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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

If Rahul Gandhi and his party are now claiming the Centre's decision as their success, they must first explain why a caste census was not conducted when they were ruling. If the Congress truly believed in a caste census, why didn't they implement it during their 50 years in power? From KCR's so-called 'samagra survey' to Revanth's caste enumeration, there has been no standard methodology. Surveys were tampered with to inflate the numbers of favourable castes and suppress others

— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union MoS for Home P4

DON'T MISS...

5 medicos among 6 killed in road accident

In a ghastly road accident, five medical college students and a 50-year-old man were killed when the car in which they were travelling crashed into a house at Pothireddypalem village of Kovuru mandal of Nellore district on Wednesday. Police said that six medical college students, studying second year medicine at Narayana medical college. They attended the engagement function of the sister of one of the deceased. When they were going back to their hostel, their car crashed into a roadside house killing a resident of the house Venkata Ramanaiah...

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Form a popular govt' in Manipur

Twenty-one Manipur MLAs have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah separately, urging them to form a "popular government" in the northeastern state, which is now under the President's rule, to ensure peace and normalcy.
The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur, where more than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023...

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Sugarcane price hiked by 4.41 pc

The government on Wednesday decided to increase the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane by 4.41 per cent to Rs 355 per quintal for the upcoming 2025-26 season beginning October. A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi keeping in mind the interest of sugarcane farmers, an official statement said. For the current 2024-25 season, the sugarcane FRP has been fixed at Rs 340 per quintal...

-PAGE: 8

GT looking at Gill as long-term captain

Gujarat Titans have systems and processes in place to help Shubman Gill "grow as a captain" as the franchise has appointed the India batter with a long-term view, says COO Colonel Arvinder Singh. A vital cog in their title-winning campaign in Gujarat Titans' maiden season in IPL 2022, Gill was appointed captain of the franchise when Hardik Pandya moved back to Mumbai Indians ahead of the 2024 edition. While the first year as a full-time skipper didn't bring Gill much success as GT finished eighth...

-SPORTS

7 devotees killed in wall collapse at Simhachalam

- Thousands of devotees had gathered to witness 'Nijaroopa Darshanam' during Chandanotsavam
- Wall, allegedly constructed recently, became unstable due to waterlogging after heavy rains

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

NDRF personnel conducting rescue operations at the collapsed wall site of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple, Simhachalam, Visakhapatnam

At least seven devotees lost their lives, including four from the same family, and several others were injured when a wall that was constructed recently collapsed at the Simhachalam hilltop in the early hours of Wednesday. The tragedy took place around 3 a.m., as thousands of devotees had gathered to witness the Nijaroopa Darshanam of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy during the annual Chandanotsavam festival.

The victims were identified as Kumpatla Manikanta Eswara Sesha Rao (29), Pathi Durga Prasad Naidu (30), Yedla Venkata Rao (58), Pilla Umamaheswar Rao (30), Pilla Sailaja (27), Gujjari Mahalakshmi (65), and Pyla Venkata Ratnam (45). One more person, who sustained critical injuries in the collapse, is currently undergoing treatment at King George Hospital, where all the injured were promptly shifted.

Preliminary reports suggest that the wall, allegedly of recent construction, became unstable due to waterlogging caused by heavy overnight rains. The weakened structure gave way under the pressure of the large crowd waiting in queues to witness the rare darshan, where the deity is displayed without the customary sandalwood paste.

Emergency response teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), along with local authorities, were quickly mobilised to carry out rescue operations.

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CM announces Rs 25 L ex-gratia for kin of deceased

Three-member committee to inquire into the incident

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Expressing deep shock at the death of seven pilgrims following the sudden wall collapse at Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple in Simhachalam, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, on Wednesday, directed the officials to provide emergency medical services to the injured in the incident.

Continued on Page 2

CM unveils vision for Amaravati

AI CAPITAL, GREEN GROWTH AND PEOPLE-POWERED PROGRESS

C PRADEEP KUMAR
cpk007@gmail.com
■ VIJAYAWADA

The NDA government, under Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, has launched a sweeping revival plan for Amaravati, reasserting its commitment to develop the capital into a globally recognised city rooted in smart urbanism, sustainability and inclusive growth.

The Centre has pledged an unprecedented ₹15,000 crore for Amaravati's development, supplemented by funding partnerships with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and HUDCO. With HUDCO alone signing an agreement for ₹11,000 crore, the city's financial foundation is robust. Additional Central assistance of ₹1,500 crore and a proposed ₹2,245 crore 57-km railway line further reinforce Amaravati's strategic importance.

The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA) has resumed operations, with ₹36 crore allocated for clearing invasive vegetation across 25,000 acres. Construction activities are slated to resume fully by December, following the adoption of 23 expert recommendations. Issues with previous contractors are being addressed and fresh tenders will be floated where needed.

Continued on Page 2

CM urges NDA leaders to attend PM's Amaravati visit

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has called upon leaders and activists from the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Jana Sena Party and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to actively participate in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Amaravati on May 2, where he will relaunch developmental works for the State capital.

In a teleconference with MPs, MLAs and grassroots-level leaders, the CM revealed that the Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone for developmental projects worth ₹49,040 crore in Amaravati.

Continued on Page 2

Centre announces caste enumeration in next census

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a major decision, the government on Wednesday announced that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise in a "transparent" manner and slammed the opposition parties for using caste survey as a "political tool".

The Congress and other opposition parties have been vociferously demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue, and some states like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have conducted such surveys.

The government decision comes ahead of assembly elections in Bihar, where several parties including some BJP allies have been coming out in support of the caste census.

Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some states have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society.

Noting that caste was not included in all census operations conducted since Independence, Vaishnaw alleged that the Congress governments have always opposed caste census and the party had used the issue as a political tool.

Continued on Page 2

Complete projects on time: PM to Chief Secretaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has directed the Chief Secretaries of various State governments to complete various national and inter-State projects on time. He held a video conference with the Chief Secretaries from Delhi on Wednesday to discuss the progress of the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana grievance redressal, Tumkur-Rayadurga via Kalyanadurga new railway line project and the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Yojana scheme.

Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister directed the completion of various national and inter-State projects on time and expeditiously. He added that the complaints related to the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana should be resolved quickly.

Prime Minister Modi instructed the Chief Secretaries to take steps for the successful implementation of the PM Vishwakarma Yojana scheme. He directed the Railway Department to coordinate with Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to take steps to complete the construction of the Tumkur railway line on time.

hief Secretary K Vijayanand, who participated in the video-conference virtually from Delhi, informed the Prime Minister that the Tumkur-Rayadurga via Kanyanadurga new line (206 km) project was approved in 2009. The project cost was Rs 970.34 crore and the work was to be completed by 2015. Due to delays, the revised cost has reached Rs 2495.86 crore. He also said that the completion time of the work has been extended till 2027.

14 dead in Kolkata hotel blaze

PM announces ex-gratia, CM orders probe

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A massive fire that tore through a budget hotel in the congested Mechuapatti area of Burrabazar in central Kolkata on Tuesday night claimed at least 14 lives and left 13 injured, triggering a political blame game and calls for accountability.

The fire broke out around 7:30 PM in the six-storey Rituraj Hotel and quickly engulfed the building, trapping several of the 88 guests staying in 42 rooms at the time, officials said. "Most of those who died were trapped inside and could not escape the thick smoke," a senior officer of the Fire and Emergency Services Department said.

Narayana reviews arrangements for PM Modi's programme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration Minister P Narayana, on Wednesday, conducted a comprehensive review of the arrangements being made for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming public meeting in Amaravati. Accompanied by senior officials, the Minister inspected the venue and surrounding areas, told the media that preparations are nearing completion.

Highlighting the significance of logistics, Narayana said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had directed officials to ensure seamless parking and transportation arrangements, particularly by making contingency plans in case of rain. Police authorities have been instructed to implement alternate parking solutions to prevent inconvenience to attendees.

Originally, the venue was being prepared to accommodate 3,000 buses and 1,000 cars, but due to the anticipated turnout of over five lakh people, officials have now scaled up parking capacity to handle 6,500–7,000 buses and around 3,000 cars. Narayana said that as per protocol, formal invitations are being sent to key stakeholders, including political leaders and officials from across departments. Coordination among all departments concerned is in full swing to ensure the event's smooth execution.

"The Prime Minister's visit is of historic importance for Andhra Pradesh. We are making every effort to ensure that the arrangements reflect the significance of the occasion," the Minister said, adding that authorities are working round-the-clock to make the event a grand success.

The PM is scheduled to launch multiple key infrastructure and development projects during his visit on May 2.

SC reserves verdict on plea for delimitation exercise in AP, TG

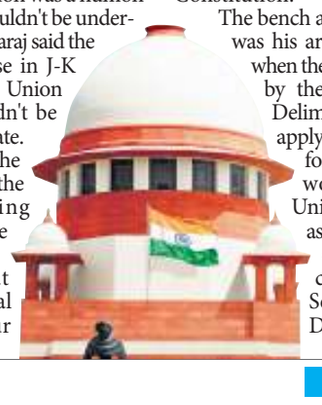
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved its verdict on a plea seeking directions to the Centre for holding the delimitation exercise to increase the assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh reserved its decision on a plea filed by K Purushottam Reddy who contended that holding delimitation exercise only in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and excluding Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was unconstitutional.

The petitioner's counsel said he was seeking parity with UT of Jammu and Kashmir and delimitation exercise be taken in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Additional solicitor general K M Nataraj, appearing for the Centre, referred to Section 26 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act and said the delimitation process could be undertaken only after the 2026 census concluded.

He said delimitation was a humongous exercise and couldn't be undertaken overnight. Nataraj said the delimitation exercise in J-K was in the case of Union Territory and couldn't be equated with the state.



The counsel for the petitioner opposed the distinction being drawn between the UT and a state and contended that Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland were included in the prior delimitation notification issued by the Centre, but not Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, though the northeastern states were also governed by Article 170 of the Constitution.

The bench asked him whether it was his argument that as and when the power was exercised by the Centre under the Delimitation Act, it must apply to all states uniformly. He said states would also include Union Territories also as far as notification for delimitation was concerned and referred to Section 2(f) of the Delimitation Act.

AP, TG women legislators top in facing criminal cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana and Andhra Pradesh have emerged as the top states with the highest proportion of sitting women MPs and MLAs with criminal backgrounds, according to a recent analysis of 512 women legislators across the country.

Of the 12 women representatives from Telangana, eight (67%) have declared criminal cases, and five (42%) have declared serious criminal cases, making the state one of the worst performers on this front.

Andhra Pradesh follows closely, with 14 (58%) of its 24 women legislators facing criminal charges and nine (38%) involved in serious criminal cases.

> *This trend is reflected in the national picture as well, where out of 512 sitting women MPs and MLAs, 143 (28%) have criminal cases and 78 (15%) face serious charges such as attempt to murder and even murder.*

This trend is reflected in the national picture as well, where out of 512 sitting women MPs and MLAs, 143 (28%) have criminal cases and 78 (15%) face serious charges such as attempt to murder and even murder.

As per the ADR report, among political parties, the TDP and AAP have the highest percentages of women MPs and MLAs with criminal records, that is, 65% and 69% respectively. Serious charges are also alarmingly high in these parties, with 45% of TDP and 31% of AAP's women legislators facing grave charges. Andhra Pradesh also leads with the highest average assets for women MPs/MLAs at Rs 74.22 crore. Across the country, the average wealth per woman legislator is Rs 20.34 crore, and the total wealth of the 512 analysed comes to Rs 10,417 crore. Notably, 17 women MPs/MLAs are billionaires.

Out of the total 512 women MPs/MLAs, 71% are graduates or above, 24% have studied between Class V and XII, and only 12 are diploma holders. Youth representation (25 to 40 years) is at 22% among women, a much better figure compared to just 10% among male legislators.

AP Govt, UNICEF join hands to empower youth

LAUNCH THREE INITIATIVES -- YOUTH FOR SOCIAL IMPACT, YOUTHHUB AND PASSPORT TO EARNING

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major step towards youth empowerment, the Andhra Pradesh government, in collaboration with UNICEF, has launched three flagship initiatives -- Youth for Social Impact (YFSI), YouthHub and Passport to Earning (P2E) -- at a high-profile event attended by Nara Lokesh, Minister for Human Resource Development, Electronics & IT.

The initiatives were launched under a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in the presence of key UNICEF representatives, including Zelalem Birhanu Taffesse, Chief of UNICEF Field Office for Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana; Murali Krishna M, Adolescent and Youth Development Officer Manasa Priya Vasudevan, Adolescent and Youth Development Specialist at UNICEF India and Ravi Thejha Bale, Digital, AI and Strategy Consultant from UNICEF's Office of Innovation in Stockholm.

These programmes are aligned with Andhra Pradesh's ambitious "One Entrepreneur, One Family" mission and the Swarna Andhra Vision 2047, aimed at fostering innovation, inclusion, and sustainable livelihoods among the youth.

KEY INITIATIVES

'Youth for Social Impact' programme will empower over 2,00,000 youth from polytechnic, degree, and engineering institutions with entrepreneurial thinking and problem-solving skills using UNICEF's globally recognised UPSHIFT framework. It aims to cultivate a generation of job creators rather than job-seekers.

YouthHub, however, is a multilingual digital platform integrated with the State's Naipunyam portal. It connects marginalised youth to skilling, job, and volunteering opportunities. It ensures inclusive access to the digital economy and support for all young people, regardless of background.

P2E targets the youth aged 15–29, providing free, globally competitive digital and professional skill training, and preparing them for leadership roles in the fast-evolving workforce landscape.

Speaking at the launch, Zelalem Birhanu Taffesse and Manasa Priya Vasudevan lauded the Andhra Pradesh government's forward-thinking approach. "The State's commitment to youth empowerment and inclusive development is a model for the nation. UNICEF is proud to partner with Andhra Pradesh in building a future where every young person is prepared to thrive and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development," they said.

The success of this collaboration is credited to the leadership of Kona Sasidhar, Principal Secretary of the Higher Education Department and G Ganesh Kumar, CEO of the Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), who played a pivotal role in conceptualising and operationalising the programmes.

Together, these initiatives represent a powerful move toward unlocking the potential of Andhra Pradesh's youth, aligning with India's national agenda of Viksit Bharat @2047 and driving forward a vision of youth-led innovation, inclusion, and economic transformation.

Conduct handloom cooperative polls soon: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Minister for Handlooms and Textiles, S Savitha, has directed officials to initiate the necessary steps for conducting elections to handloom cooperative societies at the earliest. On Wednesday, the newly appointed Special Chief Secretary for Handlooms and Textiles Department, RP Sisodia paid a courtesy visit to the Minister at the State Secretariat in Amaravati. They held discussions on the initiatives being undertaken by the government for the welfare and development of handloom weavers.

Savitha said that CM Chandrababu Naidu's vision is to ensure 365 days of employment and a life of dignity for every weaver. In line with this vision, the State government has designed several schemes. She further urged that efforts be made to secure as many projects and funds as possible from the Central government

CM wishes Tourism Minister all the best for Vietnam visit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has extended his best wishes to Tourism Minister Kandula Durgesh ahead of the latter's official visit to Vietnam. On Wednesday, Minister Durgesh paid a courtesy visit to the Chief Minister at his residence in Undavalli, where he briefed the CM on the details of his upcoming trip.

Durgesh informed the Chief Minister that he would be departing for New Delhi on Wednesday evening before flying to Vietnam. He is scheduled to take part in a major international event, the Exhibition of Lord Buddha's Relics, to be held in Vietnam from May 1-6. He will co-organise the event alongside Union Minister for Minority Affairs, Kiren Rijiju.

During the meeting, Durgesh presented a copy of the official directive issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) assigning him responsibilities for the event. Chandrababu reviewed the documents and encouraged the minister to fulfil his duties successfully. He conveyed his best wishes and expressed confidence that Durgesh would represent the State and country with distinction.

CASTE CENSUS

Congress seeks fund allocation to initiate exercise

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday welcomed the government's decision to include caste enumeration in the forthcoming census and demanded allocation of funds to start work at the earliest.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the government should allocate funds to initiate caste census at the earliest with complete transparency, while former party chief Rahul Gandhi said the Centre should give a timeline to implement it. Addressing a press conference, Gandhi credited the sustained campaign run by his party for the announcement and hoped it would not have the same fate as the women's reservation bill.

He said the BJP has been opposing the caste census for 11 years and demanded that it should give a timeline.

The leader of opposition in Lok Sabha said the Congress will break the "barrier" of 50 per cent cap on reservations and demand the implementation of Article 15(5), which pertains to reservations in private educational institutions.

"We urge the government to implement Article 15(5) promptly," he said. Noting that it is the first step of a completely new development paradigm in the country, he said, "We are going to push this paradigm one way or the other."

"It doesn't matter what the BJP thinks. We have shown that we can pressure the BJP into doing the caste census," Gandhi said at the presser. He was flanked by Congress general secretaries K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera, AICC national coordinator of SC, ST, OBC and minorities department K Raju and OBC department head Anil Jaihind.

AGONY AND ANGUISH AT KGH

Simhachalam tragedy shatters families

'We don't want another report. We want justice.'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

King George Hospital became an unrecognisable wailing place on the eve of the Chandanotsavam festival as it bore witness to an unimaginable tragedy—the aftermath of a wall collapse at the Simhachalam temple that left families shattered and hearts broken.

The corridors echoed with unbearable pain. Families collapsed to their knees in shock, their hearts broken beyond recognition. Mothers searched for children, sons for their parents—many found only stillness. The sobs of those who had lost their world pierced through the sterile walls, louder than any siren.

Among those devastated was the son of Pyla Venkata Ratnam, who had accompanied his mother to witness the sacred Nijaroopam. Kneeling beside her lifeless body, his sobs echoed through the hall. "She came seeking blessings, not death… How could this happen in such a holy place?" he wept, his voice barely a whisper before grief overtook him.

Nearby, the shattered family of Yedla Venkata Rao sat frozen in disbelief. What had been a pilgrimage of faith had ended in an unthinkable funeral. "We came to bow our heads before the Almighty… now we carry back a coffin. The weight of this loss is beyond anything words can express," whispered a relative, clutching a damp handkerchief, her tears never stopping.

But amidst the weeping and mourning, sorrow turned to rage. Grief-stricken families and survivors began to question the very foundations — both literal and institutional — that failed them. "A night of rain cannot be an excuse for death. This was no act of fate — this was negligence, pure and brutal," cried one relative, voice trembling with fury. "Cheap materials, rushed construction — someone must pay for this. Someone must answer for these souls taken so cruelly."

AP to support JIPMER Super Specialty Centre in Yanam

MANY PEOPLE FROM SURROUNDING ANDHRA PRADESH DISTRICTS VISIT THE CENTRE DAILY

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav has agreed to extend necessary support to operate the JIPMER Super Specialty Centre in Yanam, aiming to benefit both the State's government doctors and the Telugu-speaking population in and around the Union Territory.

JIPMER (Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research), a premier medical institution under the Central government, has constructed a 100-bed Super Specialty Centre in Yanam, part of the Puducherry Union Territory. The institute sought the Andhra Pradesh Government's assistance in providing manpower to make the facility operational.

In a high-level meeting held at the AP Secretariat on Wednesday, former Puducherry Health Minister and ex-MLA of Yanam, Malladi Krishna Rao, JIPMER Director Dr VS Negi and senior officials discussed the matter with Minister Satya Kumar Yadav, Special Chief Secretary MT Krishna Babu, Director of Secondary Health Dr A Siri and DME Dr Narasimhulu.

Krishna Rao highlighted that although Yanam has a population of just 80,000, a significant number of people from surrounding Andhra Pradesh districts visit daily for medical needs. The operationalisation of JIPMER's new centre will serve these Telugu-speaking communities extensively.

The ?91-crore facility will offer a range of multi-specialty services. Dr Negi requested the Andhra Pradesh Government to depute skilled doctors, nurses and paramedical staff across departments such as obstetrics, paediatrics, anaesthesiology and surgery. He also sought the posting of senior resident doctors and postgraduate medical students under the District Residency Programme (DRP). The Puducherry Government will provide accommodation and deputation allowances for the staff.

Additionally, Dr Negi requested the inclusion of the Yanam JIPMER centre in the Dr NTR Vaidya Seva Scheme as a network hospital to extend insurance benefits to Andhra Pradesh residents.

In return for the support, Dr Negi offered advanced training opportunities for AP government doctors in laparoscopic procedures, organ transplants and robotic surgeries at JIPMER. He stressed the global reputation of JIPMER and the significant skill development such training will offer to Andhra Pradesh's medical professionals.

Minister Yadav acknowledged the dual benefits of supporting the Yanam centre providing quality healthcare to Telugu populations and offering advanced training for AP doctors. He assured JIPMER that the State government would extend necessary support and asked them to submit a detailed proposal outlining specific manpower and training needs.

Jagan blames Govt negligence for Simhachalam mishap

Demands Rs 1 cr ex-gratia, strict action against those responsible

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/VIZAG

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP president YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has demanded severe action against those responsible for the mishap at Simhachalam and an ex-gratia of Rs 1 each to the kin of the deceased. He squarely blamed the government for its negligence.

Speaking to the media after visiting the victim's house and consoling the bereaved family members, Jagan said 'sheer negligence of the government' claimed the innocent lives of the devotees as the wall which collapsed was constructed without the prescribed format nor were tenders called for. "The construction of the wall was carried out in a hurry, and it was not a RCC wall. It was raining and the devotees were asked to queue up along the wall, which shows the sheer negligence on part of the government," he said.

"Despite knowing that Chandanotsavam is a calendar event and lakhs of devotees would throng the temple to witness the Appannaswamy Nijaroopa Darshan, and it is customary that it would rain during the event, the authorities did not take proper measures and allowed the devotees to queue up at the 10-foot-high wall without providing any facilities.

Lakshmi Parvathi blames CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP has lambasted Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for trying to undermine dharmic institutions.

Speaking to the media here on Wednesday, party's official spokesperson Lakshmi Parvathi said whenever Chandrababu assumes office grave incidents occur at places of worship and the Simhachalam incident is one among them.

7 devotees killed in wall collapse...

Continued from Page 1

Visakhapatnam District Collector A. Harendhira Prasad and Commissioner of Police Shankhabrata Bagchi reached the spot to coordinate relief efforts. Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha, who visited the site soon after the incident, confirmed that a detailed probe will be conducted into the quality of the wall's construction. She also expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu conveyed deep sorrow over the incident and announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs 25 lakh to the families of the deceased and Rs 3 lakh to each of the injured. He also assured that one eligible member from each bereaved family would be offered a job in the Endowments Department. A three-member committee has been constituted to investigate the circumstances surrounding the collapse and to recommend safety measures for future religious gatherings.

Several State leaders, including Ministers Anitha, Kondapalli Srinivas, and Anagani Satya Prasad, visited King George Hospital to meet the injured and offer support to grieving families.

CM announces Rs 25 L ex-gratia...

Continued from Page 1

"It is painful that when a large number of devotees gathered to see the 'Nijaroopam' (true form of the Lord) on Wednesday, a wall collapsed in the queue due to heavy rain at midnight, due to which some devotees lost their lives," the Chief Minister said. Soon after learning about the incident, Chandrababu Naidu had a teleconference with Ministers Anam Ramanarayana Reddy, Dola Bala Veeranjaneya Swamy, Vangalapudi Anitha and Anagani Satya Prasad, MP Sribharat, and the trustee of the Simhachalam temple, Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

The CM, who expressed deep sorrow over the tragedy, sought the details of the incident and the medical assistance being provided to the injured. He also ordered an inquiry into the incident by a three-member committee. Expressing deep sympathies to the families of the deceased, the Chief Minister announced Rs 25 lakh each as ex-gratia to the families of the deceased. Besides, one member from each family will be provided employment on outsourcing basis in the temples under the purview of the Endowments Department.

CM unveils vision for...

Continued from Page 1

Justice for farmers is central to the renewed Amaravati project. All illegal cases filed against those who gave up land for the capital will be withdrawn, reinforcing the government's commitment to people-led development. Institutions that had previously exited the region, including the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub and XLRI, are now showing renewed interest.

The reimagined Amaravati will house nine thematic, non-polluting 'cities within the city', such as Finance City, Justice City, Health City and Media City, designed to attract top-tier institutions and talent. Amaravati is also positioned to become a national hub for artificial intelligence, hosting initiatives like Quantum Valley and a network of excellence-driven universities, including BITS Pilani and Amrita University.

Educational and health infrastructure is rapidly expanding, with institutions like VIT, SRM, NID and AIIMS Mangalagiri anchoring the capital's knowledge economy. Top school networks such as Podar and Glendale International are also establishing campuses.

As part of India's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, Amaravati will emerge as a green capital, with solar-powered housing, green building mandates and sustainable urban practices. All government housing projects will feature compulsory rooftop solar systems, and a third of rooftop areas will be dedicated to solar energy generation.

CM urges NDA leaders to attend...

Continued from Page 1

In addition, Modi will inaugurate and commence several key projects totalling ₹57,962 crore under the purview of DRDO, DPIIT, NHAI and Railways.

The CM stressed the overwhelming mandate received by the NDA, citing a 93 per cent strike rate in recent elections. He attributed this success to the commitment made to rebuild Andhra Pradesh, which he described as having been severely mismanaged by the previous government.

Highlighting key developments, Chandrababu announced that the Polavaram irrigation project will be completed by 2027 and that significant employment opportunities will arise from the TCS campus in Visakhapatnam. He added that Bhogapuram airport construction is progressing rapidly and confirmed LG Corporation's ₹5,000 crore investment in Sri City.

Centre announces caste enumeration...

Continued from Page 1

"Considering all these facts and to ensure that the social fabric is not disturbed by politics, caste enumeration should be transparently included in the Census instead of surveys," he said, adding that this will strengthen the social and economic structure of our society while the nation continues to progress.

The minister alleged that the states ruled by opposition parties have done caste surveys for political reasons and emphasised that the Modi government has resolved to transparently include caste enumeration in the forthcoming pan-India census exercise.

"Better late than never," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X, reacting to the government announcement. The last nationwide census was completed in 2011 and the next decadal one was to commence in April 2020 but got delayed due to the Covid pandemic.

Though Home Minister Amit Shah had said late last year that the census would be conducted "very soon", there is no clarity as yet on when exactly the exercise would be carried out.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Chaturthi:	Apr 30 02:12 PM to May 01 11:23 AM
Panchami:	May 01 11:23 AM to May 02 09:14 AM
Nakshatram:	
Mrigashirsha:	Apr 30 04:18 PM to May 01 02:20 PM
Ardra:	May 01 02:20 PM to May 02 01:04 PM
Rahukalam:	1:48 PM to 3:23 PM
Yamagandam:	5:53 AM to 7:28 AM
Varjyam:	10:17 PM to 11:48 PM
Gulika:	9:03 AM to 10:38 AM
Amritakalam:	06:15 AM to 07:43 AM, 03:36 AM to 05:06 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:47 AM to 12:38 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 38°C
Humidity: 64%
Sunrise: 5:43 AM
Sunset: 6:327 PM

Updated: April 30, 2025 5:00 PM

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
STATE DISASTER RESPONSE & FIRE SERVICES DEPARTMENT
TENDER NOTIFICATION THROUGH "GEM" PORTAL
Rc. No. 3708/Plg/2013-Adv-WT Date: 29-04-2025
Online tenders are invited under GeM Portal for **"Fabrication of Advance Water Tenders (50 Nos.)** as per Departmental Specifications in State Disaster Response & Fire Services Dept., Vijayawada. Bid end date: **14.05.2025 at 17.00 Hrs.** Details can be seen at Gem Portal i.e.. **https://gem.gov.in/. Ph.7702406667.**
Sd/- Director of Fire Services, (Admin),
A.P., Vijayawada
DIPR R.O.No: 16240/CL/AD/VT11/1/2021-22, Dt. 30.04.2025

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Plans to make Amaravati a world-class capital: Min

Atchannaidu reviews arrangements for PM Modi's visit tomorrow

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In anticipation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Amaravati on Thursday to recommence capital development projects, Minister for Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development, Cooperative and Marketing, K Atchannaidu, chaired a crucial review meeting at the NTR District Collectorate in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

The meeting brought together key officials and leaders, including NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Shivanath alias Chinni, NTR District Police Commissionerate DCP KGB Saritha, MLAs Gadde Rammohan (Vijayawada East) and Maddhipati Venkataraju (Gopalapuram), among others.

The discussions centred on finalising logistics and ensuring seamless coordination for the high-profile visit, which marks a significant moment in the revival of Amaravati's capital development. The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to make the Prime Minister's visit memorable and impactful, symbolising a renewed chapter in Amaravati's journey.

Atchannaidu highlighted that Amaravati is being envisioned as a world-class public capital, one that will stand as a source of pride for future generations. He lauded Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's leadership for reviving momentum and ambition in capital development.

With PM Modi expected to travel by road from Gannavaram Airport to Amaravati, the Minister issued key directives regarding traffic management, public amenities, and venue readiness. He stressed the importance of setting up medical camps, drinking water stations, and food distribution points to accommodate the large crowds expected from across the State.

To manage the anticipated influx of people, Atchannaidu urged officials to use modern technology for traffic guidance and crowd monitoring. He recommended the use of drones to assess real-time congestion and instructed police to leverage the Astra app to monitor vehicle flow on all seven major routes leading to the capital. He called for tight security, proactive planning, and inter-departmental coordination, underlining that there should be no room for negligence in managing the Prime Minister's visit.

Prominent attendees included TDP State spokesperson Nagul Meera, BJP NTR district president Adduri Sriram, TDP State executive secretary MS Baig, TDP West constituency observer Chittabattuni Srinivasa Rao, State Minority Cell general secretary Fataullah, APIIC Chairman Mantena Ramaraju, and other leaders from the NDA alliance.

Anantapur MLAs urge CM to resolve RDT FCRA suspension issue

RDT, which operates primarily in remote villages in two Telugu States, relies heavily on foreign donations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Legislators from the undivided Anantapur district met Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday, seeking his intervention to help resolve issues faced by RDT following the suspension of its Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licence by the Central government.

MLAs Kalva Srinivasulu, Paritala Sunitha, Bandaru Shravani, Alimineti Surendra Babu and D Venkateswara Prasad submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister at the State secretariat, highlighting the need for urgent steps to restore RDT's FCRA registration.

The legislators informed the Chief Minister that RDT, which operates primarily in remote villages across the two Telugu States, relies heavily on foreign donations to deliver critical healthcare and development services. They noted that RDT's foreign funding was halted after allegations surfaced that local contribution funds were being diverted to activities unrelated to the organisation's core mission, leading to the suspension of its registration by the Central government.

They stressed that RDT has formally requested the renewal of its FCRA licence and urged the State government to extend support in resolving the matter. The suspension has disrupted healthcare services for many rural and underserved communities, they said.

Responding to their appeal, CM Chandrababu assured the MLAs that the State government would take up the issue with the Union Government and pursue necessary steps to facilitate a resolution. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting organisations working for the welfare of rural populations and promised to address the issue at the earliest possible opportunity.

421 Govt school jobs under sports quota in Mega DSC-2025

Candidates can apply from May 2 to 31; no written test required

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant move to empower athletes in the State, the government has announced a notification to fill 421 government school posts under the sports quota as part of the Mega DSC-2025 recruitment drive. Selection will be based solely on sports merit, as certified by the senior sports department, with no written test required.

Transport, Youth, and Sports Minister Mandipalli Ramprasad Reddy officially released the Sports Quota Notification under Mega DSC-2025 at the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) headquarters, located at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium in Vijayawada, on Wednesday.

Ramprasad Reddy stated that the government has implemented a three-per cent horizontal reservation for sportspersons, recognising their contributions to society and promoting career opportunities through sports.

"Youth grow both physically and mentally strong through sports. This is the cornerstone of building a competent society," the Minister expressed, praising Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for his vision of sports-led social development and his strong support for athletes. He also thanked Minister Nara Lokesh for his role in bringing this initiative to fruition.

The Minister noted that out of the total 16,347 posts announced under Mega DSC-2025, 421 are allocated for the sports quota. The breakdown of these vacancies is as follows: 333 posts in Government, Zilla Parishad (ZP), and Mandal Parishad (MPP) schools; 30 posts in Municipal and Corporation schools; 22 posts in AP Tribal Welfare Ashram schools; two posts in AP Residential Schools; four posts in AP Model Schools; seven posts in AP Social Welfare Residential Schools; and 23 posts in AP Gurukula Welfare Residential Schools.

Eligible sportspersons can apply online from May 2 to May 31, through the official portals https://sports.ap.gov.in and https://sportsdsc.apcfss.in. Minister Ramprasad Reddy emphasised that the entire selection process will be transparent and merit-driven, with strict penalties for fraudulent sports certificates.

He also assured that incentives would be provided to sportspeople who achieve exceptional accomplishments. "This is a historic and unprecedented opportunity for talented youth in sports. It offers not just a job, but a path to a stable life, respect, and security," stated the Minister.

The event was attended by SAAP Vice Chairman & Managing Director PS Girisha, along with SAAP officials and staff.

CM to launch 11 MSME parks today

Plans to establish parks in all constituencies by 2028

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced a major initiative aimed at boosting employment and entrepreneurship across the State. As part of his vision to transform every constituency into a hub for small-scale industries, the government plans to establish one MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) park in each of the 175 Assembly constituencies.

To mark May Day, the Chief Minister will officially inaugurate 11 MSME parks in a special event at Narampeta in SPS Nellore district. These parks will be launched in Anakapalli, Pileru, Rajanagaram, Badvel, Gannavaram, Panyam, Dhone, Atmakur, Darsi and Puttaparthi constituencies. In addition, the FFC (Flatted Factory Complex) at Rambilli in Yelamanchili constituency will be inaugurated.

These 11 projects, spread across 909 acres, involve an estimated investment of ?199 crore. The Atmakur MSME park alone is being developed over 55 acres in Narampeta.

In the next phase, the CM will also lay the foundation stone for an additional 14 FFCs and 25 new MSME parks. The 14 FFCs, covering 546 acres, will be developed at a cost of ?359 crore, while the 25 MSME parks will span 1,455 acres with an estimated cost of ?559 crore. This forms the first phase of the government's plan to establish MSME infrastructure in 40 constituencies, with a goal of expanding to all 175 constituencies by 2028.

The government sees MSMEs as a vital pillar of the State's economic growth, second only to agriculture in job creation. The initiative is expected to nurture entrepreneurship and generate substantial employment opportunities.

District collectors and local MLAs will collaborate to identify land for MSME parks in the remaining constituencies. In urban and semi-urban areas, Flatted Factory Complexes will be developed to offer plug-and-play facilities spread over 50,000 square feet for MSME units. The cost of setting up each MSME park or FFC is estimated to be between ?10 crore and ?15 crore.

Each park will initially be developed with industrial infrastructure across 20 acres of land, with the capacity to host 100–150 MSME units. According to government estimates, every ?1 crore investment could create employment for over 10 individuals.

With over ?2,000 crore in projected investments and a target of establishing 15,000 MSME units by the 2027–28 financial year, the State government aims to generate over two lakh employment opportunities through this ambitious programme.

Energy Minister launches key infrastructure projects in Addanki

PNS ■ ADDANKI

Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar has laid the foundation stone for critical infrastructure projects in Addanki constituency, reaffirming the government's commitment to rural development and electricity sector reforms.

As part of his visit, the Minister announced that over 70,000 agricultural electricity connections have been provided across the Sstate, with plans to issue another 50,000 soon. In Addanki, two new substations worth Rs 11 crore were launched to ensure stable and high-quality electricity for both agricultural and domestic needs. Additionally, 1,700 old electricity poles have already been replaced, with 500 more set to be installed.

Taking a dig at the previous administration, Gottipati criticised former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy for neglecting the power sector. "The current coalition government is rebuilding what was recklessly damaged. There was no vision or progress under the previous regime," he said.

Tender process for Budameru canal repairs over: Dr Nimmala

Directs officials to finish work before the monsoon season

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With the tender process completed for repair works on the three canals linked to the recent Budameru flash floods, Minister for Water Resources Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu has directed officials to commence work immediately and ensure completion before the onset of the rainy season.

The Minister reviewed the progress of Budameru Modernisation and Polavaram Left Canal works at the Secretariat at Amaravati on Wednesday. The meeting was attended by Engineer-in-Chief M Venkateswara Rao, Chief Engineers, Superintending Engineers, Executive Engineers, representatives of executing agencies, and senior officials of the respective irrigation projects.

During the review, Minister Dr Ramanaidu stressed the need for an action plan to complete pending works aimed at increasing the Budameru Diversion Canal's discharge capacity to 37,500 cusecs. He also instructed officials to draft a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to ensure that floodwaters from Budameru are diverted effectively into the sea via Enikepadu, Kolleru, and Upputeru.

The Minister proposed the development of a new parallel flood channel with a capacity of 20,000 cusecs to ease pressure on the existing Budameru canal and strengthen Vijayawada's flood control infrastructure. To secure Central assistance under disaster management provisions, he called for a coordinated approach involving the Municipal, Revenue, and Disaster Management Departments, with a consolidated report to be submitted to Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

VMC fire officials conduct surprise checks at shops

Educate management and employees about crucial fire safety practices

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Fire Department staff explaining fire preventive measures at a shopping mall in Vijayawada on Wednesday

As per the instructions of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanachandra, the VMC fire staff conducted surprise fire safety inspections at several major commercial establishments on Eluru Road and Lenin Centre, including RS Brothers Mall, South India Shopping Mall, V9 Cloth showroom, and Chandana Brothers showroom. The inspections aimed to prevent fire accidents in these high-footfall commercial spaces.

During the drive, staff educated the management and employees about crucial fire safety practices. These included the proper usage of fire prevention equipment, procedures to extinguish fires, and installation and maintenance of fire sprinklers and smoke detectors.

The officials emphasised the importance of smoke alarms, their function in early fire detection, and the layout planning of fire safety systems in and around the complexes. The initiative aims to ensure public safety by enhancing preparedness and minimising fire risks in densely populated shopping zones.

Regional Fire Officer N Venkateswara Rao, District Fire Officer D Malyadri, Station Fire Officer M Raja and other staff were present.

Summer skill development classes from today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala (SDMSMK), Vijayawada, in collaboration with its Entrepreneur Development Cell and the Department of Computer Science, is all set to launch summer skill development classes on the college campus from May 1 to June 15.

The official poster for the programme was jointly released on Wednesday by A Poornima, Director of Jan Shikshan Sansthan, Vijayawada, and Dr S Kalpana, Principal of Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala, during a function held at the college.

Speaking on the occasion, Poornima emphasised the importance of acquiring professional skills. "Every student should learn at least one vocational or professional course. Skill development not only builds self-confidence, but also creates self-employment opportunities," she said. Also, she highlighted how several successful entrepreneurs today started with small skill sets.

Principal Dr Kalpana stressed the value of pursuing one's passion. "Passion helps reduce pressure and builds resilience. Our Entrepreneur Development Centre is offering a wide range of creative and practical courses such as Beautician Training, Tailoring, Mehendi Design, Loom Work, and Fabric Painting. These sessions will be held from 10 AM to 12 noon and are open to both students and women from the community," she noted.

The Computer Science Department will simultaneously offer technical courses including Computer Applications, C Programming, Python, Web Development, Languages, and Artificial Intelligence. These classes will run from May 1-May 30, and will require a nominal fee. Candidates must have completed either Class 10 or Intermediate to enrol.

Public outcry over unequal compensation for victims

Rs 50 lakh was announced for kin of victims in Tirupati stampede

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Widespread criticism is surfacing over the State government's announcement of Rs 25-lakh ex-gratia to the families of those who lost their lives in the wall collapse at Simhachalam, which occurred on the eve of the revered Chandanotsavam festival. Many citizens, especially devotees, are questioning the logic behind the compensation amount, pointing to the stark differences compared to previous tragedies.

In past incidents, compensation figures were significantly higher. The government had announced Rs 50 lakh for each of the families of those who died in the Tirupati stampede. The previous YSRCP administration had granted Rs 1 crore to each bereaved family in the Gopalapatnam LG Polymers gas leak tragedy. Similarly, the TDP government had extended Rs 1 crore compensation to the families of victims in the Pharma City industrial accident.

"The lives of the poor and the lives of devotees seem to be valued less in this case. Why only Rs 25 lakh for Simhachalam victims," questioned Ramana Murthy, a local resident and regular devotee at the temple. Others echoed similar concerns, pointing out the seeming arbitrariness of the government's approach. "If someone dies in Tirupati, it's Rs 50 lakh. If it's in Simhachalam, it's half that. What kind of justice is this," asked Lakshmi, a homemaker from Gajuwaka.

WALL COLLAPSE INCIDENT

3-member panel ordered to submit report in 72 hrs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for I&PR and Housing K Parthasarthy has said that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has ordered the three-member committee to submit its report on the wall collapse at the hill shrine Simhachalam in 72 hours.

The Minister told the media in the Secretariat that the Chief Minister responded to the incident immediately and directed the officials to take rescue operations.

"The Chief Minister ordered the three-member high level committee to submit its report in 72 hours," he stated.

Minister Parthasarathi recalled that the Government has announced Rs 25 lakh ex gratia to the family of each of the deceased and Rs 3 lakh to each of the injured. An outsourcing job will be given to the eligible person of the families, he stated.

The Minister revealed that the government had made all the necessary arrangements to organize the Chandhanotsa celebrations of Simhachalam Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy in a grand manner. However, due to an unexpected natural disaster, a wall built for queue lines fell on the devotees, leading to this tragedy.

Minister Parthasarathi said that the government has appointed an inquiry commission comprising of Principal Secretary of the State Municipal and Urban Development Department as chairman, Inspector General of Police A Ravikrishna, Advisor and Engineer-in-Chief of the Water Resources Department Venkateswara Rao as member to take immediate action against those responsible for this tragedy.

The I&PR Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is coming to Amaravati on May 2 and all are invited to the programme. The State capital will remain the financial growth engine to the state. Minister Parthasarathi called upon people to make the programme a big success.

TTD Chairman offers *Pattu vastrams* to *Appanna*

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Chairman Sri B.R. Naidu offered Pattu vastrams to Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy (Appanna) at the Simhachalam temple near Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

Since 1996, TTD has been offering these clothes every year during the Chandanotsavam festival. Simhachalam is one of the oldest Narasimha temples in India, and the idol here is believed to be self-manifested.

The Chandanotsavam festival began in the early hours. The idol is usually covered with sandalwood paste throughout the year. Only on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya, the sandal paste is removed for 12 hours so that the devotees can see the presiding deity in Nija Rupa(original form) clearly. Then, a fresh layer of sandal paste is applied again.

On this special day, TTD offered the vastrams on behalf of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple.

TTD Dy EO Lokanatham, Bokkasam In-charge Guru Raja Swamy, and other officials were also present.

Five medicos among six killed in road accident

PNS ■ NELLORE

In a ghastly road accident, five medical college students and a 50-year-old man were killed when the car in which they were travelling crashed into a house at Pothireddypalem village of Kovuru mandal of Nellore district on Wednesday.

Police said that six medical college students, studying second year medicine at Narayana medical college. They attended the engagement function of the sister of one of the deceased. When they were going back to their hostel, their car crashed into a roadside house killing a resident of the house Venkata Ramanaiah (50).

The injured six medical college students were shifted to a private hospital where five of them were declared dead. The deceased medicos were identified as Jeevan (20) Vignesh (20), Naresh (20) Abhisai (21) and Abhisekh 20).

The injured Mounish Reddy is undergoing treatment. The car driver might have been drowsy resulting in him losing control over the car, police said.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock and grief over the ghastly road accidents in which five medicos and another person were killed. He conveyed sympathies to the bereaved families and assured of extending needed support to them.

Former Chief Minister and YSRCP President Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed deep shock and grief over a tragic car accident in Nellore district that claimed six lives, including five medical students.

The incident occurred near Pothireddypalem, Kovuru Mandal, when a speeding car lost control near a petrol pump on the Mumbai National Highway and crashed into a house, killing resident Venkata Ramanaiah (50) instantly. In a statement, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy called the loss of young, promising lives "heartbreaking" and urged stringent road safety measures.

"This tragedy shows the urgent need for accountability and prevention," he said and extended condolences to the bereaved families.

Governor of Andhra Pradesh S Abdul Nazeer expressed anguish and profound grief on the accident occurred near Pothireddipalem in Kovur mandal of Nellore district on Wednesday, in which five medical students and an inmate of the house lost their lives when the car in which the students were traveling lost its control and crashed into a nearby house.

The Governor offered his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family members and directed district administration to provide medical care to the injured persons.

Mega job mela postponed to May 9: Minister

PNS ■ RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM

The mega job mela, scheduled to be held on May 3 in Nidadavole town, was postponed to May 9. Informing this to the media here on Wednesday, Minister for Tourism and Cinematography Kandula Durgesh said in a statement that a mega job mela scheduled to be held in Nidadavole on May 3.

However, the job mela was postponed to May 9 due to some technical reasons. "The job mela will be held on May 9 on the SVD Government degree college premises in which many multinational companies participate to select eligible candidates for various jobs in their firms," the Minister asserted.

Minister Kandula Durgesh said that the Job Mela programme was postponed to May 9th in the wake of instructions from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to him to accompany Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju on behalf of India to attend the exhibition of the relics of Lord Buddha to be held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam from May 1st to 6th. The Tourism Minister revealed that after successfully completing the responsibility of organizing the Buddhist religious programme and returning to India from Vietnam, a mega job mela would be organized.

He stated that 1302 unemployed youth would be participating in the mega job fair, being organized to provide jobs to them. The Minister asked the unemployed youths to take advantage of this opportunity to get jobs.

Make arrangements to conduct NEET UG exams efficiently: DC

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari district Collector Chadalavada Nagarani directed the officials to make arrangements to conduct NEET UG 2025 examinations on May 4 efficiently.

The Collector held a review meeting here Wednesday via Google Meet with NEET UG officials, superintendents, and education department officials on the arrangements for the NEET exams from a video conference hall in the local collectorate. District Superintendent of Police Adnan Naeem Asmi also participated in this meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Nagarani stated that two examination centers are being set up in Tadepalligudem in the district, adding that one examination center has been set up in NIT and one exam center has been set up in Shashi Engineering College. She noted that a total of 2,100 students would appear for the NEET examination in the district, stating that the exam will be held offline from 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm.

The Collector made it clear that the students would be allowed into the examination center from 11.00 am. She instructed the police officials to impose Section 144 in the vicinity of the examination centers and make strict security arrangements.

The Collector suggested that the examination papers received by the custodian bank should be brought with the help of superintendents and police. Police officials have ordered the police personnel to provide strong security at the examination centers. The officials were instructed to arrange wheelchairs and assistants for the differently abled students at the examination centers.

The Collector instructed the officials to strictly follow the NEET UG rules and regulations, adding that candidates appearing for the exams are not allowed to carry cell phones and other electronic devices.

Collector Nagarani instructed the electricity department officials to ensure that there is no power outage in the exam centers. Police should take special measures to prevent people from assembling at examination centers and steps should be taken to ensure that Xerox centers do not work anywhere near the examination center.

Women police should also be appointed at the examination centers. DRO Mogili Venkateswarlu and DEO Narayana were among those who attended the meeting.

Drinking water through tankers being supplied on directions of Min

PNS ■ ELURU

On the directions of Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar, the officials started supplying drinking water through the tankers to the villagers of Puliramudugudem.

Minister Nadendla Manohar during his recent visit, assured the villagers of Puliramuduguem of resolving the drinking water crisis.

Minister Manohar directed the ITDA and RWS officials to take steps to supply water to the villagers of Puliramugudem through tankers.

As per the orders of Minister Manohar, the ITDA and RWS officials started providing the villagers drinking water through tankers. The village panchayat has sanctioned the establishment of an RO plant at a cost of Rs 2.50 lakh and the Minister ordered the officials to begin the RO plant works.

"The State government has released Rs 971. 80 lakh to resolve the drinking water problem wherever it prevailed and in the tribal areas. Out of this, Rs 501.43 lakhs are for Gram Panchayats under the 15th Finance and Rs 270.37 lakhs for Mandal Praja Parishads. Through funds, repairs of hand pumps and repairs of protected drinking water schemes are being carried out in the district," Minister Manohar asserted.

"Funds of Rs 41.55 lakhs have been sanctioned under the 15th Commission Grant and Rs 20 lakhs under Mandal Praja Parishad Finance Funds to provide drinking water through water tanks in tribal areas of Polavaram constituency," Nadendla Manohar highlighted.

The villagers of Puliramuduguem thanked Minister Nadendla Manohar for swift action to provide them drinking water.

Officials told to encourage natural farming

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam district Collector A Thameem Ansariya directed the agriculture officials to take steps to further promote and encourage natural farming.

Collector Thameem Ansariya on Wednesday visited Sri Krishnam Venkata Rao Dairy Farm at Rangayapalem of Kothapatnam mandal and distributed fodder seeds and feed to dairy farmers with subsidy.

The Collector inquired with the dairy managers about the cost of setting up the dairy farm, the monthly cost of running the dairy, and the income they were getting.

The dairy farm managers explained to the Collector that a loan of Rs 25 lakh was taken to set up the dairy farm and there are 32 cows in the dairy farm which produce about 400 to 500 liters of milk per day.

The dairy managers explained that they earn an income of about Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh per month after paying the monthly expenses of labour, maintenance, feed and EMI. They told the Collector that in the past they used to sell milk at Rs 40 per liter but they are now selling it at Rs 37. They urged the Collector to take steps to ensure they are paid Rs 40 per litre of milk.

Later, the Collector visited the groundnut field cultivated by farmer P Venkateshwarlu in Kothapatnam DD Colony and spoke to him. He explained to the Collector that currently, sunflower, gherkin, and cluster beans are being cultivated as intercrops along with groundnut crops.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector Ansariya instructed the officials to take steps to further promote natural farming in the district. The Collector also visited the farm of farmer Venkateswara Reddy, who is cultivating under the PMDS system as part of the natural farming system in Gamallapalem village of Kothapatnam mandal.

She observed a live demo conducted by the Agriculture Department officials on recording pH, moisture and temperature in barren land, as well as a demo conducted on soil sample collection in the PMDS field.

The Agriculture Department officials explained to the Collector that the PMDS system would improve soil health and crop health.

Later, the Collector visited the horticulture field in Kothapatnam and inspected the cultivation of various types of horticultural plants and inquired about the details and inspected the production and distribution of PMDS kits as well as the exhibition of crops grown through natural farming and inquired about the details from the concerned officials and farmers.

Caste census is Modi's decision, not Cong's legacy: Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, asserted that the decision to conduct a nationwide caste census is a bold, historic move by the Modi Government, and dismissed the Congress's attempts to claim credit for that as "shameless propaganda."

In a statement issued in Hyderabad on Wednesday, Sanjay said, "If the Congress truly believed in caste census, why didn't it implement that during its 50 years in power? Even when many political parties demanded caste enumeration during the 2010 Census, the Congress-led UPA agreed only for a socio-economic survey and not a scientific caste count."

He accused the Congress of using the issue merely for vote bank politics without any genuine intent. "If Rahul Gandhi and his party are now claiming the Centre's decision as their success, they must first explain why a caste census was never done when they were ruling," he said.

Calling the Modi government's move "scientific and transparent," Sanjay said the Centre's approach will provide a clear picture of caste-wise population figures across the country, helping to ensure 'justice' in reservations without favour or bias.

Sanjay also criticised the caste surveys undertaken by states like Telangana, saying that it lacked transparency and consistency. "From KCR's so-called Samagra Survey to Revanth Reddy's caste enumeration, there has been no standard methodology. Surveys were tampered with to inflate the numbers of favourable castes and suppress others, creating social tensions," he said.

He reminded that the Congress has always opposed caste-based enumeration in the past and has no moral right to stake claim now. "From 1947 to 2024, the Congress never added caste data during the national census. Their new love for caste census is completely opportunistic," he said.

Collector approves Potential Linked Credit plan 2025-26

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K VetriSelvi has approved the District Potential Linked Credit Plan prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for the financial year 2025-26.

The PLP, prepared in coordination with various departments, keeping in mind the policies of the Central and State governments and national priorities, was unveiled by Collector VetriSelvi here on Wednesday. The loan plan has been prepared with an estimate of Rs 17,785 crore for the priority sector in the NABARD Potential Loan Plan.

The total estimate for the priority sector is Rs 17,785 crore, of which the total for the agriculture sector is Rs 11,282 crore, which is 63% of the total estimate.

The credit for micro, small and medium enterprises is estimated at Rs 3,633 crore. The export sector is estimated as Rs 147.90 crore, the education sector is Rs. 83.70 crore, the housing sector is Rs. 534.64 crore, the social infrastructure is Rs. 46.63 crore, the renewable energy is Rs. 12.70 crore and the other priority sector is estimated at Rs 1106.09 crore.

"The plan has been prepared taking into account factors such as the level of financial assistance and unit costs, the pattern of field credit flow, changing practices at the field level and the current infrastructure index. It also includes information on the infrastructure gaps that the state government and banks need to address and key actions to be taken to utilize the available credit capacity under the priority sectors," the Collector asserted.

The programme was attended by NABARD DDM T Anil Kant, Agriculture Department JD Habib Bhasha, DRDA PD R Vijaya Raju, LDM D Neeladri, GM DIC Subrahmanyeswara Rao and APIIC Zonal Manager K Babji.

ACROSS THE STATES

MP CM Mohan Yadav dubs terrorists as 'germs'

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday termed terrorists as "germs" and urged people to remain united in the fight against terror launched by the Modi government in the wake of the Pahalgam attack. Citing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong message against terrorism after the Pahalgam terror attack, During a program organized at Janapav, the birthplace of Lord Parshuram, about 50 km from Indore city, Yadav said that Prime Minister Modi has pledged to destroy India's enemies, terrorists and their supporters and at such a time, the countrymen should maintain their unity. Yadav said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India's flag is flying high in the world today, while some germs (terrorists) are seen buzzing like flies and mosquitoes. They (terrorists) have forgotten that we Indian citizens are descendants of Lord Parshuram. They will not be able to know where they have disappeared."

IMD predicts above-normal temperatures in May

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday said most parts of India are likely to see above-normal temperatures in May but occasional thunderstorms may keep the heat from reaching the severe levels of last year. IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said the number of heatwave days is expected to be higher than normal -- by one to four days -- in most parts of Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal. Some areas of Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, adjoining Telangana and north Karnataka are also expected to see above-normal heatwave days. Normally, different parts of the country, except the southwest Peninsular India, experience one to three days of heatwave in May. Mohapatra said most parts of the country are likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, except for some areas in northwest, central and northeast India.

Meth tablets worth Rs 6 cr seized in Mizoram

In a major drug haul, methamphetamine tablets worth Rs 6.17 crore were seized during an operation in Aizawl, police said in a statement on Wednesday. Two persons have been arrested for transporting the drug, which was believed to be smuggled from Myanmar, the statement said. Acting on a tip-off, CID (Special Branch) team of Mizoram police in Aizawl, carried out a covert operation across the stretch of a national highway between Tuirial and Zemabawk in the northeastern outskirts of Aizawl and intercepted two cars at Zemabawk area near a Presbyterian church on Tuesday, it said. The vehicles were coming from east Mizoram's Champhai town, which shares border with Myanmar, it said. Upon thorough inspection of the vehicles, 20 bundles, each containing methamphetamine tablets, weighing a total of 18.9 kg were seized from one vehicle, while 29 other bundles containing 28.5 kg of the highly addictive drug were seized from another vehicle, it said. The contraband weighing 47.5 kg was valued at Rs 6.17 crore. It was concealed inside the rear body linings and dashboard beams of the two cars, it said.

Public admin training modules must keep evolving: Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said public administration training modules must keep evolving to meet the rapidly changing requirements driven by emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and quantum computing.

Addressing the convocation ceremony of the 50th Advanced Professional Programme in Public Administration (APPPA) at the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) here, he said, "What is relevant today may not be tomorrow. We need to learn every day to stay relevant."

Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel, also underscored the importance of civil-military synergy.

"Today's army officers don't just stay in isolation; they are expected to brief the media, interact with civilians and respond jointly in disaster-affected regions," he said, calling for greater focus on communication skills in future iterations of the course.

CENTRE TO STATE GOVT

Implement BNSS Sec 479 for relief to undertrial prisoners

"All states and UTs are, therefore, requested to issue necessary instructions to the prison authorities for proactive implementation of the provisions of Section 479 and to ensure submission of monthly progress reports to MHA in the prescribed format."

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has asked all states and Union territories to actively implement the provisions of Section 479 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita. This section of BNSS seeks to release on bail undertrial prisoners who have been detained for half of the maximum punishment term for their offence.

In a letter to chief secretaries as well as directors general and inspectors general of prison facilities in all states and UTs, the ministry has said Section 479(3) places a specific responsibility on the superintendent of a prison to file an application before the concerned court for the release of such eligible undertrial prisoners on bail.

The section provides that undertrial prisoners, who have undergone detention for half of the maximum period of imprisonment prescribed for the offence shall be released on bail by the court.

For first-time offenders, the provision applies upon completing one-third of the maximum sentence.

Citing its repeated calls in the past for its implementation, the ministry reiterated that the provisions of Section 479 of the BNSS can play a vital role in addressing the prolonged detention of undertrial prisoners and reducing overcrowding in prisons.

"All states and UTs are, therefore, requested to issue necessary instructions to the prison authorities for proactive implementation of the provisions of Section 479 and to ensure submission of monthly progress reports to MHA in the prescribed format," it said.

The ministry had also written to the states and UTs on January 1, saying this was not a one-time exercise and that they should continue to provide the benefits of Section 479 to eligible prisoners on a continuous basis and to provide monthly progress reports on its implementation to the home ministry.

The fresh letter was shot off after it was observed that only a limited number of states and UTs have shared the requisite information after November 26, 2024.

The ministry has said that under this initiative, states and UTs were requested to identify eligible undertrial prisoners and move their applications before the concerned courts for their release on bail/bond under the said provisions.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had in the past also written to the chief ministers and UT administrations, seeking their cooperation and urging them to issue appropriate instructions to the prison authorities.

Form a popular govt' in Manipur to bring peace

21 MLAs WRITE TO PM MODI, AMIT SHAH

PNS ■ IMPHAL

Twenty-one Manipur MLAs have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah separately, urging them to form a "popular government" in the northeastern state, which is now under the President's rule, to ensure peace and normalcy.

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur, where more than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The imposition of the President's rule came after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.

The letters, containing the same appeal, were signed by 13 BJP MLAs, 3 NPP legislators, 3 Naga Peoples' Front MLAs and two independent members of the assembly.

The letters stated, "The people of Manipur welcomed the President's rule...with lots of hope and expectations. It's going to be almost three months since the President's rule was imposed, but no visible actions to bring peace and normalcy are seen so far."

"There is strong apprehension among the people that the violence may reoccur in the state. Many civil organisations have come out openly against the imposition of the President's rule. They have been demanding installation of a popular government in the state," it said.

"The people of Manipur welcomed the President's rule...with lots of hope and expectations. It's going to be almost three months since the President's rule was imposed, but no visible actions to bring peace and normalcy are seen so far."

The legislators claimed in the April 10 letter that these organisations have started "holding public rallies, street corner meetings, instigating the general public, blaming the ruling MLAs for not staking claim to form a popular government and fixing responsibility for the imposition of PR (President's rule) in Manipur".

The letters were received separately by the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 29 and made public on Wednesday, one of the legislators said.

Rajnath to represent India at Russia's Victory Day parade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will represent India at Russia's Victory Day parade on May 9 that will mark the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Germany in the Second World War, official sources said on Wednesday.

Russia invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the grand parade to be held in Moscow but India conveyed to Russia that Singh will attend it.

"An invitation was extended to the prime minister to attend the Victory Day Parade at Moscow. The Russian side was informed earlier that India would be represented by Defence Minister Singh," said a source.

Russia has invited leaders of several friendly nations to attend this year's Victory Day parade.

Modi had travelled to Russia twice last year for an annual summit with President Vladimir Putin and to attend the BRICS Summit in Kazan.

The Russian president is expected to visit India for the annual summit this year.

Priyanka flags scant access to medical facilities in Wayanad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has written to Union Health Minister J P Nadda, flagging the issue of many tribes in Wayanad living in remote areas with scant access to medical facilities and demanding that a super specialty hospital, such as an AIIMS or a PGI, be urgently set up in her constituency.

In her letter to Nadda, Priyanka Gandhi said Wayanad district has the largest tribal population of Kerala and due to its distinctive geographical features and tropical biodiversity, many of these tribes continue to live in remote areas with scant access to medical facilities.

"Presently, there are approximately 48,397 families and 1,67,799 people living in 3,105 tribal settlements across the district. The major tribal communities living in Wayanad district are Paniyan, Adiyan, Kattunayakan, Kurichiyan, Kuruman, Vettukuruman, Wayanadan Kadar, Thachanadan Mooppan, of which the Paniyan, Adiyan and Kattunayakan communities are considered most marginalised," she said.

786 Pakistanis exit India; 1,465 Indians return home from Pak

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 786 Pakistani nationals, including 55 diplomats, their dependents and support staff, besides eight Indians with Pakistani visa, have left India through the Attari-Wagah border crossing in the last six days following a government order in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, officials said on Wednesday.

A total of 1,465 Indians, including 25 diplomats and officials, besides 151 Pakistani citizens with long-term Indian visas have crossed over to India from Pakistan through the international border crossing located in Punjab since April 24.

The 'Leave India' notice to the Pakistani nationals was issued by the government after 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed by Pakistan-linked terrorists in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22.

The 'Leave India' notice to the Pakistani nationals was issued by the government after 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed by Pakistan-linked terrorists in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22.

The deadline for exiting India for those holding SAARC visas was April 26.

For those carrying medical visas, the deadline was April 29.

The deadline for 12 other categories of visas was April 27. These were visas on arrival and visas for business, film, journalist, transit, conference, mountaineering, student, visitor, group tourist, pilgrim and group pilgrims.

Delhi govt to rehabilitate homeless, beggars under SMILE scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government will rehabilitate beggars, including homeless children, with the help of NGOs and provide skill development training, health care facilities and education, a statement said Wednesday.

The Department of Social Welfare has issued a call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from NGOs and other interested organisations, for the implementation of the SMILE scheme (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise), which focuses on the comprehensive rehabilitation of beggars.

The department has instructed the organisations to submit their proposals by May 13, the statement read.

The SMILE scheme, introduced by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, will be implemented in nine selected areas of Delhi --- Karol Bagh, Dwarka, Munirka-Vasant Vihar, R.K. Puram, Nizamuddin, Rohini, Shahdara, Old Delhi and Bangla Sahib Gurudwara.

The initiative adopts a structured, multi-step approach involving identification, outreach, shelter and long-term resettlement. It prioritises support for children, women, senior citizens and persons with disabilities, it stated.

Court orders seizure of property of SP leader

PNS ■ PRATAPGARH (UP)

A court here has ordered the seizure of assets worth Rs 7 crore belonging to a local Samajwadi Party leader under the Gangsters Act.

Additional Superintendent of Police (West) Sanjay Rai said on Wednesday that the District Magistrate's court issued the order in connection with a case filed against Gulshan Yadav under the Gangsters Act at Kotwali Kunda police station.

According to the order, Yadav, the acting district president of the SP and a resident of Maudara, had accumulated movable and immovable assets, including luxury vehicles, residential land, and bank accounts, through criminal activities and illegal means.

The total value of the seized assets amounts to Rs 7,00,15,502.

Rai said Yadav is facing 53 criminal cases, including charges of murder, attempted murder, extortion, violations of the Goonda Act, the Arms Act, the Explosives Act, and the Gangsters Act.

ENPO accepts Centre's proposal of 'Frontier Nagaland Territory'

PNS ■ KOHIMA

The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) has announced that it is "compelled to temporarily narrow down" its long-standing demand for a separate statehood and accepted the Centre's offer for a certain level of autonomy in six eastern districts of the state.

ENPO media cell said the apex body of tribal organisations in six districts of eastern Nagaland has submitted its 'stance' to the Ministry of Home Affairs on the draft memorandum of settlement and the comments forwarded by the Nagaland government.

Alleging that the eastern Nagaland areas have been neglected in all sectors since Nagaland state was created in 1963, the ENPO has been demanding statehood since 2010. The organisation has been demanding the formation of Frontier Nagaland Territory (FNT), comprising Kiphire, Longleng, Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang districts.

The ENPO, while maintaining its demand for a "separate statehood", stated, "It is compelled to temporarily narrow down its stance, considering the inability of the GoI but with the condition that FNT arrangement would be reviewed in 10 years, and that all other unresolved matters will be taken up through democratic political processes."

Explainer: Caste Census – history, politics, and its significance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

All castes were enumerated during census exercises carried out in British India between 1881 and 1931, but at the time of the first census of independent India in 1951, the then government decided not to count castes any more except for scheduled castes and tribes.

A decade later in 1961, the central government asked states to conduct their own surveys and prepare state-specific lists of OBCs if they wished so.

Over six decades later now and after demands from several quarters and various parties, the government has now decided to include caste enumeration in the next nationwide census.

The last nationwide caste enumeration took place in 2011 under Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in a bid to gather detailed information about the socio-economic status of households and individuals, including their caste.

Here is a look at history, politics, and recent developments

What is a Caste Census?

A caste census involves the systematic collection of data on the caste identities of individuals during a national census exercise. In India, where caste has historically shaped social, economic, and political dynamics, such data can provide insights into the demographic distribution, socio-economic conditions, and representation of various caste groups. This information can be used to inform policies on affirmative action, reservations, and social justice.

What is its historical context?

Caste enumeration in India has a long history:

British India (1881–1931): The British colonial administration included caste enumeration in census exercises conducted every decade between 1881 and 1931. These surveys categorized the population by caste, religion, and occupation, providing detailed demographic data. The exercise was partly driven by the colonial need to understand and govern India's complex social structure.

Post-Independence Shift (1951): After India gained independence in 1947, the first census of independent India in 1951 marked a significant departure. The government, under then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to discontinue caste enumeration except for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This decision was rooted in the belief that focusing on caste could perpetuate divisions and hinder national unity in a newly independent nation.

1961 Directive: A decade later, in 1961, the central government allowed states to conduct their own surveys to prepare state-specific lists of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This was in response to demands for affirmative action for socially and educationally backward groups beyond SCs and STs.

Editor's TAKE

Deepening rifts and rising trade tensions

BRICS foreign ministers meet ends without joint statement as internal rifts surface

As the BRICS grouping of emerging powers convenes its foreign ministers in Rio de Janeiro ahead of its highly anticipated July summit, cracks within the expanded coalition are becoming increasingly visible. Despite shared concerns over global trade and geopolitical shifts, the meeting ended without a joint communique — an uncommon outcome that underscores growing internal disagreements. BRICS first summit was held in 2009. It originally brought together Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa to reshape global governance in a way that reflects the growing economic and political weight of the Global South.

In 2024, the group expanded significantly to include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran — an enlargement aimed at amplifying its geopolitical influence. Together, BRICS nations represent over 40 per cent of the global population and a significant share of global GDP, positioning the bloc as a potential counterweight to Western-dominated institutions like the G7, the IMF, and the World Bank. Its growing economic heft and strategic alignment have made it central to discussions about a new multipolar world order. However, this recent meeting revealed that size does not always translate to cohesion.

The group was unable to issue a joint statement — a traditional diplomatic outcome — due to disagreements among members, particularly over language relating to United Nations reforms. Egypt and Ethiopia reportedly objected to proposals endorsing a stronger role for South Africa in a reformed Security Council, a priority for legacy BRICS members like India, Brazil, and South Africa. Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira acknowledged the divisions but emphasised that "there is room to resolve differences before July." He highlighted that while consensus was reached on major issues, the diversity of the group, especially post-expansion, requires more negotiation to align positions.

Despite these diplomatic fissures, the foreign ministers rallied around a common concern: the rise of protectionist economic policies, particularly those implemented by the United States under President Donald Trump.

The Chair statement issued by Brazil expressed "serious concern at the prospect of a fragmented global economy and the weakening of multilateralism." Without naming the US directly, the statement criticised "unjustified unilateral protectionist measures" and specifically condemned the "indiscriminate raising of reciprocal tariffs and non-tariff measures."

These comments clearly referenced the Trump administration's aggressive trade policies, including high tariffs on Chinese goods and escalating trade spats that risk destabilising the global economy. China, which has borne the brunt of these tariffs — facing levies as high as 145 per cent — reportedly pushed for stronger language in the statement. While Brazil and others supported a unified position, some newer members were less enthusiastic about directly antagonising the US, reflecting varied foreign policy alignments within the bloc.

The 2024 expansion of BRICS brought new energy and increased global clout to the bloc, but it also introduced conflicting interests and historical rivalries. Diplomats acknowledged that with greater power comes a need for more diplomacy. Indeed, the expansion has its costs, but it also gives BRICS more resources and a bigger platform for cooperation. Besides, so far the journey of BRICS has been rather rhetorical than real. It is yet to take on the Western world and establish itself as a formidable force in world trade and the geopolitical landscape.

Despite its growing economic clout and strategic aspirations, BRICS continues to suffer from several structural handicaps that limit its effectiveness as a unified global force. Chief among them is the vast political, economic, and ideological diversity among its members, which often results in conflicting priorities and diluted consensus. While legacy members like India, Brazil, and South Africa push for democratic reforms in global institutions such as the United Nations, newer entrants like Egypt and Ethiopia may resist initiatives that undermine regional balances or national interests.

Additionally, the bloc lacks a permanent secretariat or institutional framework to enforce decisions or coordinate policies, relying instead on rotating presidencies and ad hoc mechanisms. Geopolitical rivalries — such as the uneasy relationship between China and India — further complicate joint action. These internal frictions frequently undercut the group's ability to present a cohesive front on major global issues, from trade and security to climate policy and governance reform.

Looking ahead to the July summit, the challenge for BRICS will be to forge a coherent strategy that accommodates its internal diversity while pushing forward its shared interests — particularly in trade, development finance, and institutional reform. As the global system edges away from US unipolarity towards a more fragmented and competitive landscape, BRICS ability to function as a unified bloc may well determine how the emerging multipolar world takes shape.

Taiwan: Advancing health equity

Taiwan, with its world-leading National Health Insurance system and pioneering digital health innovations, stands as a model for equitable, accessible healthcare. Yet, it remains excluded from the WHO due to political barrier

Health is a fundamental human right and a universal value. Improved health results in greater well-being for the people and has ramifications for the survival and development of a country and even the world.

At the 77th World Health Assembly, members adopted the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Fourteenth General Programme of Work for 2025–2028. The programme includes such strategic objectives as improving health service coverage and bolstering financial protections to ensure universal health coverage.

WHO has called on all countries to take action on these issues. As concerns universal health coverage, Taiwan launched the National Health Insurance (NHI) system in 1995. The scheme, which brought together already existing occupational insurance schemes, has reached its 30th year and now covers 99.9 per cent of the population.

The NHI system provides equitable, accessible, and efficient healthcare to all people in Taiwan. It is also an important pillar and guarantor of Taiwan's social stability as well as people's health and safety. It has, moreover, become a global benchmark for achieving universal health coverage.

In an annual survey carried out by Numbeo, Taiwan has been ranked first in the Health Care Index category for seven consecutive years.The NHI operates on a pay-as-you-go, self-sustaining model capable of addressing the financial challenges posed by an ageing population and rising healthcare costs. By reforming premium rates and adding additional funding sources, such as the tobacco health and welfare surcharge, the system is on a sound, sustainable footing.

To promote the health of our people, President Lai Ching-te articulated a vision of a healthy Taiwan in 2024. This aims to ensure that people are healthy, the nation is strong, and the world is ready to embrace Taiwan. Remaining focused on people, families, and communities, we are expanding health promotion operations and preventive healthcare.

Moreover, we are implementing a family physician plan, offering comprehensive care to patients with chronic diseases, and utilising telemedicine to improve healthcare accessibility in rural areas. By promoting integrated long-term care, palliative care, and ageing in place, we ensure holistic, lifelong, and dignified care for all people, realising health equity. In 2021, WHO released the Global Strategy on Digital Health for 2020–2025.

Under this plan, the global health body is seeking the development and adoption of person-centric digital health solutions to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious diseases. It also oversees the development of infrastructure and applications to use health data to promote health and well-being. Taiwan continues to utilise its prowess in information and communications technology to build effective, high-ROI health systems and services.

CHIU TAI-YUAN

The NHI cloud facilitates the more efficient exchange of medical records, while the adoption of international standards such as Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources enhances international medical data sharing. Additionally, the incorporation of AI-assisted technologies is advancing the development of smart healthcare.

The introduction of a virtual health insurance card and the My Health Bank app, which enables real-time management of personal health data, empowers people to make health-enabling choices. In 2008, Taiwan introduced the Health Technology Assessment to facilitate evidence — based policymaking. It also accelerated the inclusion of new treatments under the NHI system. For example, in 2023, gene and cell therapies were covered for the first time, marking a new era for precision medicine and offering patients enhanced treatment options. Taiwan also continues to leverage innovative technologies to improve the working environment for the medical workforce and to bolster the overall quality of medical service.

What's more, despite facing political challenges, Taiwan has continuously participated in international health affairs and has been dedicated to supporting the global health system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan played a crucial role in sharing supplies, strategies, and experiences, and proved to be a reliable partner of countries worldwide. Separately, Taiwan's success story in implementing universal health coverage offers valuable lessons for countries worldwide. As we continue to share our experiences in universal coverage, financial management, and digital health, we hope to facilitate other nations in reaching WHO's goal of universal health coverage.

In this rapidly changing era, health challenges transcend borders, and global cooperation has become essential to addressing various health crises. However, Taiwan has been prevented from participating in WHO — the foremost global health cooperation body — due to China's continued distortion of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 and World Health Assembly Resolution 25.1. Neither of these resolutions mentions Taiwan or declares that Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China.

Therefore, these resolutions have no power to confer upon the PRC any right to represent Taiwan in WHO. In light of this, and to uphold the core UN values of inclusiveness and universality, we urge WHO and all relevant parties to recognise Taiwan's considerable contributions to global public health and the human right to health.

WHO must adopt a more open-minded approach and demonstrate flexibility, adhering to the principles of professionalism and inclusivity. Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities, and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement.

Taiwan earnestly hopes to work with the international community to create a future of borderless healthcare that realises the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The writer is Minister of Health and Welfare ROC Taiwan. Views are personal)

Raja who worked for the people

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

The Bengal Renaissance marked a pivotal awakening in India's social, cultural, and intellectual life. Bengal became the crucible of this transformation, led by men of exceptional intellect and character — figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, and Dwarakanath Tagore.

Their relentless efforts reshaped the moral and philosophical foundation of a stagnating Indian society, breathing new life into a nation shackled by tradition, superstition, and social injustice. Foremost among these reformers was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, born on May 22, 1772 in Radhanagar to Ramakanto Roy and Tarini Devi. A visionary far ahead of his time, Roy found no solace in the rigid orthodoxy and ritualism of contemporary Hinduism. Deeply disturbed by idolatry, he even journeyed to Tibet in search of spiritual truth, hoping to find refuge in Buddhism. However, his experience there was disappointing — he found Tibetan Buddhism equally steeped in rituals and idolatrous practices. Yet this journey left a profound mark on his life. After a group of Tibetan women saved him from violent monks, he developed a deep reverence for women, recognising their strength and resilience. This experience became the foundation of his lifelong advocacy for women's emancipation, especially his crusade against sati, the inhumane practice that forced widows to self-immolate on their husband's funeral pyre. Roy's dedication to social reform extended beyond this. He promoted women's education, property rights, and gender equity — causes later championed by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, culminating in the landmark Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Roy's vision laid the groundwork for a more progressive and humane society. Spiritually, Roy sought to uncover the core, universal truths of religion. He founded the Brahma Sabha, which later evolved into the Brahmo Samaj — a reformist movement that drew from both Hindu and Christian traditions. A polyglot fluent in at least ten languages, Roy studied religious texts across traditions — Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. He even learnt Hebrew and Greek to explore the foundational texts of Christianity.

Through this comparative lens, he published *The Precepts of Jesus*, appreciating Christianity's ethical teachings while also advocating for pure theism within Hinduism, stripped of its superstitions. An ardent proponent of modern education, Roy believed that Sanskrit-based instruction alienated the masses. Although he respected ancient scriptures, he opposed Sanskrit education for practical reasons, arguing that its esoteric nature hindered widespread learning. His progressive stance led him to advocate for English education, emphasising the need for rational and scientific knowledge. His vision helped establish prestigious institutions such as Hindu College, Presidency College, Vedanta College, and the English School in Calcutta. He even petitioned the East India Company to expand English-language instruction, showcasing his commitment to national enlightenment. Roy also pioneered journalism in India, launching publications in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, and English. These journals served as powerful tools to disseminate knowledge in science, literature, and politics.

Despite oppressive press restrictions of the time, Roy fiercely defended freedom of expression, challenging censorship in courts and through official appeals. Although he did not live to witness the removal of these press controls, abolished by Charles Metcalfe in 1835 — his role as a crusader for free speech remains undeniable.

Politically astute, Roy campaigned against the Jury Act of 1827, which barred Indians from participating in trials involving fellow natives. He also opposed the renewal of the East India Company's charter and called for key reforms, including civil and criminal law codification, greater Indian representation in the military, and the separation of judiciary and executive powers. Though an internationalist — he travelled to England in 1831— Roy remained deeply empathetic to the plight of Indian peasants, decrying exploitative zamindars and punitive export duties. In every respect, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a man far ahead of his time. His unwavering commitment to truth, reason, justice, and unity laid the foundation for the Indian freedom movement and inspired generations.

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

Leaderspeak

I would guess that India would be one of the first trade deals we would sign. Vice President Vance was in India last week, talked about substantial progress. I have mentioned that the negotiations with the Republic of Korea have gone very well, and I think we've had some very substantial negotiations with our Japanese allies.

US TREASURY SECRETARY SCOTT BESSENT

Letters to the Editor

Liberals call the shots in Canada

Madam — The recent Canadian midterm election results brought unexpected reactions from global leaders, reminiscent of the classic 1960s Bollywood song *Na Na Karte Pyar Tumhi Se Kar Baithe*. Many appeared to hope for a loss for Canada's Liberal Party, but despite falling three seats short of the majority mark of 172, the party is poised to form the Government.

Notably, Donald Trump, who once quipped about making Canada the 51st US state, congratulated Liberal leader Mark Carney — not via social media, but with a personal phone call. Ironically, Trump's antagonism may have helped Carney. As a vocal critic of Trump, Carney's opposition struck a chord with voters, boosting the Liberals' vote share by 11 per cent and securing 15 more seats than in the last election.

Meanwhile, the Indian Government was seen favouring Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, possibly due to past tensions with Justin Trudeau. Indian media widely predicted a Liberal defeat — but reality defied those expectations. Reluctantly, Prime Minister Modi congratulated Carney. Encouragingly, Carney has called for renewed India–Canada relations, emphasising their importance and expressing his intent to restore full diplomatic engagement. It is time both nations move past their differences and rebuild a strong, respectful partnership.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

China faces the brunt of US tariffs

Madam — As tensions between India and Pakistan reach a peak, the tariff war between the United States and China has also intensified. Many factories in China have shut down after losing orders from the United States. There is growing concern that around 10 to 20 million workers in China, linked to export industries, may face unemployment.

Many factories manufacturing toys, sports goods, and cheap products have sent their workers home and have nearly stopped production. In response, several Chinese companies are now seeking new customers in Europe and Latin America instead of depending on the United States. They are also considering setting up production units in India and Southeast Asia. In the coming months, this shift could completely transform China's export model. The situation is most erning in Yiwu and Dongguan, China's major export hubs.

The athletic wear factory Wuiswole in Ningbo has started online sales in the domestic market. According to several Chinese company heads, the impact of Trump's tariffs is more severe than that of COVID-19. Chinese tech companies have come forward to support domestic businesses. Hundreds of companies have been provided with free AI tools and virtual hosting services to help them resume online sales quickly amid difficulties caused by the Trump tariffs. The Chinese dragon is now deeply entangled in the web of American tariff strategies.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

A tipping point in the global trade

Madam — The article on Mr Trump's tariff moves (dated 30-4-25) sheds light on a deep-rooted global economic struggle. After the two World Wars, colonial powers lost access to cheap raw materials and captive markets. In response, they established mechanisms like the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank — to maintain economic dominance. However, these institutions often left newly liberated nations trapped in debt rather than fostering growth.

The global economic system, driven by profit, has increasingly benefited a tiny elite while depriving the majority. Without sufficient purchasing power among the masses, markets dried up — a crisis that surfaced in the 1930s. Economist Keynes proposed state-led welfare spending to revive demand, a strategy that helped restore economic activity. Yet, the relentless pursuit of profit led to a repeat collapse in 2008, exposing the fragility of the system.

Globalisation, once hailed as a panacea, soon turned the United States into a dumping ground, diminishing its dominance. Trump's reaction — tariffs and trade barriers — reflects a shift towards protectionism.

While most nations resist his unilateralism, bilateral trade pacts are rising. China stands firm, signalling the end of American economic hegemony. Trump's recent pause on tariffs and softer stance suggest a reluctant recognition of this new multipolar trade reality.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

PAHALGAM MASSACRE: TARGETED KILLINGS, NATIONAL OUTRAGE

The terrorists who massacred 26 people in Pahalgam also fired an extremely destructive weapon. Inadvertently or by design, they asked the tourists their religion, and asked to identify themselves by reading the Kalma or other means. After confirming them to be Hindus, killed them mercilessly in front of their wives and children! The mass murder of 26 unsuspecting tourists is an gory inhuman act, but after sometime, like Pulwama or 26/11 Mumbai attack will become an statistic. But the pointed killing of Hindus by openly identifying them will surely result in violent retribution continuously.

They and their masters knew very well that enemity between the Indians can be very easily created. Since they have absolutely no love lost for muslims in india, they are hardly bothered of their fate as long as they are able to inflict a million cuts; and that too without any nefarious efforts by them!

Already, there are calls of boycotting muslims and their business, attacks on them accusing them of cow-slaughter. Kashmiri students studying in other states are threatened and are made to feel insecure, prompting the Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister to request respective governments to ensure their safety.

Amidst call of unity the BJP is blaming the opposition and the opposition calling out the criminal lapses of the ruling party! Not one person has asked for finding how could the terrorists just walk in and create bloody mayhem. Nobody is talking of the lapses, intelligence failure or what precautions are to be taken to prevent such tragedies in future! The PM down to the ministers and ordinary member are roaring and warning of strong action; all this after the killings! We still are unaware how the Pulwama carnage took place!

The terrorists both here and in Pakistan will be celebrating this schism in the country! These attacks give our upstart politicians opportunity to blame each other and shameless upmanship!

ANIL BAGARKA | MUMBAI

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

Reimagining migration: It's time for an overhaul

As global labour shortages intensify, a policy reset could transform this demographic strength into a global competitive edge, if India can shift from fragmented migration to a structured, ethical, and strategic talent export framework

FIRST Column

The Reserve Bank of India's recent bulletin reaffirms India's position as the world's top recipient of remittances, receiving a record $129.1 billion in 2024, amounting to 3.4 per cent of the national GDP and 14.3 per cent of global inflows. These remittances now rival nearly 30 per cent of India's merchandise exports, positioning India's migrant workforce as a critical economic asset to families back home and the nation's macroeconomic stability. This record inflow is not merely a number, it represents the enduring ambition and resilience of over 35 million Indian diaspora, encompassing Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) living and working abroad, making up the world's largest diaspora.Their contribution is even more significant when seen as a source of foreign exchange, a buffer to the current account deficit, and a stabilising force during global economic shocks, as observed during the pandemic and subsequent economic downturns.

The epicentre of illegal migration, Punjab alone received ₹32,535 crore in remittances in 2024, representing over 56 per cent of its merchandise exports and 4.6 per cent of its GDP — underscoring how significant migrant remittances are to state economies. Similar patterns are seen in Kerala, where remittances have historically funded household consumption, real estate, education, and local infrastructure. According to the World Bank, remittances exceed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in many developing nations, and India is no exception.

Despite these achievements, India's migration landscape is marked by a stark duality. At the same time, approximately 2.5 million Indians migrate overseas yearly, and remittances continue to grow — so do irregular and unsafe migration, driven by a lack of legal pathways, poor governance, and limited awareness. States such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala — traditional migration hubs — are also grappling with the social and human costs of undocumented migration: from human trafficking and exploitation to unsafe "donkey routes" and permanent statelessness.

AS MITTAL

An Untapped Opportunity

As high-income countries — particularly OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations like the US, UK, Germany, France, Japan, and Australia — face a projected workforce shortage of 40–50 million by 2030, rising to 160 million by 2040, India stands uniquely positioned to meet this global demand.

With over 65 per cent of its population under 35, India has the world's largest youth cohort. Sectors like healthcare, logistics, construction, education, and technology are already witnessing acute shortages abroad. If paired with policy foresight, this demographic dividend could transform India into the world's leading exporter of skilled human capital. But to realise this, a shift from sporadic migration to structured, state-supported, legal migration is crucial. The Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024, currently under consideration, promises a long-overdue update to the Emigration Act of 1983.

It seeks to build a modern, transparent, and welfare, oriented migration system. But legislative reform alone won't suffice. We need a federalised, mission-mode approach involving Central Ministries, State Governments, skilling agencies, and private sector partners. To catalyse this shift, India must embrace a "Talent Export Policy"— similar in ambition to the "Invest India" initiative. Here's a seven-pronged roadmap to do so:

Establish a National Overseas Employment Authority

Set up a dedicated body under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that works with State Governments to identify destination country demands, facilitate skill-matching, and negotiate bilateral migration corridors. District-level Migration Resource Centres and Indian embassy helpdesks should be institutionalised worldwide.

> ACCORDING TO THE WORLD BANK, REMITTANCES EXCEED FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) IN MANY DEVELOPING NATIONS, AND INDIA IS NO EXCEPTION. DESPITE THESE ACHIEVEMENTS, INDIA'S MIGRATION LANDSCAPE IS MARKED BY A STARK DUALITY

Integrate Global Skill Standards

India must reimagine its skilling architecture to align with global job market standards, including foreign languages, cross-cultural communication, and sector-specific certifications. NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) can partner with countries for mutual qualification recognition.

Make Migration Affordable

Migration costs to Europe can reach up to ₹10 lakh, deterring legal movement and incentivising illegal channels. Low-interest loans, Government subsidies, and employer — funded training models, inspired by the Philippines' ESA-Pay system, must be adopted to reduce the financial burden.

Strengthen Migrant Welfare Systems Abroad

Enforce ILO (International Labour Organisation)-compliant employment standards and fund legal aid cells, health insurance, and cultural orientation programmes in collaboration with Indian missions abroad. The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) can be scaled up to provide real-time support.

Negotiate Migration Agreements

India must expand its Bilateral Labour Mobility Agreements (BLMAs) portfolio like those already signed with Japan, the UAE, and Germany, ensuring wages, insurance, housing, and grievance redressal mechanisms are part of the contract.

National Mobility Industry Council

Bringing together ethical recruitment agencies, training institutes, employers, and regulators under a national industry body will professionalise migration practices, reduce fraud, and ensure quality assurance.

Harness the Power of Returning Migrants

Returning migrants bring global exposure, savings, and skills. A repatriate reintegration programme can turn them into local entrepreneurs and job creators, including re-skilling, credit access, and start-up incubators.

The Way Forward

For India, migration is not just an economic tool, it's a geopolitical asset. A well-supported diaspora can influence foreign policy, trade ties, cultural diplomacy, and technology transfer. Countries like the Philippines, Mexico, and Vietnam have already built national strategies around their overseas workforce. It is time for India to do the same, not out of compulsion but with a vision to lead.With the proper safeguards, strategic investments, and bold policy thinking, India can become the world's largest remittance — receiving nation and the most respected exporter of skilled talent. The global workforce crisis is India's demographic opportunity but only if we act with urgency, coordination, and compassion.

From gaon (village) to global capitals, Indian migrants are already shaping the world. Now it's time for India to shape the future of migration — legally, ethically, strategically and geopolitically. India's migration story is at a critical crossroads — rich in promise yet fraught with challenges. With remittances at record highs and global demand for skilled workers surging, the moment calls for bold, coordinated action.

By embracing a structured, rights-based migration policy, India can not only safeguard its migrants but also elevate them as strategic assets in global diplomacy, trade, and development. Legal, affordable, and skill-aligned migration must become the new norm. If done right, India can transition from being the world's top remittance recipient to a global leader in talent export — transforming migration into a national strength and a tool for inclusive progress.

(The writer is Vice-Chairman (Cabinet Minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views are personal)

The Unseen hands that build our world

On May 1, Workers' Day, we do more than mark a date — we remember a revolution born from blisters, built on dignity, and carried forward by the unbreakable spirit of those whose work shapes our lives, yet whose names we rarely know

She wakes not to an alarm but to the first strike of a hammer. There is no day, no night — just an endless chain of work that begins before sunrise and continues after dark. The hands that bear blisters are the ones that strengthen the nation's foundation. The sweat that falls to the ground raises towering buildings. Yet, these hands have been given more space on floors than in the pages of history.

They haven't been counted — they've been brought down, bent low. But May 1 is the day when the worker straightened their back and told the world: No more.

This day is not just a date on the calendar but a symbol of the consciousness that unites voices crushed for centuries. It is the echo of the strength hidden in the sweat of labourers — a strength that can redirect rivers, split mountains, and, most importantly, transform society's mindset.

A worker is not just a person but an idea. An idea that says labour is the foundation of creation. No uniform, no title, no rank — yet these are the most real people in the world. They may not have degrees to show, but every perfectly aligned brick is proof of their skill.

They are the ones who build cities but often get lost on their edges. They are denied entry to malls, yet they are the ones who build them. Labour is not just working; it is an unwritten poem, composed in lines of blisters, sweat, and unseen exhaustion.

It is a battle — a battle for existence, dignity, and identity that is repeatedly crushed by being called 'unskilled'. But the truth is, the most vital skills belong to those without whom the world would become a stalled machine.

Imagine for a moment: if workers stopped working for a day, what would happen? Cities would halt, streets would empty, and the framework of our so — called modernity would crumble. Yet, how often do we salute their labour?

Today's era is one of technology and innovation. We talk of Digital India, start-ups, and artificial intelligence, but do we forget that the engine of all this still runs on human effort? The delivery boy pedalling through scorching afternoons to bring your package — do we see the exhaustion hidden in his smile?

The welder whose eyes, sparked by more than just metal, forge the future — do we honour their art? Labour is no longer confined to factories; it is the story of every person who lives not for a 'job' but for a passion, even if that passion is to feed their family. It is the story of the rickshaw puller who carries the weight of his family with the strength of his legs.

It is the story of the domestic worker who weaves dreams for her children, even if she never attended school. These people are the backbone of our society, yet how often do we dismiss them as mere 'workers'?

RK JAIN ARIJEET

The workers' fight is not just for wages or working hours but for the respect their labour deserves. They often fight alone — sometimes with their voices, sometimes with tears, and sometimes in silence.

But when they stand together, they change history. That day in 1886, when workers in Chicago demanded an eight-hour workday, was not just an event — it was a spark that ignited labour movements worldwide.

Even today, when workers take to the streets, their voice represents not just themselves but every person who stands against injustice. No law, no Government, and no policy is greater than their collective consciousness. Workers' Day is not just a red mark on the calendar — it is a warning to systems that believe labourers only follow orders. They also ask questions, and when they do, the world must answer.

> WE MUST ASK: IS OUR DEVELOPMENT TRULY INCLUSIVE IF WORKERS' CONTRIBUTION IS LIMITED TO THEIR LABOUR? IS OUR PROGRESS GENUINE IF ITS FRUITS DON'T REACH THOSE WHO WATER ITS ROOTS? NO REVOLUTION, NO DEVELOPMENT, NO CONSTRUCTION IS COMPLETE WITHOUT THE WORKER'S SMILE AT ITS CORE.

We need a society where labour is seen not as a class but as a value. Where honest work is not looked down upon. Where a child who says, "I want to be a worker like my father," is met with respect, not pity. This will only be possible when we view labour not just as a means of survival but as an art — a matter of pride.

We must understand that workers don't just work — they shape dreams. They don't just build structures — they lay the foundation of society. May 1 will truly be a festival when, instead of spending the holiday in malls, we take a step for workers' rights. When we listen to their stories and give their voices a platform.

This day also reminds us that workers are not just a tale of the past but the architects of the future. As we speak of the environment, sustainable development, and social justice, workers are at the heart of that change. Those who grow crops in fields, operate machines in factories, or clean our streets — they are the axis keeping our planet and society alive. Yet, our policies, priorities, and thinking often push them to the margins.

We must ask: Is our development truly inclusive if workers' contribution is limited to their labour? Is our progress genuine if its fruits don't reach those who water its roots?

No revolution, no development, no construction is complete without the worker's smile at its core. As long as their share is only sweat and not the rewards, our achievements remain incomplete. This day is not an empty slogan — it is the sound that rose from the strike of a hammer and can still shake our souls — if we are willing to listen.

It gives us a chance not only to remember workers' struggles but to ask what we can do for them. Perhaps it's time we see their labour not just as work but as a force that can change the world. Perhaps it's time we make Workers' Day not just a holiday but a day of resolve — a resolve to build a society where every worker stands tall, and their voice is heard. Because until the worker's smile becomes part of our progress, no achievement of ours will ever be complete.

On May 1, we do not just honour workers, we awaken to the truth they represent. Their hands, though blistered and unseen, shape the world we live in. They are the silent force behind our cities, our comforts, and our dreams.

Yet, they remain invisible — underpaid, undervalued, and often unheard. Workers' Day is a call not just to remember their struggles but to reimagine a society where labour is not just a necessity but a value of pride.

True progress lies in dignity for all not just in technology or wealth, but in the recognition of every hand that builds, cleans, grows, and delivers. Until we ensure their voices are heard and their efforts rewarded, our achievements remain hollow.

Let this day be a pledge — not just of gratitude but of action — to build an inclusive, just, and respectful world, where every worker stands tall and every drop of sweat is met with the respect it deserves.

On May 1, we honour not just the worker's toil but their truth. Their sweat shapes our world, yet their worth goes unseen. Let this day remind us: without dignity for labour, progress is hollow. Real development begins when every worker's voice is heard and their efforts valued equally.

(The author is a professor and a columnist. Views are personal)

IN BRIEF

India to be among Costa Coffee's top 5 markets

India will be among the top-five global markets for Costa Coffee, which is adding about 50 stores a year in the country as part of its expansion plans, the British coffee chain brand's Global CEO Philippe Schaillee said on Wednesday. Costa Coffee, now owned by beverages major Coca-Cola, is enthusiastic about the Indian market where millennials are gradually shifting towards coffee from tea. "Today there are less than 50 million consumers who are willing to pay a premium for coffee. However, that cohort is growing massively in double digits… That's why India is an important market for us," Schaillee said. India is among the top-20 coffee markets globally for Costa Coffee, and, Schaillee said, it is focussing on key metro cities as part of its growth strategy. "We want to play a long game here. So we are focused on quality growth and not quantity growth. So we have a run rate of opening about 40-50 stores a year. That's a good run rate," he said. Costa Coffee, which is operated in India through its franchise partner Devyani International Ltd (DIL), is marking 20 years of presence in India.

IOC signs $1.4 bn LNG import deal with Trafigura

Indian Oil Corporation, the nation's largest oil firm, has signed a USD 1.3-1.4 billion deal with Trafigura to buy 2.5 million tonne of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to meet the rising energy needs of the country, Chairman A S Sahney said on Wednesday. Trafigura will supply 27 cargoes or 2.5 million tonne of LNG beginning the second half of 2025, he told reporters here. India's gas demand is growing at double digit as it pushes usage of the fuel which is considered a transition fuel. Besides being used as a fuel in industries, natural gas is converted into CNG for running automobiles as well as piped to household kitchens for cooking purposes. LNG is also used as a fuel in long-haul trucking. Sahney said the deal with Trafigura is benchmarked to US Henry Hub prices.
IOC operates a 5 million tonne a year LNG import facility at Ennore in Tamil Nadu and also has capacity booked at other import terminals, he said.

Jharkhand increases power tariff by 6.34 pc

The Jharkhand State Electricity Regulatory Commission (JSERC), on Wednesday, raised the power tariff in the state by 6.34 per cent. Under the new rates, domestic consumers in rural areas will pay Rs 6.70 per unit, up from Rs 6.30, while urban consumers will pay Rs 6.85 per unit, up from Rs 6.65. The revised tariff will come into effect from May 1, the member law of JSERC, Mahendra Prasad, said. While the rural tariff increased by 40 paise, the urban tariff by 20 paise.
"The domestic tariff does not include the consumers availing 200 units of free electricity per month," he said.
Of around 46 lakh domestic consumers, around 40 lakh consumers are availing 200 units of free electricity per household per month in the state, another official said.
Despite Jharkhand Bijli Vitran Nigam Limited's (JBVNL) proposal for a 40.02 per cent increase, the commission approved a 6.34 per cent hike after examination.
For the commercial category, the tariff was increased by 10 paise for rural and 5 paise for urban consumers.

Centre hikes sugarcane price by 4.41 pc to Rs 355/qtl

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday decided to increase the fair and remunerative price (FRP) of sugarcane by 4.41 per cent to Rs 355 per quintal for the upcoming 2025-26 season beginning October.

A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi keeping in mind the interest of sugarcane farmers, an official statement said.

For the current 2024-25 season, the sugarcane FRP has been fixed at Rs 340 per quintal.

FRP is the minimum price mandated by the Government of India that sugar mills are legally obligated to pay sugarcane farmers for their produce.

Briefing media after the meeting, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the FRP of Rs 355 per quintal has been approved for a basic recovery rate of 10.25 per cent.

"The FRP for sugar season 2025-26 is 4.41 per cent higher than current sugar season 2024-25," the statement said.

A premium of Rs 3.46 per quintal for each 0.1 per cent increase in sugar recovery over and above 10.25 per cent will be provided to farmers. A reduction in FRP by Rs 3.46 per quintal will be for every 0.1 per cent decrease in recovery rate.

The government has also decided that there will not be any deduction in case of sugar mills where recovery is below 9.5 per cent. Such farmers will get Rs 329.05 per cent for sugarcane in the ensuing 2025-26 season.

According to the statement, the cost of production of sugarcane for the sugar season 2025-26 is Rs 173 per quintal. The FRP of Rs 355 per quintal fixed for 2025-26 at a recovery rate of 10.25 per cent is higher by 105.2 per cent over production cost.

India, UK making last ditch effort to conclude FTA talks

GOYAL MAY VISIT LONDON AGAIN THIS WEEK

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is likely to visit London again this week as India and the UK are making a last-ditch effort to iron out differences and announce the conclusion of talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA), sources said.

There are four or five outstanding issues in all three pacts that the two countries are negotiating, they added. The three pacts under negotiation are - free trade agreement, bilateral investment agreement (BIT), and social security pact (officially dubbed as Double Contribution Convention Agreement).

The two sides were preparing to announce the closure of these negotiations on April 29 in London but differences cropped up over certain technical issues at the last minute.

Goyal concluded his two-day visit to London on April 29. On Monday he held bilateral meetings with UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds MP. The two held discussions to push forward negotiations on these pacts. The minister at present is in Oslo (Norway) and is scheduled to visit Brussels on Thursday. After that, he may visit London again on Friday or Saturday, according to the sources.

The two sides were preparing to announce the closure of these negotiations on April 29 in London but differences cropped up over certain technical issues at the last minute. Goyal concluded his two-day visit to London on April 29

One of the sources said that there are outstanding technical issues in areas including BIT, and financial services.

"Talks are progressing at a faster pace. Talks are going on. We are very optimistic. A lot of issues were closed during the visit of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the commerce minister," they said, adding issues pertaining to matters including visas, wines, spirits, and electric vehicles have been resolved and closed.

Sitharaman on April 9 wrapped up the 13th Ministerial India-UK Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD) with her British counterpart Chancellor Rachel Reeves on a positive note and expressed eagerness to conclude the agreement negotiations soon.

Before that on February 24, Goyal and UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds had announced the resumption of negotiations for the proposed FTA between the countries. The talks resumed after a gap of over eight months. So far, 14 rounds of talks have been completed which were launched on January 13, 2022.

In FTAs, two countries either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on maximum goods traded between them. They also ease norms for promoting trade in services and bilateral investments.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Credit growth to farm sector slows to 10.4 pc: RBI data

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The bank credit growth to the agriculture sector slowed to 10.4 per cent year-on-year for the fortnight ended March 21, while advances to the industry remained flat at 8 per cent, as per the RBI data released on Wednesday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released the data on sectoral deployment of bank credit collected from 41 select commercial banks, accounting for about 95 per cent of the total non-food credit deployed by all banks taken together.

Credit to agriculture and allied activities registered a growth of 10.4 per cent (y-o-y) as of the fortnight ended March 21, 2025, against 20 per cent in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year.

"Credit to industry expanded by 8.0 per cent (y-o-y) as on the fortnight ended March 21, 2025, same as in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year," the RBI said.

Among major industries, outstanding credit to 'petroleum, coal products and nuclear fuels', 'basic metal and metal products', 'all engineering' and 'construction' recorded an accelerated y-o-y growth.

However, credit growth in the infrastructure segment decelerated.

Bank loans to the services sector increased by 13.4 per cent as of the fortnight ended March 21, 2025, (20.8 per cent in the corresponding fortnight of the previous year), primarily due to decelerated growth in credit to NBFCs.

Credit growth (y-o-y) to 'professional services' and 'trade' segments remained robust.

Further, the credit to personal loans segment registered a growth of 14 per cent compared to 17.6 per cent a year ago, largely due to a decline in growth in 'other personal loans', 'vehicle loans' and 'credit card outstanding'.

On a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis, non-food bank credit as of the fortnight ended March 21, 2025, grew by 12 per cent compared to 16.3 per cent during the corresponding fortnight of the previous year (March 22, 2024), the RBI said.

Cine stars, cricketers invest in Karamtara pre-IPO round

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bollywood actors Ranbir Kapoor and Aamir Khan, as well as cricket players Rohit Sharma and Jasprit Bumrah, have invested in power transmission firm Karamtara Engineering's pre-IPO round.

Karamtara Engineering is a backwards-integrated manufacturer of products for the renewable energy and transmission lines sectors. It offers a diverse product portfolio, which enables it to serve as a one-stop shop for solar structures (fixed-tilt and trackers).

The company offers lattice structures for transmission lines, fasteners for solar, wind, transmission and industrial sectors, and overhead transmission line hardware fittings and accessories.

RISK OF SHOWDOWN WITH INDIA

Pakistan Stock Exchange plunges 3500 points

PNS ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) plunged by more than 3,500 points on Wednesday as uncertainty took hold due to increasing risk of a showdown with India.

Information Minister Atta Tarar said that India was planning military action against Pakistan in 26 to 36 hours, spreading panic in the market.

The market maintained a downward trend throughout the day and finally the index closed at 111,326.57, down by 3,545.61 or 3.09 per cent, from the last close of 114,872.18, according to the data provided by the PSX.

Analysts attributed the plunge to the uncertain security situation after the Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 22 that killed at least 26 people.

The Dawn newspaper reported that Mohammed Sohail, chief executive of Topline Securities, attributed the decline to "news of a likely attack in the next few days".

Awais Ashraf, director research at AKD Securities, said, "Investors are worried about potential Indian military action against Pakistan, concerns that have intensified following the information minister's press briefing."

Yousuf M Farooq, director of research at Chase Securities, echoed the same sentiments. He said that the market was under pressure following the information minister's "statement last night suggesting that India may take military action within the next 24–36 hours".

"The market in the short term will most likely follow news flows of Pakistan-India tensions," he added.

Sana Tawfik, head of research at Arif Habib Limited, also credited the slump primarily on geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan.

Earlier in the day, Information Minister Tarar said that "credible intelligence" reports indicated that India was planning to conduct military action in the next 24 to 36 hours.

IA may face Rs 77 cr weekly addl expenses on airspace curbs

PNS ■ MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

Indian airlines are likely to face additional weekly expenses of Rs 77 crore for international flights operated from north Indian cities as the airspace curbs result in increased fuel consumption and longer flight durations.

An analysis of the number of overseas flights and back-of-the-envelope calculations based on increased flight time as well as approximate expenses by PTI showed that the additional monthly operational costs could be over Rs 306 crore.

Amid escalating tensions between India and Pakistan due to the Pahalgam terror attack, Pakistan on Thursday said it will bar Indian airlines from using its airspace.

Alternative flight path is resulting in additional flying time of up to 1.5 hours for international flights from Delhi and north Indian cities.

A senior airline industry official, who has extensive experience in the commercial side, told PTI that the additional time for a 16-hour flight to North America will be around 1.5 hours.

For 1.5 additional hours, the cost will be around Rs 29 lakh, including landing and parking charges on account of a technical halt in an airport enroute, the official said.

Similarly, the additional flight time for a 9-hour flight to Europe will be about 1.5 hours, and the extra cost will be around Rs 22.5 lakh.

In the case of Middle East flights, the additional time will be around 45 minutes, and the resultant cost will be about Rs 5 lakh, the official said.

Indian carriers are scheduled to operate more than 6,000 flights one way to various international destinations in April, data from aviation analytics firm Cirium showed.

Over 800 weekly flights are operated by Indian airlines to and from north Indian cities to overseas destinations, including North America, the UK, Europe and the Middle East, as per an analysis of the Cirium data.

India sees brisk gold buying on Akshaya Tritiya despite price surge

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver buying in India -- the world's largest gold consumer -- kicked off positively on Wednesday's auspicious Akshaya Tritiya festival despite high prices, with jewellers' body GJC projecting gold sales to jump 35 per cent in value terms over the last year.

Consumer footfalls were higher in south India during the first half of the day and were expected to increase in Maharashtra and northern states later due to extreme weather conditions.

Gold prices are trading between Rs 99,500 and Rs 99,900 per 10 grams across different parts of the country, 37.6 per cent higher than Rs 72,300 on Akshaya Tritiya in 2024.

Consumers who had hesitated to buy gold at elevated prices are now purchasing as prices have stabilized from peak levels, All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council (GJC) Chairman Rajesh Rokede said.

"We expect gold sale to remain steady at last year's level of 20 tonnes. However, in value terms, we see 35 per cent increase in gold sale today," he said.

Buying precious metal on Akshaya Tritiya is a tradition widely followed in south India that has gradually spread across the country with increased awareness.

Rokede noted that even consumers aged 25-40 years are buying gold and silver, an emerging trend amid sharp rises in precious metal rates. Consumers are purchasing jewellery, coins, and bars based on necessity and budget.

"Affordability has been impacted due to rise in gold prices. However, there is strong buying sentiment due to Akshaya Tritiya. Consumers will buy," said World Gold Council India CEO Sachin Jain.

PNG Jewellers Chairman and Managing Director Saurabh Gadgil said consumer sentiment remains upbeat despite record-high gold prices, with steady interest in gold, diamond and silver jewellery.

Women account for 7 pc of total workforce in NSE-listed cos: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Women account for 7 per cent of the total workforce in the NSE-listed logistics firms despite contributing to cost savings of up to 12 per cent due to higher efficiency, better attendance, and improved order processing quality, according to a report.

The report by the CII Centre for Women Leadership and NGO The Udaiti Foundation also indicates that safety remains a salient issue for women in the logistics sector, which may affect their participation.

The Udaiti Foundation aims for increasing India's female labour force participation rate to 50 per cent and doubling the number of women owned enterprises in the country.

According to 'SheMoves Logistics - Driving Diversity & Inclusion in Logistics Report,' leadership diversity drives financial performance, but representational gaps persist even as 44 per cent of companies have at least one woman in key management positions (KMPs), and most firms having one woman on their Board of Directors (BoDs).

The quantitative insights are based on data from 18 NSE-listed logistics companies and Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR) while qualitative insights are drawn from in-depth interviews with other logistics companies besides the NSE listed companies, as per the report.

The report by the CII Centre for Women Leadership and NGO The Udaiti Foundation also indicates that safety remains a salient issue for women in the logistics sector, which may affect their participation

"Women constitute 7 per cent of the workforce in the NSE listed firms in the sector, showing a 1 percentage point increase over the last four years. Top performers include AllCargo Logistics (19 per cent), TCI Express and All Cargo Gati (13 per cent each), Container Corporation of India (12 per cent), and Mahindra Logistics (11 per cent)," it said.

Noting that deep-seated structural and cultural factors continue to influence women's participation in logistics, the report said this manifests in challenges such as entrenched gender biases affecting hiring and promotion practices, the exclusion of women from informal networks, and infrastructural gaps like the lack of safe and gender-responsive workplace facilities, including basic amenities such as separate washrooms.

Indicating that safety concerns remain a salient issue for women in the logistics sector, which may affect their participation, the report observed that POSH-related complaints in the sector increased by 37 per cent between 22-23 and 23-24.

Data show that 22 per cent of companies provide daycare benefits to their employees - which could be an important factor in ensuring women, have a higher return-to-work rate, as per the report.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | THURSDAY | MAY 1, 2025

Fresh look, fresh role? Pashmina Roshan fuels casting speculation

Pashmina Roshan, who made her Bollywood debut in 2024 with *Ishq Vishk Rebound*, has quietly sparked speculation after sharing photos of herself sporting short hair on social media. The actor captioned the post simply with the words "Chop-chop," leaving fans and industry curious about the reason behind the transformation.

The change in appearance has led to questions about whether the new look is connected to an upcoming role. Drastic physical changes among actors are often seen as early signs of character preparation, especially when no other explanation is given.

Social media is already buzzing, with fans sharing their guesses and eagerly watching for any hint. As of now, there has been no official announcement from Pashmina, but in the film world, small changes like this often come before big announcements.

'Killer comedy' awaits as *Housefull 5* drops its teaser

Sajid Nadiadwala, the man who gave Indian cinema one of its most beloved comedy franchises marks 15 glorious years of *Housefull*! The 1st instalment of *Housefull* released on 30th April 2010 and on Wednesday, they celebrated 15 years of the franchise. On this special occasion, the much-anticipated teaser of *Housefull 5* has been unveiled.

The film promises five times the laughter, five times the madness and full-on family entertainment like never before. Housefull is India's only franchise to reach its 5th Installment.

The teaser offers an exciting first glimpse of a truly star-studded ensemble featuring Bollywood's biggest names: Akshay Kumar, Abhishek Bachchan, Riteish Deshmukh, Jacqueline Fernandez, Sonam Bajwa, Nargis Fakhri, Sanjay Dutt, Jackie Shroff, Nana Patekar, Chitrangada Singh, Fardeen Khan, Chunky Pandey, Johnny Lever, Shreyas Talpade, Dino Morea, Ranjeet, Soundarya Sharma, Nikitin Dheer and Akashdeep Sabir.

Directed by Tarun Mansukhani, *Housefull 5* takes audiences aboard a luxurious cruise, promising a rollercoaster ride of endless laughs, twists and a killer comedy with chartbuster songs.

Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala under his banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, *Housefull 5* sails into cinemas worldwide on 6th June 2025.

SEEMA PAHWA CLARIFIES

'I'm not quitting films, just fearing loss of creativity'

Actress Seema Pahwa clarified that she is not quitting the industry and also shared a fear that, somewhere, she might lose her creativity.

Seema's comments come after a news article, where the actress revealed that she was considering quitting films due to the industry due to the business-minded decisions started doing the rounds.

The actress, who rose to prominence for her role of Badki in the popular soap opera *Hum Log*, took to Instagram and wrote: "For the past few days, there's something that's been occupying my mind and it's the truth — that I don't know how to give interviews, or when I try to speak, maybe I fail to convey my message properly to the interviewers. The thing is, I have received a lot of love and respect from the film industry, and I hope to continue receiving it in the future."

She added: "I have no complaints about anyone. It's just a fear that somewhere, slowly, I might lose my creativity. Maybe I haven't expressed myself well and people misunderstood it, thinking that I want to leave the industry. But I love my industry."

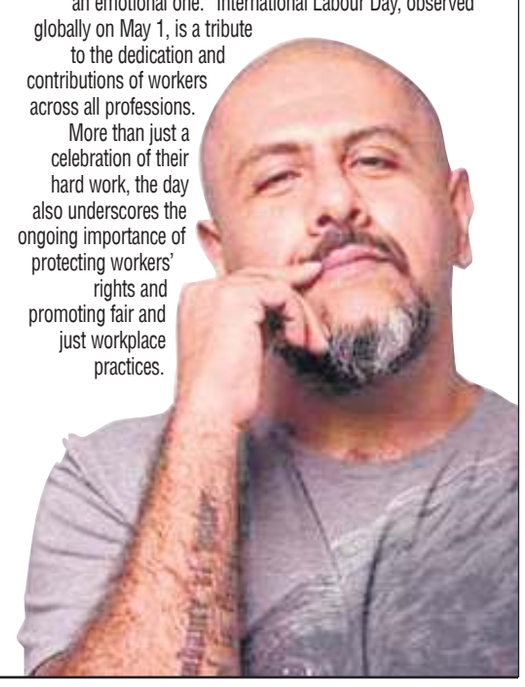
The actress, who made her directorial debut with *Ramprasad Ki Tehrvi* in 2021, wrote in the caption: "I would like to make my second film very soon."

Vishal Dadlani pays soulful tribute to construction workers on Labour Day

Singer Vishal Dadlani marked International Labour Day with a touching tribute to construction workers. He released a special song *Sugee's tribute* dedicated to their relentless hard work and dedication. Sung by Vishal, the track is composed by Chaitanya Pandit and lyrics have been penned by Chirag Modi and Chaitanya Pandit. To mark International Labour Day, Sugee Group unveiled a heartfelt musical tribute honouring the tireless efforts of construction workers who are the foundation of its projects.

Speaking about the song, Vishal Dadlani shared, "We rarely pause to acknowledge those who build our homes, often without recognition or expectation. So when Sugee Group asked me to give my voice to this song that expresses gratitude towards construction workers on Labour Day, I was genuinely moved. What makes the song so powerful is the way it weaves in the raw, real textures of their working world - actual construction site sounds like hammers, drills, rammers and shears. It's this grounding in reality that gives the composition its emotional weight. Lending my voice to it wasn't just a musical decision - it was an emotional one." International Labour Day, observed globally on May 1, is a tribute to the dedication and contributions of workers across all professions.

More than just a celebration of their hard work, the day also underscores the ongoing importance of protecting workers' rights and promoting fair and just workplace practices.



'I LIKE SUCH CHARACTERS WHO GET LOST IN THE CROWD'

Like most actors, his aim is to disappear into his character. And unlike most movie stars, Nawazuddin Siddiqui would like to get lost in a crowd in real life too – the equivalent maybe of Harry Potter's invisibility cloak.

"It's very difficult for me to make myself presentable and stand out. But I feel very good that I am sitting in a corner and no one is looking at me... rather, I'm observing others," Siddiqui said in an interview "I feel the world is a 70mm film and I'm watching it," added the actor who became a star playing everyday people, be it in small roles such as in *Munnabhai MBBS* and *Peepli Live* or performances in acclaimed titles, including *The Lunchbox*, *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* and *Maanjhi*.

Siddiqui's journey from Budhana in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh to Delhi's National School of Drama and then to Mumbai from where he emerged as one of the Hindi film industry's most versatile stars after a long struggle is the stuff dreams are made of. The aspiring actor went straight from watching C-grade films to world cinema. Growing up in Budhana, he said there were no literary or cultural influences but there was a 'kachcha theatre' that would mostly show C-grade movies.

"I have grown up watching those movies and when I came to the city, I went to the National School of Drama and I was introduced to world cinema there so I missed a lot of Bollywood movies in between, which I saw later." The 50-year-old said he still considers each character a fresh challenge, the latest being his portrayal of former customs officer Costao Fernandes in a new film on ZEE5. In fact, if he had to have one of his characters as a travel companion, it would be that of a regular Mumbai tourist photographer from director Ritesh Batra's *Photograph*.

"It's the kind of person who does not have a status and has nothing special about him. Even if he passes in front of you, you won't pay attention to him. I like such characters who get lost in the crowd," he said. Isn't it the antithesis of what actors want to stand out and be noticed?

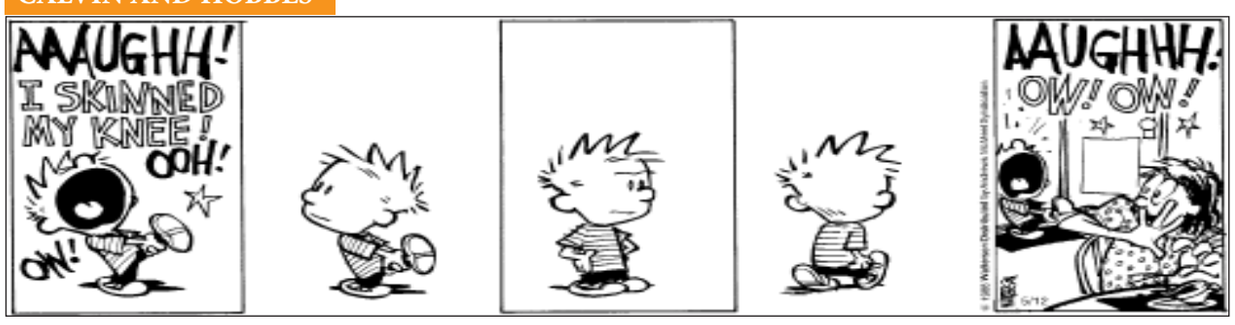
"I don't want it. My aim is to not stand out even in real life. There are a lot of my friends, my seniors, like Manoj Bhai , who often says that 'if you make Nawaz stand in the crowd, you won't even know where he is, he merges with the crowd'. So, I have that, and I like it," he said. Siddiqui has often played characters on both sides of the moral and political divide *Manto* and *Thackeray*, the former a biopic on writer *Saadat Hasan Manto*, the latter on Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray; a serial killer in *Raman Raghav 2.0* and a cop in *Raees*. He said he has carefully tried to stay away from an established image and, in fact, has trust issues with people who have the image of a person without any faults.

"I don't want to be fixed in a certain kind of image. I have played many such characters where I have been criticised like *Raman Raghav 2.0*. When I did *Manto*, certain people didn't like it and then there were some who didn't like *Thackeray*.

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

SUDOKU

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	8	3	7		6			
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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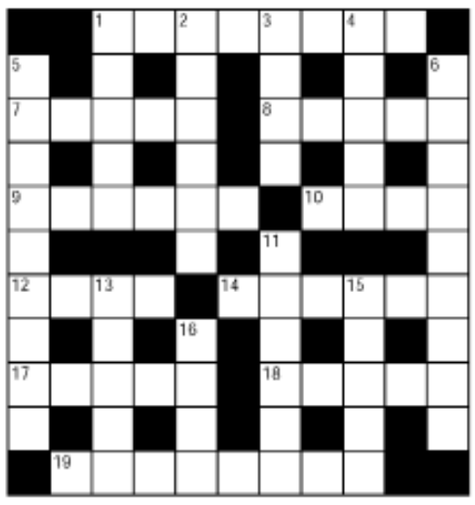
Rules

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

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Long pants
7 Correct
8 Untrue
9 Someone who lives alone, keeping away from others
10 Costing nothing
12 Shortly
14 Thief
17 Lift up
18 Think the same way
19 Huge

DOWN

1 A large wild cat
2 Get
3 Out of danger
4 Draw a straight line with this
5 A large group of musicians who play together
6 Practised
11 A root vegetable
13 A smelly vegetable
15 Destroys by fire
16 Expensive

SOLUTION

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THURSDAY MAY 1, 2025

Nawazuddin Siddiqui powers through the flaws in *Costao*

TEJAL SINHA
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Plot

Set in the politically turbulent landscape of 1990s Goa, *Costao* follows the gripping real-life journey of Costao Fernandes (Nawazuddin Siddiqui), a principled customs officer committed to uprooting gold smuggling in the region. At the center of his investigation is a powerful and cunning politician-socialite, D'Mello (Kishore Kumar G), who manipulates both the political system and criminal underworld for personal gain. As Costao digs deeper, he finds himself ensnared in a conspiracy that turns his world upside down. Despite his unwavering honesty, he is forced to flee after being falsely implicated. While battling to clear his name and uphold the law, Costao must also confront growing resentment at home—particularly from his wife Maria (Priya Bapat), who feels increasingly alienated by his dedication to work. The film traces Costao's fight for justice as he races against time and power structures that seem intent on silencing him.

Highlights

Costao offers several moments that leave an impact. The setting of Goa is more than just a backdrop—it's an atmospheric presence that adds texture to the story. Rafey Mahmood's cinematography captures both the sunlit beauty and the darker undercurrents of the state. One of the emotional high points of the film comes through the tender bond between Costao and his daughter Marissa, played by the talented Asmi Deo. These moments of father-daughter intimacy provide warmth in an otherwise intense narrative and anchor the protagonist's emotional core. Another notable highlight is the physical transformation of Nawazuddin Siddiqui—particularly evident in an extended foot chase sequence where his dedication to embodying Costao's stamina and urgency truly shines.

Drawbacks

The film's primary weakness lies in its execution. The pacing is inconsistent—what begins with crisp storytelling eventually succumbs to sluggishness. A sharper edit could have significantly improved the narrative's momentum, especially in the second hour. Additionally, the writing fails to delve deeper into the moral complexity of its characters. D'Mello, as the main antagonist, is painted with broad strokes; his menace is implied rather than demonstrated. Kishore Kumar G is not given enough material to elevate his role beyond a cardboard villain. Moreover, some potentially powerful scenes—such as Costao's internal conflict or the family's breakdown—are glossed over or emotionally undercooked. These missed opportunities rob the film of the layered depth it could have achieved.

Technical Aspects

At its core, *Costao* is a story about resilience and moral conflict, but its storytelling never fully capitalizes on the tension embedded in its premise. Director Sejal Shah sets up the stakes effectively in the first half, introducing Costao's dual life—publicly revered but privately strained. The screenplay by Bhavesh Mandalia and Meghna Srivastava initially shows promise, gradually immersing the viewer in the web of deceit that threatens to destroy the protagonist. Unfortunately, that grip slackens considerably in the second half. While the narrative builds intrigue with the tip-off about a 1500 kg gold smuggling operation, the aftermath plays out in a repetitive, stretched manner that diminishes the urgency. The dialogues are thoughtful in patches, particularly during confrontations and introspective moments, but the overall structure lacks tightness, resulting in a film that wavers between biographical realism and conventional crime drama tropes.

Rafey Mahmood's cinematography is a clear standout, capturing not just the picturesque beauty of Goa, but also its gritty underbelly with a balanced lens. Unnikrishnan Payoor Parameswaran's editing, however, leaves much to be desired—certain sequences feel drawn out and repetitive, which affects the pacing. The film runs for 2 hours and 5 minutes, but the narrative drag makes it feel longer.

Performances

Performance is the one department where *Costao* truly excels. Nawazuddin Siddiqui once again proves why he remains one of India's most versatile and committed actors. He slips seamlessly into the skin of Costao Fernandes, portraying a man of integrity with remarkable restraint and gravitas. His portrayal balances strength and vulnerability, particularly during scenes where he confronts betrayal or injustice. The effort he has invested—whether in physical training for action sequences or emotional depth—is evident and elevates the entire film. Priya Bapat delivers a quietly powerful performance as Maria. She communicates her frustration, love, and hurt with great authenticity. One of her most notable scenes, where she confronts Costao over his absence and emotional distance, is handled with admirable restraint and power. Asmi Deo, who plays Marissa, is a revelation. Her innocence, timing, and chemistry with Nawazuddin add immense emotional value to the film. Kishore Kumar G, though charismatic, is underused. His role as D'Mello never quite reaches its potential, leaving a void where a formidable antagonist was needed. Hussain Dalal makes a brief appearance and is effective within the limited screen time.

Verdict

Costao is a film that leans heavily on its lead actor to carry the weight of its story, and Nawazuddin Siddiqui delivers in every frame. However, the film falls short in terms of narrative engagement and emotional payoff. While it sets up an intriguing premise based on real events, the screenplay loses steam midway and the direction doesn't always maintain the required urgency or emotional intensity. Still, for viewers who appreciate performance-driven cinema and stories of unsung heroes, *Costao* offers moments of sincerity and reflection. It's a film that had the potential to be much more than what it eventually delivers.

Rise of nature-first luxury living in India: More than a weekend dream

A few years ago, the idea of living in a forested estate, surrounded by fresh air and green views, was considered a privilege reserved for holidays. Today, for a growing number of affluent Indians, that dream is becoming a very real way of life.

We are seeing a powerful shift away from cities entirely toward balance, toward homes that offer both sophistication and stillness. High-net-worth individuals (HNIs) and ultra-HNIs are increasingly choosing spaces that bring them closer to nature, not just on weekends but every day. This is not a passing trend. It's a conscious decision about how and where people want to live.

What's driving the shift?

There's no single trigger behind this change. Instead, it's a blend of evolving values, flexible work, and a desire to live better. Remote work has opened up lifestyle possibilities that were unthinkable a decade ago. Many professionals no longer need to live within 10 minutes of a business district. With stable connectivity and strong infrastructure in many Tier-2 and fringe locations, it's now viable to work from homes nestled in nature.

Wellness is another driving force. Clean air, silence and green surroundings have gone from luxuries to essentials. We now understand that our environment plays a major role in our physical and mental health. And when you can choose to live in a place that supports both, why wouldn't you? Then there's the redefinition of luxury itself. For many HNIs, true luxury is no longer found in just a location or a high-end interior. It's in the experience of space, of calm, of connection to something larger than four walls.

Market that's catching up

This isn't just anecdotal. The numbers support it. Knight Frank's Wealth Report 2024 noted a 25% increase in second home purchases by ultra-HNIs, with a growing preference for locations that offer open space, natural landscapes, and a slower pace of life. Meanwhile, a recent India Sotheby's report found that over 60% of its clients now place "nature proximity" among the top three priorities when selecting a residential property. These homes aren't just for the occasional weekend anymore. A lot of people are actually living in them, staying for weeks at a time, sometimes longer. Some are working from there; some have kids attending school online. And many want a quieter place to spend more of their day-to-day life.

Closer look: How developers are responding

For a long time, being close to nature meant getting a weekend place outside the city. But today's luxury buyers want that connection every day, not just once in a while. And developers are listening. Builders like Marvel Realtors are designing homes where nature isn't something you drive to—it's something you live with. Across their premium projects, you'll find open-plan layouts that let sunlight flood every room, smart cross-ventilation to keep air fresh and double-height terraces that invite the outdoors inside. Landscaped courtyards, rooftop gardens, wide green corridors and shaded walking paths are no longer luxuries—they're part of the blueprint.

The shift is clear: larger balconies are sized for real outdoor living. Natural light and air aren't afterthoughts; they're planned into how the spaces breathe. Even building orientation is fine-tuned so homes work with the sun, the seasons, and the air movement, not against them. It's a response not just to lifestyle aspirations, but to a deeper change in priorities. In cities that are getting faster, louder and more crowded, true luxury is about slowing down, opening up and feeling rooted—even if you're five minutes from a business district. Developers are creating ecosystems where living feels lighter, healthier and closer to the world outside.

From retreat to routine

The clearest sign that this isn't a temporary trend is the way these homes are being used. Buyers aren't just booking occasional stays; they're living there, working there, sending their children to school from there and hosting friends for extended weekends that casually blend into weekdays. This is everyday living with the feel of a weekend. And for many, that blend is the new definition of balance.

What it all adds up to

What we're seeing isn't just a passing interest; it's a real change in how people want to live. The idea of home is expanding. It's not just about where you sleep or work, it's about how the space makes you feel every day.

Because of this transformation, people now seek different features in their homes. They no longer focus solely on spacious rooms and beautiful views because they seek emotional connections with their living space. People seek breathing room, quiet areas and their own personal green space. The true challenge for home builders who operate in our field involves listening to these needs to develop spaces that enhance daily life equilibrium.

(The author, Vishwajeet Jhavar, is the MD and CEO of Marvel Realtors.)

Battling deepfakes and digital deception; safeguarding India's cyber frontlines

PNS|HYDERABAD

As phishing attacks in India surged by 175% in 2024, according to the Digital Threat Report, the spotlight has shifted sharply toward a more insidious cyber menace—AI-generated deepfakes. From impersonating bank officials to simulating entire identities, these synthetic media tools are redefining the anatomy of cybercrime. Standing at the forefront of defense is pi-labs, a deep-tech company spearheading AI-forensics innovation through its flagship platform, Authentify.

In an exclusive interview, Ankush Tiwari, Founder and CEO of pi-labs, delves into how the company is tackling emerging threats, the core technology behind Authentify, and the evolving ecosystem of deepfake-driven attacks.

AI has not only empowered productivity—it has also supercharged deception. Deepfakes, which can replicate a person's face, voice, and expressions with uncanny accuracy, are now being weaponised in identity fraud, vKYC manipulations, and even fake video calls.

"Traditional phishing relied on poor-quality impersonations; today, deepfake videos, audios, and images can simulate a real person's face, voices and gestures with alarming precision. This enables fraudsters to bypass verification systems, manipulate trust in video KYC processes, or even orchestrate scams through fake video calls."

To counter this new wave of attacks, pi-labs has developed Authentify, a detection platform designed to flag synthetic media across video, audio, and images—before they can exploit systems or trust.

At the heart of Authentify is a powerful AI stack trained on millions of datasets spanning geographies, languages, and identity markers. But the company isn't just chasing accuracy metrics—it's building contextual intelligence.

"We use AI and deterministic techniques to identify deepfakes. We are also providing maximum transparency and explainability for our deepfake predictions," explains Tiwari. "We believe that deepfake detection goes beyond algorithmic precision—it requires an understanding of nuances and identity-specific markers."

Operating in real-time, the platform integrates seamlessly into existing verification workflows through APIs. It offers deployment flexibility, supporting both on-premise implementations for sensitive environments and scalable cloud solutions. This allows Authentify to embed deepfake detection at the point of identity verification, without disrupting operations.

One of the most alarming trends pi-labs has observed is the commodification of deepfake creation itself. Criminals are offering realistic identity forgeries—including Aadhaar, PAN cards and even voice clones—for as little as INR 50 to INR 100.

"This is no longer just a cybercrime issue—it's the beginning of Jamtara 3.0. Misinformation, fake documents and identity manipulation pose real threats to national security, BFSI systems and law enforcement operations."

These services are often hosted via encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram, sometimes operated from international hubs including China. The accessibility of such tools significantly lowers the barrier to committing sophisticated fraud.

"Much like the early days of antivirus software, we always want to believe that attackers are ahead of us. This keeps us on our toes and ensures we are always on the hunt to look for problems in this domain."

pi-labs' technology isn't just theoretical—it's actively securing high-risk sectors.

"In BFSI, [Authentify] is helping prevent fraud during remote onboarding and vKYC processes. In law enforcement, the platform is assisting agencies in authenticating digital evidence and identifying manipulated media."

The company is currently working with central and state-level government bodies, helping them resolve complex cases involving synthetic media. Additionally, it is integrating its solution across verification workflows, from KYC systems to HR interviews and even at the device level on laptops and mobile devices.

"The threat is evolving fast, and so must the defense. Proactive, embedded and AI-driven verification is no longer optional—it's critical."

As synthetic media increasingly fuels misinformation, pi-labs sees its role expanding into the domain of public communication, elections and journalism.

"Authentify can empower media outlets by offering them real-time verification tools to authenticate videos, audio, and images before publication. For regulatory bodies and election commissions, it can serve as a validation layer to flag manipulated political ads, campaign material, or fake public service announcements."

To support large-scale operations, the company offers API-based tools that can be directly embedded into content management systems and public-facing reporting platforms. This enables automated, real-time detection of synthetic media—an essential step in safeguarding democratic processes.

In line with India's cyber resilience roadmap, pi-labs takes pride in being both locally grounded and globally competitive.

"Our models are trained on data that reflects Indian demographics, languages and cultural nuances. At the same time, our technology architecture, AI pipelines and compliance standards are benchmarked against global best practices."

While the core of their R&D is rooted in Indian realities, the company actively contributes to international cybersecurity alliances and standards.

As AI evolves, so do the threats. pi-labs is actively building future-proof defenses through continuous research.

"We believe that the only way to stay ahead is to invest in deep, meaningful R&D. As a small but mission-driven company, we are proud to have published five patents and multiple research papers that contribute to the broader cybersecurity and AI-forensics ecosystem."

Their R&D pipeline is focused on next-generation detection systems, real-time identity risk scoring and advanced signal processing for synthetic voice and video artifacts.

"Our team is unified by a shared belief that we're working toward a greater good—building technologies that protect digital trust and strengthen the fabric of society in an age of synthetic media."

For pi-labs, scaling AI-forensics infrastructure across India means building bridges—with government, academia and industry.

"We believe a national framework for synthetic media detection standards, public-private research grants and collaborations with regulatory sandboxes will be critical. pi-labs is actively engaging with fintech alliances, cybersecurity task forces and digital governance initiatives to contribute to building this ecosystem."

By partnering with policymakers and frontline institutions, pi-labs aims to anchor India's digital future on a foundation of trust, transparency and technological integrity.

In an era where seeing is no longer believing, platforms like Authentify may be the silent sentinels standing between digital truth and deception. As Ankush Tiwari puts it, "AI-driven verification is no longer optional—it's critical."

Attention on him avoidable: Dravid on Suryavanshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Rahul Dravid doesn't want microscopic attention on 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi following his path-breaking hundred in the IPL but having said that, the Rajasthan Royals head coach knows it is something that he can't control.

Having received a barrage of questions on Suryavanshi in the Star Sports Press Room on Wednesday, Dravid realised that the cricketing world will not be leaving the talented teenager alone from now onwards. The Bihar teen will have to find a way to handle this overnight stardom, he said.

In the interaction, the former India head coach also touched upon Suryavanshi's special skills that make him a formidable T20 batter at such a young age before adding that he remains very much a work in progress.

"I think it won't be possible to completely sort of avoid him from the experience that is around him. I can't control what people are talking about him. I have come to this interaction and all I have heard is questions about Vaibhav," said Dravid when asked about protecting the youngster from the hysteria around him.

"It is going to be challenging for him but it is exciting at the same time. I would love to say that we should not shower him with that much attention. Maybe I am being naive as that it is not going to happen.

"Recognising that it happens and putting a certain level of support around that and navigate that attention and allow him space to be a youngster. It is part of being a cricketer in this country, it is impossible to distance yourself from and (you tend to get) sucked into it."

As the India U-19 coach, Dravid nurtured the likes of Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw, Yashasvi Jaiswal and many more exciting talents.

Asked about Suryavanshi, Dravid explained what makes him special.

"For me it is really the ability to have that level of fearlessness and not get fazed by the occasion. You don't get to see that with people that young. The range of shots he showed.

"He is only going to get better. Nobody is saying that he is a finished article. No one should rush to call him somebody he is not. Teams will be smarter against him. T20 format is such where he will have games where it will not work out," he cautioned.

Suryavanshi's six-hitting ability also stands out. He cleared the ropes 11 times in his 35-ball hundred against a potent Gujarat Titans attack.

"What gives him power is a good bat speed, high backlift, hand-eye coordination. His judgment of length is something that has amazed me, whether it is fractionally short or full, he can capitalise on that. His natural strength is helpful in this situation," said the Indian great.

A video clip of Suryavanshi was shown during the interaction where he was seen praising Dravid for making him a better cricketer over the past three months.

The moment the footage ended, Dravid played down the role played by him in his rise.

"The biggest credit goes to him. It would be wrong of me to take credit for him. He has come through a system (having played first class and India U19.

"His father has been supportive. Here in Rajasthan Royals, so many people have been involved...He will be asked Dravid questions and he has to give a diplomatic answer," the former India captain said with a smile.

"We try to keep it simple with him. For us, it is important that he plays the kind of cricket he enjoys playing...It is pretty obvious he likes to play attacking brand of cricket. We picked him not keeping his age in mind, we were convinced of his talent," he added.

Gujarat Titans looking at Gill as long-term captain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Gujarat Titans have systems and processes in place to help Shubman Gill "grow as a captain" as the franchise has appointed the India batter with a long-term view, says COO Colonel Arvinder Singh.

A vital cog in their title-winning campaign in Gujarat Titans' maiden season in IPL 2022, Gill was appointed captain of the franchise when Hardik Pandya moved back to Mumbai Indians ahead of the 2024 edition.

While the first year as a full-time skipper didn't bring Gill much success as GT finished eighth, his side has been one to beat in this IPL, currently ranked third with an impressive six wins and three losses in nine matches so far.

"At Gujarat Titans, whatever we do, we don't do it for a season or two; we think long-term. When Hardik moved on, many were of the opinion that we had players who can just walk in and take on the role of a captain; but we chose to invest in Shubman," Singh said in a statement. "This decision clearly indicated that we were investing in Shubman for a long-term, not just for a single season. The results of that investment are now evident," he added.

Singh said GT have put in a system in place for Gill, who was appointed India's vice-captain during their victorious Champions Trophy campaign, to develop as a leader.

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"What is more important for us as an ecosystem is to understand that you cannot just make someone a captain and expect him to do everything," Singh said.

"There is a full-fledged system and process in place that has helped him grow as a captain. This is in addition to what he has gained at the international level over the years, representing India as a vice-captain on many occasions."

"Of course, we've had several senior players in the team, including Jos Buttler, Rashid Khan, and Kane Williamson. Shubman is someone who is very open to learning from others," he added.

Singh said Gill, who is nearing the 400-run mark for GT once again in the IPL, is stepping up as a leader on the field.

"The transformation in his leadership from last year to this year is remarkable; he is truly stepping up as the leader on the field. It's inspiring to witness," he said.

Cricket retained for 2026 Asian Games in Japan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has confirmed that cricket will be a part of the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4.

The call to retain cricket was taken during the meeting between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the organising committee (AINAGOC) earlier this week.

"The latest development in the compilation of the sports programm came at the 41st meeting of the AINAGOC Board of Directors at Nagoya City Hall on Monday, April 28, when cricket and Mixed Martial Arts were both formally approved," the OCA said.

Cricket matches will be played in the T20 format and hosted in Aichi prefecture, although the exact venues are yet to be finalised.

"The venue for cricket will be in Aichi prefecture but the exact location has not been decided. Interest will be high, not only because of cricket's popularity in South Asia in particular but also because the T20 (20 overs per side) format will be included in the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028," the OCA said.

"This will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tournament.

Cricket will be among 41 sports featured at the Games, which are expected to see participation from 15,000 athletes and officials representing the OCA's 45 National Olympic Committees.

This will be the fourth time cricket features in the Asian Games, following its inclusion in Guangzhou (2010), Incheon (2014), and Hangzhou (2023). The Indian men's and women's teams are the defending champions.

Cricket will also feature in 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. It will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tournament.

The OCA also confirmed that a "floating Athletes' Village" — a cruise ship docked in Nagoya Port – will accommodate 4,600 athletes and officials. It will house athletes from several disciplines including archery, basketball 3x3, canoe/kayak (sprint), cycling mountain bike, cycling BMX racing, football (men), gymnastics, handball, judo, kabaddi, kurash, mixed martial arts, rowing, rugby, sepaktakraw, sport climbing, squash, tennis, weightlifting, wrestling and wushu.

However, that cricketers will be accommodated in hotels, alongside athletes from badminton and football.

Dhawan lauds Suryavanshi, terms his ton "phenomenal"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India opener Shikhar Dhawan on Wednesday lauded teenage sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi for his fearless IPL hundred, saying the 14-year-old's confidence belies his age and his performance will inspire aspiring cricketers across the country. Rajasthan Royal's Suryavanshi set the IPL ablaze by becoming the youngest player to score a century in the tournament. His 35-ball hundred against table-toppers Gujarat Titans was also the second-fastest in league history.

"It's a great performance indeed, the way he batted was just phenomenal. The big thing is not that he is just 14, the greater thing in that is his self-confidence at such a tender age," said Dhawan on the sidelines of the Intercontinental Legends Championship (ILC) launch.

The baby-faced big-hitter from Bihar's Samastipur hammered 11 towering sixes and seven fours, accumulating 94 of his 101 runs in boundaries. His innings was the fastest by any RR batter, breaking Yusuf Pathan's 15-year-old record of a 37-ball hundred against Mumbai Indians.

"The way he dominated the bowlers that night who have a name in international cricket is a great achievement indeed…the country should be proud and it will inspire other youngsters in the country," Dhawan said.

Dhawan, the first player to hit back-to-back centuries in the IPL, was also impressed with other youngsters, including Ayush Mhatre, who have made a mark this season.

"It is great to see these players—someone is 14, another is 17—playing in the Indian Premier League. To see these boys achieve success at such a young age is great to see," said Dhawan.

The 39-year-old also condemned the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam region, expressing heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and backing the government's response.

"I have no words for what happened in Pahalgam… I have full faith in our government that they'll be planning something to counter this. I have my full condolences with the families of the victims. It was heart-wrenching indeed," said Dhawan.

Dhawan was the guest of honour at the launch of the Intercontinental Legends Championship (ILC), which has been co-founded by U-19 Cricket World Cup winner and former Delhi Ranji player Pardeep Sangwan. I had envisioned this league since the day I retired... Shikhar (Dhawan) bhai, Praveen (Kumar) bhai, Parvinder Awana and Pawan Negi—thank you for extending your warm support, along with the sponsors who believed in us," said Sangwan.

Congratulating Sangwan on the initiative, Dhawan said: "I want to extend my heartiest congratulations to Pardeep (Sangwan) and his team for organising ILC. In such leagues, the pressure is relatively high because we play for respect. The competition will be tough."

Took the retirement call in Gabba, did not want to repeat the circle: Ashwin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India off-spinner R Ashwin thought about retiring after his 100th Test but finally took the call midway into the tour of Australia to ensure the "whole circle" related to his spot in the playing eleven doesn't repeat itself.

Speaking on a newly-launched podcast by Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin told fellow CSK member Mike Hussey that he made up his mind on retirement after not starting the Australia series in Perth where Washington Sundar played ahead of the veteran off-spinner.

Ashwin did play the second Test at Adelaide before being left out of the eleven for the third Test at Gabba where he eventually brought the curtains down to a glorious career.

"To be very honest, I wanted to do it after my 100th Test (in Dharamsala, March 2024). And then I thought, Ok, let me give it a go in the home season. Because, I mean, you're playing well, and you're getting wickets, you're making runs," Ashwin said.

"I thought I'd probably close off with the Chennai Test here (against Bangladesh). I ended up getting a six-wicket haul and a hundred. So it's very tough to quit when you're doing very well.

"So, I went on with the series, and we lost against New Zealand. So, one after the other, it was just building up. And then I thought, okay, let me go to Australia. Let me see how this goes. Because the last time I was in Australia, I had a great, great tour," said India's second highest wicket-taker in Tests with 537 scalps to his name.

Having said that, time away from home was beginning to affect him.

"I thought it does make sense to play a bit. I was having a lot of fun, but the whole hard yards that I had to put through to put myself in the park again, physically and mentally, one of the most important things that was pulling me down was the family time," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is back at CSK this season, eventually made the announcement at the Gabba.

"And when I didn't start in Perth, it was like, okay, this whole circle keeps going again. People add very little value to what you're going through emotionally," he said.

"They don't really consider that because your emotions are yours, and it doesn't matter to anybody else. So I had been contemplating that, and then I thought, okay, maybe it is time," added Ashwin.

Azhar Mahmood shows interest in becoming Pakistan head coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lahore

Former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood on Wednesday expressed his interest in becoming the next head coach of the national team, saying he will soon apply for the high-pressure post.

The PCB was forced to begin a fresh search to find a new head coach and Director of the National Cricket Academy after foreign coaches Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie resigned last year, less then eight months into their two-year contracts.

The PCB had named one of their selectors, Aaqib Javed as their interim head coach until the T20 series in New Zealand.

Azhar reckons that he has "gained a lot of experience while working as assistant and bowling coach of the Pakistan team in recent years". He has worked with Mickey Arthur, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has set May 5 as the deadline for interested candidates to apply for the head coach position.

The PCB has not confirmed as yet whether it will appoint separate coaches for the red and white ball teams or one coach for both formats.

Pakistan's former test spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who has also worked as interim head coach and bowling coach in the past with the national team, is said to be another strong candidate in the running for future assignments.

According to PCB sources, New Zealand's Mike Hesson is the front runner to take over as head coach if he agrees to take up the assignment.

Two years back, PCB had approached Hesson but he had turned down the offer due to his prior commitments in leagues.

Hesson is coaching the undefeated Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Pakistan's first commitment of its new international season will be a five-match T20 series at home against Bangladesh in late May and early June.

Pakistan has had several foreigners as team director, head coach, high performance coach and even bowling, fielding and batting coaches since 2023 but most of them left on not-so-very-amicable terms with the PCB.

The list includes Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn, Andrew Puttick, Morne Morkel, Tim Nielsen, Simon Helmot, Yasir Arafat, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The PCB has also experimented with local coaches including Saqlain Mushtaq, Muhammad Hafeez, Aaqib Javed not to forget the long list of local batting, bowling and fielding coaches.

Assam lifts the first North East Little Masters Trophy (U-14)

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam defeated Tripura by 47 runs in the final of the inaugural NE Little Masters Trophy 2025 at the ACA Cricket Academy Ground, Fulung, Guwahati.

Player of the Match (Final): Ayush Pandey (Assam)Best Batter of the Tournament: Shresthangshu Deb (Tripura)Best Bowler of the Tournament: Abhinav Khanal (Meghalaya)Player of the Tournament: Pastha Pratim Kashyap (Assam) The closing ceremony was attended by BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia, BCCI Apex Council Member Mamon Majumdar, ACA Secretary Tridib Konwar, Tournament Director Romen Dutta, Treasurer Chiranjit Langthasa and representatives of all the cricket associations of the Northeast states.

BCCI Secretary Shri Devajit Saikia appreciated the efforts of ACA in hosting this grassroots-level tournament and expressed confidence that such initiatives will help young cricketers from the Northeast dream big and reach higher levels.

MUTHAYYA

A dreamer's journey wrapped in rustic charm and realism

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While Telugu cinema often features mass entertainers where the protagonist takes on goons and saves the world, many recent films are filled with violence, action, and gore. Only a few offer realistic stories with natural performances. One such film is Muthayya, which has released directly on ETV Win. Directed by debutant Bhaskar Maurya, the film features a cast of mostly new actors.

Story

Muthayya (Sudhakar Reddy) is an elderly man living in a village in Telangana. He does odd jobs to make a living but is an avid movie buff who watches all the latest releases in town. His close friend is Malli, a young cycle mechanic. Muthayya dreams of becoming an actor and expresses this desire to Malli, asking him to show his film to all the villagers once he succeeds.

Meanwhile, Malli is in love with a college-going girl from the same village, and the two meet in secret. Muthayya's son, who sells sarees for a living, never encourages his father's dream. Against this backdrop, the film explores whether Muthayya's dream comes true and what happens to Malli and his love story. These questions are answered as the story unfolds.

Analysis

There's always something special about village-based stories, as they bring out the innocence of the characters. Director Bhaskar tells the story of Muthayya, an elderly man passionate about cinema. He appreciates old films but also wants to watch the latest ones to understand how movies are being made today.

Muthayya shares a strong bond with Malli. They quarrel, joke, drink together, but can't live without each other—that's the essence of their friendship. Muthayya owns an acre of land and lost his wife early in life. Though his son doesn't encourage him, Muthayya loves both his son and grandson deeply.

The director narrates Muthayya's love for cinema and his journey to becoming an actor. All the characters are portrayed realistically, and their behavior and dialogues feel natural. The scenes between Malli and his lover at the bus stop are hilariously presented.

Some standout moments include Muthayya running to see a film shoot in his village and making reels on his phone. These scenes showcase his fascination with cinema. Though the narration is slow-paced, it keeps the viewer curious about whether Muthayya succeeds in fulfilling his dream.

The film also touches on traditional theatre (natakam), once popular in villages. Back in the 70s and 80s, villagers performed mythological dramas without even being able to read properly, yet they recited difficult dialogues and sang poetic verses fluently. The film brings back this nostalgic village culture.

The last 45 minutes become more engaging and emotionally rich as Muthayya faces several problems. A short filmmaker arrives in the village and decides to make a short film with Muthayya, leading to trouble. From this point, the director skillfully handles the narrative until the end, including several emotional moments. He connects multiple narrative threads through Muthayya's story. The music is nicely composed, and the cinematography beautifully captures the village backdrop and its greenery.

Cast: Sudhakar Reddy, Arun Raj, Poorna Chandra, Mounika Bomma, and others

Cinematography: Divakar Mani

Music Director: Karthik Rodriguez

Producers: Vamsi Karumanchi, Vrinda Prasad

Writer and Director: Bhaskar Maurya

Release: ETV Win

Rating: 3/5

Performances

Sudhakar Reddy, who plays Muthayya, steals the show. He is undoubtedly the film's backbone, delivering a natural and powerful performance. He truly becomes Muthayya on screen, making it one of the finest portrayals in recent times.

Arun Kumar, who plays Malli, is another highlight. He delivers a superb performance and supports the lead actor well. Though most of the other actors are newcomers, they all do justice to their roles.

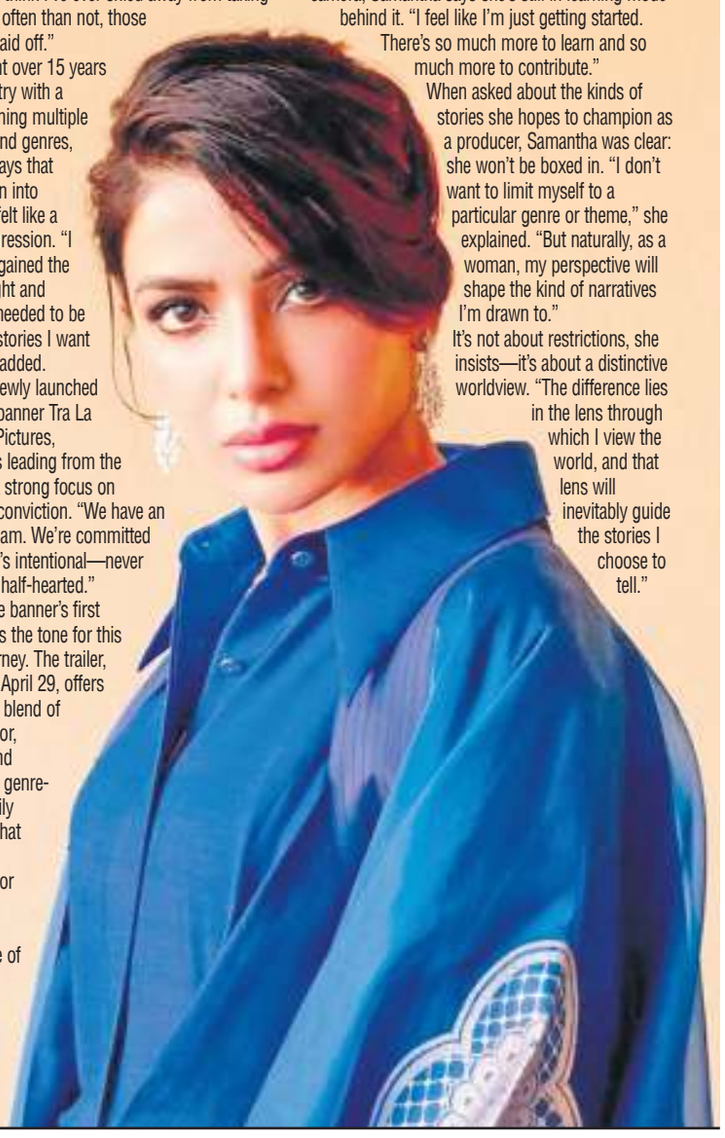
Technical Aspects

Director Bhaskar Maurya makes a confident debut, focusing on authenticity and emotional depth rather than commercial frills. The screenplay unfolds at a measured pace, which may feel slow at times but suits the tone of the story. Dialogues are realistic and rooted in the village setting, adding to the film's charm. Karthik Rodriguez's music complements the narrative beautifully—subtle yet emotionally stirring. The background score supports the mood without being overbearing. Divakar Mani's cinematography is a major asset. He captures the lush village landscapes, rustic textures and everyday moments with warmth and simplicity. The visuals feel organic, reflecting the soul of rural Telangana.

Verdict

Muthayya is a well-written film set in a village, revolving around an old man's dream to become an actor. Whether or not he fulfills his dream is what keeps the audience engaged. Sudhakar Reddy lives the character of Muthayya and is ably supported by the rest of the cast. Though there are a few loopholes, the film is definitely worth watching. It has already won several awards nationally and internationally.

'My perspective will shape the kind of narratives I'm drawn to'



As her debut production *Subham* gears up for a theatrical release on May 9, Samantha Ruth Prabhu is stepping into a new phase of her cinematic journey—not just as a celebrated actor but now as a producer with vision and intent.

Reflecting on her evolution in the film industry, the two-time Nandi Award winner says she's no longer governed by fear. Instead, she's driven by passion and the power of storytelling.

"You can't expect meaningful change without taking risks," Samantha shared in a latest interview adding, "And I don't think I've ever shied away from taking them. More often than not, those risks have paid off."

Having spent over 15 years in the industry with a career spanning multiple languages and genres, Samantha says that the transition into production felt like a natural progression. "I believe I've gained the kind of insight and experience needed to be sure of the stories I want to tell," she added.

Under her newly launched production banner Tra La La Moving Pictures, Samantha is leading from the front, with a strong focus on quality and conviction. "We have an incredible team. We're committed to work that's intentional—never middling or half-hearted."

Subham, the banner's first offering, sets the tone for this creative journey. The trailer, released on April 29, offers a refreshing blend of humor, horror, suspense and emotion—a genre-defying family entertainer that promises something for everyone.

Though she remains one of South cinema's most versatile stars—with acclaimed performances in films like *Eega, Mahanati, Theri, Super Deluxe, Majili*, and the hit series *The Family Man*—Samantha confesses that producing has brought a new kind of joy.

"As an actor, you're part of the process, but when you're a producer, you experience the journey in its entirety. It's incredibly fulfilling to be part of every stage—pre-production, casting, budgeting, editing—and I've learned more producing this one film than I did over years of just acting."

And despite her vast experience in front of the camera, Samantha says she's still in learning mode behind it. "I feel like I'm just getting started. There's so much more to learn and so much more to contribute."

When asked about the kinds of stories she hopes to champion as a producer, Samantha was clear: she won't be boxed in. "I don't want to limit myself to a particular genre or theme," she explained. "But naturally, as a woman, my perspective will shape the kind of narratives I'm drawn to."

It's not about restrictions, she insists—it's about a distinctive worldview. "The difference lies in the lens through which I view the world, and that lens will inevitably guide the stories I choose to tell."

Tamannaah Bhatia joins Sidharth Malhotra in mystical thriller *VVAN – Force of the Forrest*

Tamannaah Bhatia is set to take on a role unlike any before in the upcoming folk thriller *VVAN – Force of the Forrest*, starring opposite Sidharth Malhotra. Known for her powerful on-screen presence, Tamannaah will delve into a story deeply rooted in ancient folklore, mystery and suspense.

In the beautifully crafted motion poster released by Balaji Motion Pictures and TVF, we catch a glimpse of her character—draped in a maroon saree, sprinting barefoot through a dense, shadowy jungle. Upon seeing a warning sign, she's visibly shocked but continues her journey, even when thorns draw blood. Her determination is clear as she lights a diya, defying the ominous forces of the forest.

Set in the mythical heartlands of Central India, the film will be shot in real forest locations, adding to its authenticity and intensity.

Backed by Ektaa R. Kapoor, directed by Deepak Mishra and Arunabh Kumar, the film promises to be a genre-defining spectacle. From glowing orange eyes hidden in forest canopies to ancient temples pulsing with energy, VVAN is set to ignite imaginations when it releases in theatres in 2026.

VVAN marks a major collaboration between two content giants—Balaji Motion Pictures and The Viral Fever (TVF). Balaji Motion Pictures, a division of Balaji Telefilms Ltd, has always been known for delivering bold, courageous, thrilling and gripping content to the masses. On the other hand, TVF has captured hearts with relatable stories that resonate with audiences as a whole. With both coming together, VVAN promises to be a one-of-a-kind cinematic experience, offering something truly unprecedented. The forest is alive—and it's calling.

Sharwanand's pan-India action drama titled *Bhogi*

Sharwanand is stepping into a whole new cinematic zone with his upcoming film *Bhogi*, which marks his first full-fledged pan-India project. Directed by Sampath Nandi, the film was officially titled on Wednesday with the makers dropping a powerful teaser titled *First Spark*, setting the tone for what promises to be a visceral and intense action drama. Alongside the teaser, the team also announced that the film's shoot had officially commenced.

Taking to social media, director Sampath Nandi wrote, "Every drop of blood has a reason. Every fest carries a purpose. And #SharwaSampath BloodFest has a BLOODY name etched into it *#BHOGI! #Sharwa38* First Spark out now. SHOOT STARTS TODAY." The teaser offers a glimpse into the brutal and rugged world the film is set in, with imagery that includes a hand writing the phrase "A blood fest" and the creation of a machete, hinting at a storyline drenched in violence and retribution.

The film features Anupama Parameswaran and Dimple Hayathi, with Anupama playing the lead opposite Sharwanand, while Dimple is set to appear in a significant role. Bhogi unfolds against the raw and politically charged backdrop of the North Telangana-Maharashtra border during the late 1960s. It is a period rarely explored on Indian screens, and the story is expected to capture the social and emotional turbulence of that time with a grounded, gritty aesthetic. Set in a rural landscape that has been recreated with painstaking detail, the film dives deep into a world where power rules and survival is soaked in blood.

Known for his expressive performances, Sharwanand has undergone a striking transformation for the role, which demands a physical and emotional intensity not seen before in his past characters. The film, being made on a lavish scale, is being produced by KK Radhamohan under the Sri Sathya Sai Arts banner and is presented by Lakshmi Radhamohan. With Sampath Nandi at the helm—celebrated for his flair in delivering stylish, mass entertainers—Bhogi is expected to strike a balance between grounded storytelling and high-octane action.

From its production design to its cinematography and music, *Bhogi* is being supported by a powerful technical team. Kiran Kumar Manne is handling the production design, Soundar Rajan S is serving as the cinematographer, and the music is composed by Bheems Ceciroleo. The film's visuals and soundscape are expected to elevate the raw storytelling, immersing viewers in an atmospheric narrative built on emotion, grit and spectacle.

Sharwanand's *Bhogi* will be released in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Hindi, aiming to reach audiences across India. With the first glimpse now out and production underway, the film has begun its journey towards becoming one of the most anticipated action dramas of the year.

Santhanam steps into a haunted reel world in *Devil's Double: Next Level*; trailer promises laughs and screams

The trailer of *Devil's Double: Next Level*, the much-anticipated horror comedy starring Santhanam, was unveiled on Wednesday by actor Silambarasan, adding a wave of excitement among fans of the *Dhillukku Duddu* franchise. Silambarasan, popularly known as Simbu, shared the trailer on X (formerly Twitter), writing, "Big cheers to @iamsanthanam and the entire team on the grand trailer launch! Looks super fun and exciting — wishing you all a massive success! Can't wait to catch it on the big screen!"

Directed by S. Prem Anand, the film is a spiritual sequel to DD Returns and is scheduled to hit screens worldwide on May 16. The trailer offers a uniquely hilarious and spooky premise—Santhanam plays a film reviewer who's lured into watching a private screening by a devilish theatre owner, played by filmmaker Selvaraghavan. What starts as a simple screening soon spirals into a bizarre reality-bending experience when Santhanam is literally sucked into the world of the movie he's watching.

As Selvaraghavan's devilish character taunts him—"Review? How many films have you mocked? Now let's see you review while in the film"—the reviewer finds himself stuck inside a horror movie. He meets various characters, including Gautham Vasudev Menon as Raghavan, a nonsense investigation officer, and Redin Kingsley, among others. However, none of them recognise their real selves—they are fully immersed in the roles they've been cast into within the film. The only one apart from Santhanam who's aware of the truth is Motta Rajendran, who brings in his signature comic flair and one-liners.

As the story progresses, Santhanam and Rajendran realise they are trapped on a mysterious island, with eerie happenings unfolding around them. The trailer promises a heady mix of slapstick comedy, meta-humour and supernatural thrills, staying true to the tone that made the *Dhillukku Duddu* films cult favourites.

Produced by Niharika Entertainment and The Show People, *Devil's Double: Next Level* boasts high production value and is presented by actor Arya. Director Prem Anand has revealed that the script was a year in the making. "*DD Returns* was a huge success with great response from the audience from all walks of life. We worked on the script of its sequel for one year. From children to adults, everyone will laugh and enjoy this flick too," he said.

The technical crew includes cinematographer Dipak Kumar Padhy, music composer Ofro, editor Bharath, and art director AR Mohan. The film is expected to deliver a perfect blend of chills and chuckles, catering to both horror buffs and comedy lovers alike.