



The Pioneer

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DELHI

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BHOPAL

BHUBANESWAR

RANCHI

CHANDIGARH

DEHRADUN

HYDERABAD



SC's journey is 'inseparable' from Indian Constitution:

CJI

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TSCS'S

PREVENTIVE MODEL OFFERS HOPE AGAINST THALASSEMIA



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Trisha stuns in bold avatar in Sugar Baby from Kamal Haasan's

THUG LIFE



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

The Congress Government is issuing notices in the Kaleshwaram Project case as a smokescreen to cover up its own corruption. This government doesn't know how to govern, doesn't have the guts to fulfil its fake

promises, and is now staging dramas by issuing notices to KCR. The notice to KCR is not a legal move, it's a political stunt. We have full faith in the judiciary. These notices will fly like cotton in the wind



— KT Rama Rao, BRS Working President

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DON'T MISS...

ST panel concern over fever cases

Dr. D.V.G. Shankara Rao, Chairman of the State Scheduled Tribes Commission, on Wednesday voiced serious concern over the increasing number of fever cases reported among tribal communities in various Agency areas across the State. He urged health authorities to intensify efforts to provide timely and adequate medical care to the affected populations. Responding to a recent report in The Pioneer, titled "Fever outbreak in tribal hamlet, child dies," which highlighted a sharp rise in fever-related illnesses...

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India: Committed to global health

India addressed the plenary session of the 78th World Health Assembly on Wednesday, reaffirming its commitment to global health equity under the theme "One World for Health". Representing the Indian delegation, Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava congratulated the newly elected committee chairs and welcomed the opportunity for meaningful international dialogue and collaboration. Speaking on India's commitment to inclusive and universal health...

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Gold rallies Rs 1,910 to Rs 98,450/10 g

Gold prices rebounded by Rs 1,910 to Rs 98,450 per 10 grams in the national capital as rising global uncertainties triggered a fresh wave of safe-haven buying. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 96,540 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 1,870 to Rs 98,000 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday from the previous day's close of Rs 96,130 per 10 grams. "A weak dollar supported..."

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IPL a life-changer for me: DC's Nigam

Delhi Capitals all-rounder Vipraj Nigam feels the ongoing IPL has brought a lot of changes in his life, and said the learnings which he got by sharing the dressing room with greats of the game will definitely help him in his nascent career. The 20-year-old Nigam, who was picked for Rs 50 lakh by DC, has been impressive in the IPL with both bat and ball. Reflecting on the life-changing experience of sharing the dressing room with senior players, Nigam said: "There have been a lot of changes in life..."

-SPORTS

Top Maoist Basavaraj among 27 killed in encounter

Elimination of CPI (Maoist) general secretary seen as major blow to insurgency in Chhattisgarh



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Top Maoist leader Nambala Kesava Rao, alias Basava Raju, was killed along with 27 other Maoists in a major anti-insurgency operation in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on Wednesday. Kesava Rao, who had been serving as general secretary of the CPI (Maoist) since 2018, was one of the most wanted Maoist leaders, carrying a bounty of Rs 2.02 crore. Security officials confirmed that the operation was based on sustained intelligence

gathering and surveillance under the Centre's coordinated anti-Maoist strategy.

Born on July 10, 1955, in Jiyannapeta village, Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, Rao came from a modest background. His father, Vasudeva Rao, was a schoolteacher. A B.Tech graduate from Regional Engineering College, Warangal (now NIT), he excelled in sports, representing Andhra Pradesh in volleyball at the national level.

Rao's radical transformation

began during his student days. In 1980, after a clash with ABVP members, he was arrested and went underground. He later joined the People's War Group, marking the start of a decades-long underground political career.

Kesava Rao quickly rose through the Maoist ranks. By 1992, he became a central committee member of the CPI-ML (People's War), and after the 2004 merger that formed the CPI (Maoist), he took charge of the central military commission. He was the alleged mas-

termind behind several deadly attacks, including the 2010 Dantewada ambush in which 76 CRPF personnel were killed.

He was also accused in the assassinations of TDP MLA K. Sarveswara Rao and former MLA Sivari Soma in Andhra Pradesh. Until his death, he held key positions in the Maoist leadership, including politburo and central committee memberships, and was part of the editorial board of the party's publication, Awam-e-Jung.

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Will promote Yoga as mass campaign

Yoga – India's gift to the world, says CM Launches month-long YogAndhra-2025



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has hailed yoga as one of India's greatest contributions to the world and stressed the need to make it an essential part of everyone's daily life. Speaking during a media interaction at Undavalli residence on Wednesday, he credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving yoga global recognition and announced that Andhra Pradesh will host a grand celebration of International Yoga Day on June 21 in Visakhapatnam.

The State government has launched a month-long campaign titled YogAndhra-2025, which aims to promote yoga as a mass movement across Andhra Pradesh. The

campaign began on Wednesday and will culminate in a mega event on June 21, where five lakh people are expected to perform yoga from RK Beach to Bhogapuram from 7 AM to 8 AM. The CM also launched the official YogAndhra website to support the initiative.

Chandrababu praised PM Modi's efforts that led to the United Nations declaring June 21 as International Yoga Day in 2014, recognising yoga as a universal practice that transcends region, religion, and nationality. "In today's fast-paced, tech-driven world, yoga is the only path to inner peace. It's time we make yoga a daily habit, not just a symbolic practice," he said.

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State machinery gears up for Modi's visit on June 21

'Home Minister reviews arrangements

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to visit Visakhapatnam on June 21 to take part in the International Yoga Day celebrations to be held along the city's scenic beach road. In anticipation of the Prime Minister's visit, Home Minister Vangalapudi

Anitha undertook a comprehensive review of the preparations on Wednesday.

Accompanied by District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad, City Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi, Joint Collector Mayur Ashok, and other senior officials, she conducted an on-ground inspection of the proposed venue and its surroundings.

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Karnataka hands over four trained elephants to AP

DCM Pawan Kalyan receives kumki elephants

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant gesture of inter-State cooperation, the Karnataka government officially handed over four trained elephants (kumki elephants) to Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. The event was held at the Karnataka Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru and was graced by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre. Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister and Forest Minister Pawan Kalyan received the elephants on behalf of the Andhra Pradesh government.

The event began with a tradi-

tional gaja puja (elephant worship), after which Pawan Kalyan formally welcomed the elephants amidst floral showers.

While Karnataka had committed to providing six kumki elephants, only four – named Deva, Krishna, Abhimanyu and Mahendra -- were handed over in the first phase. Karnataka authorities stated that the remaining two elephants will be delivered later due to health concerns and incomplete training.

As part of the formal proceedings, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presented Pawan Kalyan with official documents, licences and elephant care protocols.

Continued on Page 2

Kannada writer Banu Mushtaq wins Booker Prize

PNS ■ LONDON

Writer, activist, and lawyer Banu Mushtaq's short story collection 'Heart Lamp' has become the first Kannada title to win the coveted GBP 50,000 International Booker Prize in London.

Mushtaq described her win as a victory for diversity as she collected the prize on Tuesday night at a ceremony at Tate Modern along with her translator Deepa Bhashti, who translated the title from Kannada to English.

The winning collection of 12 short stories chronicles the resilience, resistance, wit, and sisterhood of everyday women in patriarchal communities in south-



ern India, vividly brought to life through a rich tradition of oral storytelling.

Shortlisted among six worldwide titles, Mushtaq's work appealed to the judges for its "witty, vivid, colloquial, moving and exhorting" style of capturing portraits of family and community tensions.

India expels Pak High Commission official

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday expelled a Pakistani official working at the Pakistan High Commission here on charges of indulging in activities not in keeping with his official status.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the official has been given 24 hours to leave the country. It said the Charge d'Affaires of the Pakistan High Commission was issued a demarche to this effect.

"He was asked to strictly ensure that none of the Pakistani diplomats or officials in India misuse their privileges and status in any manner," the MEA said in a statement.

On May 13, India expelled a Pakistani official for allegedly indulging in espionage.

Sonia 'abused' her position to benefit self, son in AJL takeover: ED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Sonia Gandhi "abused" her position as the then AICC president for personal gains to herself and her son Rahul Gandhi by converting public money for self use through the Young Indian (YI) company, the ED is understood to have alleged in its chargesheet filed in the National Herald case.

Both the leaders, sources told PTI quoting the chargesheet, have told the federal probe agency during recording of their statements in this case a few years back that they were "not aware" about the activities taking place at the YI and the Associated Journals Limited (AJL). They are understood to have told the agency that all these affairs were

taken care of by late Congress leader Motilal Vora as he was "empowered" to deal with the administrative and financial matters. The chargesheet was filed on April 9 and the local court is yet to take its cognisance.

The ED has named 78-year-old former Congress president and Rajya Sabha MP Sonia Gandhi as accused no 1 and her son Rahul Gandhi (54) as accused no 2, apart from five others in the prosecution complaint filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The National Herald-AJL-YI case pertains to an alleged conspiracy orchestrated to illegally obtain the underlying assets of the AJL by the beneficial owners and majority shareholders of YI (Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi).



AP police's AI Hackathon from June 27

A strategic platform for demonstrating how AI can address real-world challenges in law enforcement

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Police Department has announced the launch of its upcoming national-level AI Hackathon scheduled from June 27-29. The landmark initiative aims at fostering innovation and identifying AI-driven solutions that can significantly enhance policing and public service delivery. The official poster for the event was unveiled by Director General of Police Harish Kumar Gupta on Wednesday.

This initiative is being conducted in alignment with the vision of the Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who has emphasised the adoption of cutting-edge technologies like Artificial Intelligence in governance. The hackathon will serve as



a strategic platform for demonstrating how AI can address real-world challenges in law enforcement and public administration.

The hackathon is expected to be a high-profile event, with the presence of the Chief Minister, senior State officials, and IT leaders from

across India. It will be held at RVR&JC College of Engineering, Guntur, which will serve as the official Hosting Partner.

The Andhra Pradesh Police Department has partnered with 4SightAI as its knowledge partner, responsible for the overall concep-

The Andhra Pradesh Police Department has partnered with 4SightAI as its knowledge partner, responsible for the overall conceptualisation, planning, and execution of the hackathon.

tualisation, planning, and execution of the hackathon. All problem statements in the hackathon will be based on real policing use cases, ensuring that the solutions developed are practical and impactful.

The evaluation panel will include senior IPS officers and industry

experts. Participants will also have a unique opportunity to interact with government policymakers, industry leaders, and investors during an exclusive AI Symposium chaired by the Chief Minister.

The Police Department has invited IT companies, startups and academic institutions both from India and overseas to participate and showcase their AI capabilities.

There is no entry fee for the hackathon. In addition, all boarding and lodging will be provided free of cost to selected participants.

Participation certificates will be issued by the Andhra Pradesh Police Department to all qualified teams, and cash prizes will be awarded to the top-performing ones.

No ‘Gulzar Houz fire accident’ again, please

The fire accident, which took place in the Gulzar Houz area of the Old City of Hyderabad which killed 17 people, including eight children of a family, has frightened city residents.

The accident was so severe that the victims died due to asphyxiation within an hour of the fire starting on the ground floor. Officials said that a short circuit was the reason for the accident. They said that some outdoor units of air conditioners exploded and that smoke engulfed the rooms where the family was sleeping.

There was no escape for the family as the only narrow staircase that led outside was on fire. As they could not go down or up, the victims inhaled the smoke and died.

Fire accidents are not new to Hyderabad, but the conditions which caused the fire at Gulzar Houz have sent a chill down the spines of citizens. Lakhs of families in Hyderabad live in similar conditions in which the

Gulzar Houz family has lived.

Most residential buildings in the Old City and some parts of the new city are located in densely populated areas, and on top of that, they are constructed in a semi-detached manner. There would be no space between houses, and they share a wall.

These buildings were constructed decades ago and obviously did not adhere to any rules. Lakhs of people live in these houses as these areas are centrally located.

The fire accident in Gulzar Houz has raised many questions about the safety of the occupants of these houses. Narrow lanes, no space between houses, and no windows would render firefighters helpless.

Around 59 people have died in seven major accidents in the last 23 years in Hyderabad. Most of the times officials came to the conclusion that the accidents took place due to short circuit or the burning butt of cigarettes.

The old buildings of Hyderabad do not have enough ventilation. The front and back doors are the only ventilation points in most houses. Most houses do not have exhaust fans which can blow the smoke out when accidents take place

Experts have suggested many steps to prevent fires. They are of the view that the National Building Code should be revisited and new norms must be prepared.

They explained that the fire safety measures currently prescribed by fire services departments across India do not reflect the advancement in fire safety technologies now available in the market. Current guidelines predominantly recommend water-based sprinkler systems with wet risers or downcomers, which often lead

to practical challenges, inconvenience, and even damage in certain cases.

They have suggested that systems like aerosol-based extinguishers, clean agents, inert gases, Dry Chemical Powder (DCP), foam-based systems, and liquid CO2 could be used in place of water during residential and industrial fire accidents.

They are of the view that the residential building safety norms should be made applicable to old houses.

Experts have pointed out that an unbearable load was laid



GUDUR NARAYANA REDDY

Senior TG BJP leader and producer

on the electrical wiring system in lakhs of houses in Hyderabad and surrounding areas. The installation of air conditioners without considering the capacity of wiring is leading to fire accidents.

The wiring in the old houses does not meet current standards. The owners do not bother to change the wiring and go on adding new gadgets.

Today, most houses have fans, coolers, grinders, fridges,

air conditioners, and lights which need a lot of power. The old wiring systems were designed to carry a load required to run just fans and lights.

The upper middle class and the rich are using more than one air conditioner, which consumes a lot of power. This needs three three-phase connection and higher voltage. It leads to an unbearable load on the weak wiring system. The wiring system in old houses did not have trip switches in the event of a short circuit.

In some houses, even today, the fuses and meters are fitted on wooden boards, which would catch fire immediately if there is a short circuit.

Apart from the wiring, the terraced houses, row houses, semi-detached houses, and multi-family dwellings are a challenge to firefighters if something goes wrong. Some houses did not have wide staircases. In some houses, only one person can pass at a time.

The roads, lanes and by-lanes of the old city and parts of the new city would not allow fire engines to reach the spot. The fire engines being used in the city are designed to Western road standards. We do not have small and medium-sized fire engines which can enter the narrow lanes of our towns.

The firefighters also face water scarcity problem. The water carried in the engine would not be enough when a major fire accident takes place, and they have to search for water sources. The water pipelines are operated for limited hours in a day, and no tapping point is provided, like in Western countries.

The old buildings of Hyderabad do not have enough ventilation. The front and back doors are the only ventilation points in most houses. Most houses do not have exhaust fans which can blow the smoke out when accidents take place.

In order to ensure that the Gulzar Houz incident does

not repeat the state and central governments should take some immediate steps. Ventilation should be made mandatory in all old buildings. By-lanes should be widened, and encroachments on roads should be removed.

The electricity department should be asked to inspect old houses and examine whether the wiring is compatible with current electrical needs. The owners should be advised to use fire-resistant wires, even though their cost would be Rs 3 to Rs 4 per meter more than conventional wires. All wooden panel boards should be removed, and new panel boards which adhere to the present-day standards should be fitted.

Smoke detectors should be fitted in every room so that residents can become alert as soon as the fire starts. Fire alarms should be linked to the nearest fire station so that fire engines can reach the accident spots immediately.

VMRDA to take up 22 roads to Bhogapuram Airport

State govt keen to expedite Visakhapatnam Metro Rail project: Minister

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development (MAUD), P. Narayana, on Wednesday announced that the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) will take up the construction of 22 roads to link Visakhapatnam with the upcoming Bhogapuram International Airport. Of these, tenders have already been invited for 15.

The announcement was made during a review meeting at the VMRDA office, where the Minister interacted with MLAs and senior officials from the undivided Visakhapatnam district to take stock of infrastructure and urban development projects under VMRDA and the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC).

Addressing media persons after the meeting, Narayana said that the State government is keen to expedite the long-



awaited Visakhapatnam Metro Rail project. "It will be constructed as a double-decker system, with works scheduled to begin on October 1. While such projects usually take four years, the Chief Minister has instructed that it be completed in three," he noted. The Minister also revealed plans for a semi-ring road around Visakhapatnam to serve a population of up to one crore. He stated that VMRDA is currently engaging consultants to initiate the planning phase of the project. Touching upon the housing sector, Narayana recalled that the earlier TDP government (2014–2019) had

aimed to build seven lakh TIDCO houses and had issued tenders for five lakh units. However, during the YSRCP's tenure (2019–2024), the target was reduced to 2.61 lakh houses, and the progress stalled. He said an estimated ₹7,000 crore is now needed to complete the remaining units, and CM Chandrababu Naidu has directed that some houses be completed by Vijayadasami this year. He also announced that a new commissioner will soon be appointed to the GVMC to bolster administrative functioning.

The meeting featured discussions on a broad range of

topics including the VMRDA infrastructure plan, revision of the Master Plan 2041, the Visakhapatnam–Kakinada PCPIR jurisdiction map, and upcoming MIG layouts. Key infrastructure, including priority road networks, coastal erosion mitigation, and tourism development at Kailasagiri and Rushikonda, was also reviewed.

Land-related matters, such as Simhachalam, Anakapalli pooling, the Beach Corridor, and road access to Vizag Steel Plant, were discussed. MLAs urged the completion of GVMC pipeline works, additional water tanks, and improved waste collection in hilly areas. MLAs Ganta Srinivasa Rao, P. Vishnu Kumar Raju, Palla Srinivasa Rao, Panchakarla Ramesh Babu, Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu, Ch. Vamsikrishna Srinivas, Konathala Ramakrishna, District Collector M.N. Harendhira Prasad and VMRDA Chairman Pranav Gopal attended the meeting.

Naidu dismantling Jagan's welfare reforms: Karumuri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP former minister Karumuri Nageswara Rao has strongly condemned the systematic destruction of transformative welfare reforms introduced by former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. "These reforms were widely recognised as a model for other States, prioritising the poor and marginalised, ensuring equitable access to essential services. However, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu dismantled these people-centric initiatives with a callous disregard for the livelihoods of thousands," he alleged.

The Mobile Delivery Unit (MDU) system, a revolutionary mechanism for doorstep ration delivery, has been a lifeline for the poor. The system, which proved its worth during crises like the Godavari and Vijayawada floods, ensured timely access to essential supplies. Yet, Naidu's government has abruptly terminated this initiative, leaving 20,000 families associated with MDUs and 2.6 lakh volunteers jobless.

ST panel chief voices concern over fever cases in Agency areas

Calls for immediate medical intervention and preventive measures

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

Dr. D.V.G. Shankara Rao, Chairman of the State Scheduled Tribes Commission, on Wednesday voiced serious concern over the increasing number of fever cases reported among tribal communities in various Agency areas across the State. He urged health authorities to intensify efforts to provide timely and adequate medical care to the affected populations.

Responding to a recent report in The Pioneer, titled "Fever outbreak in tribal hamlet, child dies," which highlighted a sharp rise in fever-related illnesses in Parvathipuram Manyam and Alluri Sitarama Raju districts, Dr. Shankara Rao said the situation is particularly alarming in agency mandals such as Gummalaxmipuram, Salur,



THE PIONEER IMPACT

and Kurupam in Manyam district.

During his recent field visits to these areas, Dr. Shankara Rao personally observed a large number of tribal residents suffering from fever and related ailments. "The remoteness of these regions continues to pose a major challenge, as many residents

struggle to access even the nearest Primary Health Centres (PHCs)," he said.

Highlighting the urgent need for intervention, the Commission Chairman called for proactive measures at the village level to curb the spread of seasonal diseases. "Improvement in sanitation and drinking water facilities must go hand in hand with conducting medical camps wherever necessary," he said.

Dr. Shankara Rao further emphasised the crucial role of the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) in monitoring health conditions through its field-level staff and ensuring swift action to contain outbreaks. He also appealed to district collectors and ITDA officials to prioritise the healthcare requirements of tribal populations, especially those residing in remote and underserved locations.

Top Maoist leader...

Continued from Page 1

Calling it a "historic" development, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said: "Basavaraj was the backbone of the Naxal movement. For the first time in three decades, a leader of general secretary rank has been eliminated. I congratulate our brave security forces and agencies for this major success."

However, Diwakar, secretary of the CPI (ML) New Democracy's Andhra Pradesh State committee, condemned the killing as a "fascist act". Alleging that Operation Kagar aims to displace tribals and facilitate corporate access to natural resources, he demanded a judicial inquiry by sitting Supreme Court judges, calling the encounter "fake".

Will promote Yoga as...

Continued from Page 1

Highlighting the scale of the campaign, the Chief Minister said the goal is to involve two crore people across the State and train at least 10 lakh individuals, issuing certificates for participation and completion. Special yoga training programmes will be conducted in cities, towns, and villages, with over 2,000 yoga instructors and school teachers to be

trained in partnership with the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga.

Yoga awareness activities will also be organised at more than 100 tourism and spiritual sites, including Amaravati Buddha Stupa, Lepakshi, Gandikota, Araku, Lambasingi and the Akhanda Godavari region.

The CM announced that yoga would be integrated into school curricula, with stu-

dents receiving one hour of daily yoga practice. Volunteers and participants who actively contribute to the campaign may get a chance to attend the Prime Minister's event on June 21.

"We are not doing this for photos or publicity, this is a movement," Chandrababu said, urging the media and public to support YogAndhra-2025 and spread awareness about yoga's benefits.

State machinery... Fire breaks out in Nidhi...

Continued from Page 1

The Home Minister examined the security arrangements, public access points, and other logistical aspects critical to the smooth conduct of the event. She stressed the importance of meticulous coordination among departments to manage the anticipated large gathering of both dignitaries and the general public.

Speaking to the media after the inspection, Anitha underscored the significance of the Prime Minister's participation in the event. "This is a matter of great honour for the State, and we must ensure flawless execution of all arrangements," she said. She directed officials to remain vigilant and ensure that the event proceeds without any disruptions or inconvenience to the public.

Anitha further called for seamless coordination between all departments, emphasising the need for proactive planning and strict adherence to security protocols.

"The success of this event will reflect the efficiency of our administration," she remarked.

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Firefighters responded promptly and managed to bring the situation under control. They broke windows to let the smoke escape and ensured all personnel were safely evacuated. However, officials noted that the building's fire safety equipment did not function, contributing to the spread of smoke.

The fire erupted on the second floor of the five-storey building, causing thick smoke to spread rapidly. The incident led to concerns over the safety of crucial data, computers, and documents, especially as the building houses key departments like Treasury, Work Accounts, Pay and Accounts, State Audit, APCFSS, and MAPGLI.

Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav visited the site and reviewed the damage. He clarified that no important physical files were destroyed in the fire. Director Padmaja also confirmed that all important digital data remains safe despite concerns over damaged computers.

District Fire Officer Srinivas Reddy stated that the fire safety systems in the building were non-functional, resulting in the heavy smoke. Employees expressed worry over the potential damage to computers and stressed the importance of the records maintained at the facility, which include payrolls and departmental transactions from across the State.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Y.S. Sharmila, on Wednesday, began an indefinite hunger strike at the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) protest site, extending solidarity to the recently terminated contract workers. According to the Congress party, the VSP management has removed nearly 2,000 contract workers over the past few weeks. Addressing party workers and protestors at the venue, Sharmila demanded the immediate reinstatement of the terminated workers and warned that the agitation would be intensified if the demands are not fulfilled.

"In support of workers at the VSP protest site, APCC chief Y.S. Sharmila Reddy has begun an indefinite hunger strike," said a senior Congress leader from North Andhra. A large number of Congress leaders and cadres participated in the protest in the port city. Sharmila lashed out at the VSP management, accusing it of adopting an "authoritarian attitude" and

APCC chief seeks reinstatement of 2,000 contract workers, clearance of salary arrears and opposes VSP privatisation



ignoring the legitimate concerns of its workforce. Taking to social media platform X, she said: "The management of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is exhibiting an authoritarian attitude. While workers are preparing to go on strike from tomorrow demanding justice, the management has shown no signs of taking corrective measures. There is not even the slightest concern to resolve workers' issues. The

management is behaving arrogantly, as if there's no authority to question them."

She further alleged that the management was planning to terminate an additional 3,000 contract workers and described the move as "utterly cruel". The APCC president also condemned the reported suspension of employees who had voiced opposition to the terminations.

Highlighting the financial distress faced by regular employees, Sharmila claimed that salaries had not been paid for the past eight months. She outlined the Congress party's key demands, which include reinstatement of the 2,000 terminated contract workers, immediate clearance of salary arrears to regular employees, withdrawal of the Centre's January 2021 decision to privatise the VSP, and a formal merger of the plant with the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL).

Issuing a stern warning, Sharmila announced that if the demands were not met, the Congress would launch a State-wide indefinite hunger strike. "Visakha Ukku Andhrula Hakku (Visakha Steel is the right of the people of Andhra). We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the protection of the steel plant and the welfare of its workers," she asserted.

Will stand by party...

Continued from Page 1

Lokesh interacted with Balakotireddy's widow Venna Nagendramma, and his nephews Venna Narasimhareddy and Venna Ramakrishnareddy, listening to their grievances. The family expressed distress that the accused were still roaming free and requested a full investigation and strict punishment.

Responding to their concerns, Lokesh assured the family of full and lifelong support. He promised to resolve pending government dues, help release their mortgaged home, and ensure justice by pursuing the murder case until the culprits are punished.

The family members expressed their gratitude to the Minister for standing by them during their time of need and for his unwavering support to TDP cadre affected by political violence.

Karnataka hands...

Continued from Page 1

The elephants were then officially transferred from Karnataka Forest Department officials to their Andhra Pradesh counterparts. To ensure a smooth transition and proper care, mahouts (elephant caretakers) from Karnataka will stay in Andhra Pradesh for two months, providing training to local mahouts on handling and managing the elephants.

Speaking on the occasion, Siddaramaiah expressed Karnataka's willingness to provide more elephants in the future based on Andhra Pradesh's needs. He also stressed the importance of maintaining friendly and cooperative relations between the two States.

Pawan Kalyan assured that he would personally oversee the health and well-being of the elephants and thanked Karnataka for their support. Senior forest officials from both States were present at the handover ceremony.

Housing for poor: CPI to launch State-wide stir on June 2

PNS ■ KAKINADA

CPI State executive member Thatipaka Madhu has said that his party will launch a State-wide agitation on June 2 demanding house sites for the poorer sections -- at three cents in rural areas and two cents in urban areas -- and Rs.5 lakh for the construction of houses.

Attending the CPI district executive committee meeting held at the STU office here on Wednesday, he said their agitation will not stop till all the eligible poor get house sites. Claiming that the CPI was serving the poor and down-trodden besides the working class for the past 100 years, Madhu called upon the party cadre to celebrate the CPI Foundation Day at all levels.

He said the party district conference will be held on July 15 and 16, and asked the party leaders to mobilise the maximum number of members to attend the meet. Party State secretariat member Dega Prabhakararao, district joint secretary Thokala Prasad, Peddireddi Satyana rayana, Pappu Adinara yana, Kesavarapu Appala raju and other leaders were among those who attended the meeting, which was chaired by T. Annavaram.

Participate in fire prevention efforts, DG urges people

Residents of older buildings advised to upgrade wiring systems

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In light of the increasing risk of fire accidents during the summer season, Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Response and Fire Services Department Director General (DG) Madireddy Pratap has called upon the public to take fire safety measures. He highlighted the vulnerability of older buildings and densely populated city areas.

During a media conference at the State Fire Department Headquarters in Vijayawada on Wednesday, the Director General highlighted recent tragic events, such as the Charminar fire in Hyderabad, as illustrative cases. He evaluated the potential risks that could arise in comparable urban settings throughout Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, and other significant cities in Andhra Pradesh.

Pratap highlighted the vital role of community engagement in preventing fire-related incidents. He noted that when fires occur in older urban areas, the danger is heightened due to narrow streets, a mix of commercial and residential properties,



DG Madireddy Pratap highlighted the vital role of community engagement in preventing fire-related incidents. He noted that when fires occur in older urban areas, the danger is heightened due to narrow streets, a mix of commercial and residential properties, and deteriorating infrastructure. Immediate action is necessary to mitigate these risks, he warned

and deteriorating infrastructure. Immediate action is necessary to mitigate these risks, he warned.

Furthermore, he recommended that residents of

older structures upgrade their electrical systems to accommodate modern appliances, advocating for the use of Fire Retardant Low Smoke (FRLS) wiring.

He also suggested the installation of Micro Circuit Breakers (MCBs) in every room to avert electrical overloads and short circuits.

Additionally, he emphasised the necessity of proper earthing in all buildings to minimise shock and fire risks. Homes should be fitted with smoke detectors and exhaust fans to facilitate early fire detection and smoke removal. Each residential unit should feature a 'breathing balcony' to provide escape routes and air access during emergencies.

He cited a recent fire at a shopping mall in Srikakulam, where firefighters struggled for six hours to reach the site due to heavy smoke and synthetic materials.

He assured that the department is enhancing its fire safety protocols and will issue No Objection Certificates (NOCs) only after a comprehensive assessment of fire safety measures in residential and commercial properties.

The press meet was also attended by Fire Department Director D Murali Mohan, Additional Director T Uday Kumar, Assistant District Fire Officer K Vinay, and other fire service personnel.



CM participates in Gangamma Jatar in Kuppam

Naidu and wife offer silk garments to Gangamma on behalf of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams

PNS ■ KUPPAM

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, along with his wife Bhuvaneshwari, visited the famous Prasanna Tirupati Gangamma Jatar in Kuppam, Chittoor district, on Wednesday. The couple was warmly welcomed with Poorna Kumbham by temple priests.

As part of the traditional celebrations, the Chief Minister and his wife offered silk garments to Gangamma on behalf of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD). The

couple also performed special prayers at the temple and received teertha prasadams from the priests.

Speaking on the occasion, CM Chandrababu expressed his devotion, stating that the rare Vishwaroopa Darshan of goddess Gangamma only once a year was a divine experience. He prayed for the well-being and prosperity of the people of Andhra Pradesh and sought the blessings of the goddess for continued peace and happiness.

The Chief Minister particularly prayed for the successful

and timely completion of all developmental works undertaken by the government in the Kuppam region and hoped that the benefits would reach all citizens.

TTD Chairman BR Naidu, several board members and local political leaders also participated in the festivities. Before heading to the temple, the CM received a grand welcome from district officials, local TDP leaders and party workers in Kuppam.

Following the darshan, the Chief Minister returned to Amaravati via Bengaluru.



EO inspects devotee services at Durga Temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To enhance facilities and improve the experience of devotees at Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam atop Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada, Executive Officer VK Seena Naik conducted a surprise inspection on Wednesday. The inspection began with a review of the devotees' slipper stand, as well as the mobile phone and luggage storage counters. Seena Naik personally interacted with devotees to ensure that services were not being overcharged.

Although he confirmed that slipper storage is provided free of cost, he expressed concern about the clutter caused by unclaimed footwear. He instructed staff to make announcements using a microphone to improve coordination and minimise congestion. At the Ghat Road, Seena Naik inspected various shops and firmly instructed shopkeepers to sell products at the

Maximum Retail Price (MRP). He warned that any mistreatment of devotees or instances of overpricing would lead to the cancellation of shop licences.

During his visit to the protocol office, the EO advised Protocol Supervisor Laxman to ensure that vehicles accessing the office do not obstruct temple security or inconvenience regular devotees. He also examined the registration process for protocol darshan and checked the operations at the Rs. 500 darshan ticket counter.

The EO raised concerns about the increased use of plastic in and around the temple. While the temple distributes eco-friendly bags for prasad, many street vendors near the hill were observed handing out plastic bags, contributing to environmental degradation on Indrakeeladri. He urged devotees, vendors, and temple staff to support efforts to minimise plastic use.

Jagan condemns TDP's 'assault on democracy' in Tiruvuru

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP president and former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has met with councillors from the Tiruvuru nagar panchayat, NTR district, who detailed a disturbing account of attacks and intimidation by TDP leaders during the election of the nagar panchayat chairperson.

The councillors reported that TDP MLA Kolikapudi Srinivas, along with coalition leaders and police, acted in blatant violation of constitutional norms, resorting to unethical tactics to undermine the democratic process. YS Jagan expressed outrage at the ongoing assault on democracy in Andhra Pradesh, condemning the coalition government's 'brazen disregard for majority rule' in local body elections.

He accused them of engaging in lawless and oppressive politics to cling to power. Jagan praised the resilience of the Tiruvuru councillors, who stood firm despite severe harassment, and assured them of the party's unwavering support in pursuing justice through legal and constitutional means.

He urged party members and supporters to remain steadfast in their commitment to democratic values and promised that the party would stand as a pillar of strength for those facing oppression.

TDP's Mini Mahanadu creates festive fervour in Penukonda

PNS ■ PENUKONDA

Penukonda turned into a festive hub as the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) held its 2025 Mini Mahanadu on Wednesday. Under the leadership of State Minister for BC Welfare and Handlooms S Savitha, the event witnessed an enthusiastic turnout of leaders and supporters.

Hindupur MP BK Parthasarathi, Penukonda constituency in-charge Narasimha Rao and Anantapur district TDP president Kollakunta Anjanappa were the chief guests.

The proceedings began with floral tributes to NTR's statue at the local NTR Circle, followed by a spirited rally to the TDP office, where further tributes were paid.

Minister Savitha sharply criticised the previous YSRCP government, stating that under their regime, Penukonda witnessed utter neglect and stagnation. She asserted that the TDP-led alliance achieved more development in 10



months than the YSRCP did in five years. She stressed the Rs 100-crore AMRUT scheme which aims to provide drinking water to every household in Penukonda municipality.

She highlighted key achievements such as new roads, drainage systems and borewells across the constituency. Reopening of BC hostels and impressive SSC results from government schools were cited as signs of real progress.

Savitha also criticised former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleging he confined himself to his camp office while disregarding environmental and employment

concerns. She lauded TDP chief and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for immediately approving the mega DSC recruitment file upon returning to power.

During the event, she extended support to every loyal TDP worker, including providing Rs 5.5-lakh assistance to the family of late Nimmakayala Ramanuja, whose bills were allegedly stalled during the YSRCP rule. The event concluded with the distribution of gift boxes to party cadres and participation from thousands of senior leaders and activists from the region.

Masula Fest-25 to showcase water sports and cultural grandeur

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In preparation for the Masula Fest-25, to be held from June 5-8, Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman Animini Ravi Naidu announced that water sports, beach kabaddi, and beach volleyball competitions will be conducted in coordination with local authorities to promote sports and tourism in the

region.

The SAAP Chairman visited Manginapudi Beach, Machilipatnam, on Wednesday along with key officials to review festival preparations. After inspecting the venue for water sports, he instructed officials to set up spectator galleries, lighting, sound systems, and safety nets to accommodate and ensure the safety of an estimated 8,000 attendees.



Speaking to the media, Ravi Naidu highlighted the historic significance of Machilipatnam,

once a flourishing hub of culture and commerce. He noted that Minister for Mines & Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, as a Sports Minister, had undertaken several initiatives between 2014 and 2019 to revive its past glory.

He stated that the government is now committed to taking these efforts further by promoting tourism and cultural activities in the region.

Free orchard cultivation under Upadhi scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has directed officials from the District Water Management Agency (DWAMA) to raise awareness among farmers regarding the free orchard cultivation initiative under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), commonly referred to as the Upadhi scheme.

On Wednesday, the Collector presented documents at the collectorate that detailed information on the cultivation of fruit gardens and fodder through the Upadhi scheme.

He reiterated the need to motivate farmers to cultivate horticultural crops at no cost through MGNREGS, highlighting that such crops could lead to increased income for them. He noted that small and marginal farmers, those with less than five acres, are eligible to



grow a variety of crops, including mango, guava, lemon, sapota, pomegranate, dragon fruit, coconut, oil palm, apple, bear, tung, jasmine, and rose gardens.

Furthermore, he mentioned that the government will offer financial assistance for this initiative, specifying that mango cultivation would receive Rs. 1,09,950 per acre, while guava would receive Rs. 1,46,971 per acre. Besides, approximately Rs. 1,85,396 will be allocated for the cultivation of 1,600 jasmine plants per acre.

He also indicated that small

and marginal farmers with their own land and livestock could engage in fodder cultivation, with Rs. 1,09,950 available for the cultivation of fodder on 0.50 acres, estimating the cost at Rs. 32,992. This funding will cover material or wage components for various tasks.

He also directed the agricultural and horticultural farmers to recognise the beneficiaries. He emphasised the need for constructing crop ponds to support horticultural gardens, which will facilitate plant cultivation and contribute to the enhancement of groundwater levels.

‘YogAndhra’ campaign in Vijayawada

Special CS MT Krishna Babu and Collector Dr Lakshmisha inaugurate one-month-long initiative

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With a vision of creating a 'prosperous, healthy, and happy Andhra Pradesh', the Medical Health and Family Welfare Special Chief Secretary, MT Krishna Babu, NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha, AYUSH Director K Dinesh Kumar and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner launched 'YogAndhra-2025', a month-long campaign, at Haritha Beram Park, Punnamighat, on the banks of the Krishna River in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

The NTR district administration and the Vijayawada municipal corporation are organising the programme from May 21 to June 21. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from officials



across various departments, yoga practitioners, and public representatives. Yoga trainer Ramanjaneyulu demonstrated yoga techniques, shared the principles of Patanjali Yoga, and explained the physical and mental benefits of regular yoga practice.

Speaking on the occasion, Krishna Babu said that International Yoga Day, first celebrated on June 21, 2015, was initiated by India and

adopted by the United Nations. He also announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the 11th International Yoga Day celebrations in Visakhapatnam this year. As part of the 'YogAndhra' campaign, he said that special programmes will be held in urban and rural areas under the guidance of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, aiming to encourage people to make yoga a part of their daily lives.

Later, he said that the campaign targets the participation of two crore citizens across the State. A dedicated mobile app and online portal have been developed for registration and coordination. The campaign will include events at four tourist locations in each district, totalling about 100 tourist spots State-wide, and will feature theme-based programmes to ensure inclusivity, he explained.

NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha hailed 'YogAndhra' as a major step toward achieving the vision of 'Swarnandhra'. He said yoga activities will be held in all government offices, village secretariats, and ward secretariats. Events are also planned at the Babu Museum, Kondapalli Fort, and Gandhi Hill.

24/7 e-challan office now operational at Vyas Complex

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an effort to enhance public access to police services, the e-challan payment office in Vijayawada has been relocated and upgraded. Previously located within the premises of the Suryaravapet Police Station, the office has now moved to the third floor of the Vyas Complex, situated directly across from the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium.

Following the directives of NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhara Babu, the newly relocated e-challan office will operate 24 hours a day, allowing motorists and the general public to pay their pending traffic challans at any time, day or night.

Starting Wednesday, people can conveniently settle any outstanding vehicle challans. The modernisation and relocation of this facility aim to make traffic enforcement services more accessible, promoting convenience and compliance among the public.

The Vijayawada city police has encouraged all motorists to promptly clear any unpaid challan on their vehicles and to adhere strictly to the rules outlined in the Motor Vehicles Act to ensure road safety for everyone.



TDP's strength is its activists: Minister

PNS ■ NARASARAOPET

Minister for Energy Gottipati Ravikumar has claimed that the Telugu Desam party has over one crore members and the activists are the strength of the party.

The TDP organized a mini-Mahanadu in Narasaraopet on Wednesday. Addressing the party cadres on the occasion, Minister Ravikumar said that the TDP in its 43 years of existence has faced many turbulences.

"The TDP always stands by the party activists. The TDP is providing Rs 5 lakh insurance cover to its activists. Welfare of the people and development of the State are two eyes to the TDP."

The TDP had created a record by coming to power within 9 months of launching the party," he highlighted.

The Minister recalled that the NT Rama Rao headed government had bestowed the property rights to women and launched the flagship scheme of KG rice at Rs 2. He said that the TDP is implementing welfare schemes especially for its activists, he noted.



"The Naidu headed government in the previous term, brought the Godavari waters to the river Krishna through the Pattiseema Lift scheme. The TDP is organizing its annual Mahanadu as a festival," Minister Ravikumar acknowledged.

Launching a scathing attack against the Opposition YSRCP, Minister Gottipati Ravikumar

condemned the brutal murder of TDP activist Thota Chandrayya. He alleged that the anti-socials, affiliated to the YSRCP, brutally murdered Thota Chandrayya.

Hundreds of families of TDP activists were driven away from the villages by the YSRCP workers during the five years of the YSRCP regime, he slammed.

As soon as the coalition government came to power, the families went to their native villages without fear and the YSRCP's victims were extended financial assistance by the TDP, he noted.

MP Lavu Sri Krishnadevarayalu, Chief Whip GV Anjaneyulu were among a slew of leaders who attended the meeting.



Collector, JC, ZP chairperson participate in Yoga programme

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K Vetriselvi practiced Yoga at an event organized here on Wednesday.

Along with Collector K Vetriselvi, Joint Collector P Dhatrireddy, ZP chairperson Ghanta Padmasri and DRO U Visweswara Rao also practiced Yoga at the event.

It may be mentioned here that the Government of Andhra Pradesh is organizing the 'Yogandhra-2025' from May 21 to June 21. On the occasion, the Collector unveiled an App to enroll to participate in the international Yoga Day event on June 21.



AP to hold awareness programmes on Yoga for one month: Durgesh

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Andhra Pradesh Government will organize awareness programmes in a big way from May 21 to June 21 on Yoga.

Minister for Tourism Kandula Durgesh inaugurated a massive Yoga event at Gowthami ghat here on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that the AP Government is organising the International Yoga Day grandly in Visakhapatnam on June 21 in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi would participate.

The Tourism Minister noted that awareness programmes in

various forms would be organized across the State on Yoga from village level to the district level with the theme of 'Yogendra 2025'. He said that over five lakh people would practice Yoga on June 21 international Yoga day programme over two crore people would also practice yoga across the state on the day. He called upon all to practice Yoga and participate in the international Yoga day programme.

Tourism Minister Durgesh revealed that prominent personalities including film stars would participate in the programmes. Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan

Kalyan and Minister for IT Nara Lokesh would also participate in various awareness programmes on Yoga at various places, the Minister asserted.

Collector P Prasanthi called upon people to practice Yoga to keep good health. She exhorted people to make Yoga a part of life. This programme aims to ensure that the Yoga practitioners and create awareness on Yoga. District Collector P Prasanthi, SP D Narasimha Kishore, Additional SP Murali Krishna, JC Chinna Rayudu and Municipal Commissioner Ketan Garg were among those who participated at the programme.



Physical Fitness Centre to be set up at cost of Rs 12 cr: Kollu

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Excise and Mines Kollu Ravindra has announced that a Physical Fitness Centre will be established on the medical college premises at a cost of Rs 12 crore and the government is giving priority for public health.

The Excise and Mines Minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of an Urban Health Centre here on Wednesday. The Urban Health Centre is being constructed at a cost of Rs 80 lakh.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that a physical fitness centre would be constructed on the premises of the medical college here at a cost of Rs 12 crore and the tenders for the same had already

been invited. The works of the physical fitness centre will begin soon, he added.

Minister Kollu Ravindra mentioned that the State government is paying special attention to the health of the people along with development and welfare programs. The urban health center is coming up in 500 yards of site. Some individuals tried to encroach the 500 yards of precious government land but their attempts foiled with great difficulty, the Minister recalled.

"The construction of the urban health center has been undertaken with the help of the Central Government and if the construction of the Center is completed, it will be very useful for every family in the surrounding areas, especially dialysis patients," he asserted.

The Minister highlighted that funds are being extended by the Government for the construction of a hospital attached to the medical college here.

Minister Ravindra assured of developing Machilipatnam as an important health centre in the region. He acknowledged that Rs 3 crore had been disbursed for the medical treatment of the poor from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

APSRTC chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao also spoke.

Municipal Commissioner Bapiraju, DMHO Dr.Sharmistha and Municipal DE K Naik were among those who were present.

AP to be ID liquor-free by September 30

Excise Principal Secretary MK Meena leads crackdown

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major push under the Navodayam 2.0 initiative, Andhra Pradesh aims to become completely free of illicitly distilled (ID) liquor by September 30, said Principal Secretary (Excise) Mukesh Kumar Meena. Chairing a review meeting at the Prohibition & Excise Commissioner's Office in Mangalagiri on Wednesday, he issued directives to intensify enforcement across the State.

Targeting high-incidence districts such as Kakinada, East Godavari, Srikakulam and Parvathipuram Manyam, Meena stressed launching aggressive, district-specific operations and achieving visible results within fixed timelines. Performance will be closely monitored, he said and strict accountability maintained.

The review also addressed curbing non-duty paid liquor (NDPL). While the introduction of 799 liquor brands has helped reduce NDPL inflows, officials were urged to remain vigilant, especially in Sri Sathya Sai, Anantapuram, Kurnool, Nandyal and Annamayya districts.

Arrangements made for housewarming for 13,525 houses: PD

PNS ■ ELURU

District Housing Construction Project Director G Satyanarayana has made it clear that all arrangements have been made to conduct housewarming for the newly constructed 13,525 houses across the district on June 10.

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Satyanarayana said that in line with the State Government's target of completing the housewarming of 3 lakh households across the State by June 10, the target of completing the construction of 13,525 houses in Eluru district had been set of which 8,171 houses have been completed so far, meeting 60 percent of the target. The Housing Project Director stated that the construction of



5,400 houses is in progress and the construction of all the houses would be completed by June 10 and a mass housewarming program would be organized in the district on the day.

"District Collector K Vetriselvi is reviewing the progress of house construction with the officials of

the Housing Department and engineering assistants from time to time. She is taking the housing construction project forward. The State Government is providing an additional benefit of Rs 50,000 to the SC, ST and the BC to further accelerate the houses construction works. So far Rs 9.28 crore has

been extended to 5178 beneficiaries to construct their houses by the Government," Project Director Satyanarayana acknowledged. He revealed that in addition to these, the Government is providing loans ranging from Rs 30,000 to Rs 1 lakh at zero interest to the beneficiaries including to the members of self-help groups. Steps are being taken to ensure that the beneficiaries take advantage of the financial assistance provided by the state government and complete the construction of their houses expeditiously.

He mentioned that 2,500 people who have their own site for the construction of houses applied for financial assistance of which 1,200 applications were sent to the Government for approval.

Heavy rain likely in South Coastal AP, Rayalaseema

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Heavy rain is likely to occur at isolated places in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next 48 hours, the Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

In a daily weather report here, it said that the same situation is likely to prevail in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh during the next 24 hours. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and gusty winds with speeds ranging from 40-50 kmph are likely to occur at isolated places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next five days.

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers are likely to occur at most places or many places or a few places in Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema during the next seven days. Rainfall occurred at most places over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and at many places over Rayalaseema during the last 24 hours, the report added.

The Southwest Monsoon has further advanced into additional parts of the south Arabian Sea, Maldives and Comorin area, south Bay of Bengal, central Bay of Bengal,



and parts of the northeast Bay of Bengal, the Meteorological Centre said on Wednesday.

In its daily weather report, the Centre stated that conditions are likely to become favourable for the onset of the monsoon over Kerala in the next 3 to 4 days. It also noted that conditions are becoming conducive for the further advancement of the Southwest Monsoon into more parts of the south Arabian Sea, the remaining areas of the Maldives and Comorin region, parts of the Lakshadweep area, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, as well as more parts of the south and central Bay of Bengal, the north Bay of Bengal, and parts of the Northeastern states during the same period.

Meanwhile, State Disaster

Management Authority Managing Director Ronamki Kurmanath cautioned people not to stand near dilapidated buildings, under massive trees and hoardings. He also cautioned people about lightning during rain. He said that on Thursday rain will occur in Vizianagaram, Guntur, Krishna, NRT, Palnadu and Bapatla district on May 22.

On May 23, Alluri Seetharamaraju district is likely to experience light to moderate rainfall, while Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Parvathipuram, Manyam, Konaseema, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, NTR, Palnadu, Nandyal, Kurnool, Anantapur, YSR, Chittoor and Tirupati districts are likely to experience light to moderate rainfall.

As of 7 pm on Wednesday, 52 mm of rainfall was recorded in Achutapuram in Anakapalli district, 51.5 mm in Chinnamushtaru in Anantapur district, 50 mm in Narsipatnam in Anakapalle district, 48 mm in Phirangipuram in Guntur district, 47 mm in Gilakaladindi in Krishna district, and more than 30 mm of rainfall was recorded in 43 places, he added.

Hanuman Jayanthi to be held at TTD Anjaneya Swamy temples

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Hanuman Jayanti celebrations will be held with grandeur at the TTD run Sri Anjaneya Swamy Temple on Thursday.

On the occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, special poojas will be conducted at Eduru Anjaneya Swamy Temple (Opposite GT Temple), Matam Anjaneya Swamy Temple (Gandhi Road), Abhaya Anjaneya Swamy Temple (Old Huzur Office area), Sri Bhaktha Anjaneya Swamy Temple (Alipiri Sripadala Mandapam).

The TTD said in a release here on Wednesday that Hanuman Jayanthi will also be held at Sri Abhaya Hasta Anjaneya Swamy Temple (At Kapila Theertham Sri Kapileswara Swamy), Sri Sanjeevarayaswamy Temple, (Opposite Vontimitta Sri Kodandaramaswamy Temple) on Thursday.

₹97.52 cr under Swadeshi Darshan 2.0 for Suryalanka beach development

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Works should not disrupt local mangrove vegetation: Collector

Bapatla District Collector J Venkata Murali has stressed the importance of conducting development works at Suryalanka Beach without causing any harm to the mangrove ecosystems in the area. He announced that the Central government has allocated a significant sum of ₹97.52 crore under the Swadeshi Darshan 2.0 scheme for the beach's development. Additionally, the Tourism Corporation has been allotted

25 acres of land for various enhancement projects.

The Collector conducted a review meeting with relevant officials to discuss the proposed development initiatives on the beach. He underscored the necessity of ensuring that these activities do not disrupt the local mangrove vegetation, a crucial and unique natural resource in the region. "Mangroves are vital for maintaining our ecosys-

tem, and it is our responsibility to protect this species from extinction," he stated, highlighting that these mangroves stretch from Suryalanka Beach to Nizampatnam.

The Collector noted that the mangrove forests are a key attraction for tourism, contributing to the area's ecological diversity. He expressed confidence that visitors brought in through organised

tours would appreciate the lush greenery provided by the mangroves. Furthermore, he requested that development work along the canals prioritise the introduction of mangrove plants in collaboration with the Forestry Department.

Recognising the local community's dependence on these mangrove forests for fishing, Venkata Murali instructed officials to halt any activities that would involve the removal of mangrove plants during the beach's development phase.

KTR lashes out at Cong over notice issued to KCR

PNS ■ NALGONDA

BRS Working President KT Rama Rao launched a sharp offensive against the Congress Government on Wednesday, accusing it of reducing governance to a commission racket while attempting to deflect attention from its failures by targeting former Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao with politically driven inquiries.

Addressing the media at Nalgonda, KTR said the Congress government is using notices in the Kaleshwaram Project case as a "smokescreen"

to cover up its own corruption. "This government doesn't know how to govern, doesn't have the courage to fulfil its fake promises, and is now staging dramas by issuing notices to KCR," he said. He claimed that commissions of 20 to 30 per cent have become standard under Congress rule. "Even their own MLAs and ministers are saying that no work is done without commissions. The recent dharma by contractors at the Deputy Chief Minister's office exposed it all," KTR stated.

He accused both the BJP and

the Congress of colluding to politicise the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project.

"They want to brand it a failure to hide their own disasters. The notice to KCR is not a legal step, it's a political stunt. We have full faith in the judiciary. These notices will fly like cotton in the wind," he said. KTR reminded that Kaleshwaram was a transformative project that brought water to barren lands and was conceived with a long-term vision by KCR. "Those who brought light to this state's fields will be protected by the people and by God," he said.

'SVBC programmes should inspire younger generations towards devotion'

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao instructed officials to design SVBC programs that inspire the younger generation to walk the path of devotion and widely promote Sanatana Dharma. He held a review meeting with SVBC officials on Wednesday at the EO's chamber in the TTD administrative building in Tirupati. On this occasion, the EO emphasized the need to create content that highlights the significance of Tirumala, Vaishnava traditions, greenery,



Dasa literature, services offered by TTD to devotees, and the core principles of Sanatana Dharma. He suggested showcasing summaries of TTD's published books, inspirational stories, and promoting the tradition of

Bhajans to the broader public.

EO stated that SVBC is currently producing programs in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, and Kannada. However, he directed the team to prepare and broadcast more innovative and creative

content in all four languages.

The EO later emphasized the need for high-quality broadcasts and suggested evaluating the current programming to develop new shows that appeal to youth, middle-aged, and senior viewers alike. He also recommended seeking expert advice in content development. The EO instructed that promotional material related to Tirumala services, local temple rituals, and special programs should be aired in advance.

EO Syamal Rao further directed the officials to explore place-

ment opportunities in Prasar Bharati vans and facilitate live telecasts of all four SVBC channels. Additionally, he stressed the importance of utilizing SVBC's YouTube and online radio platforms to provide timely information to devotees, including details of sevas, and devotional cultural programs. The TTD EO also urged necessary upgrades for broadcasting all SVBC channels in HD quality. TTD Additional EO Ch. Venkaiah Chowdary, JEO Veerabrahmam, SVBC OSD K Padmavati, and others were also present.

ACROSS THE STATES



UP govt to construct 20-km Bharat Path in Ayodhya

The Uttar Pradesh government has proposed the construction of "a new corridor named 'Bharat Path' in Ayodhya that will connect Bharatkund, where Lord Ram's brother Bharat is said to have performed penance, to the Ram temple. The 20-km road stretch will be developed at a cost of Rs 900 crore in the temple town, the government said in a statement on Wednesday. "In a move to further elevate Ayodhya's stature as a global religious and cultural hub, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has proposed the construction of 'Bharat Path', "a new spiritual corridor that will connect Bharatkund, the sacred site of Lord Ram's devoted brother Bharat," it said. "With an estimated cost of Rs 900 crore, the Public Works Department (PWD) has already submitted the proposal for approval. The route aims to offer devotees improved access and a deeper spiritual experience, reinforcing Ayodhya's central role in India's religious landscape," it added.



Odisha guidelines for staff to avail maternity leave

The Odisha government on Wednesday laid down clear guidelines for maternity leave of women employees. The guideline was made public after Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved it. It said that maternity leave of 180 days can be availed three months before the expected delivery date (EDD) and within six months after the birth of the baby. It can be taken continuously in one go or in multiple phases. However, childbirth must take place in a recognised medical facility, it said. The guideline also cleared the doubts in cases where a female government employee was not in service at the time of childbirth but joined later, as well as in cases of miscarriage, death of a newborn, or stillbirth. It said that if a female government employee was not in service at the time of childbirth and joined later, she can avail maternity leave until her child is six months old. In such cases, the maternity leave may be less than 180 days.



YouTuber in touch with Pak staffer since 2023: Police

Jailed YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra had been in contact with a Pakistani officer since 2023, police revealed on Wednesday. Malhotra, behind bars on suspicion of espionage, had been in touch with Ehsan-ur-Rahim alias Danish, the Pakistani staffer at the Pakistani High Commission, since November 2023, a source said. Danish was expelled by India on May 13 for allegedly indulging in espionage. Police have sent Malhotra's three mobile phones and a laptop for forensic examination, the person said. The National Investigation Agency, Intelligence Bureau, and military intelligence officials have questioned Jyoti. So far, it's been revealed that she had visited Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, and some other countries. The 33-year-old Hisar native ran a YouTube channel 'Travel with JO' and was arrested from the New Aggarasain Extension last week. She was booked under sections of the Official Secrets Act and the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita, police said. Malhotra is among 12 people who have been arrested from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh over the past two weeks on charges of espionage, with investigators suspecting the presence of a Pakistan-linked spy network operating in north India.

SC's journey is 'inseparable' from Indian Constitution: CJI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India B R Gavai on Wednesday said the Supreme Court has played a "pivotal role" in expanding the scope of fundamental rights, and its 75-year journey is "inseparable" from that of the Indian Constitution.

The apex court has remained responsive to society's evolving needs by adjudicating on complex issues related to information technology, arbitration and electoral processes, he said. Importantly, it opened its doors to the most marginalised through public interest litigations, the chief justice of India stressed. The CJI was speaking at a function organised by the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) to release a book commemorating 75 years of the top court that came into existence on January 26, 1950 and inaugurated two days later.

Justice Gavai said this year marks a historic occasion as both the Constitution and the Supreme Court completes 75 years. "Over the seven-and-a-half-decade, we have witnessed an unbreakable bond between



the Constitution and the Supreme Court."The CJI said while the Supreme Court was created by the Constitution and functions under its provisions, it has, in turn, served as the "foremost shield" of the Constitution. "In that sense, the 75-year journey of the Supreme Court is inseparable from the journey of the Indian Constitution. They are two sides of the same coin, one giving life and the other ensuring that life endures with dignity, justice and liber-

ty," he said. Justice Gavai said the Supreme Court was given a huge constitutional mandate. In pursuance of that, the apex court developed the doctrine of basic structure in its landmark verdict in the Kesavananda Bharati case to safeguard the foundational features of the Constitution, he said. "Over the years, it has played a pivotal role in expanding the scope of fundamental rights, particularly by giving a broad and progressive interpre-

tation to the phrase 'right to life' and Article 21 which has led to the recognition of various essential rights such as right to privacy, right to dignity, right to justice, right to food, right to shelter, right to potable water, right to pollution free environment and so on," he said. The CJI said he must also acknowledge that the Supreme Court has shown the courage and humility to admit its own errors in the constitutional interpretation.

India reaffirms commitment to global health at WHA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India addressed the plenary session of the 78th World Health Assembly on Wednesday, reaffirming its commitment to global health equity under the theme "One World for Health".

Representing the Indian delegation, Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava congratulated the newly elected committee chairs and welcomed the opportunity for meaningful international dialogue and collaboration.

Speaking on India's commitment to inclusive and universal health, Srivastava underlined the transformative strides made under flagship initiatives like Ayushman Bharat, which has "dramatically expanded" access to comprehensive healthcare.

She said, "The programme has expanded access to comprehensive healthcare, improved infrastructure, provided financial protection for advanced treatments and accelerated digital health adoption -- paving the way toward Universal Health Coverage."

Srivastava highlighted that India's efforts in maternal health, family planning,



"The programme has expanded access to comprehensive healthcare, improved infrastructure, provided financial protection for advanced treatments and accelerated digital health adoption -- paving the way toward Universal Health Coverage."

childhood mortality and stillbirths' reduction have been acknowledged by global bodies, including the United Nations Population Fund and the UN Inter-Agency Group.

"India was recently certified as Trachoma-Free by WHO, and the nation is committed to eliminating diseases such as TB, Leprosy, Lymphatic Filariasis, Measles, Rubella, and Kala-azar," she said.

SC grants interim bail to professor Mahmudabad

Asks Haryana DGP to set up 3-member SIT to probe case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted interim bail to Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, arrested for his contentious social media posts on Operation Sindoor, but refused to stay the investigation against him.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotisar Singh



directed the Haryana director general of police to constitute a three-member special investigation team (SIT)

headed by an inspector general (IG) rank officer also including a superintendent (SP) rank woman officer

within 24 hours to investigate the case.

The top court said the interim bail was granted to the petitioner to facilitate further investigation and directed Mahmudabad to surrender his passport.

The SIT, the bench said, should comprise three directly recruited IPS officers -- not from Haryana but serving in the state.

The bench said aside from the IG rank officer, two others should be police superintendents or above rank officers.

Bus catches fire in UP, stops in time for 60 passengers to escape

PNS ■ ALIGARH (UP)

Sixty passengers on a bus here had a narrow escape on Wednesday morning when the engine caught fire, spreading rapidly to the rest of the vehicle, leaving it completely gutted within minutes. Many people were forced to smash window panes and jump out to be safe after the bus caught fire near the Mathura bypass road on the outskirts of Aligarh in Uttar Pradesh, police said.

No casualties reported in the incident. Police reported that the bus was going towards Haryana from Kanpur when the engine caught fire.

Multiple social media URLs, accounts blocked for working against national interest: Ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has informed a parliamentary committee that it has blocked, in accordance with law, multiple social media URLs and accounts for access in India as they were found to be working against national interest following the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor. The ministry said it has also advised OTT platforms, media streaming platforms and intermediaries (social media platforms) to discontinue web-series, films, songs, podcasts and other streaming content having origins in Pakistan.

The ministry shared the

It noted it had received multiple requests for blocking the content, and these were processed under relevant laws. It had issued an advisory as well on the issue.

multiple requests for blocking the content, and these were processed under relevant laws. It had issued an advisory as well on the issue.

The advisory had noted that several terrorist attacks in India have had cross-border linkages with Pakistan-based state and non-state actors.

"In the interest of national security, all OTT platforms, media streaming platforms and intermediaries operating in India are advised to discontinue the web-series, films, songs, podcasts and other streaming media content, whether made available on a subscription based model or otherwise, having its origins in Pakistan with immediate effect," it had said.



Gaps in MGNREGA implementation: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday cited the findings of a new report on MGNREGA to highlight crucial gaps in its implementation and attack the government.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh, pointing to the findings of the report by LibTech India, said only seven percent of households get the promised 100 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Even as coverage of the scheme rises -- perhaps due to the ongoing economic slowdown pushing more families to seek MGNREGS employment -- the average of days employment per household has fallen between FY 2023-

2024 and FY 2024-2025, he said in a statement.

Ramesh said due to the worsening economic downturn, the budget must make adequate financial provision to realise the vision under MGNREGA.

"MGNREGA wages cannot be set by the arbitrary whims of the government. A Standing Committee must be established to evaluate the need for changes in the wage rate," he said.

The LibTech report points out that employment fell by 7.1 percent in 2024-25, despite an 8.6 percent rise in registered households, under the scheme. It also pointed out that average workdays dropped by 4.3 percent, and 100-day completion households fell by 11.9 percent.

India lost 18,200 ha of primary forest in 2024: GFW

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India lost 18,200 hectares of primary forest in 2024 compared to 17,700 hectares in 2023, according to new data from Global Forest Watch (GFW), a global collaboration of over 100 organisations.

The GFW said the country lost 3,48,000 hectares of humid primary forest between 2002 and 2024 -- about 5.4 per cent of the country's total humid primary forest. This is 15 per cent of India's total tree cover loss during the same period.

Between 2019 and 2024, India lost 1,03,000 hectares (1.6 per cent) of humid primary

forest, which is 14 per cent of its total tree cover loss in those years.

The country lost 16,900 hectares of humid primary forest in 2022, 18,300 hectares in 2021, 17,000 hectares in 2020, and 14,500 hectares in 2019, the data showed.

The GFW defines primary forests as "mature natural humid tropical forests that have not been completely cleared and regrown in recent history". These forests are identified using Landsat satellite images and special algorithms for each region.

Since 2001, India has lost 2.31 million hectares of tree



cover, equivalent to a 7.1 per cent decrease in tree cover during this period and 1.29 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide

equivalent emissions.

However, from 2000 to 2020, India also gained 1.78 million hectares of tree cover, which

was about 1.4 per cent of the global total increase.

Between 2001 and 2024, Assam recorded the highest tree cover loss at 3,40,000 hectares, much higher than the national average of 67,900 hectares. Mizoram lost 3,34,000 hectares, Nagaland 2,69,000 hectares, Manipur 2,55,000 hectares and Meghalaya 2,43,000 hectares.

During this period, 1.39 million hectares of tree cover was lost due to shifting cultivation. Another 6,20,000 hectares was lost to permanent agriculture. Logging caused the loss of 1,82,000 hectares while natural disturbances led

to 35,100 hectares of loss. Settlements and infrastructure development caused 30,600 hectares of tree cover loss.

The GFW said its tree cover loss data is based on the best available satellite information. However, the data may change over time as algorithms improve. Therefore, it advises users not to directly compare older and newer data, especially before and after 2015.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, India had the second highest rate of deforestation in the world between 2015 and 2020, losing about 6,68,000 hectares of forest per year.

Editor's TAKE

Heat crisis deepens as summer peaks early

The unprecedented heat has gripped the capital and the worst part – the monsoon is still weeks away

Delhi is in a heat emergency. The threat is not just what the thermometer shows – it's in the air we breathe, the infrastructure we rely on, and the fragile lives caught in between. Delhi finds itself teetering on the edge of a climate emergency. With daytime temperatures already breaching unbearable levels and heat indices – the “feels like” temperature – soaring towards a blistering 50°C, the capital is caught in an escalating crisis. A new report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), titled “How Extreme Heat is Impacting India,” paints a stark picture of what's driving this relentless heat. Delhi now ranks among the top 10 most heat-vulnerable regions in the country. The report highlights a dramatic increase in very warm nights – indicating that nights are no longer bringing respite from daytime heat. This disturbing trend, combined with the city's dense infrastructure, is fueling what's known as the urban heat island effect, where tightly packed buildings and roads absorb and trap heat, pushing local temperatures higher than in surrounding rural areas.

To make matters worse, relative humidity in Delhi has climbed nearly 9 per cent in the past ten years. When humidity rises, the body's natural cooling mechanism – sweat evaporation – slows down, making it harder to cope and significantly increasing the “feels like” temperature. Compounding the crisis is the shrinking diurnal temperature range: the difference between day and night temperatures is narrowing, which means the city simply doesn't cool down enough after sunset.

More buildings, more energy use, more vehicles – all these lead to the heat load. While no one is entirely safe, the burden falls heaviest on the most vulnerable. Children, the elderly, and those who work outdoors – are at serious risk. Residents of informal settlements, where homes lack insulation, proper ventilation, or consistent electricity, are also disproportionately affected. Low-income families struggle to afford cooling appliances, while people with heart or respiratory issues face compounding health risks. Despite relatively good access to healthcare and electricity in Delhi, the scale of exposure and intensity of the hazard overwhelms these buffers, especially during prolonged heatwaves.

In these conditions, adaptation is the key for survival. People are urged to stay indoors during peak heat hours. Hydration is crucial – water intake should be frequent, even without thirst, while alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks should be avoided. Wearing loose, light-colored cotton clothing helps, as does using fans, wet towels, or mist sprays to cool down. And at the first sign of heat-related illness dizziness, excessive sweating, confusion, or nausea – immediate medical attention can save lives. Meteorologists indicate that some relief may arrive with the pre-monsoon showers expected in late June. The Delhi Government's newly launched Heat Action Plan is a timely and vital step, aiming to reduce both short-term harm and long-term risk. However, implementation and execution are vital. What's clear is that this extreme weather is the new normal, and it demands urgent, systemic change.

PIC TALK



Fireworks light up the night sky above the Golden Temple on the auspicious occasion of Gurgaddi Diwas of sixth Sikh master Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji, in Amritsar. PTI

Balochistan: The search for nationhood

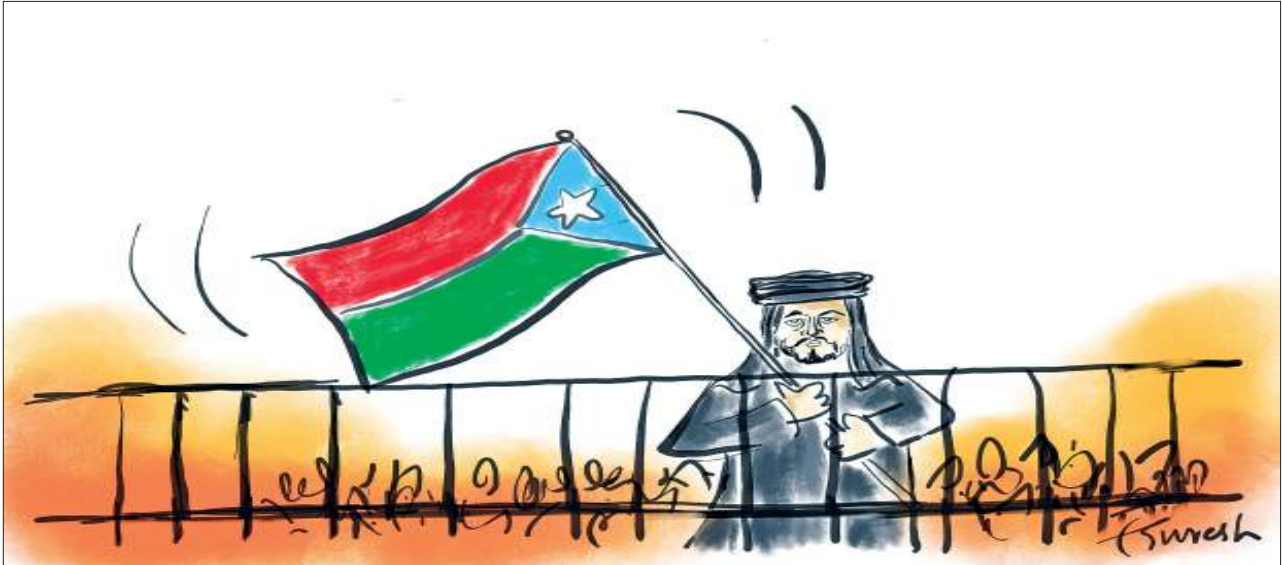
Citing decades of oppression and neglect, Baloch leaders are demanding international recognition for a long-suppressed cause – now thrust into global focus amid rising insurgency and regional turmoil

On May 12, 2025, Baloch nationalist leader Mir Yar Baloch made a historic and audacious move: he declared the Republic of Balochistan as an independent nation. In his impassioned address, he called upon the United Nations and the global community to recognise the new state, free from Pakistani domination. What was once seen as a peripheral movement has now emerged as a central fault line in South Asia's geopolitical landscape. The roots of the Baloch nationalist movement run deep. Balochistan — a region straddling Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan-has a long history of tribal autonomy and cultural uniqueness. Historically ruled by tribal confederacies and princely states such as the Khanate of Kalat, Balochistan fiercely resisted centralised control. During British colonial rule, the region served as a buffer zone against Russian expansion, with Britain exercising indirect rule while allowing internal autonomy. When British India was partitioned in August 1947, Pakistan was born on the 14th, followed by India a day later. But just before these momentous events, on August 12, 1947, the Khan of Kalat declared Balochistan an independent state. Pakistan's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, initially acknowledged Balochistan's separate identity.

However, pressures from global powers and regional considerations led to a shift. On March 27, 1948, Pakistan forcibly annexed Balochistan — a move widely viewed by the Baloch as illegitimate. This annexation marked the beginning of a long and bitter struggle for autonomy and justice. The decades that followed were marked by uprisings and brutal crackdowns. Major rebellions erupted in 1958-59 and again in 1963-69, led by Nawab Nauroz Khan and Sher Muhammad Marri. In 1973, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the provincial Government, sparking another wave of insurgency. Inspired by the secession of East Pakistan in 1971, Baloch rebels fought for nearly four years before being crushed by superior military force and lack of internal cohesion.

A pivotal moment came in 2006 with the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti, a prominent Baloch leader. His death galvanised insurgent groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), who began targeting Pakistani military installations, infrastructure, and Chinese investments-particularly those associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Balochistan's grievances are not merely historical. The region, which comprises 44 per cent of Pakistan's landmass and houses around 15 million people, remains one of the most impoverished and underdeveloped



areas in the country. Despite its rich reserves of natural gas and minerals, its people face chronic unemployment, illiteracy, and political marginalisation. Baloch representation in Pakistan's power structures — military, bureaucracy, and politics remains negligible. For many Baloch, Pakistan is not a nation but an occupying force.

The Tectonic Shift

Tensions escalated sharply after the May 7, 2025 launch of Operation Sindoor by the Indian armed forces. The operation was a direct response to the Pahalgam massacre, where terrorists-allegedly backed by Pakistan's military-attacked Indian tourists in Jammu and Kashmir. The attack was perceived as an affront to India's post-Article 370 peace efforts, prompting calls for decisive action across India.

Operation Sindoor was swift and strategic. As Pakistan reeled from the fallout and turned its focus eastward, the Baloch insurgency surged. On May 11, the BLA launched a coordinated attack across 52 locations, hitting 71 strategic targets in one of the most extensive operations in the movement's history. The very next day, the declaration of independence followed. What had long been simmering beneath the surface exploded into full view.

A Region on the Brink

The emergence of a declared Republic of



RAJIV MALHOTRA

Rural India can lead the biodiversity revolution

SECOND Opinion

With its rich biodiversity, deep-rooted farming traditions, and a population that still lives close to the land, rural India holds the key to reversing India's biodiversity crisis and achieving true sustainable development. As the world observes International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB), the spotlight turns toward the communities that have long lived in harmony with nature and the urgent need to empower them as agents of ecological change.

As we near the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), it becomes increasingly clear that rural India is not only central to India's biodiversity agenda — it could well be the catalyst that tips the scales.

Biodiversity is far more than an environmental concern; it is the foundation of life. It supports our food systems, sustains livelihoods, regulates the climate, purifies water, and provides protection against natural disasters. The rapid loss of species and ecosystems, both globally and in India, is not just a tragedy for nature — it is a threat to human survival and well-being. The KMGBF calls for a global transformation:

a new way of living that restores the balance between people and the natural world. In India, this transformation is most possible and most needed-in our villages and agricultural farm-



CHANDRAKANT KUMBHANI

lands. The legacy of the Green Revolution, while pivotal in addressing food shortages in post-independence India, also set farmers on a path heavily reliant on chemical fertilisers, pesticides, monoculture crops, and genetically modified seeds. Over time, this model has led to soil degradation, declining biodiversity, water stress, and increased input costs — leaving many smallholders vulnerable. As the ecological costs of this type of farming become more evident, the need of the hour is to re-educate and enable farmers helping them reconnect with time-tested traditional methods that work with nature, not against it. Natural farming, agroecology, and organic techniques offer a path toward regeneration. And it's not a case of 'easier said than done. Rural India is home to nearly two-thirds of the country's population and the majority of its agricultural production. For centuries, Indian farmers and indigenous communities have worked with, rather than against, nature. They've practised traditional farming systems that nurture biodiversity-rotating crops, saving seeds, maintaining mixed farming systems, and using organic inputs long before they were branded as “sustainable.” These time-tested approaches offer valuable solutions to today's challenges — if only we can help our farmers remember them and adopt them.

By building on these traditions and expanding nature-friendly practices like agroecology, organic farming, and natural farming, India can move toward a truly sustainable agri-food system-one that supports biodiversity instead

of depleting it. And yet, this transition requires more than just technical changes. It demands a shift in how we value and support rural communities. Farmers must be recognised not only as food producers but as stewards of biodiversity. Their knowledge must be respected, their leadership encouraged, and their work made economically viable.

This moment also calls for greater synergy between policy and practice. India's National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans have an opportunity to meaningfully integrate the ambitious targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) while aligning with national and state-level development priorities. Government support will continue to play a crucial role-through enabling policies, incentives, training, and infrastructure. Just as vital, however, is the active engagement of civil society, CSR bodies, local institutions, and farmers themselves, who bring invaluable on-ground experience and insight. By working together across sectors, we can co-create solutions that are both locally rooted and globally relevant.

As the 2030 deadline looms, the need for action is urgent. But there is still time to rewrite the story. The International Day for Biological Diversity reminds us to recognise that India's future lies not in distant boardrooms or global summits-but in its villages, fields, and forests. Here, harmony with nature is a way of life-waiting to be recognised, revitalised, and scaled for a better tomorrow.

(The writer is COO, Community Development, Ambuja Foundation. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

The new wave of Corona virus

The latest wave of Coronavirus disease or COVID-19 has hit many countries in Southeast Asia, with the spread of new Omicron sub variants like JN.1. India, too has reported 164 fresh cases of Covid 19, including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi and Rajasthan. To review the current COVID-19 situation and the rise in number of cases, the chairperson-ship of the Director General of Health Services (DGHS) has held a meeting with experts from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Emergency Medical Relief (EMR) division, Disaster Management Cell, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Central Government hospitals. Maharashtra has 56 active cases. Two Covid-19 related deaths have been reported, one 59 year old cancer patient and a 14 year old girl with Kidney disease. Kerala has reported 69 new cases. Tamil Nadu has 34 new cases. There are currently 257 active cases in India, a major spike observed last week. As of May 19, 2025, India has reported 257 active cases of Covid 19 cases. Both Singapore and Hong Kong are on high alert regarding the rise of covid cases. However, the symptoms have been 'mild' and not fatal, health authorities are taking extra precautions. Hospital arrangements and other precautionary measures are being taken by the health authorities. Experts have advised the citizens to wear masks and maintain social distance to prevent the mutation of this variant.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Dr Jayant Vishnu Narlikar is no more

Senior astrophysicist Dr Jayant Vishnu Narlikar passed away at his residence in Pune on May 20th, 2025. Dr Narlikar was not only a scientist but also a science writer and a pioneer of science fiction. He authored several books and articles in Marathi and English on scientific topics. To popularise science among the masses, he utilised television programs, article series, and lectures. He made significant contributions to astronomy, cosmology, and science outreach. He pursued higher education at Cambridge University. There, under the guidance of renowned astrophysicist Sir Fred Hoyle, he completed his PHD Together they proposed the Hoyle — Narlikar theory of gravitation, which is considered an alternative to the Big Bang theory.

In 1988, he established the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) in Pune and served as its director until 2003. Dr Narlikar's dedication to science communication is evident in his writings, TV appearances, and lectures aimed at igniting scientific curiosity among the public.

He was honored with numerous prestigious awards such as: Padma Bhushan (1965) Padma Vibhushan (2004), UNESCO's Kalinga Prize (1996). Through his work, Dr Narlikar inspired generations to develop an interest in astronomy. With his passing, it feels as if a star from the universe has fallen.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

Healthy living is a fundamental right!

Yet in our country, it often feels like a privilege reserved for those who can afford it. Access to quality fitness programme, preventive care, and balanced nutrition remains out of reach for many.

It's time we change that. We must make affordable, high-quality wellness options a part of everyday life for every Indian. At the same time, we face a growing mental health crisis that is dangerously overlooked — chronic loneliness among young urban Indians. Many young people are silently struggling surrounded by people but disconnected within.

This includes regular medical check-ups, mental wellness support, physical fitness, and nutritional balance. A crucial first step is to normalise conversations around mental health. Concerns about loneliness, anxiety, and depression should not be dismissed as mood swings. We must recognise the deeper emotional wounds our society often ignores — anxiety, grief, conditional love, feelings of insignificance, shame, and broken relationships.

These unspoken burdens often lead to depression, which is a prolonged state of despair, hopelessness, and emotional exhaustion. Being excessively self-critical, and enduring toxic work environments are all triggers of emotional stress. It's time we see mental health as integral to overall well-being. Only then can we build a society where healthy living is truly a right for all.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

THE INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS ARE WILTING AWAY



The once-warm relationship between India and Bangladesh now shivers under the shadow of trade tensions. India has boldly restricted \$770 million of Bangladesh's imports, 42 per cent of its total exports, in response to Bangladesh's restrictive policies, including bans on Indian rice, yarn, and consumer goods, coupled with stringent border inspections. Bangladesh's policies stem from political motives. Post-regime change, hardline forces have fueled anti-India sentiments, straining trade. Last year's \$660 million in readymade garments will now enter only through

Kolkata and Nhava Sheva ports, closing northeastern land routes. Bangladesh's economy, reliant on \$45 billion in textile exports, faces challenges as its LDC status ends, threatening tariff-free access. India, which offered zero tariffs, now demands a review.

By limiting import routes while granting transshipment exemptions to Nepal and Bhutan, India strengthens regional diplomacy. Bangladesh must now choose between cooperation or confrontation. India's move is a master-stroke on the diplomatic chessboard.

RK JAIN ARJEET | BARWANI

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

India’s semifinal victory in the fight against terrorism

The message of Operation Sindoor was clear: the path to a secure, developed, and globally respected India — Viksit Bharat — demands continued resolve, multidimensional preparedness, and an unflinching stand against terrorism in all its forms

FIRST
Column

In a bold reaffirmation of India’s commitment to counter cross-border terrorism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi established a ‘new normal’ through Operation Sindoor as a strong response to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. This operation, which featured deep and precise strikes on terror camps located not only in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) but also well within Pakistan’s heartland, was unprecedented. It showcased India’s strong willpower, operational maturity, and ability to deliver high-precision strikes with minimal collateral damage. India’s air defence capabilities were proven effective in neutralising advanced and coordinated drone threats. The successful hits on strategic air bases of Pakistan underscored India’s operational readiness and deterrent strength.

Yet, as PM Modi remarked, “We will keep taking decisive steps,” which subtly foreshadowed that a full-scale final confrontation is inevitable. Although the exact timeline remains uncertain, decisive engagement appears to be a necessary milestone toward realising the vision of Viksit Bharat — a developed, secure, and globally respected India. Therefore, India needs a multidimensional and proactive strategy to prepare for the final stage of this prolonged conflict.

Diplomatic Front

Despite the operational success, the global diplomatic response did not meet our expectations. China, predictably, stood by its long-time ally Pakistan. The United States, while posturing as the champion of global peace, took a balanced, almost ambivalent stance, attempting to preserve its strategic interests on both sides. The European Union, meanwhile, continued to misinterpret the conflict through a limited prism of the Kashmir issue, failing to grasp the larger menace posed by Pakistan, which is the epicentre of terrorism the world over.

The short-duration conflict has made it amply clear that India was not just fighting Pakistan; rather, it appears to be a broader coalition of actors who perceive India’s growing assertiveness as a threat to their geopolitical agendas. This apprehension reached new heights after Operation Sindoor, where India’s swift, coordinated and targeted strike incapacitated multiple Pakistani military installations, including airbases, radars, drone depots, and air defence systems.

Western powers must reassess their assumptions. While China continues to back Pakistan both economically and militarily, India remains the most stable and democratic partner capable of upholding a rules-based global order in the Indo-Pacific region. The United States, in particular, must recognise that strengthening India is strategically aligned with its interest in counterbalancing Chinese expansionism. However, the American response so far indicates a hesitancy to decisively back India — opting instead



to maintain a superficial equilibrium between India and Pakistan. This approach is neither sustainable nor strategic. More importantly, India has to make efforts to shift the prevailing global narrative. The world must be reminded that the Indo-Pak conflict is not simply a territorial dispute over Kashmir — it is fundamentally a battle against state-sponsored terrorism. Pakistan remains a breeding ground for radical Islamic ideologies that have manifested in global tragedies such as the 9/11 attacks, London bombings, Madrid train attacks, and the Charlie Hebdo massacre. These events are enough evidence that the terror ecosystem nurtured by Pakistan’s military intelligence, especially the ISI, has global ramifications.

India must proactively convey to the West that Kashmir has been an integral part of the Indian civilisation for thousands of years. Unlike Pakistan, which was founded on a rigid two-nation theory, India is a vibrant, pluralistic, and multi-polar democracy that cannot be confined within communal or sectarian boundaries.

India must proactively convey to the West that Kashmir has been an integral part of the Indian civilisation for thousands of years. Unlike Pakistan, which was founded on a rigid two-nation theory, India is a vibrant, pluralistic, and multi-polar democracy that cannot be confined within communal or sectarian boundaries.



ASHOK KUMAR

WESTERN POWERS MUST REASSESS THEIR ASSUMPTIONS. WHILE CHINA CONTINUES TO BACK PAKISTAN BOTH ECONOMICALLY AND MILITARILY, INDIA REMAINS THE MOST STABLE AND DEMOCRATIC PARTNER CAPABLE OF UPHOLDING A RULES-BASED GLOBAL ORDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

This historical and cultural context must be highlighted consistently in global forums to counter Pakistan’s manipulative propaganda. We need to actively counter-propaganda to reshape the Western perspective on the Kashmir issue.

External Security/Military Front

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam incident and the latest escalation with Pakistan, there is no scope for complacency. The emerging battlefield is not limited to traditional warfare — technological superiority is now decisive. China’s rapid advances in military tech, artificial intelligence, and unmanned systems must alert us to the urgency of preparedness. There is no room for laxity. Constant feedback loops from ground-level intelligence, robust cybersecurity infrastructure, and rapid response mechanisms must become the norm.

To effectively counter the growing China-Turkey-Pakistan nexus, India must ensure that it retains a decisive edge in armaments and warfare doctrine. Superior technology, robust logistics, and interoperability across forces are non-negotiable. This preparation must take place with the knowledge that while Pakistan appears on the back foot, its backing from China gives it a dangerous strategic cushion.

The Border Security Force (BSF) currently fulfils its peacetime mandate well, leveraging its familiarity with the terrain and local intelligence.

However, it must now evolve into a battle-ready force capable of handling wartime contingencies. This includes enhanced access to artillery support, drone and counter-drone technology, as well as electronic warfare capabilities. Training modules should be updated, and regular joint exercises with the Indian Army must become a routine to ensure coordination during high-stress scenarios.

Internal Security Front

Internal security presents equally pressing challenges. One of the most serious is illegal immigration, particularly from Bangladesh. In 2016, then Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju stated that “as per available inputs, there are around 20 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants staying in India.” This mass influx not only strains local resources but has also begun altering demographic compositions in sensitive border states — posing both security and social threat. Implementing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is imperative. However, it must be done transparently and fairly, shielded from political agendas and vote-bank compulsions. Handling illegal immigration with an iron hand is the need of the hour so that demographic changes can be stopped.

To maintain national harmony, India has to take strong steps against anti-national elements who are out to exploit societal divisions. India is under constant assault from psychological and information warfare, much of it orchestrated by hostile actors across the border. These campaigns are designed to sow discord, spread fake narratives, and erode the nation’s trust in its institutions. Social media has emerged as the frontline for such attacks and combating them requires a blend of technological vigilance and legal framework. We must consistently reinforce values of unity, national pride and patriotism. Fake news, hate speech and misinformation must be countered strongly.

In Conclusion

As India stands at a pivotal moment in its security journey, Operation Sindoor must be recognised not as a finale, but as a resounding declaration of intent. It represents India’s capability, resolve, and strategic acumen. However, the road to a decisive final confrontation will demand far more — visionary diplomacy, state-of-the-art military readiness, iron-clad internal unity, and above all, an unflinching political will. This is no longer just a regional struggle — it is a defining moment for India’s role as a global power. The semifinal has been decisively won. Now, the time has come to prepare — strategically, diplomatically, and militarily — for the final. Victory will pave the way for a truly Viksit Bharat.

(The writer is a retired DGP, Uttarakhand. He is currently serving as Vice Chancellor of Haryana Sports University. Views expressed are personal)

Be part of the plan: India’s bold vision for biodiversity conservation

As we approach the International Day for Biological Diversity on May 22, the 2025 theme, “Be Part of the Plan,” resonates deeply with India’s ongoing efforts to safeguard its extraordinary natural heritage. As one of the world’s 17 mega-diverse countries, India is home to over 45,000 plant species and 91,000 animal species, many of which are endemic. This rich biodiversity underpins our ecological stability, cultural identity, and economic prosperity. Drawing from my experience as PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana and former IUCN Country Representative, I am proud to share how India aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) to lead global conservation efforts.

Adopted at COP15 under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the GBF sets four global goals and 23 targets to be met by 2030. India played a pivotal role in shaping this framework and is now integrating it into our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). Our priorities — sustainable agriculture, water security, climate resilience, and disaster risk reduction — are seamlessly woven into this plan, with a strong focus on the 30x30 target (protecting 30% of terrestrial and marine areas), equitable genetic resource access, and enhanced biodiversity financing.

A Unified Conservation Strategy

India’s strength lies in its “whole-of-Government and whole-of-society” approach. We are converging sectoral schemes like MGNREGA, the National Mission for Clean Ganga, Jal Shakti Abhiyan, the National Bamboo Mission, and PM Kusum with biodiversity goals. In Haryana, the Aravalli Green Wall Project is a testament to this synergy. By uniting the Forest Department, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) support, we are restoring degraded Aravalli landscapes with native flora, enhancing water recharge, and boosting carbon sequestration.

Preserving Agro-Biodiversity and Empowering Communities

Our agricultural legacy, with over 160 cultivated species and thousands of climate-resilient landraces, is a treasure we are determined to protect. Through the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, and Plant Genetic Resources Conservation, we are safeguarding indigenous varieties and traditional farming systems. State Biodiversity Boards and over 2.7 lakh Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs)



at the Panchayat level are documenting this knowledge in People’s Biodiversity Registers (PBRs). With over 2.9 lakh PBRs, India leads the world in community-based biodiversity documentation.

In states like Maharashtra, Kerala, and Odisha, BMCs are driving conservation reserves, sacred grove restoration, and marine biodiversity monitoring by local fisherfolk and coastal communities. This grassroots momentum embodies the spirit of “Be Part of the Plan.”

Restoring Ecosystems for a Sustainable Future

To meet the GBF’s Target 2—restoring 30% of degraded ecosystems by 2030 — India is scaling up forest landscape restoration, wetland rejuvenation, and coral reef revival. The Namami Gange Programme is a global benchmark, integrating fish

diversity monitoring, turtle nesting conservation, and riverine ecosystem restoration. The National Wetland Mission and MISHTI scheme for mangrove plantations further protect ecologically sensitive habitats, ensuring community participation and climate resilience.

Reviving Wildlife and Engaging Youth

Our flagship species recovery programs — Project Tiger, cheetah reintroduction in Kuno National Park, vulture conservation in Pinjore (Haryana), and blackbuck protection in Gujarat and Haryana — demonstrate targeted action. The expansion of Protected Areas, Eco-Sensitive Zones, and Conservation Reserves balances conservation with community livelihoods.



VIVEK SAXENA

The youth are our future stewards, and the National Green Corps (NGC) Eco-Clubs, active in over 1 lakh schools, are proof of this. These clubs lead plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns, and biodiversity documentation. Digital platforms like iNaturalist India and the India Biodiversity Portal empower citizens to contribute to science and climate action.

Innovative Financing and Global Leadership

India is pioneering biodiversity financing with Green Bonds, Payment for Ecosystem Services, and CSR partnerships. The National CAMPA Authority directs funds toward restoring degraded ecosystems, while the Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanism ensures communities benefit from biological resource use. Globally, India leads the Global Biodiversity Framework Fund and shares expertise in community forestry, medicinal plant conservation, and biodiversity law with Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Call to Collective Action

“Be Part of the Plan” is more than a slogan — it is a responsibility. Whether you are a policymaker crafting biodiversity-friendly laws, a student planting trees, a farmer cultivating indigenous seeds, or a forest officer patrolling a sanctuary, every action counts. As India links biodiversity conservation with climate action, health, and sustainable development, we set a global example. This International Day for Biological Diversity is a moment to commit — a collective pledge to protect our planet’s living legacy. Will you join us?

(The writer is IFS, is the PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden of Haryana and a former IUCN Country Representative. Views expressed are personal)

How terror stilled the dreams of Kashmiri women

Pahalgam, often called “the valley of shepherds,” rests gently in the cradle of the Himalayas. With its snow-fed Lidder River, dense pine forests, and sprawling meadows, it’s easy to see why this corner of Kashmir is called “paradise on Earth.” Each spring, travelers from across the world arrive to ride ponies into the hills, sip hot kahwa by the riverside, and breathe in the crisp mountain air. It is a place where time slows down and serenity fills every breath.

This year, the arrival of spring brought more than blooming flowers — it brought hope. After years of pandemic lockdowns and political tensions, Kashmir’s tourist season was finally stirring back to life. Markets began buzzing again, homestays reopened their doors, and visitors started returning.

For many local women, this revival wasn’t just economic — it was deeply personal. Tourism had become a path to independence. Women were stepping out of their homes and into new roles: hosting travelers in homestays, selling traditional crafts, running food stalls, leading nature walks, and offering embroidery workshops to curious tourists. Slowly, silently, they were stitching together lives of dignity.

Then came April 22, 2025. On that day, in broad daylight, five armed militants attacked a group of people in Pahalgam, opening fire with chilling precision. It was sudden, merciless. Twenty-six people lost their lives, and more than twenty others were injured. It was the deadliest terror attack India had witnessed in recent years, and its impact reverberated far beyond the blood-stained valley.

National headlines captured the horror of the moment — but what happened in the days that followed, especially to the women of Kashmir, was barely mentioned. Tourists began cancelling in droves. According to a recent LocalCircles survey, more than 62 families across India abandoned their travel plans to Kashmir. Travel agencies were flooded with calls for refunds. Hotels and guesthouses stood empty. The laughter, the click of cameras, the joyful hum of a region trying to heal — all of it vanished overnight. And once again, silence returned to the valley. But this silence was not just the absence of visitors. For countless women, it meant the loss of their only source of income. It meant doors closing — on opportunity, on movement, on possibility. Rubeena, who runs a modest kahwa stall near Aru Valley, spoke through tears: “We had just started recovering from COVID-19. April was supposed to be our busiest time. And now, we are back to nothing.”

In Anantnag, artisan Shabnam echoed the pain: “We had tourists who returned every year, who remembered our names. Now, they’re afraid to come. And just like that, we are invisible again.”

Studies in recent years have shown that tourism in Kashmir offered women more than jobs — it gave



them confidence, skills, and a space in the public sphere. In a place long scarred by conflict, these acts — selling tea, guiding a walk, teaching embroidery — were radical steps forward.

Every kahwa poured, every shawl stitched, was a quiet act of resilience.

Now, with fear in the air again, families are reluctant to let women step outside. Daughters are told to stay home. Homestays once proudly run by women stand deserted. Kahwa stalls are shuttered. Craft workshops lie still. The energy that was just beginning to return has gone cold again.

And this is where the true damage of terror lies — not just in lives lost, but in dreams interrupted. In the retreat of women from the spaces they had only just begun to inhabit. In the silence that replaces the sound of ambition. Kashmir’s instability doesn’t just make headlines; it crushes livelihoods. And while the world debates security and geopolitics, it is the women — without safety nets or alternative employment — who bear the brunt of the fallout. Every cycle of violence sets them back years. When we speak of Kashmir, let us not reduce it to borders and political disputes.

Let us also see the human cost — especially for those whose stories rarely reach the surface. It’s not just about danger. It’s about lost dignity, interrupted growth, and deferred dreams. Pahalgam has always symbolised peace. But if we allow violence to keep defining this region, we are not just losing a tourist destination — we are losing the women who dared to hope. We are letting fear win over freedom, silence over voice, and darkness over the promise of spring. And that, truly, would be the greatest loss of all.

(The writer is an associate member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India. Views expressed are personal)

IN BRIEF



Domestic air passenger traffic grows to 143.16 lakh

Indian airlines flew 143.6 lakh passengers on domestic routes in April, 8.45 per cent more as compared to the year-ago period, amid rising air traffic demand. In terms of domestic market share, IndiGo topped the list with 64.1 per cent of the pie, followed by Air India Group (27.2 per cent), Akasa Air (5 per cent) and SpiceJet (2.6 per cent), according to the latest data from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). "Passengers carried by domestic airlines during January-April 2025 were 575.13 lakh as against 523.46 lakh during the corresponding period of the previous year thereby registering an annual growth of 9.87 per cent and monthly growth of 8.45 per cent," DGCA said in its monthly report. Domestic air passenger traffic was at 143.16 lakh in April compared to 132 lakh in the same period a year ago. In terms of On Time Performance (OTP) of scheduled domestic airlines -- computed for the four metro airports at Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai -- IndiGo's OTP stood at 80.8 per cent while that of Akasa Air and Air India Group was 77.5 per cent and 72.4 per cent, respectively.



Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 85.59 against US dollar

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day down by 1 paisa at 85.59 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on dollar demand from importers and foreign banks as well as surge in crude oil prices. Forex traders said market sentiment soured under pressure from rising US Treasury yields and persistent foreign fund outflows. However, positive domestic markets and a weak US dollar index cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.65 and moved between an intra-day high of 85.53 and a low of 85.70 against the greenback. The unit ended the session lower at 85.59 (provisional), registering a fall of 1 paisa over its previous closing level. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 16 paise to close at 85.58 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on importer demand for dollar and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East."



EPFO adds 14.58 lakh net members

Retirement fund body EPFO added 14.58 lakh net members during March 2025, registering an on-year increase of 1.15 per cent, according to the latest payroll data released on Wednesday. The Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) enrolled around 7.54 lakh new subscribers in March 2025, representing a 2.03 per cent increase over February 2025 and 0.98 per cent year-on-year growth compared to March 2024, a labour ministry statement said. EPFO has released provisional payroll data for March 2025, revealing a net addition of 14.58 lakh members. The year-on-year analysis reveals an increase of 1.15 per cent in net payroll additions compared to March 2024, the statement said. This growth in new subscribers can be attributed to growing employment opportunities, increased awareness of employee benefits, and EPFO's successful outreach programs, it added. As per the report, 4.45 lakh new subscribers were stated in the 18-25 age group, constituting a significant 58.94 per cent of the total new subscribers added in March 2025.

India, EU looking for early harvest trade agreement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Negotiations for a proposed trade pact between India and the 27-nation European Union are progressing at a faster pace and both the sides are looking at concluding the talks for an early harvest trade agreement by July this year, a government official said on Wednesday.

The early harvest or an interim trade agreement would include issues such as intellectual property rights (IPRs), government procurement, tariff, and non-tariff barriers, the official said.

An Indian official team from the commerce ministry is visiting Brussels this week for the next round of negotiations on the trade agreement with the European Union (EU). This visit comes in the backdrop of recently-concluded eleventh round of talks between chief negotiators of both the sides on May 16 here in the national capital.

"We are looking for an early harvest. We are trying to do it as early as possible...targeting by July for early harvest," the official added.

The two sides have agreed to conclude the agreement in two phases on account of the uncertain global trade environment, particularly due to the US tariff actions under President Donald Trump.

India has followed the practice of negotiating trade pacts in two phases with Australia. The early harvest pact



would lead to a full fledged free trade agreement.

Besides demanding significant duty cuts in automobiles and medical devices, the EU wants tax reduction in products like wines, spirits, meat, poultry and a strong intellectual property regime.

Indian goods' exports to the EU, such as ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, can become more competitive if the pact gets concluded successfully.

Two-thirds of job seekers open to new roles: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Even though 67 per cent of professionals interviewed are open to new opportunities, they do not know what job titles or industries to search for, a report said on Wednesday.

According to research by professional network LinkedIn, 65 per cent of professionals stated they can explain their career goals to a friend but don't know how to search for that role, and 64 per cent find job filters confusing.

"Two-thirds (67 per cent) of professionals in India say they're open to new opportunities, however, they don't know what job titles or industries to search for," the report said.

Another 74 per cent wished they could discover relevant roles they hadn't thought to search for, it said.

As job titles evolve and skills become central to hiring decisions, there is increasing demand among job seekers for easier ways to find opportunities based on their skills and goals, rather than predefined titles or keywords, it added.



Tea tasting certification course on cards to skill youth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Tea Board of India, under the commerce ministry, will explore the possibility of launching certification courses in tea tasting with an aim to skill the youth, and promote tourism in the sector, a top government official said on Wednesday.

On the International Tea Day, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said such courses would also help promote "tea literacy" in the country.

"The Tea Board is trying to take steps to establish a centre for tea tasting certification courses in the country," Barthwal told reporters here.

Such courses, according to experts, will provide structured training in tea tasting segment as it is a specialised

skill essential to the industry. It would also help standardise tasting practices and provide young professionals with a recognised qualification.

"This will also contribute to promoting tea tourism," he said. The export of tea grew to USD 920 million in FY25 from USD 830 million in FY24.

Major producing states include Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, with 81 per cent of the production consumed domestically.

International Tea Day, observed on May 21, highlights the cultural and economic significance of tea worldwide and recognises the contribution of workers in the sector. Main varieties of tea in India include Darjeeling, Assam, Nilgiri, and Kangra.

INTERIM TRADE DEAL WITH US

India seeks full exemption from 26 pc additional tariff

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the US may announce an interim trade agreement before July 8, with New Delhi seeking full exemption from the additional 26 per cent tariff on domestic goods, an official said.

The US on April 2 imposed an additional 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on Indian goods, but suspended it for 90 days till July 9. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed by America remains in place.

The government official said India's endeavour to protect its sensitive sectors may entail some quota or minimum import price (MIP). Such sectors include agri goods and dairy.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was there in Washington earlier this week to give an impetus to the trade talks. He held meetings with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

"Talks are moving positively. Before July 8, we are looking at concluding an interim deal before the first tranche. It will include goods, non-tariff barriers, some areas of services also



like digital. We are trying that the 26 per cent additional duty and the 10 per cent baseline tariff should not be there for India," the official said, adding that India is seeking concessions for its labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and leather.

At present, the Trump administration requires approval from the US Congress to bring tariffs below the MFN (most favoured nation) rates.

But the administration has the authority to remove the reciprocal tariffs imposed on a number of countries, including India.

India may look at certain commitments from the US on the duty concessions for its

labour-intensive sector in the first tranche of the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

Both countries have fixed a deadline to conclude the first phase of the pact by fall (September-October) of this year to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030.

The minister-level meetings were followed by the deliberations between chief negotiators of the two countries, which will continue until May 22.

Officials from New Delhi and Washington are looking to take advantage of the 90-day tariff pause window to advance the talks. The US has suspended the additional 26 per cent tariffs on

The minister-level meetings were followed by the deliberations between chief negotiators of the two countries, which will continue until May 22

Gold rallies Rs 1,910 to Rs 98,450/10 g amid global uncertainty

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rebounded by Rs 1,910 to Rs 98,450 per 10 grams in the national capital as rising global uncertainties triggered a fresh wave of safe-haven buying.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 96,540 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 1,870 to Rs 98,000 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday from the previous day's close of Rs 96,130 per 10 grams.

"A weak dollar supported gold prices. Investors are also evaluating sovereign risk after Moody's downgraded the US credit rating due to fiscal deficit concerns," Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

The downgrade has heightened uncertainty around the

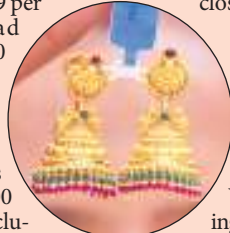
long-term stability of US finances, prompting investors to seek safe-haven assets like gold, Mehta said.

In addition, silver prices climbed Rs 1,660 to Rs 99,160 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. The white metal had finished at Rs 97,500 per kg in the previous market close.

On the global front, spot gold rose USD 21.79 or 0.66 per cent to USD 3,311.76 per ounce.

"Gold edged higher on Wednesday reclaiming the USD 3,300 level amid rising geopolitical tensions and US fiscal concerns," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Research Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Meanwhile, investor jitters stemming from ongoing uncertainty regarding tariff policies and an upcoming crucial vote on President Donald Trump's major tax reforms are leading to caution, with the US dollar weakening and gold rising, Gandhi added.



Govt headhunter finds none suitable for NTPC top job

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government headhunter on Wednesday found none of the dozen candidates suitable for the role of chairman and managing director of India's biggest power producer NTPC, as its string of struggle in finding the right candidates for top job at PSUs continued.

The Public Enterprise Selection Board (PESB) interviewed a dozen candidates -- half of them directors on board of NTPC and other state-owned firms -- but found none suitable to be appointed chairman and managing director when the incumbent Gurdeep Singh superannuates on July 31.



"The board did not recommend any candidate for the post and advised the Administrative Ministry/Department to choose an appropriate course of further action for selection including the search-cum-selection committee (SCSC) or as deemed appropriate with the approval of the competent authority,"

PESB said in a notice posted on its website.

NTPC is the latest bluechip public sector firm where the government headhunter struggled to find the right candidate. Since 2021, PESB has failed to find a suitable candidate for at least four other PSUs -- Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Indian Oil

Corporation (IOC), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation (HPCL), and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL).

Search-cum-selection committee route was taken wherever PESB failed to find suitable candidates.

Incidentally, Singh, too, was chosen to head NTPC by a search-cum-selection committee in 2016.

PESB is a statutory body under the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), responsible for selecting candidates for top management posts like chairman and managing directors and directors in Central Public Sector Enterprises.

IndusInd board suspects staff involvement in fraud

Asks the bank to report to investigative agencies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IndusInd Bank board suspects involvement of certain employees in the derivatives, microfinance and balance sheet "fraud" and directed the bank to report the matter to investigative agencies and regulatory authorities.

The bank board met on Wednesday to approve the financial results for the March quarter and for 2024-25 fiscal.

In a regulatory filing, IndusInd Bank said based on review of internal audit reports as well as external professional firm, its board "suspects the occurrence of fraud against the Bank" and the involvement therein of certain employees having a significant role in the accounting and financial reporting of the Bank.

"Accordingly, the Board has directed necessary steps be taken under applicable law (including reporting to regulatory authorities and investigative agencies) and to also fix accountability of all persons responsible for these lapses," it said.

The Bank has appropriately accounted for and reflected the impact of all discrepancies identified in these reports while finalising the financial results for the quarter/twelve months

ended March 31, 2025, IndusInd added.

In March, the private sector bank had reported accounting lapses in the derivative portfolio which were estimated to have an adverse impact of approximately 2.35 per cent of the bank's net worth as of December 2024.



Following this, the bank appointed external agency PwC to assess the impact on the bank's balance sheet, lapses at various levels and suggest remedial action.

The agency in its report has quantified the negative impact of the above as of June 30, 2024, at Rs 1,979 crore. On April 29, CEO Sumant Kathpalia and Deputy CEO Arun Khurana resigned from the bank, following which IndusInd Board appointed a Committee of Executives to oversee the operations of the bank, till a new MD & CEO assumes charge or a period of three months.

Sebi cautions investors on stock market scams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday cautioned investors against unsolicited messages from unverified people and asked them to refrain from joining WhatsApp groups or communities.

This warning comes amid a rise in cases where entities are using social media platforms to entice and deceive gullible investors in the securities market.

Sebi has observed that such entities use various strategies to gain investors' trust and

confidence. Generally, these entities send unsolicited invitations in the form of links to join WhatsApp groups -- often under names like "VIP Group" or "Free Trading Courses"--targeting prospective clients.

To appear credible, these entities often create fake profiles that depict them as experts in the securities market. In many instances, they impersonate Sebi-registered intermediaries, well-known public figures, celebrities, or CEOs/MDs of established organisations.

They exploit investors by



showcasing fake testimonials of large profits, supposedly earned by other group members who are actually playing

a supporting role in the scam. This misleading portrayal tricks investors into transferring funds to the bank

accounts of these entities, lured by false promises of similarly high returns.

Accordingly, Sebi, in a statement, advised investors "to not trust such unsolicited messages from unverified people and refrain from joining such WhatsApp groups/communities. Investors are advised to deal with only Sebi-registered intermediaries and through authentic trading apps".

To safeguard their interests, investors are encouraged to verify the registration status of any entity with Sebi at <https://www.sebi.gov.in/intermediaries.html> before making

investments.

Moreover, transactions should be conducted only through authentic trading apps of Sebi-registered intermediaries.

Investors are also urged to communicate only with genuine social media handles of Sebi-registered entities.

The regulator has issued this caution in the wake of rampant frauds and scams perpetrated by unscrupulous actors and aims to help investors with the necessary awareness to protect themselves while engaging in the securities market.

Janhvi Kapoor makes stunning Cannes debut with *Homebound*

Janhvi Kapoor just hit a major milestone—making her grand debut at the 78th Cannes Film Festival with her latest film *Homebound*. Directed by the critically acclaimed Neeraj Ghaywan, the film has been officially selected under the prestigious Un Certain Regard section, a spotlight reserved for films with unique storytelling and vision. *Homebound* stars Ishaan Khatter and Vishal Jethwa, and its Cannes selection marks a significant moment in Indian cinema, placing Janhvi among a rare group of Indian actresses who've had a film in the Official Selection at Cannes. For her first-ever Cannes red carpet, Janhvi Kapoor served ethereal glam in Tarun Tahiliani creation. The soft hues and intricate detailing of the dress perfectly mirrored Janhvi's poised yet youthful energy, setting the tone for a dazzling international debut. With *Homebound*, Janhvi steps confidently onto the global stage—blending star power with meaningful cinema.



Urvashi Rautela shares emotional backstory behind torn Cannes gown

Actress Urvashi Rautela recently walked the red carpet at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival, turning heads in a stunning black silk taffeta gown by Naja Saade Couture. But what truly grabbed headlines wasn't just her glamorous appearance—it was a small tear near her underarm that quickly went viral on social media. Now, the actress has shared the moving story behind the wardrobe mishap, revealing it stemmed from a moment of humanity, not fashion failure. In an interview with IANS, Urvashi recounted how the incident unfolded just moments before her red carpet appearance during the screening of the Brazilian film *O Agente Secreto*. While en route to the event, her driver abruptly applied the brakes to allow an elderly woman to cross the road. The sudden jolt caused her couture gown to tear slightly.

"Our driver's swift action to protect her sent us lurching forward, and my gown—a vision of artistry—paid the price with a tear," Urvashi explained. Rather than feel embarrassed, the actress said she was filled with gratitude. "There was no sense of loss, only thankfulness that the old lady was safe. I could now walk the red carpet with a story worth sharing," she said, adding that true strength lies in perspective and the ability to shape narratives. The actress emphasized that her Cannes appearance this year wasn't about making a bold fashion statement—it was about embracing purpose and presence. "When the gown tore, instead of panic, I embraced the moment as one of meaning. I wasn't walking the red carpet just for glamour, but for something greater," she noted. Urvashi also shared that she chose to meet the situation with grace rather than distress. "Rather than let a wardrobe mishap define me, I stepped onto that red carpet with my head held high. I represented grace, strength, and national pride," she said. "To those who jest, I offer a smile and a truth: elegance is not in the fabric we wear, but in the choices we make."



Suniel Shetty breaks silence on *Hera Pheri 3* confusion, says film needs Paresh Rawal

Actor Suniel Shetty has addressed the uncertainty surrounding *Hera Pheri 3* following reports of Paresh Rawal stepping away from the franchise. Sharing his deep concern, Shetty echoed director Priyadarshan's confusion and admitted he himself has no clarity on the developments.

What he is sure of, however, is that the film cannot proceed without Rawal reprising his iconic role as Baburao Ganpatrao Apte. In an interview with ANI, Shetty emphasized that while the film might somehow continue without him or even Akshay Kumar, it would be "100% impossible" without Paresh Rawal. "It cannot happen. 100 percent cannot happen without Paresh Rawal. It can have a 1 percent chance without me and Akshay, but 100% can't happen without Paresh ji," he stated firmly. The actor stressed that Baburao's character is the glue that holds the trio together, calling him the driving force behind the chemistry of Raju, Shyam, and Babu Bhaiya. "It was Baburao who brought Shyam and Raju together as tenants. The entire dynamic of *Hera Pheri* hinges on this trio," Shetty said. Like many fans, Shetty expressed surprise upon hearing that Paresh Rawal may not return for the third installment. He revealed plans to personally reach out to Rawal to understand what might have led to his apparent exit from the project. "I was really looking forward to *Hera Pheri 3*. Like the audience, I've waited years to see the three of us reunite," Shetty added, highlighting the emotional connection fans have with the beloved characters. The fate of *Hera Pheri 3* now hangs in the balance, with its soul—Baburao—potentially missing from the equation. While speculation continues, Shetty's candid remarks underline what audiences have long felt: without Baburao, *Hera Pheri* just isn't the same.

Pavail Gulatie and Fatima Sana Shaikh come together for a web-comedy series *Teen Kawwe*

In an exciting creative collaboration, Pavail Gulatie, Sidhant Gupta, and Fatima Sana Shaikh are coming together for an upcoming web series, *Teen Kawwe*. Backed by Siddharth Roy Kapur, this anticipated project marks the first collaboration between the trio, three layered actors who have established their space by constantly pushing creative boundaries. With this upcoming series, their admirers are curious to see what they unravel with their on-screen chemistry as well as the narrative. Currently in the pre-production stage, the comedy web series is expected to be a slice-of-life drama that blends humour, emotions, and realism to deliver a rich narrative and connect with the audience through relatable and honest storytelling. The carefully chosen actors, including Pavail, have cemented themselves as layered performers who bring sincerity and intensity to their performances, making them look natural and hard-hitting. The presence of a strong cast and the backing of Siddharth Roy Kapur suggests that *Teen Kawwe* is a story rooted in relatable experiences and nuanced characters. While the collaboration has gained significant buzz, fans are eagerly waiting for an official announcement and more details about the web series. While Fatima Sana Shaikh will be

seen as the female lead, Pavail Gulatie is sure to add depth to the plot as the male lead, followed by Sidhant Gupta. Known for delivering engaging and compelling performances, Pavail has a knack for picking off-beat characters that stay with the audience, and he's sure to maintain his graph with *Teen Kawwe*. As the masses are eager for the details, they are even more curious to see Pavail Gulatie on the screens after his performance in *Deva* and *Kaushalji Vs Kaushal*.



Dark secrets, deep guilt, *KanKhajura* trailer promises an unforgettable descent into the past

Sony LIV's *KanKhajura* offers a glimpse into a haunting tale where silence is deceiving, and what lies beneath is far more dangerous than what's visible. They just released trailer offers a glimpse into a world where guilt clings, secrets simmer, and the past seeks revenge. A gripping Indian adaptation of the critically acclaimed Israeli series *Magpie*, *KanKhajura* reinvents the original with an Indian soul and raw, emotional intensity. The story explores the relationship of two estranged brothers who are forced to confront their darkest past with the line between memory and reality blurring. What happens when your own memories become the prison you can never escape? Sarah Jane Dias, who plays Nisha, said

"There's something deeply unsettling about *KanKhajura*, not just the story, but what it forces you to confront—guilt, family, and memory. Nisha is a character who's trying to hold it all together while everything inside her is falling apart. It wasn't easy to play a character that is so nuanced and layered, but it was empowering." Produced by Ajay Rai and directed by Chandan Arora, *KanKhajura* brings together a compelling ensemble cast including Mohit Raina, Roshan Mathew, Sarah Jane Dias, Mahesh Shetty, Ninad Kamat, Trinetra Halder, Heeba Shah, and Usha Nadkarni. The show has been reimaged under license from yes Studios by creators Adam Bizanski, Omri Shenhari, and Dana Eden and produced by Donna and Shula Productions.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



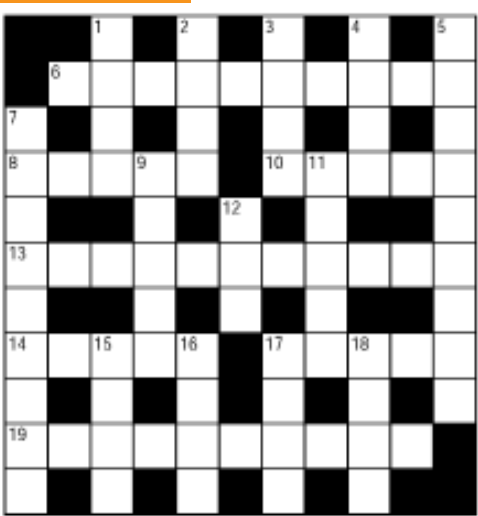
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Words that ask you politely to come
- Arm joint
- The head of a city council
- Very tall city buildings
- From Ireland
- These birds honk
- A person who has seen something happen and can give evidence in court

DOWN

- A round handle
- The scene from a window
- Do damage to
- Very small
- Took clothes off
- Sweated
- A desert green place
- This fruit has pips
- Rub with a towel
- A thought
- This grows on heads
- Firearms
- The direction opposite west



TSCS'S PREVENTIVE MODEL OFFERS HOPE AGAINST THALASSEMIA

In Telangana, particularly Hyderabad, thalassemia remains a pressing genetic health concern. "Every year, an estimated 250 to 500 children are born with thalassemia in the state," says Dr. Chandrakant Agarwal, President of the Thalassemia & Sickle Cell Society (TSCS). Despite awareness

"This recognition will help us scale our impact further," says Dr. Agarwal. "The collaboration will open doors for international training programs, cutting-edge research, and wider dissemination of global best practices in India."

PNS|HYDERABAD

That's both the potential and the true challenge! Online career exams are a vital initial step, according to Alternate Angle Academy. In order to recommend appropriate positions in technology, law, management, or design, these tests analyze a person's personality, abilities and cognitive talents. Better engagement, quicker progress and higher work satisfaction result when your professional path plays to your natural abilities. Career design

What is anticipated in the industry and what is taught in schools frequently

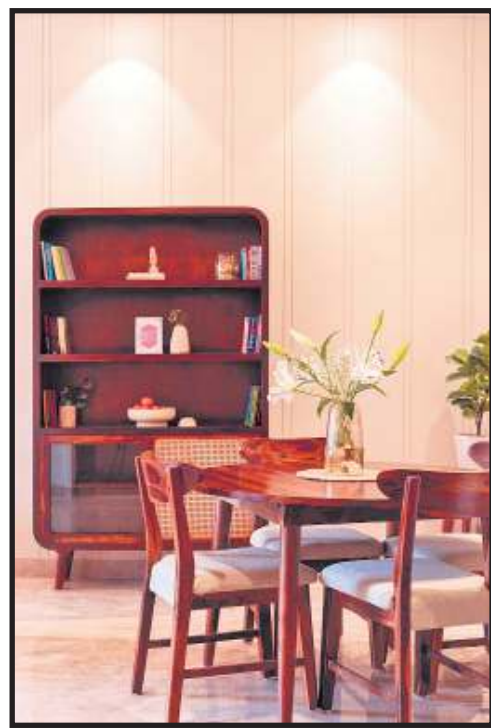
diverge. For example, students may have a solid understanding of design theory but be unprepared for real-world abilities like digital fluency, budgeting, regulatory procedures and client management. Basic requirements now include knowledge of building bylaws, Revit, Rhino and BIM tools. Soft skills like communication, teamwork, and negotiating are equally crucial. We must give kids more than just academic

The goal of both platforms is to close the knowledge gap between practice and education. Professionals and students can interact, study and pursue unconventional career options in the collaborative ecosystem that WOARCHITECT offers. Conversely, Alternate Angle Academy emphasises skill development, career mapping and mentoring. In addition to helping stu-

Don't confine your vision to traditional notions of achievement. "What kind of architect do you want to be?" is now the inquiry instead of merely "Do you want to be an architect?" Be receptive to opportunities. Map your career based on your understanding of yourself, including your hobbies, values and strengths. You can genuinely construct a profession that is as distinctive as any space you ever design if you have the correct resources and attitude.

StayVista's latest twist!

The "Work x Play x Relax" elements are expertly incorporated into this concept, elevating it above a simple place to stay to a well-thought-out sanctuary where comfort, lifestyle and mental health are given equal importance.



How architecture is evolving beyond tradition

Once upon a time, the word “architect” summoned a clear-cut image: a person hunched over drafting tables, sketching skyscrapers or drawing meticulous floor plans. But that picture is rapidly blurring. In an age of environmental urgency, digital revolutions and global complexity, architecture is no longer just about buildings—it’s about systems, experiences, policies and possibilities. Today, architects are just as likely to be coding algorithms for parametric design as they are to be influencing urban law or leading sustainability initiatives. With at least 48 distinct career paths now recognised in the architecture ecosystem, this field is transforming into one of the most versatile, boundary-breaking professions of the future. But with such a dizzying array of options, a big question looms for students and emerging professionals: How do you find the right path for you? Welcome to a new era of architecture with Ar. Snehal Jagdale Surve, Director, Alternate Angle & Co-Founder, Alternate Angle Academy as well as Co-Founder, WOARCHITECT platform—where self-awareness is just as important as site analysis and designing your career can be as intentional and creative as designing a building.

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

"We've got we just got to be aware of that, smart enough to be able to make sure that we articulate things when we get the opportunity so that we don't

– BRENDON MCCULLUM, ENGLAND HEAD COACH

"If we look at it at the start, people were excited by the way we played," said McCullum. "They were enthralled by the free-wheeling type of cricket and they felt...With a bit of idle time, we get the opportunity to retrospectively look at things and see where things have been over the last few years...What we've achieved, opportunities we've let slip..." the former New Zealand captain added.



Hitaashee also impressed last week as she finished tied 12th in her first LET (Ladies European Tour) appearance this season. Tvesa will be keen to find her rhythm after she failed to make the cut at the Dutch Ladies Open. Diksha has enjoyed a great season with four Top-10 finishes. In nine starts, she has missed the cut just once and one event in Australia was cancelled.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

For Gujarat, everything seems to have fallen into place. Their top-order trio of Orange Cap holder B Sai Sudharsan (617 runs), skipper Shubman Gill (601), and Jos Buttler (500), has been in prolific form, laying the foundation for most of the team's victories. Together, they have racked up 16 half-centuries and a century, dominating the tournament's batting attacks with clinical consistency. Such top-order dominance, however, has left the middle order largely untested. Gujarat's bowling unit has been equally formidable. Their Indian pace battery has led the charge, with Prasidh Krishna being the leading wicket-taker this season after snaring 21 wickets. Mohammed Siraj and lanky left-arm spinner R Sai Kishore have chipped in with 15 wickets each.

Injuries to key bowlers further derailed their campaign. Left-arm pacer Mohsin Khan missed the entire season, while express quick Mayank Yadav, who was retained with high hopes, spent most of it on the sidelines. Avesh Khan and Akash Deep also struggled with fitness, leaving LSG's bowling attack depleted. Pant acknowledged the devastating impact these absences have had on the team. "Definitely, it could have been one of our best seasons but coming into the tournament we had a lot of gaps, injuries and as a team we decided to not talk about that, but it became difficult to fill those gaps for us," he said after their previous game.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

"Now it'll be one good one to finish. It's probably fitting that we're at the bottom. We've played that type of cricket, so you can't hide away from it," Fleming said after the match. The New Zealander said they know the road ahead and failure of top-order batters has played huge role in the ordinary run. "Our order is not right at

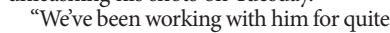
Pacer Ashul Kamboj has managed to impress this season with his pace and Fleming feels he will be a good asset for India after his selection in A side for the England tour. "His speeds have been around 138, 139 (kph). He is deceptive and the ball always seems to hit the gloves harder. His big strength is his length and he just gets the ball to wobble. You saw that today on a reasonably flat wicket and he'll do well on that tour (of England) if he gets conditions that seam a bit and a little bit of swing. He'll be an absolute handful. He has got some real potential with both white and red ball. We're happy with his development and the opportunity he has taken this year"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Evian-les-Bains
(France)

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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

"All three of them were phenomenal



"We got ourselves into the positions where we should have finished the games, but unfortunately couldn't do that. It hurts," he added.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nottingham

Zimbabwe isn't expected to offer much resistance to England, having slumped to a 138-run defeat to a Professional County Club Select XI in Leicester last week. Before that, however, it did earn a first test



While Zimbabwe's view is very much about the present, England's sights will be on the future. Ahead this summer is a five-test series against India and then an Ashes tour Down Under. For England, it doesn't get much bigger than that, so the match against Zimbabwe will be important preparation, especially for a bowling department at the start of a new era following the test retirements of Stuart Broad (in 2023) and Anderson (last year).

For the Zimbabwe test, England will

Then there's the batting lineup where opener Zak Crawley and No. 3 Ollie Pope have been retained despite continued speculation about their worthiness in the team. There's the welcome sight of a return for wicketkeeper Jamie Smith after missing the tour of New Zealand in November and December while on paternity leave.

As for the Zimbabweans, they'll take whatever top-flight games they can on the long road back to cricket relevancy.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Nigam praised DC coaching staff for providing him clarity about his all-

'I have played the UPT20 League. The best part for me was the support I got from my coach. He helped me understand that if you're a bowler - and if you're unable to hit sixes or finish games - you limit your overall growth. Spending time with him really helped me develop as a player,' Nigam said.

Allu Arjun sweats it out for Atlee's action drama



Fresh off the buzz surrounding Pushpa 2: The Rule, Allu Arjun is now preparing to dive into a new and demanding role in director Atlee's next big project, tentatively titled AA22xA6. The actor is undergoing a rigorous physical transformation for the film, guided by renowned celebrity fitness coach Lloyd Stevens.

Stevens recently gave fans a glimpse into Arjun's intense training routine by sharing a behind-the-scenes photo on Instagram. The image, captured from Arjun's perspective, shows his smartwatch displaying workout stats — a total of 295 kilocalories burned, with an average heart rate of 140 BPM, peaking between 101 and 167 BPM. Stevens captioned the post: "@alluarjunonline POV," subtly highlighting the actor's commitment to the role.



Atlee lands in Hyderabad to meet Allu Arjun for #AA22xA6, pre-production in full swing

Blockbuster filmmaker Atlee, known for delivering mass entertainers with heart, has officially touched down in Hyderabad to begin pre-production on his next big project #AA22xA6. The film stars none other than Icon Star Allu Arjun and is backed by powerhouse production banner Sun Pictures.

This marks the first-ever collaboration between Atlee and Allu Arjun, a pairing that has already created a storm of excitement across the country. The buzz around the film is loud and clear, with fans eager to see what this dynamic duo brings to the screen. A video capturing Atlee's arrival at Hyderabad airport has gone viral, adding to the growing anticipation. The clip has been widely shared on social media, with fans flooding comment sections and fan pages, speculating about what's in store. With pre-production now in full swing, #AA22xA6 is shaping up to be one of Indian cinema's most awaited ventures. From action and drama to scale and spectacle, this collaboration promises to deliver it all and fans can't wait for the storm to hit.

Trisha stuns in bold avatar in Sugar Baby from Kamal Haasan's Thug Life

Thug Life, one of the most eagerly awaited Tamil films of the year, continues to stir excitement with the release of its second single, "Sugar Baby". The track features Trisha Krishnan in a bold and glamorous avatar, grooving to AR Rahman's vibrant composition, and has swiftly become a fan favourite.

The lyrical video showcases Trisha draped in a striking white saree paired with a matching choker, exuding confidence and elegance. Her performance is both sultry and energetic as she dances in sync with background performers. The visuals are intercut with glimpses of Kamal Haasan, offering a peek into their on-screen chemistry, while some action-packed frames featuring Silambarasan TR (STR) also make a brief appearance.

Yet, what truly grabs attention is Trisha's unexpected English rap segment and her audacious dance moves—marking a fresh and daring shift in her screen persona. Fans were quick to react on social media, with comments like "No one can replace Trisha's dance" and "Trisha is a majestic queen" flooding platforms.

"Sugar Baby" is composed by Oscar-winner AR Rahman, who also co-wrote the lyrics alongside Siva Ananth. The track features a multilingual flair, with the rap segment performed by Shuba, while the main vocals are delivered by Alexandra Joy, Shuba, and Sarath Santhosh. Music supervision credits go to Nakul Abhyankar and Prashanth Venkat, ensuring a seamless fusion of genres and cultures.

This new single comes after the successful release of Jinguchaa, an upbeat track set against a festive wedding backdrop. That video featured Silambarasan TR and Sanya Malhotra in high spirits, dancing amid vibrant celebrations, while Kamal Haasan was seen joining in the festivities with his trademark charm. Sanya's energetic performance in Jinguchaa drew applause, especially from fans impressed by her Tamil debut.

Meanwhile, at the recent pre-release event held in Mumbai, the actress addressed the age-gap criticism with grace and confidence. Shutting down the chatter surrounding their pairing, Trisha emphasized that the chemistry she shares with Kamal Haasan on screen felt powerful from the very beginning.

Reflecting on her decision to join the film, Trisha shared, "I think that's something I knew when they announced the film, and I had not even signed it yet. That's when I thought, wow—this is magic. And I wasn't even part of it at that point."

Her remarks hinted at a deeper appreciation for the film's vision and the creative energy behind it, rather than dwelling on superficial concerns.

Trisha also expressed her admiration for witnessing two cinematic powerhouses—director Mani Ratnam and actor Kamal Haasan—work in unison. She

Directed by Mani Ratnam, Thug Life marks his first collaboration with Kamal Haasan in 36 years, after their cult classic Nayakan. With a powerful ensemble cast, including Trisha and STR, and AR Rahman crafting the music, the film has already garnered massive buzz—even ahead of its theatrical release.



Kamal Haasan sparked the idea behind Mani Ratnam's Thug Life, says the director

In a candid interaction with the media during a recent promotional event in Mumbai, acclaimed filmmaker Mani Ratnam revealed that the genesis of his upcoming project 'Thug Life' was rooted in his long-standing relationship with legendary actor Kamal Haasan.

"The first thing that came was Kamal Haasan, and then Thug Life came in. So, it started from there," Ratnam shared, explaining how the idea for the film was inspired by Haasan himself. Reflecting on their early days, Ratnam recalled how a shared love for cinema laid the foundation for their creative collaboration. "He was a person I admired, and I liked the way he spoke. We became friends, part of a circle that only discussed films—never gossip. That's where it all began," he said. He also reminisced about visiting film sets in Mumbai during the making of Nayakan, noting how they would eagerly watch other filmmakers work, driven by pure passion for cinema.

Music maestro A.R. Rahman, who reunites with Ratnam for this project, also opened up about the creative process behind the film's score. He described experimenting with various melodies and sounds before settling on the track used in the teaser, which stood out for its intensity and uniqueness.

Rahman revealed that a key element of the score is a haunting vocal rendered in an unfamiliar language. "There's something very evocative about it—it adds a layer of mystery that the whole team loved," he noted.

The promotional event saw the core team—Kamal Haasan, Mani Ratnam, and A.R. Rahman—joined by cast members including Silambarasan TR, Trisha Krishnan, Abhirami, and Ashok Selvan. The ensemble reflected the scale and ambition of the project. Commenting on assembling such a high-profile cast and crew, Ratnam stated, "The scale of the film is dictated by the story. You go where the story takes you. It's always a pleasure—and a great help—when you have the right people. I've been lucky to have the best." Kamal Haasan, who serves as actor, writer, and producer for Thug Life, emphasized that the most fulfilling part of the process was collaborating with Ratnam. "The most exciting part was working with him. Everything else fell into place naturally," he said.

Haasan also reflected on his early impression of Ratnam, revealing a personal connection that predates their professional collaborations. "I first knew him as a friend in the neighborhood. I didn't even realize he came from a film family," Haasan recalled.



Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma (RGV) came under fire on social media after posting a controversial comment alongside Kiara Advani's bikini photos from the recently released War 2 teaser. The statement sparked widespread outrage for its indecent nature, forcing RGV to



delete the post amid the backlash.

The teaser for War 2 dropped on Tuesday, creating a buzz as Hrithik Roshan and Jr NTR prepare to face off in the highly anticipated sequel. Alongside his commentary on the film, RGV shared an image of Kiara Advani donning a bikini from the teaser, captioning it: "Instead of our countries and societies, if the war between Hrithik and Jr NTR is on who gets her bk, then 2 will be a b*buster."

Social media users quickly condemned the remark, calling it disrespectful and sexist. The comment ignited a heated debate across platforms, including Reddit, where users expressed shock and disappointment.

One user wrote, "What the actual f**k," while another commented, "And this is what he is uttering publicly... Can you imagine what he is like in private?" Others described RGV's behaviour as having "gone down bad sleazy levels" and labelled him a "creepazoid," criticizing his repeated inappropriate remarks.

Despite the uproar surrounding RGV's post, Kiara Advani remained positive and enthusiastic about her role in War 2. On Tuesday, she shared an Instagram Story listing several personal milestones connected to the film, including her first action film, first collaboration with stars Hrithik Roshan and Jr NTR, and notably, her first bikini shot. Alongside a video, Kiara wrote: "Lots of firsts in this. First YRF film. First action film. First with these two amazing heroes. First collaboration with Ayan. And of course, first bikini shot."

Mohanlal turns 65, announces social initiatives to mark birthday

Malayalam cinema's beloved icon Mohanlal celebrated his 65th birthday on Wednesday, with an outpouring of love and admiration lighting up social media platforms. Affectionately known as 'Lalattan' by fans, the superstar received heartfelt greetings from colleagues, friends, and fans alike.

Mohanlal rings in his 65th year while basking in the success of his latest releases, L2: Empuraan and Thudarum, both of which have reportedly crossed the ₹200 crore mark at the box office.

Born on May 21, 1960, Mohanlal's illustrious career spans over four decades and includes more than 400 films across Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, and Kannada. A five-time National Film Award winner, he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2019 for his contributions to Indian cinema.

In a heartwarming gesture,



Mohanlal announced two noble initiatives through his ViswaSanthi Foundation to mark his birthday. In a Facebook video message, the actor shared that, in collaboration with Baby Memorial Hospital, the Foundation would offer liver transplant surgeries at significantly subsidised rates for underprivileged children.

"Many children in Kerala suffer from liver ailments and need

transplants. This initiative aims to extend a helping hand to their families," he said.

Additionally, he launched a year-long anti-drug awareness campaign titled Be a Hero, also under the aegis of the ViswaSanthi Foundation.

Founded in 2015, the Foundation works in the areas of healthcare, education, and socio-economic upliftment for the underprivileged.

Tamil actor Ravi Mohan and Wife Aarti's divorce drama continues amid social media spat

The ongoing divorce battle between Tamil actor Ravi Mohan and his estranged wife, Aarti Ravi, has taken center stage on social media once again, with both parties exchanging statements that have fueled public speculation over the past six months. Their legal separation, which began last September, is currently being heard at the Chennai Family Welfare Court.

This week, both Ravi and Aarti appeared before the 3rd Additional Family Welfare Court in Chennai, where Judge Thenmozhi presided over the proceedings. According to a News18 report, Ravi Mohan firmly stated in his petition that reconciliation was impossible and expressed his desire to finalize the divorce. On the other hand, Aarti filed a counter-petition seeking maintenance of ₹40 lakhs per month to support herself financially post-separation. The court has adjourned the case until 12 June.

Ravi and Aarti were married for 15 years before their relationship began unraveling publicly in 2024, when Ravi left their home citing irreconcilable differences and filed for divorce. The situation intensified after Ravi's



friendship with singer Keneeshaa Francis came under the media spotlight. The controversy escalated further when Ravi was seen attending a high-profile wedding in Chennai last week alongside Keneeshaa, the daughter of producer and entrepreneur Dr Ishari K Ganesh.

On 20 May, Aarti Mohan took to Instagram to address the rumors and allegations. Though she did not name anyone specifically, she hinted that a 'third person' entering their marriage was the real cause of the breakdown, dismissing claims about money, power, or control being responsible. "None of

these are why our marriage suffers. There is a third person in our marriage. What broke us wasn't something between us — it was someone outside. The 'light of your life' brought only darkness to ours. That's the truth," she wrote, referencing Ravi's public remarks about Keneeshaa.