids across the state. As many as 100 EAGLE (Elite Anti-Narcotics Group for Law Enforcement) teams were deployed to inspect medical shops and agencies suspected of illegal drug sales.

Acting on the directives of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha, the operation was spearheaded by IG AK Ravi Krishna of the EAGLE wing. The initiative, carried out in coordination with the Vigilance and Enforcement department, local police, and the Drug Control Administration,

100 EAGLE teams deployed to inspect medical shops, agencies



was aimed at curbing the sale of prescription drugs being misused as narcotics.

During a press briefing in Gundala, IG Ravi Krishna emphasized that the

mission was part of the state's commitment to a drug-free environment. He pointed out that certain medications, such as Albendazole tablets and injections with narcotic

effects, were being misused by the youth, leading to addiction. He also noted that, despite continuous efforts to curb the sale of ganja, complaints had surfaced about alternative drugs being abused.

A surprise inspection was carried out at a medical shop in Gundala, where officials scrutinized records and stock to check for violations. Ravi Krishna stressed that medical shops are strictly prohibited from selling drugs without valid prescriptions and warned of stringent action against offenders. He assured that the enforcement of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act would be intensified.

Telangana: Magnanimous FMs & miserly CMs

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

Take, for example, this year's budget by the current finance minister, Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka. Like last year, this year, too, he introduced a record-breaking budget. While he made allocations worth 2,91,000 crore last year,

he introduced a budget of 3,05,000 crore this year. These are not small sums. On average, the allocation crosses 75,000 rupees per person. Similarly, during the two terms of BRS, budgets set new records every year except once. The budget rose from one lakh crore (1,00,637 crore) in 2014 to a whopping 2,90,396 crore in 2023. Our finance ministers, either BRS or Congress ones, never disappointed us: they generously dished out bigger and bigger budgets every year.

Yet, it is our misfortune that our Chief Ministers - Chandrasekhar Rao and Revanth Reddy, did not have the heart to spend all the money their finance ministers have so generously allocated year after year. Of the 10 budgets introduced during his tenure, only twice did the

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

then Chief Minister, Chandrasekhar Rao, come close to spending the amounts allocated by his finance ministers. So is the case with the current Congress Chief Minister, Revanth Reddy. He did not spend anywhere close to the 2,91,000 crore allocated by his finance minister, Bhatti Vikramarka, for the year ending 31st March 2025. The miserliness of our Chief Ministers is evident from the fact that even during 2020 - when we were reeling under

COVID, our then Chief Minister Chandrasekhar Rao could not bring himself to spend the entire allocated amount.

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



KISHORE POREDDY

Harish Rao, budgeted 2,45,257 crore, excluding debt repayments for the year. Chandrasekhar Rao only spent 1,92,536 that year - 52,721 crore and 21% less than allocated. It's not that there were no programs to spend on. Harish generously

allocated 17,700 crore that year, too, like the prior year, for the Dalit Bandhu scheme. Yet the then CM did not spend a single rupee on the scheme. He let the money his nephew allocated go to waste but could not bring himself to give it to the Dalits - the most disadvantaged section of our society. Over seven years, from 2015-16 to 2022-23, Chandrasekhar Rao, on average, let 17% of the budget allocated by his finance ministers go to waste by not spending the amount.

Current Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is no less miserly. Like Chandrasekhar Rao of the BRS, the current Congress Chief Minister could not get himself to spend money, especially for the socially disadvantaged sections of the Telangana society. Bhatti Vikramarka had allocated 8,424 crores to fulfil the

promise of a pucca house to the poorest of the poor in the state. Revanth, despite the central government pitching in by agreeing to modify its Prime Minister Awas Yojana so that Congress can keep its promise under the "Indiramma Indlu" scheme, let the allocated monies go down the drain. That is just one example. Similar was the fate of allocations made by his finance minister for Revanth's dream projects like Musi rejuvenation and Metro to the airport.

Going a step further than Chandrasekhar Rao, Revanth not only underspent the allocated budget but even tried to rationalise his underspending. He claimed the Telangana treasury was empty. He declared that the state only received monthly revenue of 18,000 and 18,500 crore. He claimed the banks automati-

cally deducted 13,000 crore for salaries and pensions and servicing the humongous debt the previous BRS government had mindlessly incurred, leaving him to spend less than 5,500 crore monthly. If the government's revenues, as Revanth claimed, were so low, wouldn't this year's budget reflect that reality? Why would the new budget allocate 14,000 crore more than last year? Is he accusing Bhatti Vikramarka of deception?

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

(The author is BJP TS spokesperson.)

MP Chinni outlines ACA's vision for cricket development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP and Andhra Cricket Association (ACA) president Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has unveiled an ambitious roadmap for cricket development across Andhra Pradesh, highlighting plans to establish 30 cricket grounds annually across all 175 constituencies. Addressing a press conference at NTR Bhavan, he credited Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Minister Nara Lokesh for their support in strengthening ACA's initiatives.



Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) addressing a press conference in the city on Friday. Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

Chinni dismissed speculation about the renaming of the Visakhapatnam Cricket Stadium and instead emphasized recent upgrades to the facility. While the stadium had previously hosted IPL matches, concerns raised by Delhi Capitals over infrastructure issues temporarily hindered its inclusion in the tournament. However, following discussions with the GMR Group, ACA initiated a comprehensive renovation project on January 20, completing it by March 10.

The upgrades included 34 new rooms, 320 modern toilets (up from 53), complete LED lighting, and a revamped press gallery. Representatives from Delhi Capitals inspected the improvements and expressed satisfaction, while former cricketer Venkatapathi Raju hailed the new dressing rooms as the best in the country. However, security concerns have led to a temporary halt in elevation work at the stadium.

aim to train young talent and provide a pathway to IPL selections.

Chinni expressed gratitude to all those involved in the Visakhapatnam stadium renovations, including the 800 workers who expedited the project. He underscored the state's commitment to making Andhra Pradesh a hub for cricket and sports development.

Additionally, he highlighted Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's recent meeting with Indian Olympic Association (IOA) President PT Usha to discuss the possibility of Andhra Pradesh hosting the National Games in 2029. The Chief Minister also reviewed the state's new sports policy and explored plans to establish a Sports Authority of India (SAI) regional centre.

According to Chinni, the government will review developments over the next three to four months, with a long-term goal of creating the necessary infrastructure to host the National Games within three years.



NDC team meets AP Chief Secy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A delegation from the New Delhi National Defence College (NDC), led by Major General CP Sangra AVSM YSM (Retd), met Andhra Pradesh Chief Secretary K Vijayanand at the CS Camp Office in Vijayawada on Friday as part of their study tour. The team included representatives from the Army, Navy, Air Force, National Defence Academy (NDA), DRDO, and other defence institutions.

Chief Secretary Vijayanand briefed the delegation on the state's developmental initia-

tives under the Swarnandhra 2047 Vision Plan, aligned with the national Vikasit Bharat 2047 framework. He outlined the ambitious Ten-Point Plan aimed at accelerating progress across key sectors.

Highlighting governance innovations, Vijayanand discussed the implementation of WhatsApp Governance, which has enhanced the delivery of civic services. He also detailed major infrastructure projects, including new ports, green hydrogen, and green energy ventures along Andhra Pradesh's 970 km coastline,

positioning the state as a leader in sustainable industrial growth.

Expressing confidence in the state's economic trajectory, Vijayanand noted significant advancements in industry, services, manufacturing, and logistics, with strong central government support for key projects. He also emphasized Andhra Pradesh's leadership in technology-driven governance, horticulture, and natural farming.

Acknowledging the invaluable role of the defence forces, Vijayanand recalled their swift

assistance during natural disasters, including the Hudhud cyclone and last year's floods in Vijayawada. He praised the Army, Navy, Air Force, and NDRF for their continued support in disaster response efforts.

Major General Sangra stated that the 16-member NDC team is visiting various parts of Andhra Pradesh to study the coordination between central and state government agencies.

The meeting was attended by Principal Secretary Mukesh Kumar Meena and other senior officials.

98.92% students attend Class 10 English exam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Class 10 English public examination was conducted on Friday, recording an overall attendance of 98.92%. Of the 6,20,173 registered students, 6,13,487 appeared for the exam, while 6,656 were absent, according to Director of School Education Vijay Rama Raju.

Malpractice was reported at Kupplli Model School's A and B examination centres in Etcherla mandal, Srikakulam district. Officials found that students were aided by staff in an attempt to secure admission into IIT. As a result, five students were debarred, and 15 staff members involved were suspended. In Tirupati district, one student was debarred, and a teacher was suspended for similar violations.

The examination was conducted across 3,450 centres, with flying squads inspecting 1,673 centres. The School Education Director instructed officials to ensure the smooth and fair conduct of the examinations in all centres.

MP announces plans for modern Haj House

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has announced plans to build a state-of-the-art Haj House in the city, reaffirming his commitment to supporting the Muslim community.

Speaking at an Iftar dinner at the TDP office in NTR Bhavan, the MP extended Ramadan greetings and highlighted the party's longstanding support for the community under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. He emphasized the government's initiatives, including pensions for imams and mouzams, fulfilling a key election promise.

Kesineni Chinni also lauded the contribution of Muslims, particularly in the city's auto industry, and assured that any concerns of the community would be taken up with the Chief Minister. Recalling the construction of a Haj House in Hyderabad during Chandrababu Naidu's tenure, he pledged to establish an even more advanced facility in Vijayawada.

The event was attended by several political leaders and Muslim religious heads.

Govt to resolve all pending...

Continued from page 1

He made it clear that errors in land records would not be tolerated. He also reiterated that the existing legal framework for land administration is comprehensive, requiring no further clarification at the state level. The government, he said, is fully committed to digital governance, streamlined procedures, and precise land records to build public trust.

Chief Commissioner of Land Administration (CCLA) Jaya Lakshmi, in her keynote address, highlighted the government's focus on simplifying land-related processes, particularly those concerning Veb land, freehold house sites,

and site allocations. She revealed that four specialized teams, each with five members, have been formed to address key land challenges. Additionally, she said vacant land within existing layouts could be used for new housing allocations as per regulations.

Dr. N. Prabhakara Reddy, Additional CCLA Secretary, led discussions on resurvey, land rights, encroachments, and digital land management systems. He personally monitored the conference proceedings, addressed queries from Joint Collectors, and provided guidance to Revenue Divisional Officers to ensure clarity in land administration policies.

Govt sets up vision ...

Continued from page 1

Each unit will be led by District In-Charge Ministers, MPs, MLAs, and senior administrative officers.

District Collectors have also been directed to appoint Special Officers for every constituency to oversee implementation.

The government has instructed all District Collectors to establish these units immediately to ensure seamless execution of the Swarna Andhra @2047 strategy.

The initiative aims to streamline governance, enhance accountability, and accelerate long-term development.

Panels set up for...

Continued from page 1

Initially, 1,100 skilled employees will be deployed for a year on an On Duty (OD) basis, with the option for extension. The selection will prioritize functionaries such as Mahila Police, Survey Assistants, VRO/Ward Revenue Secretaries, and Ward Planning & Regulation Secretaries. Candidates will

undergo a screening test and interview to assess their computer proficiency and numerical skills.

The selection committee, chaired by the District Collector, will include officials from municipal panchayat, and planning departments. The government has instructed district authorities to complete the process by March 31, 2025.

CM's family takes part in ...

Continued from page 1

While serving Annappasadam, he interacted with devotees about the facilities provided by TTD and the quality of the meals. Devotees expressed their satisfaction,

praising the taste of the Annappasadam and the excellent arrangements made by TTD.

Later, the Chief Minister and his family members had Annappasadam along with the devotees.

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

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Scattered Showers
Temp: 33°
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 6:10 AM
Sunset: 6:19 PM
Updated: March 21, 2025 5:00 PM

Use tech to curb crime...

Continued from page 1

She directed officials to make elaborate security arrangements for the upcoming Collectors' Conference, scheduled for March 25 and 26, under the chairmanship of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Reviewing the progress of CCTV installations, Anitha interacted with SPs from various districts. Kurnool, Nandyal, and Kadapa districts had installed nearly 24,000 CCTV cameras, according to the Kurnool Range DIG. The SPs assured that efforts were underway to meet the targets set by DGP Harish Kumar Gupta.

On traffic enforcement, the Home Minister instructed city commissioners to deal sensitively with helmet rule violators. While strict enforcement was necessary in some areas, she suggested a balanced approach elsewhere, stating that the helmet drive was aimed at saving lives and deserved public appreciation.

Anitha also urged the police department to expedite revenue-related case resolutions and coordinate closely with

the Revenue Department. She emphasized the need for special attention to cases with legal complexities.

Reviewing the status of rowdiness and public nuisance cases, she directed the police to keep a close watch on the activities of rowdy sheeters to prevent criminal activities. Representatives from the State Police Association met the Home Minister and submitted a representation seeking the immediate release of surrendered leaves and arrears.

Later, a group of transgenders met Anitha at her camp office, expressing gratitude for the swift police response to the recent murder of a transgender person in Anakapalli. They submitted a memorandum requesting job opportunities based on their qualifications, citing previous employment support through NGOs and One-Stop Centers.

DGP Harish Kumar Gupta, senior police officers at the IG and DIG levels, Commissioners of Police from Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam, SPs from all districts, and officers from the DGP office attended the meeting.

Vizag master plan in 4 months...

Continued from page 1

Key issues discussed included road expansion, traffic congestion, the metro rail project, land encroachments, drinking water supply, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) bonds, and underground drainage.

Addressing concerns raised by the MLAs, Narayana assured that the revised master plan would be made available online for public feedback before finalization. He also emphasized the need for road widening in certain areas, metro rail integration, and resolving TDR bond issues through special municipal drives.

He added that the government was committed to tackling traffic congestion around Bhogapuram Airport and resolving drinking water shortages.

MLA Konathala Ramakrishna raised concerns about land disputes in Anakapalle and Gajuwaka,

along with issues related to drinking water and the beach corridor. He confirmed that Minister Narayana had assured solutions.

MLA Palla Srinivasa Rao highlighted the struggles of small landowners along major roads and sought government intervention. He also pointed out delays in resolving civic issues due to frequent changes in officials.

MLA Vishnu Kumar Raju stressed Visakhapatnam's crucial role in the state's Vision 2047 initiative, calling for necessary corrections in the master plan to ensure the city's growth.

The meeting was attended by Revenue Department Special Chief Secretary R.P. Sisodia, Municipal Department Principal Secretary Suresh Kumar, Municipal Director Sampath Kumar, VMRDA Commissioner Vishwanath, APUC FIDC Chairman P. Govind, VMRDA Chairman Pranav Gopal, and other senior officials.

Special Trust in the ...

Continued from page 1

Referring to the 2003 assassination attempt on him involving 24 claymore mines, he attributed his survival to divine protection.

"If all the claymore mines had exploded, survival would have been impossible. It was only due to Lord Venkateswar's blessings that I am alive today," he said.

Naidu urged Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) employees to dedicate themselves to preserving the sancti-

ty of the temple and reiterated that only Hindus should be employed in TTD, assuring that individuals of other faiths would be given opportunities elsewhere.

As part of a broader vision, he announced plans to construct Lord Venkateswara temples in capital cities across India and in foreign countries with significant Hindu populations. He said efforts would soon be made to coordinate with other Chief Ministers to facilitate the initiative.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
No.131 to 218/2024-25 **Date: 18-03-2025**
 Online tenders are being invited for execution of 86 works in Prakasam district, sanctioned under the Jal-Jeevan Mission with an estimated cost of Rs. 6068.72 lakh. Documents will be available on e-procurement platform from 24-03-2025. For details, contact www.tender.approcurement.gov.in or call 9100121600.
 Sd/- Superintending Engineer, RWS & Sanitation Circle, Ongole
 CPFR No: 1313/CLAD/VT/2024-25 Dt: 21.03.2025

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

Public urged to play active role in Machilipatnam development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Mines, Geology, and Excise Kollu Ravindra has called on the public to actively participate in the development of the historic Bandar (Machilipatnam) city and support various government initiatives aimed at its transformation.

As part of the Swachh Bandar initiative, the Minister, along with APSRTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao and other coalition leaders, took part in a tree-planting program on Friday along the road leading from the old railway station to Bandar Fort.

Highlighting the historical significance of Machilipatnam Port Road, the Minister recalled its prominence as a key trade route in the past. Over time, it had become overgrown and littered, but recent efforts have cleared the area. The tree-planting drive aims to enhance its aesthetics and develop a greener, more scenic corridor. He also revealed plans to further beautify the city through govern-



As part of the Swachh Bandar initiative, Excise Minister Kollu Ravindra, along with APSRTC Chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao and other coalition leaders, took part in a tree-planting program on Friday along the road leading from the old railway station to Bandar Fort.

ment and coalition collaboration.

As part of the initiative, encroachments along roads in Bandar city are being removed. While there have been minor objections, the Minister said the majority of the public has supported the move. He urged citizens to contribute ideas for the city's

development and emphasized Vision 2047 and P4 programs focused on poverty eradication, cleanliness, beautification, and infrastructure development.

Addressing the issue of stray animals on city roads, the Minister announced plans to allocate 15 acres in the Manginapudi beach area for their relocation. He also stated

that he would soon meet with the Chief Minister, along with district leaders, to push for the inclusion of certain areas within the Capital Region Development Authority (CRDA) limits.

Former Municipal Chairman Motamarri Babaprasad, Bandar Municipal Commissioner Bapiraju, and other officials and leaders were present at the event.

Naidu's vision. He lauded the community for supporting the greening efforts and stressed the importance of public cooperation in the city's development.

1,630 pilgrims from AP selected for Haj 2025

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Haj Committee Executive Officer Sk Md Ghouse Peer announced that 1,630 pilgrims from the state have been selected for the Haj pilgrimage in 2025. He explained that the Haj Committee of India allowed pilgrims to choose their preferred embarkation points, with most opting for Hyderabad, followed by Bengaluru.

A total of 1,096 pilgrims have chosen Hyderabad as their embarkation point, while 454 opted for Bengaluru. Only 71 selected Vijayawada and nine chose other embarkation points. Since the number of pilgrims from Vijayawada is low, they have been accommodated on flights from Hyderabad, their second preference.

The Aviation Department will arrange special flights for Haj pilgrims, but a chartered flight for just 71 individuals

The Aviation Department will arrange special flights for Haj pilgrims, but a chartered flight for just 71 individuals from Vijayawada is not feasible. Ghose Peer noted that if more pilgrims choose Vijayawada in the future, arrangements may be made for direct departures.

from Vijayawada is not feasible. Ghouse Peer noted that if more pilgrims choose Vijayawada in the future, arrangements may be made for direct departures.

He assured that the state government has already initiated steps to set up special Haj camps in Hyderabad and Bengaluru, ensuring all necessary facilities for the pilgrims from Andhra Pradesh.



AIG chief, CM explore use of AI in healthcare

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Padma Vibhushan awardee and Chairman of AIG Hospitals and AIM Foundation, Dr. Nageshwar Reddy, met Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu to discuss the transformative role of AI and MedTech in healthcare.

The discussions focused on leveraging technology to

enhance accessibility and efficiency in medical services across Andhra Pradesh. Potential collaborations between the State government and the AIM Foundation were also explored.

Dr. Rakesh Kalapala, Director at AIG Hospitals and President of AIM Foundation, shared key insights during the meeting.

Vijayawada railway division earns Rs 5,638 cr gross revenue

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In yet another remarkable achievement, the Vijayawada Division of South Central Railway (SCR) has set a new benchmark by recording its highest-ever gross revenue of Rs 5,638 crore in the current financial year.

This milestone surpasses the previous record, with 11 days still remaining in the fiscal year. The division has also achieved a significant feat in freight revenue, registering Rs 4,098.21 crore—a testament to its operational efficiency, sustained growth, and strategic resource utilisation.

The previous highest gross and freight revenue of Rs 5,625 crore and Rs 4,062 crore, respectively, recorded in 2023-24, has been comfortably exceeded, marking a historic moment for the division.

The freight segment continues to be the largest contributor, with freight tonnage increasing by 7.66% compared to last year's 34.09 million tonnes.

The major contributors to freight earnings are Krishnapatnam and Kakinada Ports, which contributed Rs 2,078 crore and Rs 1,110 crore, respectively, accounting for 78% of the freight revenue.

During the current fiscal year 2024-25, the division achieved another milestone by loading a record 10,514 rakes, with coal being the



Revenue breakdown

- Freight Business: Rs 4,098 crore (72.6%)
- Passenger Business: Rs 1,342 crore (23.8%)
- Other Coaching Services (Parcels & Ticket Checking): Rs 109 crore (1.9%)
- Sundries: Rs 89 crore (1.6%)

dominant commodity, contributing 46% of total freight loading, followed by fertiliser and iron ore.

Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), extended his heartfelt congratulations to Rambabu Vavilapalli, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager, and D Narendra Varma, Senior Divisional Operations Manager, for their unwavering dedication and leadership.

The DRM emphasised that this record-breaking performance highlights Vijayawada Division's ability to exceed

financial targets and its pivotal role in strengthening economic growth and trade connectivity.

He further stated that with continued infrastructure upgrades and the commissioning of new railway lines, the division is poised for even greater success in the coming years.

This milestone underscores Vijayawada Division's commitment to operational excellence and economic progress, reinforcing its position as a crucial link in India's industrial and trade corridors.

Rs 600 cr released for fee reimbursement

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government has reaffirmed its commitment to the timely disbursement of tuition fees to educational institutions, with Rs 788 crore already released for fee reimbursement in the current academic year 2024-25. An additional Rs 600 crore was released on Wednesday, while another Rs 400 crore will be disbursed soon.

Officials stated that the government is also working towards clearing pending dues from the previous administration in a phased manner.



Educational institutions have been directed not to pressure students for fee payments or resort to coercive tactics, as steps are already being taken to address reimbursement issues. In a memorandum issued on March 12, the government clarified that any action

restricting students from attending classes, withholding hall tickets, or denying examination access due to non-payment of fees would be considered illegal. Institutions found violating these directives will face stringent punitive measures.

Vice Chancellors of all universities have been instructed to ensure strict compliance with these orders in their affiliated institutions. The government has warned that any violations will be taken seriously, and severe action will be initiated against non-compliant institutions.

Raise awareness of integrated water pits: Collector to officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshminsha has directed officials of the District Water Management Authority to raise awareness among farmers about the benefits of integrated water pits under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). He also emphasised the need to complete the construction of these pits before the onset of the monsoon season.

On Friday, Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan held a virtual meeting with district collectors to review the implementation of the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Dr Lakshminsha, along with district officials, participated in the meeting.

The Deputy Chief Minister issued guidelines to ensure effective implementation of the scheme at the grassroots level with transparency and accountability.

He also instructed officials to provide drinking water, shade, and other facilities for labourers working under the scheme during the summer. Additionally, he stressed the



importance of ensuring an average daily wage of Rs 300 for workers and reviewed progress on integrated water pits and other activities under the scheme.

Following the meeting, Collector Lakshminsha held discussions with officials from the District Water Management Authority and Panchayat Raj on the importance of water pits for rainwater storage. He highlighted that these pits would help maintain a steady water supply for crops, prevent soil erosion, preserve soil nutrients, and

boost groundwater levels. He further noted that farmers could use the pits for fish farming and vegetable cultivation on the embankments, generating additional income.

Dr Lakshminsha stated that 2,713 pits had been sanctioned across 289 gram panchayats in the district.

He instructed officials to set clear targets and expedite the work to ensure timely completion.

The meeting was attended by DWMA PD A Ramu, DPO P Lavanya Kumari, and other officials.

SDMSM College principal stresses urgent need to protect forests

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Raising concern over shrinking forest areas, Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila College Principal Dr. S. Kalpana emphasized the urgent need to protect forests to prevent environmental disasters.

The college marked 'International Day of Forests' on Friday with an awareness program. Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Kalpana highlighted that deforestation is leading to natural calamities and stressed the importance of expanding forest cover. She urged collective efforts to safeguard forests, emphasizing their crucial role in maintaining ecological balance and supporting human life.

Retired IFS officer Chiranjeevi Chowdary elaborated on the vital role forests play in sustaining life and protecting the environment.



He expressed concern over the lack of rainfall in the Nallamala and Maredumilli forest regions in recent months due to indiscriminate deforestation. The residents in these areas, he noted, are surviving on the residual rainfall from previous seasons.

Chowdary also warned about the harmful effects of deforestation, rising pollution, and excessive pesticide use. He recalled how India

once had cheetahs in its forests before their extinction in 1953 due to habitat loss, forcing the country to import cheetahs from abroad.

Special Officer K. Anka Rao underscored how deforestation leads to the destruction of wildlife habitats. He explained the critical role trees play in oxygen generation and environmental protection, benefiting both humans and wildlife.



Centre approves 1,736 quintals of breeder seeds for AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Central government has approved the supply of 1,736 quintals of breeder seeds to Andhra Pradesh, following a two-day national meeting of state agriculture officers in Delhi.

The meeting, attended by Central Agriculture Ministry officials including Ajit Kumar Sahu, focused on high-yielding and newly released seed varieties, their characteristics, yields, and pest resistance.

Recognizing the importance of breeder seeds for quality seed production, the government will subsidize their supply for seven key crops: groundnut, paddy, sorghum,

millet, cotton, and sugarcane. The allocation of breeder seeds was based on proposals submitted by the states.

Kripadas, Joint Director of Seeds, representing the Andhra Pradesh Director of Agriculture, expressed satisfaction that the state's proposal for 1,736 quintals of subsidized breeder seeds was approved. He explained that these seeds will enable farmers to produce quality seeds for the 2027-28 third season, ensuring no shortage. Furthermore, Andhra Pradesh plans to produce 335,720 quintals of certified seeds, following a strategic plan directed by Agriculture Director Dilli Rao.

VMC extends cash counter hours for tax payments

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra announced the extension of working hours for six cash counters to enhance public convenience. These counters will now operate from 8 AM to 8 PM, allowing citizens more flexibility for tax payments. The six counters are among 13 located across the city and are strategically placed at three circle offices to ensure easy access. The commissioner urged residents to utilize the extended hours to fulfill their tax obligations without time constraints. The cash counters operating under the new schedule are located at the Circle-1 Office in Chittinagar, the Circle-2 Office near AKTPM High School in Satyanarayanapuram, and the Circle-3 Office at BVR Complex in Patamata.

VMRDA's East Coast Habitat Centre, VR Arena receive good response

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) has received an enthusiastic response to its recently released Request for Proposals (RFP) for the development of the East Coast Habitat Centre, a state-of-the-art virtual reality arena, and a three-star hotel.

VMRDA Chairman Pranav Gopal reaffirmed the authority's dedication to elevating Visakhapatnam into a world-class city by spearheading sev-

eral key initiatives in collaboration with the State government through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. He underscored the strategic significance of the 30-kilometer-long Visakhapatnam-Bheemunipatnam Marine Drive, positioning it as a crucial component in the broader vision of transforming the region into a global tourism hotspot.

Speaking to The Pioneer, MV Pavan Kartheek, Secretary of the AP Tourism Forum, expressed optimism about the

timely execution of these projects, stating that they would provide a substantial boost to the tourism sector. He emphasised that once operational, these developments are expected to significantly enhance investment opportunities in the IT, fintech, and tourism sectors, further strengthening the city's economic prospects. The twin projects will be implemented under the PPP framework, ensuring active private sector involvement in their successful realisation.

Inspired by Delhi's iconic India Habitat Centre, the East

Coast Habitat Centre is envisioned as a premier destination for business and cultural engagements. Spanning an 8.82-acre site at Rushikonda, the centre will feature a business hub, commercial spaces, an auditorium, and banquet halls catering to corporate and cultural events. Additionally, the project will house a boutique hotel, an exclusive club, landscaped gardens, multi-cuisine restaurants, a sports arena, supermarkets, and banking facilities, making it a comprehensive lifestyle and business hub.

Complementing this, the proposed virtual reality arena and three-star hotel aim to provide an immersive digital entertainment experience. Spanning 2.82 acres near the Madhurawada ACA VDCA International Cricket Stadium, the facility will integrate advanced technologies such as augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and interactive gaming, making it a prime attraction for technology enthusiasts and entertainment seekers.

Pavan Kartheek also highlighted the importance of bol-

stering social infrastructure to support the city's rapid urban expansion. He applauded the Andhra Pradesh Government's newly introduced tourism land allotment policy, describing it as a forward-thinking initiative that promotes tourism infrastructure, attracts investments, and fosters sustainable tourism practices.

He noted that this policy will not only strengthen the State's tourism sector, but also create significant employment opportunities, ensuring long-term socio-economic benefits for the region.



55 km of cement roads paved in West Godavari: Collector

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has stated that 55.37 km of cement roads have been constructed across all mandals in the West Godavari district.



Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj, K Pawan Kalyan, held a video conference from his camp office on Friday. Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani said that West Godavari district had completed 99.27% of road construction works by laying 55.37 km of roads against the target of 55.54 km. Various other development works, including the construction of cement roads, Gokul sheds, and farm ponds were discussed during the meeting.

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan directed collec-

tors to provide work under the NREGA scheme to 97.42 lakh workers across all districts. He also instructed them to ensure that NREGA works are completed by 11 am daily in view of the intense summer

heat and to provide drinking water and sheds at worksites.

He appreciated West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani for successfully completing the construction of 55.37 km of

cement roads and securing the third position in the state in road construction.

Collector Nagarani informed the Deputy Chief Minister that the road works taken up under the Palle Panduga programme had been completed by 99.27%, and the remaining works would be finished by the end of the month. She further explained that so far, 1,46,780 workers had been provided 36,45,149 workdays, while 3,397 families had received 100 days of work. West Godavari district sanctioned 950 Gokul sheds, of which 354 have been completed, while construction of the remaining 556 is in progress.

DWMA PD Dr KCH Appa Rao, Panchayat Raj SE K Sriinivas, and RWS SE B Nageswara Rao attended the meeting.

Two boys drown in Vayyeru canal

PNS ■ ELURU

In a tragic incident, two 10-year-old boys drowned in the Vayyeru irrigation canal at China Kapavaram village in Akividu Mandal, West Godavari district, on Monday.

Police said Padikowru Sharat Kumar and Katari Pawan Sai, both studying in Class 5, entered the canal for a bath but were swept away. Their bodies were later retrieved.

The village was left in shock and grief over the heartbreaking loss.



Bankers told to expedite loan sanctions to farmers

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prasanthi expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of loan disbursement by banks and directed them to expedite the process to meet the set targets. She issued the instructions while presiding over the District Consultative Committee and District Level Review Committee meetings held here on Friday.

Police said Padikowru Sharat Kumar and Katari Pawan Sai, both studying in Class 5, entered the canal for a bath but were swept away. Their bodies were later retrieved. The village was left in shock and grief over the heartbreaking loss.

Questioning the effectiveness of regular bankers' meetings when targets were not being met, the Collector stressed the need for prompt action. She instructed that applications for units under the Backward Classes, Other Backward Classes Corporation, Kapu Corporation, SC Corporation, and Minority Corporation should be accepted by March 22, loan scrutiny should be completed by April 7, and grounding should be done by April 11, marking Jyotirao Phule Jayanti.

She emphasized that merely convening meetings every three months without tangible results was futile. The State Government, she noted, has a strict policy on providing loans



to tenant farmers, urging bankers to sanction them liberally.

The Collector also expressed displeasure when Bank of India senior officer Lakshman Reddy failed to provide details on loan progress. She warned that a report would be submitted to the State-Level Bankers' Committee regarding the functioning of banks. She directed the Lead District Manager (LDM) to document the performance and attendance of bankers, including the RBI representative, through Google Meet in the official minutes. Highlighting the targets, she stated that 1,229 units should be established for ABCD groups by the BC Corporation, 24 for generic medical shops, 121 for bamboo basket and pottery making, 749 through

Kapu Corporation, 8 MSME units through Kapu Corporation, 173 for self-employment via EWC Corporation, 30 for generic medicines, 699 through the Scheduled Caste Cooperative Society, and 12 under the Minority Corporation. Banks, she said, must take proactive steps to facilitate unit setup in a streamlined manner. She further pointed out that out of 12,871 applications for Pashu Kisan Cards, 6,695 had been received, but only 1,116 were sanctioned, leaving 5,000 applications pending. She sought a detailed explanation from bankers regarding the delay.

DCC convener and DGM A Viswaswara Rao, DRO T Sitarama Murthy, and LDM D V Prasad were among those present at the meeting.

Rajini questions Marri's resignation from YSRCP

PNS ■ CHILAKALURIPETA

Former minister Vidudala Rajini has hit back at Marri Rajasekhara Reddy following his resignation from YSRCP and his criticism of the party. She urged him to introspect, reminding him that the YSR family—from the late YS Rajasekhara Reddy to YS Jagan Mohan Reddy—had always recognized his contributions by entrusting him with key positions, including united Guntur district president, regional coordinator, and MLC. She questioned the timing of his resignation after benefiting from such opportunities.

Rajini recalled that in 2004, when Rajasekhara contested as an independent from Chilakaluripeta after being denied a Congress ticket, YSR backed him over the official candidate, ensuring his victory. Even after Congress lost in

2009, he was treated with dignity. Later, upon joining YSRCP, he was made district president, though he lost the 2014 election. In 2019, Rajini won from Chilakaluripeta with Jagan's support, while Rajasekhara was later appointed MLC and regional coordinator. However, she criticized his decision to resign during the party's post-election struggles, which led to the MLC seat going to TDP. She argued that he could have stayed and fought against the coalition's "Red Book" governance instead.

Rajini noted that in 2024, she contested from Guntur West on Jagan's directive and, despite her loss, accepted post-election responsibilities in Chilakaluripeta. Contrasting her loyalty with Rajasekhara's exit, she asserted that YSRCP had always treated him fairly and wished him well in his next political move.

Waltair Division to launch in-train magazine

'Your Platform' will be placed at each berth for passengers

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Waltair Division of the East Coast Railway is launching an in-train magazine, 'Your Platform', starting April 1. This initiative complements the ongoing efforts to improve passenger facilities at Visakhapatnam railway station, which include the addition of escalators, lifts, and improved boarding access.

The new magazine, designed to offer engaging reading material for travellers, will be placed at each berth for convenient access. Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Lalit Bohra announced this innovative project to the media on Friday, highlighting its unique status. "This is a first for Andhra Pradesh and only the



second such initiative in the entire country," he stated.

Initially, 'Your Platform' will be available on three prominent train routes: the Visakhapatnam-Secunderabad Vande Bharat Express, the Visakhapatnam-Kirandul Express (equipped with Vistadome coaches), and the Uday Express. Presented in a coffee table book format,

the magazine will feature compelling articles on the history of Indian Railways, popular tourist destinations, and significant heritage sites. "Our goal is to enhance passengers' understanding and appreciation of India's rich cultural and historical background," explained DRM Bohra. He emphasized that the magazine is intended for onboard reading only and should remain on the train for subsequent passengers.

The division intends to evaluate passenger feedback and potentially extend the magazine's availability to other trains. Furthermore, plans are underway to introduce a Telugu version of 'Your Platform', broadening its appeal to a wider linguistic audience.

Water security strengthened in Anantapur

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

On World Water Day, UltraTech reinforced its commitment to responsible water stewardship through focused management practices and effective governance. Its water conservation efforts extend beyond its unit premises to the surrounding communities.

UltraTech's integrated manufacturing unit in Anantapur district follows a holistic approach to water conservation. One of its key initiatives focuses on Petnikota and Ayyavaripalli villages in Nandyal and Anantapur districts, where low rainfall, land degradation, and poor crop productivity have long challenged rural livelihoods. In response, the unit launched a five-year watershed management program in 2019-20 to address these concerns.

Drones to monitor special sanitation drive in Guntur

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Guntur Municipal Corporation (GMC) Commissioner Puli Srinivasulu has launched an intensive special sanitation drive across the city, urging citizens and businesses to cooperate by avoiding waste disposal near roads and drains.

As part of the initiative, drones will be deployed to monitor sanitation activities in key areas, capturing photographs and documenting details before and after the operations.

During a review meeting at the municipal corporation office on Friday, the Commissioner inspected the labor force and vehicles assigned to the drive and issued necessary instructions to officials. He pointed out that construction debris and tree branches have accumulated in various wards over time, and the special drive aims to address these concerns.



To ensure routine sanitation work continues without disruption, workers, tractors, and cranes have been hired on a daily wage basis. The allocation of vehicles and workers to sanitary inspectors in each ward has already been completed to facilitate a thorough cleanup. GMC biologist Rama Rao, along with engineering staff Ram Babu and Ayub Khan, highlighted the collective effort to enhance the city's cleanliness and public health standards.

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

Recalls cultural ties to trees during World Forest Day event

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister Konda Surekha has urged officials of the Forest Department and others to refrain from spending large sums of money on shawls and bouquets for her during events and meetings. Instead, she has emphasized the need to redirect those funds towards supporting the underprivileged, particularly those struggling with hunger. She said, "Today I was given bouquets by our officials. These cost about Rs2000 and is of hardly any use. Instead use that money to feed poor people. I call upon

forest department, not to give bouquets"

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



"Our culture and traditions are deeply rooted in protecting trees. 'Vriksho Rakshati Rakshitaha'—if we save a tree, it saves us. This is a universal truth," said Surekha, addressing a

gathering of forest officials, volunteers and civil society members. The United Nations observes March 21 as World Forest Day every year to spread awareness about the importance of forests, she added.

Stating that forests are the backbone of biodiversity and environmental protection, she said, "There is an inseparable connection between flora, fauna, and forests. Unfortunately, humans are destroying forests for selfish reasons, thereby endangering their own existence." She warned that if people fail to realise that only nature is eternal, the crisis will deepen. "The survival of forests is essential for our survival. Let's not forget that meaningfully living with nature is the only way forward," the minister said.

Thunderstorms likely in Coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning are expected at isolated places in Rayalaseema from March 22 to 25, with strong winds reaching speeds of 40-50 kmph during the same period. Coastal Andhra Pradesh is also likely to witness thunderstorms with lightning from March 22 to 24, while strong winds of 40-50 kmph may occur in isolated areas of Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam.



Dry weather is expected in Coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next 24 hours and from March 25 to 27, while Rayalaseema may experience similar conditions on March 26

and 27. Anantapur recorded the highest maximum temperature of 41.1°C on Thursday.

The Meteorological Centre reported that a trough or wind discontinuity extends from South Chhattisgarh to South Interior Karnataka across Telangana and North Interior Karnataka at 1.5 km above mean sea level. Light to moderate rain or thunderstorms are likely at a few places in Rayalaseema over the next five days, with similar conditions expected in Coastal Andhra Pradesh from March 22 to 24.

MP solves water, power issues in Eluru village

PNS ■ ELURU

The intervention of MP Putta Mahesh Kumar has resolved the acute drinking water crisis in Pragadavaram village, Chintalapudi constituency, bringing long-awaited relief to residents.

For five years, villagers struggled for access to drinking water, with no concrete action from officials. During his recent visit, MP Mahesh Kumar listened to their grievances, particularly from women who recounted their daily struggles to fetch water. Moved by their plight, he assured immediate action. Following his instructions, local authorities swiftly laid a

pipeline, restoring water supply to the village. Grateful residents, especially women, thanked the MP for his prompt response.

During his visit, women from a colony in Pragadavaram also requested electricity facilities. Responding without delay, the MP directed DISCOM officials to take action. Officials inspected the village, prepared estimates, and on a war footing, installed 32 electricity poles, ensuring power supply to the colony.

With both critical issues resolved, villagers expressed their happiness and gratitude to MP Putta Mahesh Kumar for his swift and effective intervention.

Nalamari Chandrasekhara Reddy, State president of the YSRCP Employees and Pensioners Wing, has lambasted Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu-led coalition government for its anti-employee stance. "The government deceives employees with unfulfilled pre-election promises, leaving them in

distress. The State owes employees Rs 30,000 crore in dues, including DA arrears, PRC arrears, leave encashment, medical reimbursements, retirement benefits, and contributions to CPS, GPF and APGLI, demanding a timeline for their release," he said. Labelling Chandrababu's governance as blatantly anti-employee, Chandrasekhara

criticised the government for scrapping the previous YSRCP's Pay Revision Commission (PRC) without forming a new one, neglecting Interim Relief (IR), Dearness Allowance (DA), and timely salary and pension payments. Health cards remain non-functional due to unpaid premiums, and promises of 20 lakh jobs, unemployment allowances, and a job calendar

4 sentenced to life for rape and murder of minor girl

PNS ■ ELURU

A POCSO court in Eluru sentenced four individuals to life imprisonment on Friday for the 2019 rape and murder of a minor girl.

Superintendent of Police (SP) K. Pratap Shiva Kishore detailed the crime to the media. On February 24, 2019, the victim and her boyfriend visited the Guntupalli caves area, where they were attacked

by four men, including Potunuri Raju, also known as Anka Rao.

When the boyfriend resisted, Raju assaulted him with a stick, causing serious injuries. Raju then sexually assaulted the minor girl and subsequently killed her by striking her with a stick. The assailants stole Rs 600, two mobile phones, and two silver anklets before fleeing. POCSO Judge Uma

Sunanda convicted the four accused and ordered each of them to serve life imprisonment. The court also directed the accused to pay Rs 3 lakh in compensation to the victim's family.

The SP also stated that the Legal Services Authority has been requested to arrange appropriate compensation for D. Navin Kumar, the boyfriend, who sustained injuries during the attack.

'Coalition govt owes employees Rs 30,000 crore'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Nalamari Chandrasekhara Reddy, State president of the YSRCP Employees and Pensioners Wing, has lambasted Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu-led coalition government for its anti-employee stance. "The government deceives employees with unfulfilled pre-election promises, leaving them in

distress. The State owes employees Rs 30,000 crore in dues, including DA arrears, PRC arrears, leave encashment, medical reimbursements, retirement benefits, and contributions to CPS, GPF and APGLI, demanding a timeline for their release," he said. Labelling Chandrababu's governance as blatantly anti-employee, Chandrasekhara

criticised the government for scrapping the previous YSRCP's Pay Revision Commission (PRC) without forming a new one, neglecting Interim Relief (IR), Dearness Allowance (DA), and timely salary and pension payments. Health cards remain non-functional due to unpaid premiums, and promises of 20 lakh jobs, unemployment allowances, and a job calendar

have been abandoned. He questioned why, even after 10 months, the promised 30 per cent IR and regularisation of contract employees remain unaddressed.

Chandrasekhara highlighted the government's failure to review CPS and GPS for a viable pension scheme, leaving three lakh employees in limbo. Anganwadi workers, secretariat staff, and volun-

teers are protesting unmet demands while outsourcing employees face delayed payments after the APCOS system was dismantled. The stalled Mega DSC teacher recruitment and vacant posts reflect further neglect, he added.

He accused the coalition of undermining the village and ward secretariat system, established by former CM

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to serve citizens, through politically motivated rationalisation, leaving 21,000 posts vacant. Chandrasekhara demanded immediate action, including 30 per cent IR, regular payments, and fulfillment of promises, warning that continued anti-employee policies would provoke a strong response from the workforce.

ACROSS THE STATES



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

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



Assam BJP MLA lunges at opposition in House

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



Bhika Behram Well in Mumbai completes 300 yrs

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



with the United States regarding the treatment of the Indian deportees.

The government was also asked whether the Standard

operations, Singh said. "The ministry has strongly registered its concerns with the US authorities on the treatment meted out to deportees on the

Indians deported by the Donald Trump administration as part of a crackdown against illegal immigrants.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The MEA remains engaged with the US side regarding humane treatment of the deportees during deportation

flight that landed on 5th February, 2025 particularly with respect to use of shackles, especially on women," he said.

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



No one can dare carry out blasts now: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

He also assured the Upper

House that India would be free from Naxal terrorism (Leftwing extremism) by March 31, 2026.

'Enough divisions in nation over language'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

RSS chief inaugurates meet to discuss Manipur situation

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

When asked about the three-language row during a press conference, RSS joint general secretary C R Mukunda said the Sangh would not pass any resolution

and maintained that the organisation prefers the mother tongue to be a mode of education and day-to-day communication.

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

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



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

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

The protest was sparked by opposition anger over the allo-



cation of a four percent reservation to Muslims in public contracts.

Earlier, the BJP members had protested from the well of the house, accusing the government of attempting to "honey trap" a minister and demand-

Vishwanath, B A Basavaraj, M R Patil, Channabasappa, B Suresh Gowda, Umanath Kotyan, Sharanu Salagar, Dr Shailendra Beldale, C K Ramamurthy, Yashpal Suvarna, B P Harish, Bharath Shetty, Dheeraj Muniraju, Chandru Lamani, Muniratna and Basavaraj Mattimood.

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

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

'CASH DISCOVERY' AT JUDGE'S HOME Lawyers question transfer, demand resignation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"I think transfer is no solution in such a matter. He has to be asked to resign," he said. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi said the apex court should hold an in-house inquiry and ascertain all facts after opportunity to the judge



to have his say.

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

He said this was not something articulated by senior

advocates and lawyers in the country for the first time.

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

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

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

PNS ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

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

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

Khulatabad near here.

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

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



Two men shot dead in UP's Ghazipur

PNS ■ GHAZIPUR

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ LAHORE

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

Speaking at an event, 'Pakistan-India Relations - Current Situation and the Way Forward', organised by the Institute of Peace and Connectivity (IPAC) here on Thursday, Kasuri said that dia-

logue is the only solution for both the countries to resolve their outstanding issues.

Describing the current peri-



od as one of the worst in history between the two countries, barring times of actual

war, Kasuri said even after the wars, Pakistan and India quickly came to the table to restart the peace process.

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

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

Goa tourism dept orders closure of 23 beach shacks

PNS ■ PANAJI

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

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

"A total of 110 show-cause notices were issued and proceedings in 54 cases were completed. 31 notices were disposed of as no violations were



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

found, while 23 operators were directed to close their shacks," he said.

Beach shacks, built from bamboo, wooden poles, and

thatched palm leaves, are a popular attraction for domestic and international tourists visiting the coastal state.

As per the Goa State Shack

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

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

Editor's TAKE

Countdown to reciprocal tariffs

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

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

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

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

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

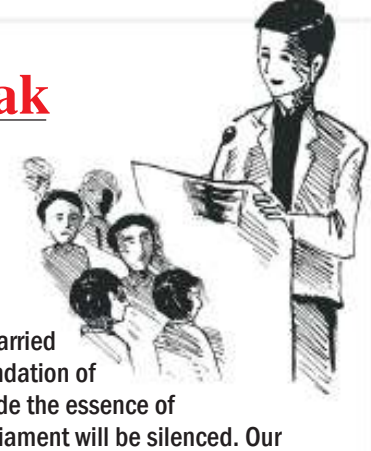
The best bet in this scenario, as other countries are also exploring and experimenting is to find alternative markets and increase South South Cooperation (SSC). Efforts are underway to explore alternative markets for Indian exports to reduce dependence on the US and mitigate potential revenue losses.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

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

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

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

Leaderspeak



“

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

”

MK STALIN, CHIEF MINISTER OF TAMIL NADU

Letters to the Editor

Saliva ban lifted, spinners get a boost

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

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

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

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

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

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

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Respect, care for parents now legal necessity

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

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

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

RK JAIN | BARWANI

Devotees' trust at stake

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

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

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

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

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

APPANNA GONAPA | VISAKHAPATNAM

AI is transforming healthcare

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

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

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

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

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

We have to accept that most jobs will likely have at least some of their tasks affected by LLMs. Pathologists are receiving scanned slides of biopsies accompanied by critical data. Then the pathologist only has to focus on the



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

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

A second caveat: Given the asymmetrical

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

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

Another interesting development, COVID-19 forced physicians and their patients to use telemedicine, and the response has been universally appreciated. It might trigger your thoughts when I say that telemedicine can capture new kinds of patient data such as facial

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

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



Starliner Mission redefines space exploration

SECOND Opinion



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

The Starliner's propulsion system failures, including helium leaks and thruster malfunctions, exposed the dangers of deploying inadequately tested technology in the harsh space environment. While challenges are inherent in space exploration, this incident highlights a troubling trend: the rush to privatise and commercialise space travel may prioritise speed over reliability. Boeing's struggles with Starliner reflect broader concerns within the industry, where cutting corners to meet deadlines can jeopardise astronaut safety. Future space colonisation efforts demand rigorous

redundancy systems and fail-safes to ensure that no single malfunction can endanger lives millions of miles from Earth.

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

The extended stay of Wilmore and Sunita Williams has yielded valuable insights into the long-term physical and psychological consequences of space travel. Although previous expeditions, such as Scott Kelly's year-long ISS stay, have provided critical data, this extended mission has significantly enhanced our comprehension. The effects of microgravity on muscles, bones, and cardiovascular systems, as well as the strains of protracted isolation, emphasise the necessity for improved medical protocols, exercise regimens, and mental health support systems for future astronauts. Colonising Mars or establishing lunar bases will require innovative solutions—from developing artificial gravity

systems to improved radiation shielding. The current ordeal has created an opportunity to refine these strategies, ensuring astronauts are better prepared for extended deep-space missions. The ISS served as a critical lifeline during the astronauts' extended mission, reinforcing the importance of private collaboration.

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

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

ECONOMIC GROWTH ALONE IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF HAPPINESS

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

India is one of the fastest-growing economies, but the extent to which this growth benefits its citizens remains debatable. The wealth gap continues to widen, leading to dissatisfaction and despair. In contrast, smaller European nations with limited resources offer better social security and fair economic distribution, ensuring greater happiness. India must focus on redistributing its economic resources to make prosperity accessible to all. Social cohesion and community support play a vital role in happiness.

While India has traditionally had strong family and social ties, modernisation and digitalisation have weakened these bonds, increasing isolation, stress, and depression.

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

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

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

Humanism and the world

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

FIRST
Column

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

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

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

Container ships are killing a growing number of whales through accidents. Japan's murderous whaling expeditions are killing hundreds of whales. Global warming has worsened matters. All this is the result of human activity, which



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



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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

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



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

60 per cent of animals on the planet since 1970.

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

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

More important, the devising and application of technologies would require continued and

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

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

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

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

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

Himachal factors in growth aspirations amid fiscal challenges

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

Plummeting central grants

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

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

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

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

Pathways to financial stability

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

Enhancing tax compliance

Improving tax compliance and minimising revenue leakages are crucial for fiscal recovery. The

state must focus on:

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

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

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

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

Rationalising subsidies

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monetising state assets

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

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

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

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

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

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

Seeking ecological compensation

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

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

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

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

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

Boosting tourism revenue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Phishing scams: Protect yourself from cyber threats!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The first and foremost way to prevent yourself from being a victim is to enable multi-factor authentication (MFA), even if credentials are compromised for it adds an extra layer of security.

Organisations should conduct regular cybersecurity training to raise awareness about phishing tactics for their employees. Even, the Indian government has taken several initiatives such as the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative, Digital India Campaign and many more to raise awareness about phishing and enhance cybersecurity among citizens, businesses and government institutions. The Indian Government regularly posts cybersecurity tips and scam alerts through platforms like Twitter (@Cyberdost) and Facebook and the Cyber Crime Helpline 1930 allows victims to report phishing attacks quickly as a few initiatives that aim to guide how to detect and avoid phishing attacks and educates users about common phishing tactics used especially in digital payments, banking frauds and fake emails.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IN BRIEF

PM MODI SAYS PROUD MOMENT

India crosses 1 bn tonnes coal output



NMDC ops resume as workers resume work

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



Coal production site.

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

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

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

Reddy said.

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

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

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

The coal ministry said the record coal output is the result

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Further, stock brokers are required to maintain an arm's-length relationship between their activities and that of their subsidiary/joint venture in GIFT-IFSC. Such a relationship is required to be maintained in terms of key personnel, infrastructure, segregation of books and records, independent reg-

ulatory control and supervisory mechanism, etc.

"In order to facilitate Sebi registered stock brokers to undertake securities market related activities in GIFT-IFSC, it has been decided to do away with the requirement of obtaining specific approval from Sebi. Stock brokers proposing to undertake securities market



related activities in GIFT-IFSC may do so under a Separate Business Unit (SBU) of the stock broking entity itself," the regulator said in its consultation paper.

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



Godrej Properties buys land in Bengaluru for housing project

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

Domestic air passenger traffic rises 11 pc in Feb: DGCA

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

Sensex, Nifty climb 1 pc on fresh foreign fund inflows

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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



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

However, Infosys, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, Titan

and Bajaj Finserv were among the laggards.

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



Electric scooter maker River to open 12 more stores

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

Crompton reimagines lighting with launch of INFINIA

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Bringing in a new range of decorative and aesthetically superior lighting, Crompton Greaves Consumer Electricals Ltd., has expanded its range of Batten Lights portfolio with the launch of two new products - Infina 24W a unique designed indirect lighting product with Pristech technology. Infina 24W comes with a unique design with decorative endcaps giving brighter illumination with an aesthetically appealing finish. Also launching SlimO 20W - 15% Slimmer batten with Decorative endcaps, designed to complement modern living spaces. These LED



lights combine advanced lighting technology and sleek aesthetics, to create the perfect ambience for both homes and offices. By enhancing decor, these new fixtures not only brighten spaces but also add a contemporary and sophisticated touch. Ideal for trans-

forming interiors, these lights seamlessly blend functionality and elegance, turning environments into inviting and visually captivating settings.

Lighting has transitioned from a basic need to a vital design element that defines ambience and personal style.

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

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

CLASSIC ELEGANCE, MODERN INNOVATION

Meet the limited-edition Samsonite's New Streamlite Samsonite

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

The New Streamlite is a modern take on Samsonite's iconic Streamlite from the 1940s. Available in Admiral Blue and Bermuda Green, its framed exterior exudes confidence, blending structure with refinement and classic design with modern sensibilities. It features a TSA-approved lock frame with one-touch access for seamless security. The Aero-Trac™ Whirl Suspension Wheels minimize vibration and noise, ensuring stability and effortless

movement on any surface.

The collection features three distinct pieces: a briefcase, a Spinner 55, and a Spinner 75. Each piece is thoughtfully designed to meet the needs of travellers who value both aesthetics and practicality. The interior showcases meticulous

craftsmanship in a luxurious a satin-like finish featuring a heritage-inspired Resort Print lining. Additionally, intelligent compartments, premium packing cubes, and a matching luggage cover in high-quality jacquard fabric ensure an effortless and elevated packing experience.

Those who value enduring quality over fleeting trends will appreciate the New Streamlite as a true collector's item. More than mere luggage, the New Streamlite embodies timeless design and thoughtful craftsmanship. Each piece includes a monogrammable tag, offering the unique opportunity to create a personal heirloom.

OCEAN DUMPING – OR CLIMATE SOLUTION?

Growing industry bets on ocean to capture carbon

PNS ■ HALIFAX (NOVA SCOTIA)

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

Whether it's pollution or a silver bullet that will save the planet may depend on whom you ask. From shore, a pipe releases a mixture of water and magnesium oxide — a pow-

dery white mineral used in everything from construction to heartburn pills that Planetary Technologies, based in Nova Scotia, is betting will absorb more planet-warming gases into the sea.

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

Planetary is part of a growing industry racing to engineer a solution to global warming using the absorbent power of the oceans. It is backed by USD



1 million from Elon Musk's foundation and competing for a prize of USD 50 million more.

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

But the field remains rife with debate over the consequences for the oceans if the strategies are deployed at large

scale, and over the exact benefits for the climate. Critics say the efforts are moving too quickly and with too few guardrails.

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

Planetary, like most of the ocean startups, is financing its work by selling carbon credits — or tokens representing one

metric ton of carbon dioxide removed from the air. Largely unregulated and widely debated, carbon credits have become popular this century as a way for companies to purchase offsets rather than reduce emissions themselves. Most credits are priced at several hundred dollars apiece.

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

Pulkit Samrat & Isabelle Kaif's romantic comedy gets a new release date

The much-awaited romantic-comedy-drama *Suswagatam Khushamadeed* starring Pulkit Samrat and Isabelle Kaif has been making noise ever since announcement. The film that promises to deliver a heartwarming message of love, unity and acceptance is all set for a grand theatrical release in cinemas on May 16, 2025. The film features the fresh pairing of talented Pulkit Samrat along with the debutant Isabelle Kaif. Pulkit Samrat's signature charm and Isabelle Kaif's fresh screen presence are sure to give a delightful cinematic experience to the audiences. It blends humour, romance and a universal appealing narrative that will resonate with audiences of all ages. Set against vibrant backdrop, the movie showcases a unique cross-cultural love story, emphasising the power of togetherness in today's divided world. Speaking about the film, Pulkit Samrat said, "I'm happy to be a part of a good story and a good team. I'm glad that the makers believe so much in the film that in spite of so many hurdles, date changes, etc., we are finally gonna release the film that we've made with so much love! It's been years of wait and now I can't wait for the audiences to watch this work of heart and labour!"



Isabelle Kaif, who plays the character of Noor, shared, "Being part of this film has been a wonderful experience. Working with Pulkit and

director Dhiraj has been great. We had a lovely time shooting, and I hope the audience enjoys the film!" Director Dhiraj Kumar shared his vision for the film *Suswagatam Khushamadeed* is a story that conveys a strong message of love and togetherness. This film serves as a reminder that love knows no boundaries and I am sure that the film will touch every heart." The film *Suswagatam Khushamadeed*, is produced by Sharwan Kumar Agarwal, Anil Agarwal, Dhiraj, Deepak Dhar, Azaan Ali, Suneel Rao and co-produced by Javed Deoriawale, and is directed by Dhiraj Kumar. It brings an ensemble cast of talented actors like Sahil Vaid, Priyanka Singh, Late Rituraj Singh, Meghna Malik, Late Arun Bali, Neela Mulherkar, Manu Rishi Chaddha, Prashant Singh, Rajkumar Kanoujia, Mehul Surana, Shruti Ulfat, Sajjad Delafrooz together in this romantic comedy. The music of the film will be released under the prestigious banner of Zee Music Company and the film will be released nationwide by Reliance Entertainment in association with Insite India, Endemol Shine India, Yellow Ant Productions, Shurbhi Entertainment, Azaan Entertainment and U Entertainment.

DIVYA DUTTA ON WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN HISTORICAL FILMS

Actress Divya Dutta has opened up about the ongoing gender disparity in the entertainment industry. She believes that despite progress, the industry remains male-dominated and there's still a long road ahead to achieve true equality. When asked about the representation of women in historical films, Divya shared her thoughts on the challenges faced by female characters in period dramas. She acknowledged that while there have been strong female roles, the space is still largely male-dominated, and there's much work to be done to ensure equal representation and depth for women in these films. She said, "That really depends on the story you're telling. If we are talking about the industry in general, yes, it is still a male-dominated world, but we are moving toward making it more equal. However, there's still a long way to go. But when it comes to stories and historical characters, it depends on the narrative. If you're portraying someone like Rani Lakshmi Bai, she is the protagonist. Similarly, if you're telling the story of someone like Indira Gandhi, she too is the central character. It varies based on whose story is being told. If it's the story of Maharaj Sambhaji, then it would focus on him." Speaking about her latest project, *Chhaava*, the *Veer Zara* actress mentioned, "When they approached me with the role of Rajmata Sohra Bai, it was already very well-researched. I still have all the sketches and stories that were prepared for me. With all these details, all you need to do is be very sincere in your approach and truly feel the character as the makers intend for you to. The sets, costumes and dialogues were beautifully executed, and our director was wonderful. The whole experience felt immersive and I felt truly part of that era. It was my first time working on a historical like this, and it was a beautiful experience." Talking about her upcoming projects, Divya shared, "In terms of future projects, I have a film coming up featuring Manoj Bajpayee and Jimmy Shergill, along with a biopic that stars Neeraj Kavi. I am also involved in a web show and two English films."



Sharvari's take on stardom: I'm still figuring it out

Bollywood actress Sharvari, who is riding high on a dream run with her standout performances in films such as *Maharaj*, *Munjya* and *Vedaa*, is grateful for her journey so far. However, she admits she's unsure whether she has "made it" yet. When asked if she feels she has finally arrived or become a star, Sharvari, "No, I am grateful for the beginnings that I have had. I don't know whether I have made it and things like that, but I do know that I want to continue to work very, very hard." "I have a dream, so I hope that I am able to work towards it and achieve it," said Sharvari, who was in the capital for the launch of Sheba's new campaign called "All they want is Sheba." The 27-year-old actress worked as an assistant director in the movies *Pyaar Ka PUNCHNA 2*, *Bajirao Mastani* and *Sonu Ke Titu Ki Sweety*. She made her acting debut in 2020 with the series *The Forgotten Army - Azaadi Ke Liye*. In 2021, she made her film debut alongside Rani Mukerji, Saif Ali Khan and Siddhant Chaturvedi in the crime comedy *Bunty Aur Babli 2*. After which, she tasted success with *Maharaj*, *Munjya* and *Vedaa*.

'FINGERS CROSSED FOR KICK 2', SAYS JACQUELINE FERNANDEZ

Actor Jacqueline Fernandez says she hopes to be a part of the second installment of 2014 blockbuster movie *Kick*, a movie that changed her life. Headlined by superstar Salman Khan, the movie was an official remake of Telugu star Ravi Teja's 2009 film of the same title. It also featured Randeep Hooda and Nawazuddin Siddiqui. Salman and filmmaker Sajid Nadiadwala, who directed the movie, officially announced its sequel last year. "I'm so excited for the franchise, but I really feel that this would be something that Sajid Nadiadwala or Salman can confirm. But I really do hope that it happens soon because there has been so much love given to the *Kick* brand by fans and it changed my life." "I really do hope that it comes through and fingers crossed it will," said Fernandez, at the press conference of Zee Cine awards. *Kick* was one of the biggest blockbusters of 2014. It was also Khan's first film to enter the Rs 200 crore club. Fernandez, known for films like *Murder 2*, *Race 2* and *Dishoom*, shared her excitement for 2025 as she has multiple releases lined up. She will be seen in the upcoming installments of the *Welcome* and *Housefull* franchises. "It's an exciting year for me because there will be a lot of releases and it's

exciting to be back on *Housefull*. We're on *Housefull 5* right now, so teaming up with that amazing cast and crew is always so much fun," she said. The fifth part of the popular comedy franchise is helmed by Tarun Mansukhani of *Dostana* fame and produced by Nadiadwala's production banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment. Besides Fernandez, *Housefull 5* also features Akshay Kumar, Ritesh Deshmukh, Abhishek Bachchan, Fardeen Khan, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Chitragada Singh, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma and Nikitin Dheer. Similarly, the latest installment of *Welcome* franchise, titled *Welcome To The Jungle*, also features an ensemble cast that includes Shroff, Kumar, Suniel Shetty, Paresh Rawal, Arshad Warsi, Tusshar Kapoor, Talpade, Aftab Shivdasani, Raveena Tandon, Lara Dutta, Disha Patani, Johnny Lever and Rajpal Yadav. Fernandez called *Welcome To The Jungle*, which is being directed by Ahmed Khan, a "crazy comedy". "It is something new for me. And we've really been having a great time shooting it, so the fans are going to love it," she said, adding that she is also excited for her maiden web series, which will be released in April.



FUN

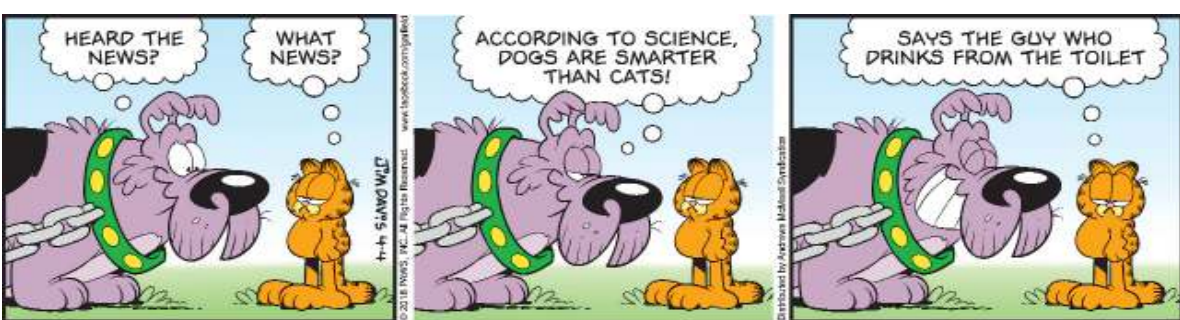
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



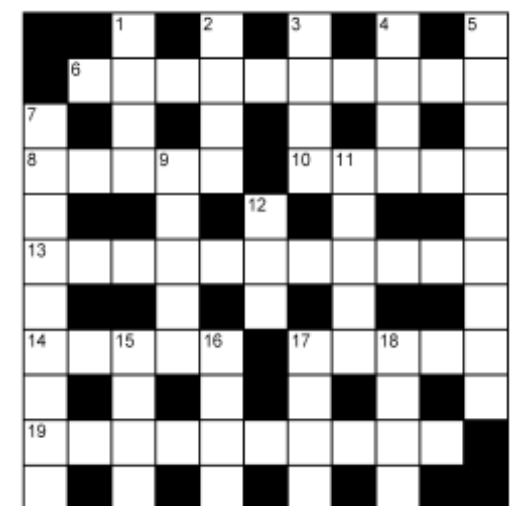
REALITY CHECK



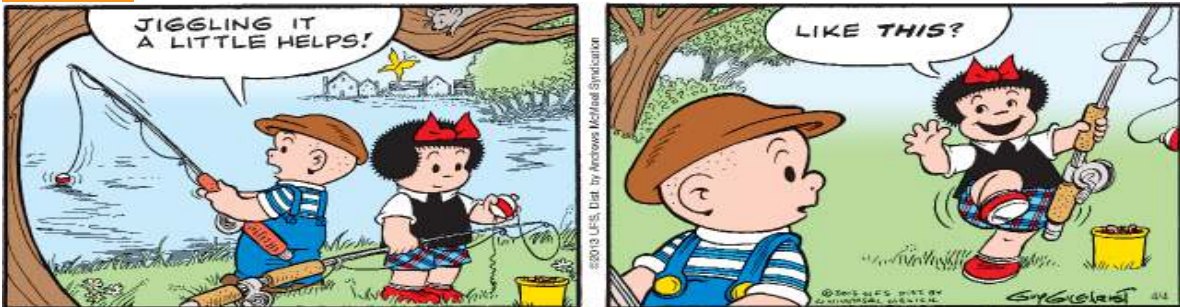
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

DIFFICULTY RATINGS: ★★☆☆☆

- ACROSS
- A maker of horseshoes
 - Wanders
 - Office tables
 - He wrote the play 'Romeo and Juliet'
 - Gets closer to
 - Go by bike
 - Somewhere to go out to for a meal
- DOWN
- This bites a dog
 - Divisions in a play
 - Second-hand
 - Comes first in a race
 - Spoke very quietly
 - People in jail
 - Manufacturer
 - The other side in a war
 - Something left after a fire
 - As well
 - Male deer
 - Be concerned
 - Metal containers for drink, food
- SOLUTION
- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| L | E | T | T | E | R | S | W | I | M |
| I | T | I | D | E | E | H | O | D | E |
| K | E | S | H | O | D | E | S | I | D |
| E | A | U | C | T | I | O | N | E | E |
| W | E | B | E | T | E | R | S | W | D |
| A | M | E | T | E | O | R | S | | |
| I | P | P | L | E | T | | | | |
| T | U | R | T | L | E | S | T | | |
| R | O | E | E | | | | | | |
| R | U | D | E | | | | | | |
| D | E | G | R | E | E | | | | |



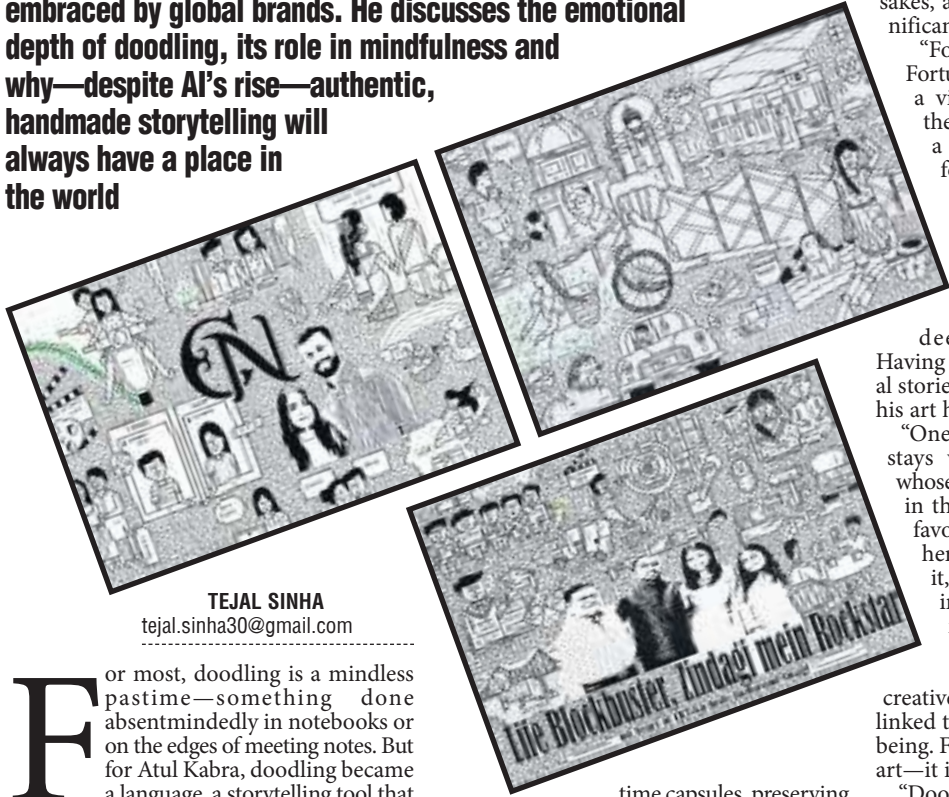
HAND-DRAWN, HEARTFELT

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



Emerging stronger after a tough fight with GUILLAIN-BARRÉ SYNDROME

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



TEJAL SINHA
 tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

Kabra’s doodles serve as deeply personal

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

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

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

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

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

“More than an art form, doodling teaches children how to express freely, think visually, and find their own creative voice,” Kabra

explains. “The future isn’t about choosing between AI and hand-drawn creativity—it’s about knowing where they serve different purposes. AI may create fast, but a hand-drawn doodle is timeless.”

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

“For brands like Samsung, IKEA and Fortune 500 companies, doodles serve as a visual storytelling tool—translating their identity, values and mission into a compelling visual narrative. The focus is strategic—creating a piece that speaks to a wide audience,” he explains. On the other hand, personal doodles carry deep emotions.

Having illustrated over 2,000 personal stories, Kabra has witnessed the impact his art has on individuals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Your passion is valid. Your story is valid,” he states.

What began as late-night sketches has grown into a brand that has trained over 5,000 students, doodled more than 2,000 stories, and collaborated with global brands. “The moment I stood on the TEDx stage, I realised—this wasn’t just about art. It was



about giving people a voice through visuals,” Kabra says. Handcrafted, deeply personal art is difficult to scale without losing its essence, but Kabra ensures that storytelling remains at the core of Doodle Kabra.

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

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

“We’re already seeing a revival of hand-drawn storytelling. The return of handwritten letters, vinyl records, and handcrafted gifts proves that people crave authenticity,” he explains.

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

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

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

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

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

A young student’s struggle to survive

On New Year’s Day in 2024, Arun (name changed), a 22-year-old student from Bangalore, felt his hands go numb. What started as a routine illness was initially dismissed but very quickly turned into a life-and-death situation. He had contracted a bacterial infection that

had led to GBS and was attacking his nerves and disrupting his ability to breathe. His condition deteriorated, and he was put on a ventilator. The extended use of mechanical ventilation was fraught with its own hazards, such as infection and muscle wasting.

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

GBS: Challenge in understanding and prevention

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

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

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

CONSTRUCTING A BETTER TOMORROW

PNS|HYDERABAD

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

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

Because of the high demand and frequent labour shortages, the construction industry continues to struggle to retain a qualified and dependable workforce. This problem is directly addressed by it, a comprehensive digital platform that enables General Contractors to effectively communicate with Labour Contractors. The platform greatly cuts down on time and effort spent on workforce mobilisation by allowing

general contractors to upload project requirements and look for qualified contractors from a pre-verified pool. Additionally, labour contractors can browse ongoing projects in real time and offer available labour. By ensuring that skilled labour is distributed quickly and effectively, this streamlined approach helps to close the gap between supply and demand. Furthermore, by evaluating contractors’ competencies, the digital contractor evaluation system makes sure that only capable and trustworthy teams are sent out. Consequently, it helps to



ensure more consistent worker availability, which promotes more efficient project management.

It has undergone successful testing on Capacite’s InfraProjects projects. How would this help the infrastructure and construction sector as a whole?

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

vide quick onboarding and precise workforce availability projections.

What’s its speciality?

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

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

For a project to be completed successfully, communication and teamwork are essential, particularly on large construction sites. Through the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



New rules, saliva ban reversal as IPL kicks off

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, this rule will not apply to afternoon games.

Additionally, the Decision Review System has been expanded to include

height wides and off-side wides, ensuring a fairer adjudication of deliveries. Despite debates about its influence on the game, the Impact Player rule remains in place.

Captain's corner

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pant's redemption arc

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



became part of cricketing lore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bumrah's fitness

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

The pacer, back at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, is undergoing

assessments to determine his readiness for the IPL. Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene remains optimistic but cautious, given that Bumrah's availability crucial not only for MI but also for India's upcoming tour of England.

The Dhoni question

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

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

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

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

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

Ro-Ko in T20 again

Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma retired from T20s after India's triumphant World Cup campaign last year, making IPL 2025 their first major outing in the shortest format post-retirement.

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

Novak Djokovic wanted players to add names to antitrust lawsuit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens (US)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parry, Hillier to participate in Hero Indian Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

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

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

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

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

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

Hillier, 25, is also in impressive form, having finished runner-up at the 2025 Hero Dubai Desert Classic. He has posted consistent Top-20 finishes across Australia, South

Africa, Bahrain, and Qatar and is currently ranked fifth in the Race to Dubai standings.

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

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

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

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

AIU bans two more Indian athletes

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

Kirulkar's urine sample collected during Pune Half Marathon in December last year, which he had won with a time of 1:04:22, was found to

contain Meldonium when tested at the National Dope Testing Laboratory in New Delhi.

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

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

Earlier, New Caledonia's 36-year-old striker Georges Gope-Fenepej scored twice in his team's win over Tahiti. The 14-year international veteran collected the rebound from captain Cesar Zeoulou's saved shot in the 50th minute and delicately chipped the ball into the Tahiti goal from close range.

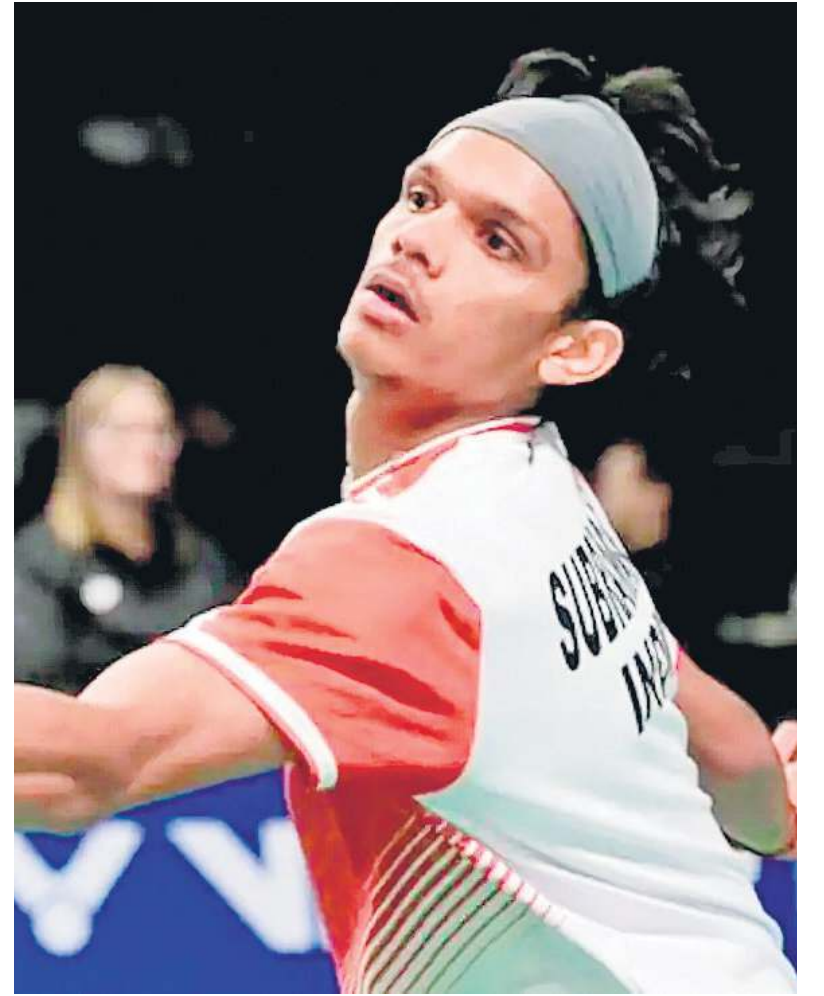
In the 75th minute, he launched a spectacular left-foot shot from 30 meters, catching the goalkeeper off his line. Substitute Lues Waya added to the scoring in stoppage time. "We're all obviously football fans so to see someone like Georges play and the display he put on today is absolutely magnificent and wonderful," New

Pakistan beat New Zealand by 9 wickets in third T20

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auckland

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

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



Sankar stuns world no 2 Antonsen in Swiss Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Basel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Subramanian vs Antonsen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Zealand, New Caledonia to meet in Oceania qualifying final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Wellington

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

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

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

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

"It's all about team," Wood said. "We had

a pretty dominant first half and we wanted to keep it going into the second half. I think the team did really well in that sense."

Earlier, New Caledonia's 36-year-old striker Georges Gope-Fenepej scored twice in his team's win over Tahiti. The 14-year international veteran collected the rebound from captain Cesar Zeoulou's saved shot in the 50th minute and delicately chipped the ball into the Tahiti goal from close range.

In the 75th minute, he launched a spectacular left-foot shot from 30 meters, catching the goalkeeper off his line. Substitute Lues Waya added to the scoring in stoppage time. "We're all obviously football fans so to see someone like Georges play and the display he put on today is absolutely magnificent and wonderful," New

Caledonia coach Johann Sidaner said.

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

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

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

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

SHANMUKHA: A BIZARRE PLOT THAT MAKES NO SENSE

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
sureshkavirayani@gmail.com

REVIEW

Cast: Aadhi Saikumar, Avika Gor, Aditya Om, Chirag Jani, Krishnu, Chitram Seenu, Manoj Nandam, Shanmugam Sappani, Ariyana, and others

Music: Ravi Basrur

Cinematography: RR Vishnu

Producers: Thulasiram Sappani, Shanmugam Sappani, Ramesh Yadav

Director: Shanmugam Sappani

Release date: March 21, 2025

Rating: 0.5/5



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

Story

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

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

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

Analysis

Every year, hundreds of films are released, but the success rate is only 7 to 10 percent. The reason the success rate does not increase is that filmmakers fail to come up with a good story, screenplay, or engaging elements. If you look at *Shanmukha*, this film makes no proper sense. Before the release, the makers promoted the film, claiming it had

some devotional elements and thrilling moments. However, this film is a complete disaster, with neither devotion nor thrill.

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

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

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

Performances

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

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

appears in bits and pieces.

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

Technical Aspects

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

Final Verdict

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

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

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

REVIEW

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

Story

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

Analysis

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

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



Final Verdict

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

Performances

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

Technical Aspects

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

Final Verdict

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

Cast: Saptagiri, Priyanka Sharma, Muralidhar Goud, Annapurna, Pramodini, Lakshman Meesala, Basha, Rohin, Ramprasad and others

Music Director: Sekhar Chandra

Cinematographer: Sujatha Siddharth

Producers: K.Y. Babu, Bhanu Prakash Goud, Sukka Venkateswar Goud, Vaibhav Reddy Muthiyala

Director: Abhilash Reddy Gopidi

Release Date: March 21, 2025

Rating: 1/5

Tuk Tuk: A fresh concept ruined by slow narration



Cast: Harsh Roshan, Karthikeya Dev, Steven Madhu, Saanvee Megghana, Nihal Kodhaty, and others

Cinematographer: Karthik Saikumar

Music Director: Santhu Omkar

Producers: Rahul Reddy D, Lokku Sri Varun, C. Sree Ramulu Reddy, and Supreeth C. Krishna

Director: Supreeth C. Krishna

Release Date: March 21, 2025

Rating: 2/5

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

Story

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

Analysis

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

The second half attempts to unravel the mystery behind *Tuk Tuk* and the spirit inhabiting it, but the pacing remains sluggish. The real plot unfolds only midway through the second half, which feels too late.

While some romantic and emotional moments work well, the film lacks a strong conflict to hold the audience's attention. On the brighter side, the cinematography is excellent, capturing the lush green landscapes, village atmosphere and monsoon settings beautifully. The background score and songs by Santhu Omkar are also noteworthy, adding to the film's visual appeal. The director aims to highlight how a village girl defies outdated traditions to pursue her dreams, which is a commendable element, though the execution could have been stronger. However, several scenes in the latter half are unnecessarily stretched, affecting the overall impact.

Performances

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

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

Final Verdict

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

Chiranjeevi calls out unauthorised fan meeting charges in UK

Megastar Chiranjeevi recently received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Team Bridge India, an organisation that honoured him at the House of Commons in the UK. The event was attended by several UK Ministers, Parliamentarians and Under-Secretaries.

However, reports have emerged that some individuals attempted to charge fans a fee to meet the actor—a move that was done without his knowledge. It remains unclear whether the event organizers were responsible for this or if others misused the occasion for personal gain.

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

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

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

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



Rana to produce a film with Manoj Bajpayee with American director



is handling the production on his own or if his good friend Akshay Kumar will be joining him once again.

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

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

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

Now, reports suggest that Rana Daggubati is producing a film with Bollywood actor Manoj Bajpayee. For this project, he has roped in American director Ben Rekhi. The untitled film is a Hindi social drama and marks Rana's debut as a producer in the Hindi film industry. It is still unclear whether he

