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## QUOTE OF THE DAY



Rahul Gandhi coined the slogan, 'As much as we are, that much is our share.' Going by that, with 46.3 per cent Hindu BCs and 10 per cent BC Muslims, the total BC reservation should be 56 per cent. Why is Rahul Gandhi, who travels across the country talking about the Constitution, backing out when it comes to BCs? If the government has genuine intent towards BCs, it should release the survey data for public scrutiny. Let all the 3.5 crore survey forms be made available for review, and a 15-day period should be given for scrutiny



— Kalvakuntla Kavitha, BRS MLC P4

**'Only BJP can increase Delhi's pace of development'**



**LARGE NUMBER**

OF INVESTORS COMING TO EXPLORE BIZ OPPORTUNITIES: GOYAL



I won't change my stand and character for someone:

**BUNNY VASU**



**DON'T MISS...**

### Tahaseen elected Dy Mayor of Nellore

Sayyad Tahaseen was elected as the Deputy Mayor of Nellore Municipal Corporation on Monday. She was elected to the Municipal Corporation from the 48th division. The Deputy Mayor election was held at the Corporation office, with Joint Collector K. Kartik acting as the presiding officer. Independent candidate Tahaseen defeated her rival Sk. Karimullah by 12 votes. YSRCP Corporators Bobbala Srinivas Yadav and Veluru Umamahesh proposed the name of Sk. Karimullah for the Deputy Mayor post. Tahaseen secured 41 votes, while her rival...

-PAGE: 4

### Visually challenged can read Constitution

Governor of Karnataka Thawar Chand Gehlot launched on Monday a Braille-enabled version of the Indian Constitution, to mark 75 years of the Constitution. The project was done in collaboration with Sankara Eye Hospital Bengaluru and CII Young Indians (YI) Bengaluru. "This initiative aims to empower those who are blind or have low vision by enabling them to read and understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens," said Dr Kaushik Murali, President of Medical Administration...

-PAGE: 5

### RBI may cut interest rate by 25 bps: Experts

The RBI is likely to reduce the key interest rate by 25 basis points this week after keeping it on hold for two years, complementing the Union Budget initiatives to push consumption-led demand, though the sliding rupee continues to be a concern. As the retail inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone (less than 6 per cent) for most of the year, the central bank can take rate action to boost growth hit by sluggish consumption, opined experts. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept the repo rate...

-PAGE: 8

### Praggnanandhaa beats Gukesh

The Indian juggernaut in international chess remained unstoppable as Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa fought through exhaustion and nerves to defeat world champion D Gukesh in a clash of compatriots to clinch the Tata Steel Masters title for the first time in his prolific career. The bespectacled 19-year-old from Chennai, a city that has become the cradle of Indian chess, came from behind to unstage the 18-year-old world number three 2-1 in the tiebreaker of the event's 87th edition here on Sunday...

-SPORTS



## Rs 9,417 cr allocated for AP's rail projects

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has been allocated a record Rs 9,417 crore for railway development in the 2025-26 Union Budget, announced by Union Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnaw during a virtual press conference at Railway Nilayam, Secunderabad, on Monday.

Vaishnaw highlighted that this allocation is part of a total investment of Rs 84,559 crore for various railway projects in the state. He pointed out that the state's average annual allocation between 2009 and 2014 was just Rs 886 crore, reflecting an eleven-fold increase in the current budget.

Among key developments, the Minister stated that Andhra Pradesh's railway network is now fully electrified. The South Central Railway (SCR) has taken the lead in

installing Kavach, with 1,465 km of this train protection system already commissioned across its jurisdiction.

He further shared that the government is targeting nationwide deployment of Kavach within the next six years. Additionally, 1,560 km of new railway track has been laid in the state over the past decade, exceeding the total rail network of Sri Lanka.

Vaishnaw also mentioned that eight Vande Bharat trains are now operational in Andhra Pradesh, covering 15 districts and 21 stations. The Amrit Bharat Express, running between Malda Town and Bengaluru, has been allotted 14 stoppages in the state. Furthermore, the redevelopment of 73 railway stations is underway under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Continued on Page 2

# India growing rapidly: Naidu

SAYS THE WORLD IS WATCHING THE COUNTRY'S TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday stated that the entire world is closely observing India's rapid progress. Sharing his insights from his recent visit to Davos, he noted that global attention, which was once centred on Information Technology (IT), has now completely shifted to Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The Chief Minister firmly believes that India is ahead of many other nations in AI, and the world recognises this fact. Expressing confidence, he asserted that by 2047, India will be a well-developed nation. He emphasised that budgetary allocations are primarily aimed at achieving the goals of 'Viksit Bharat,' with top priority given to the development of basic infrastructure.

Highlighting various reforms, he pointed out that significant changes have been made in the tax system, and Andhra Pradesh has emerged as a leader in power sector reforms. He also stressed that the policies adopted for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) would be a game-changer for the entire country.

Chandrababu Naidu expressed optimism that India will soon witness large-scale investments across multiple sectors, as several industrialists are showing keen interest in investing. Alongside launching new policies, he said that equal focus would be placed

• Naidu says by 2047, India aims to be a well-developed nation with strong infrastructure

• AP excels in power sector reforms and MSME policies

• Large-scale investments expected across multiple sectors in India

• The latest budget focuses on boosting economic growth and infra



• Indian business tycoons surpassing their global counterparts

• Naidu highlights political and environmental issues in New Delhi

• Calls for Centre's support to accelerate AP's development

on developing fundamental infrastructure. Lauding the budgetary proposals presented in Parliament on Saturday, he remarked that the budget is specifically designed to boost the nation's growth rate. He also pointed out that Indian business tycoons have surpassed their global counterparts in many aspects.

Stressing the importance of inclusive growth, he urged people to reflect on how development can be ensured by electing the right party to

power. He also commented on the current challenges faced by the national capital, stating that New Delhi is grappling with both political and environmental pollution. He remarked that the city has lagged in developmental aspects and is presently experiencing a deep crisis.

Confident of the BJP's victory in the ongoing Delhi Assembly elections, Chandrababu Naidu appealed to voters to elect the BJP to put the capital on a progressive path. "We need

leaders who do not loot the country but those who share its wealth with the people," he stated. Lamenting the state of affairs in Andhra Pradesh, he criticised the previous government's inefficient policies, which he claimed had severely damaged the state's progress. He urged the Centre to extend its support to Andhra Pradesh, stating, "If our governance is positive, the Centre will support us, and Andhra Pradesh will rapidly advance on the path of development."

## KLU under CBI scanner after bribery scam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major blow to the integrity of India's higher education system, a bribery scandal involving the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has come to light, leading to the arrest of 10 persons by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recently. The accused, including top members of the NAAC inspection team, were arrested for allegedly accepting bribes to skew accreditation reports in favour of certain institutions. Sources confirm that the arrested individuals have now applied for bail, following their remand in a Vijayawada Sub-Jail. The arrests are part of an ongoing investigation into the malpractices surrounding the NAAC accreditation

The scandal centres around the Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF) which runs the Koneru Lakshmaiah University (KLU) and its attempts to bribe officials in exchange for a favourable NAAC report. The arrested people include prominent figures such as GP Saradhi Varma, Vice Chancellor of KLEF, and Koneru Raja Hareem, Vice President of KLEF, as well as other key players in the scam, including members of the NAAC inspection committee from across India.



process, where the accused are suspected of manipulating inspection outcomes. The CBI has seized vital evidence, including laptops, mobile

phones, cash, and gold ornaments, from the homes and offices of the involved parties.

The scandal centres around the

Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation (KLEF) which runs the Koneru Lakshmaiah University (KLU) and its attempts to bribe officials in exchange for a favourable NAAC report. The arrested people include prominent figures such as GP Saradhi Varma, Vice Chancellor of KLEF, and Koneru Raja Hareem, Vice President of KLEF, as well as other key players in the scam, including members of the NAAC inspection committee from across India.

The CBI's investigation revealed that Saradhi Varma and KLEF's Koneru Satyanarayana colluded with several NAAC officials to set up a bribery network for a favorable accreditation review.

Continued on Page 2

## Resolve pending issues amicably: Centre to AP, TG

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A high-level meeting between officials of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan was held on Monday to address unresolved issues stemming from the bifurcation of the two states. Although the bifurcation took place in 2014, several key matters remain unsettled.

Discussions primarily revolved around the division of assets belonging to institutions listed under Schedules 9 and 10 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, along with the allocation of lia-

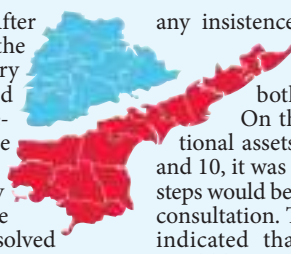
bilities and loans. After nearly two years, the Union Home Ministry conducted a detailed review of the implementation of the bifurcation act.

The Ministry emphasised that these issues should be resolved through mutual coordination between the two states. It assured continued support for infrastructure projects related to essential services. Officials were also urged to adopt a pragmatic approach in financial matters, cautioning that

any insistence on a larger share could ultimately prove detrimental to both states.

On the matter of institutional assets under Schedules 9 and 10, it was decided that further steps would be taken based on legal consultation. The Home Secretary indicated that a final decision would be made in the next round of discussions.

With several bifurcation-related disputes still unresolved, both states are expected to maintain a collaborative approach to address these long-standing concerns.



### CM, FM hold talks with finance panel chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav met Arvind Panagariya, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission, in New Delhi on Monday.

While the details of the meeting were not made public, the discussions are being seen as pivotal to the State's efforts to secure financial aid and investment for its development initiatives.

Continued on Page 2

## CM'S TAKE ON GOVT SCHEMES

# Continuous feedback key to implementation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has emphasised the need for strict vigilance in the implementation of government schemes, urging officials to eliminate negligence, corruption, and apathy. He underlined the significance of seamless execution, stressing that necessary changes should be made based on continuous feedback from the public.

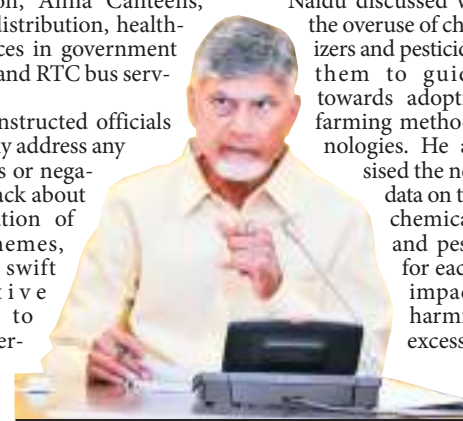
During a review of government schemes, the Chief Minister assessed data gathered through various channels, including IVRS, QR code scanning, and surveys. These data pertained to the implementation of key schemes such as pension distribution, Anna Canteens, fertilizer distribution, health-care services in government hospitals, and RTC bus services.

Naidu instructed officials to promptly address any complaints or negative feedback about the execution of these schemes, ensuring swift corrective actions to improve performance. He pointed out

that issues such as pensions not being delivered at home, concerns over the free gas cylinder distribution under the Deepam scheme, corruption, or dissatisfaction with hospital services must be thoroughly investigated and resolved.

The Chief Minister stressed the importance of analysing feedback to discern whether issues arise from individual errors or systemic flaws. He asserted that while mistakes must be corrected, there will be zero tolerance for negligence or corruption by officials. In the case of corruption related to gas distribution, he suggested holding gas agencies accountable.

Regarding the fertilizer supply, Naidu discussed with officials the overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. He urged them to guide farmers towards adopting modern farming methods and technologies. He also emphasised the need to collect data on the amount of chemical fertilizers and pesticides used for each crop, their impact, and the harmful effects of excessive use.



2

## PM's 'Make in India' failed: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Claiming that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' initiative has failed, Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Monday presented an alternative vision which greatly enhances the participation of Dalits, tribals and OBCs, and also ensures the energy and mobility revolution is not given up to the Chinese.

He, however, conceded that successive governments, be it the Congress-led UPA or the BJP-led NDA, have not been able to tackle unemployment and give a clear cut answer to the youth on employment.

Speaking on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address, Gandhi centred his address around on what a presidential address under an INDIA bloc government would look like.

"When we talk to the US, we wouldn't send our foreign minister to (get) our PM invited to his (US



President's) coronation. We will not send our foreign minister 3-4 times (to say) please invite our prime minister... because if we had a robust production system and were working on technologies, the US President would come to India and invite our PM," Gandhi said to protests from the treasury benches with Union minister Kiren Rijju asking him not to make "unsubstantiated allegations" on India's foreign policy.

Continued on Page 2

## No move to increase working hrs: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday told Parliament that it is not considering any proposal to increase the maximum working hours to 70 or 90 hours a week.

Recently, some of the corporate leaders proposed to increase the maximum working hours to 70 and even 90 hours a week. "No such proposal to increase the maximum working hours to 70 or 90 hours a week is under consideration of the government," stated Minister of State for Labour & Employment Shobha Karandlaje in a written reply to the Lok Sabha.

She informed the House that labour being a subject under the Concurrent List, the enforcement of labour laws is done by state governments and the central government in their respective jurisdictions.

While in the Central sphere, the enforcement is done through the inspecting officers of the Central Industrial Relations Machinery (CIRM), the compliance in the states is ensured through their labour enforcement machineries, she stated.

As per the existing labour laws,

working conditions, including working hours and overtime, are regulated through the provisions of the Factories Act 1948 and the Shops and Establishments Acts of the respective state governments.

Most of the establishments, including the corporate sector, are governed by the Shops and

Establishments Act.

About the discourse over 70-90-hour work week, pre-Budget Economic Survey on Friday last had cited studies to state that spending over 60 hours a week on work could have adverse health effects.

The survey noted that spending long hours at one's desk is detrimental to mental well-being, and individuals who spend 12 or more hours (per day) at a desk have distressed or struggling levels of mental well-being.

"While the hours spent at work are informally considered a measure of productivity, a previous study has documented adverse health effects when hours exceed 55-60 per week," the survey said, citing findings by Pega F Nafradi B (2021) and "A systematic analysis from the WHO/ILO Joint Estimates of the Work-related Burden of Disease and Injury".



## Producer K P Choudhary hangs himself in Goa

PNS ■ PANAJI

Telugu film producer K P Choudhary committed suicide on Monday by hanging himself from a ceiling fan in a rented house in a village in North Goa, police said.

The body of Choudhary (44), known for producing Rajinikanth-starrer "Kabali" in Telugu, was found in the bedroom of the rented premises in Siolim village, Superintendent of Police (North) Akshat Kaushal told reporters.

Anjuna Police received a call at 11.26 AM on Monday informing them that K P Choudhary had committed suicide by hanging himself, police said in a release.

"A police team rushed to the spot and noticed that Choudhary had killed himself by hanging from a ceiling fan in his bedroom, using a bed sheet," police said.



# Enhance quality of edn in engg colleges: Nara Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a meeting with representatives of the Private Engineering Colleges Management Association, the State's Minister for Education, IT, and Electronics, Nara Lokesh, emphasised the need for college managements to focus on improving the quality of education in engineering colleges. The meeting, held at Undavalli, provided a platform for the association's representatives to bring various issues to the minister's attention.

Minister Lokesh highlighted that due to the negligence of previous administrations, the education system had become ineffective. His government aims to bring about a transformation, starting from the primary level. He pointed out that there had been no reforms in the intermediate education sector for the last ten years, but since assuming office as HRD Minister, efforts have been made to initiate changes. He stressed the importance of improving the Gross Enrollment Ratio in all educational institutions and underscored the intent to introduce reforms that integrate moral values into the education system. He assured that any errors occurring during the implementation of these reforms would be promptly addressed.

Lokesh further stated that his government would not take unilateral decisions; instead, all policy decisions would be made through discussions and



consultations. Regarding scholarships, he announced that in the first phase of the RTF scheme, ₹788 crore had already been released, with the remaining ₹216.04 crore to be disbursed within the next two to three days. He also urged colleges to prioritise the National Institute of Ranking Framework (NIRF), Research & Development (R&D), and Innovations. Additionally, he requested engineering colleges to provide placement data to the government through an online platform. He outlined plans to introduce multiple reforms in the education sector and mentioned that a workshop would be conducted after the MLC elections to gather

opinions on improving the quality of engineering education.

During the meeting, representatives of engineering colleges raised several concerns. They requested that fee reimbursement for engineering students be released in accordance with the academic calendar and that the current fee structure be revised, as it was deemed inadequate.

He also suggested that the EAPCET schedule be released on time and that a three-counselling system be implemented for EAPCET admissions. On placements, they urged the government to take a proactive role by organising state-level job fairs and inviting companies to university

campuses for recruitment drives. Furthermore, they recommended revitalising the National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTTR) in the state and establishing three centres for conducting teacher training programmes. They also proposed introducing micro-certification under the National Credit and Quality Framework (NCQF).

MLCs Kancharla Srikanth, Bhumi Reddy Rangopal Reddy, Parthuri Ashok Babu, Vepada Chiranjeevi, President of the Private Engineering Colleges Management Association Vasireddy Vidhyasagar, former MLC Chaitanya Raju, and others were present at the meeting.

## Chandrababu Naidu's political opportunism exposed: Jogi Ramesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and senior YSRCP leader Jogi Ramesh has accused the coalition government of undermining democracy in the State. Speaking at the YSRCP central office, he condemned the TDP's 'violent and unlawful actions' during the municipal by-elections, alleging that they resorted to unethical tactics, including violence and coercion, to seize power in municipalities where they lack a majority.

Ramesh criticised TDP leaders and workers for engaging in widespread violence and intimidation, citing the attack on YSRCP corporators in Tirupati as a prime example of their blatant disregard for democratic principles. He called for immediate action from the Election Commission to investigate the irregularities and take stringent measures against the TDP's actions.

# TTD fully prepared for Rathasaptami: EO

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao, along with Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, inspected the arrangements on the four Mada Streets surrounding the Srivari Temple ahead of Ratha Saptami at Tirumala on Monday evening.

The facilities, including food distribution, drinking water, toilets, and sheds in the galleries, were reviewed.

On this occasion, the concerned officials were directed to take necessary measures to ensure a hassle-free experience for devotees. Speaking to the media, the EO stated that special vigilance and security arrangements had been made along the Mada Streets in coordination with the police.

He further informed that all preparations had been completed for the Ratha Saptami celebrations on Tuesday. From early morning till night, Sri Swami Varu will be taken in a grand procession on seven different vahanas.



An estimated two to three lakh devotees are expected to visit Tirumala for the occasion. To provide them relief from the summer heat, temporary sheds have been set up,

and Annarasadam will be distributed continuously across the galleries on Mada Streets.

CEO Veerabrahram, In-charge CVSO Manikantha Chandolu, District SP Harshvardhan Raju, FA & CAO Balaji, CE Satya Narayana, and other officials participated in the inspection.

# Sribharat promises a new era in AP

Underscores need for justice, transparency, and democratic values in State

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

During the discussion on the President's address in Parliament on Monday, MP Mathukumilli Sribharat delivered a compelling speech, offering a sharp critique of Andhra Pradesh's political landscape over the past five years. Drawing upon democratic principles, personal experiences, and literary references, Sribharat highlighted the urgent need for justice, accountability, and a balanced political environment in the State.

Quoting William Shakespeare's Macbeth, Sribharat cautioned against the dangers of unchecked power, stating, "I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none." He argued that this quote symbol-



ised the misuse of authority and stressed the necessity of balancing power with responsibility.

A significant moment in his address was his emotional reflection on the arrest of former Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu on September 9, 2023. Sribharat described it as a "dark chapter"

in the State's political history, recalling how he personally witnessed the arrest, an experience that left a deep impact. He termed Chandrababu's release on October 31, 2023 as a historic turning point for Andhra Pradesh.

Reflecting on the period between 2020 and 2023, Sribharat criticised the atmosphere of fear that overshadowed governance and weakened the State's democratic fabric. "In a democracy, power should always lie with the people," he asserted, emphasising the importance of hope and resilience even during challenging times. Citing Newton's Third Law, Sribharat spoke of the inevitable political backlash against past governance. He reiterated that dishonest leadership cannot sustain itself, quoting, "You can fool some

people for some time, but you can never fool all the people forever."

Looking ahead, Sribharat expressed confidence in the restoration of democratic values, judicial independence, and transparent governance under the NDA's leadership. "The previous government demonstrated how power can be misused. Now, we in the NDA will show how power can be used for the people," he declared, assuring the people of Andhra Pradesh of a new era of fair governance.

Sribharat's speech, filled with messages of justice, accountability, and hope, was a call to action for the people of Andhra Pradesh as they prepare for the 2025 elections, marking a shift towards a future rooted in democratic ideals and transparency.

# Sood Charity Foundation donates ambulances to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

'Sood Charity Foundation', which provides services in the fields of health and social welfare, has donated four ambulances to the Andhra Pradesh State government to support public health care. On Monday, actor and founder of the 'Sood Charity Foundation,' Sonu Sood, met Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at the Secretariat to formally present the ambulances.

These ambulances will be utilised for transporting patients to hospitals during emergencies and providing medical services in remote areas. The Chief Minister praised Sonu Sood on the occasion.

He stressed that the State government prioritises the



development of healthcare infrastructure to ensure the provision of medical care in even the most distant regions, with modern facilities for critical treatments.

The Chief Minister

expressed his gratitude for the 'Sood Charity Foundation's' partnership in this effort. Sonu Sood, on his part, expressed hope that the ambulances would provide reassurance and support to those in need.

## Continuous feedback...

Continued from Page 1

Referring to the rise in cancer cases in states like Punjab due to overuse of pesticides, he warned of the dangers of such practices.

The Chief Minister also clarified that pension distribution should not begin at 5 or 6 AM. Instead, he recommended starting at 7 AM and completing it by 6 PM. The process, he said, should be efficient and smooth, ensuring that staff are not overburdened by unnecessary rules. He reiterated that pensions should be delivered directly to beneficiaries' homes without fail.

If pensions are being distributed at locations such as farms or hospitals instead of homes, officials are instructed to investigate the reasons and provide flexibility where appropriate, provided there are no objections from the public. Naidu further directed government employees to ensure that pension distribution is conducted with respect and convenience for the beneficiaries.

# TDP's 'undemocratic' conduct in civic body polls condemned

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has strongly condemned the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and its chief, Chandrababu Naidu, for what it termed as the "slaughter of democracy" in the recently held civic polls. Accusing the TDP of brazenly violating electoral norms and resorting to unethical practices, the YSRCP has urged the State Election Commission to take stringent action.

Addressing the media at multiple locations, YSRCP leaders alleged that the TDP had indulged in large-scale electoral malpractices, including kidnapping, coercion, misuse of power, intimidation, and threats, reducing the elec-

tions to a mockery of democracy.

At Tirupati, former TTD Chairman Bhumana Karunakar Reddy strongly criticised the TDP-led coalition for its conduct during the Tirupati Deputy Mayor elections. He accused the ruling alliance of using violence, intimidation, and bribery to manipulate the electoral process. He revealed that four YSRCP corporators were allegedly abducted by TDP-affiliated goons in the presence of over 200 police personnel, with their families left in distress over their whereabouts. Holding the district Superintendent of Police (SP) responsible for their safety, he demanded immediate action.

Bhumana further alleged

that Revenue Minister Anagani Satya Prasad orchestrated attacks on YSRCP leaders and properties.

He presented evidence of TDP workers vandalising buses and forcefully detaining corporators. He also accused the TDP of attempting to bribe YSRCP corporators with ₹50 lakh each to secure their votes and resorting to violent retaliation when the offer was rejected.

Lashing out at Jana Sena Chief Pawan Kalyan for his silence on the electoral violence, Bhumana urged the High Court to intervene and rectify the irregularities. He also condemned media outlets like Eenadu for allegedly spreading misinformation against the YSRCP.

## PM's 'Make in...

Continued from Page 1

Gandhi's remarks were an apparent reference to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelling to the US ahead of President Donald Trump's inauguration. Jaishankar, later represented India at the inauguration on January 20.

Noting that India's future is going to be decided by the youth, Gandhi said the country has grown at a fast pace in the past and is now growing at a slower rate, but it has not been able to address the universal problem of unemployment.

"Neither the UPA government nor today's NDA government has given a clear cut answer to the youth about unemployment," the former Congress chief said.

He also said 'Make in India' was a good idea, but the prime minister "pretty much failed".

# Rs 9,417 cr allocated for AP's rail...

Continued from Page 1

The Union Minister announced the approval of 50 Namo Bharat trains, 200 Vande Bharat trains, and 100 Amrit Bharat trains, which will be rolled out in phases.

He also spoke about the ongoing mission to replace 7,000 km of old tracks, with plans to upgrade them to enable train speeds of 160

kmph on major sections, 130 kmph on other key routes, and 100 kmph across the entire network.

The press conference was attended by Arun Kumar Jain, General Manager of South Central Railway, along with other senior railway officials. Divisional Railway Managers from Vijayawada, Guntur, and Guntakal participated via video link.

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Sukla Paksha  
Tithi: Feb 04 04:37 AM to Feb 05 02:31 AM  
Saptami: Feb 05 02:31 AM to Feb 06 12:35 AM  
Ashtami: Feb 06 12:35 AM to Feb 07 01:00 AM  
Nakshatram: Ashwini: Feb 03 11:16 PM to Feb 04 09:49 PM  
Bharani: Feb 04 09:49 PM to Feb 05 08:33 PM  
Rahukalam: 3:19 PM to 4:44 PM  
Yamagandam: 9:40 AM to 11:05 AM  
Varjyam: 06:55 AM to 08:25 AM  
Gulika: 12:30 PM to 1:54 PM  
Amritakalam: 03:03 PM to 04:33 PM  
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:52 PM  
**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Mostly Cloudy  
Temp: 33°C  
Humidity: 66%  
Sunrise: 6:37 AM  
Sunset: 6:05 PM  
Updated: February 3, 2025 5:00 PM

## 'CONTROVERSIAL' REMARKS

# Kerala MPs demand sacking of Union ministers Kurian, Gopi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

MPs from Kerala demanded on Monday that Union ministers Suresh Gopi and George Kurian be sacked over their "controversial" remarks.

Gopi, the Union minister of state for petroleum and natural gas, courted controversy on Sunday by saying that the members of the "upper castes" should handle the tribal-affairs portfolio -- words that he retracted later.

Speaking at a poll rally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) here, the actor-turned politician said real progress in tribal welfare would only be

possible if leaders from "upper castes" oversee the ministry. He later withdrew his statement, claiming that it was made with good intentions.

Kurian, the minister of state for fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying and minority affairs, said on Saturday that if Kerala wants more central funds, it should declare that it is backward in terms of education, infrastructure and social welfare.

Slamming the two Union ministers who hail from the southern state, Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP John Brittas hoped that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will

take note of the comments and initiate action against them.

"The two ministers have made atrocious comments on constitutional morality and principles of the Constitution. One minister says, tribal affairs should be headed by a minister who is from the upper castes, he should be a Brahmin or a Naidu. The second one says that if Kerala needs assistance from the Centre, it should declare itself a backward state. I am sure the prime minister will take note of these statements and take action," the Rajya Sabha MP told PTI in the Parliament complex.

Continued from Page 1

One of the major revelations of the probe was the involvement of Rajeev Sijariya, a JNU professor and coordinator of the NAAC inspection team, who allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 1.80 crore to manipulate the accreditation process. Documents and testimonies suggest that the bribery negotiations began in

January 2025 when the accused agreed to pay Rs 3 lakh per member of the inspection team, along with other valuable items such as laptops and an initial bribe of Rs 10 lakh to Sijariya. In return, Sijariya provided them with a draft inspection report that was tailored to favour the university's accreditation rating.

The CBI has filed charges under the Prevention of Corruption Act, with all arrested parties facing serious criminal charges. They have been remanded in judicial custody for further investigation. This case has exposed deep flaws in the NAAC's inspection system, highlighting the need for greater transparency and accountability in the accreditation process for educational institutions.

The scandal has sparked widespread outrage, with numerous complaints flooding the CBI's offices, particularly from residents of Krishna and Guntur districts. In response, the CBI conducted a series of coordinated raids across 20 locations, uncovering the extent of the corrupt network. As the investigation continues, questions remain about how such a large-scale bribery operation could go undetected for so long, and what actions will be taken to ensure that India's higher education system remains fair and just.

Continued from Page 1

The 16th Finance Commission, headed by Panagariya, is tasked with recommending the distribution of financial resources between the central and state governments for the period from 2026 to 2031. The commission's recommendations will play a crucial role in determining the sharing of tax revenues between the Union Government and the states.

## CM, FM hold talks with...

responsible for establishing the principles for grants-in-aid from the central government to the states and suggesting measures to bolster the financial resources of Panchayats and Municipalities. It will also assess the current financing arrangements for disaster management and propose necessary changes. These recommendations will come into effect from April 1, 2026, for a five-year period.

The commission has already called for suggestions from the public, as well as from various organisations and individuals, regarding the allocation of financial resources between the central and state governments. Arvind Panagariya, a distinguished economist and former Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog, has also served as the Chief Economist of the Asian Development Bank. His exper-

tise and experience make him a key figure in shaping the financial future of India.

Naidu's meeting with Panagariya highlights his government's proactive approach in engaging with the central leadership to secure the financial resources required for the state's rapid growth. With Andhra Pradesh focusing on infrastructure development and economic expansion, the state government is expected to seek a larger share of financial resources to meet its ambitious goals.



**MP proposes bringing Anganwadis under PM Surya Ghar scheme**

● Power supply interruptions in summer cause hardships for children: MP Sivanath in Lok Sabha

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/DELHI

In Andhra Pradesh, there are 55,607 Anganwadi centres, out of which 8,455 centres do not have access to electricity. MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) has suggested expanding the scope of the PM Surya Ghar Free Electricity Scheme to include these Anganwadi centres, enabling them to receive continuous solar power.

During a session in the Lok Sabha on Monday, Sivanath raised this issue under Rule 377, urging the Central government to include Anganwadi centres under the PM Surya Ghar Bijili Yojana.

He highlighted that in rural areas, power supply interruptions during the summer months cause significant hardships for the children in Anganwadi centres. These disruptions not only affect children's attendance, but also hinder the proper care and facilities needed for them. Sivanath said that if Anganwadi centres were included in the PM Surya Ghar scheme, they could receive uninterrupted solar power.

The PM Surya Ghar Free Electricity Scheme is being implemented with a substantial budget of Rs 75,021 crore until the 2026-27 fiscal year. Sivanath also mentioned that to promote the scheme in the NTR district, an awareness rally was organised in collaboration with the District Collector, resulting in over 60,000 applications from the district for the scheme.

The scheme aims to install rooftop solar panels on all government buildings by 2025. This initiative will help both the government and the public reduce electricity bills and meet energy needs independently, he opined.

# Chairperson election postponed to today

● Nine councillors were needed for the vote, but only four YSRCP members attended special council meeting

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The election officer postponed the election for the chairperson of the Nandigama nagara panchayat in the NTR district to February 4, due to a lack of quorum. Nine councillors were needed for the vote, but not enough attended the special council meeting, prompting the election officer to delay the election.

Following notification from the State Election Commission (SEC), the District Collector, Dr G Lakshmi, had issued a notice to conduct the chairperson election. On Monday, Nandigama Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) K Balakrishna convened the special council meeting for the chairperson election.

However, only four councillors from the YSRCP, including the in-charge chairperson Orsu Lakshmi, attended the meeting. Councillors from the TDP, Jana Sena Party (JSP), and defected YSRCP members did not show up, resulting in a lack of quorum. After waiting for a few hours, the election officer announced that the election is postponed to February 4.



Four YSRCP members attending the Nandigama nagara panchayat special council meeting conducted by RDO Balakrishna on Monday

Besides, a dispute has emerged between Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath, also known as Chinni, and Government Whip and Nandigama MLA Tangirala Sowmya regarding their respective candidates for chairperson post.

The TDP leadership has announced that MP Chinni supports Shakhamuri Swarnalatha from the eighth ward, while MLA Sowmya has proposed Kamasani Satavathi from the 14th ward. However, MLA Sowmya expressed

doubts about the TDP leadership's support for Swarnalatha.

Despite the TDP having a complete majority in the Nandigama nagara panchayat, disagreements between the MP and the MLA, along with the absence of TDP, JSP



Chairperson aspirants Swarnalatha (top) and Sathyavathi

position. However, MP Kesineni Chinni's group of councillors disagreed with MLA Sowmya's selection and awaited confirmation of their chairperson candidate.

In response, TDP leadership in the NTR district has intervened, engaging in discussions with the party leadership at the Central Office in Mangalagiri to finalise the chairperson candidate.

Sources indicate that the party intends to hold discussions with both factions to select a single candidate for the position by unanimous agreement.

The TDP has appointed MLA MS Raju and observer Kanaparthi Srinivasa Rao for the Nandigama Assembly constituency to meet with MLA Tangirala Sowmya. Following the instructions from TDP leadership, Raju and Srinivasa Rao travelled to Nandigama to discuss matters with MLA Sowmya. Their goal is to ensure a smooth chairperson election without any conflicts. They are working to persuade MLA Sowmya to support the party's chosen candidate for chairperson.

## '31.52 lakh MT of paddy procured from 5 lakh farmers'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has stated that over 31.52 lakh metric tonnes of paddy have been procured from more than 5 lakh farmers during the 2024-25 kharif season.

In a statement issued on Monday, he confirmed that the government has purchased 31,52,753 metric tonnes of paddy from 5,00,352 farmers, disbursing Rs 7,222.35 crore for the produce. He reiterated that the government has honoured its commitment to procure paddy and ensure prompt payment to farmers within a couple of days.

The Minister credited the successful procurement of such a large quantity of paddy to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan. He also noted that the government has put in place arrangements to disburse payments within 24 hours.



Farmers received Rs 1,750 per quintal for 'A' grade paddy, and many expressed satisfaction with the price, he claimed. The Minister also directed officials to procure soaked paddy with moisture content ranging from 20% to 25%, ensuring that farmers do not face losses. He added that further steps are being taken to simplify the procurement process for farmers.

It may be recalled that Nadendla Manohar formally launched the kharif season procurement on October 28, 2024, at Ungatur village in Eluru district.

## Police deploy AI, target blackspots to reduce accidents

● AI-powered monitoring systems are being deployed at 110 intersections

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Police Commissioner Shankhabrata Bagchi has announced a multi-faceted action plan to tackle Visakhapatnam's alarming road accident rate. The city faces a critical road safety challenge, with 1,200 annual accidents resulting in approximately 300 deaths and 1,500 injuries. Rapid urbanisation, increased traffic, and lagging road infrastructure development have contributed to severe congestion and traffic-related hazards.

A key focus of the plan is the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) at traffic signals and targeted interventions at 68 identified blackspots - accident-prone locations. Authorities aim to demonstrate a significant reduction in accidents at these blackspots within two



months. Commissioner Bagchi's strategy also includes collaboration with the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) to address deficiencies in road infrastructure, including flawed road design and unsafe junctions.

To combat signal violations, AI-powered monitoring systems are being deployed at 110 intersections.

These systems will automatically detect and penalise violations like riding without a helmet, triple riding, signal jumping, and speeding. Additionally, road safety awareness campaigns will be conducted at seven high-accident locations, and infrastructure improvements will include installing rubber speed breakers, radium-reflective studs,

and cautionary sign boards.

The Visakhapatnam city police are also emphasising the importance of ongoing road safety education programmes for students, auto drivers, and heavy vehicle operators. Stricter enforcement, including laser speed gun surveillance, drunk driving checks, and helmet enforcement in suburban areas, will be implemented to regulate vehicle speeds and improve road discipline.

The comprehensive measures outlined in Commissioner Bagchi's plan are expected to significantly reduce traffic fatalities and create a safer road environment in Visakhapatnam. With the integration of AI technology and targeted interventions, the city's residents can look forward to a more secure and disciplined traffic system.

## KGH offers improved care for cancer patients with advanced facilities

● STATE-OF-THE-ART LINEAR ACCELERATOR INSTALLED

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

King George Hospital (KGH) has announced a significant upgrade to its cancer treatment services, ensuring timely and improved care for patients across the region. Addressing the media on Monday, Superintendent Dr. P. Sivananda highlighted the hospital's advancements in Medical Oncology, Radiation Oncology, and Surgical Oncology.

Dr. Sivananda reported that KGH had treated a significant number of outpatient and inpatient cases over the past year, including several major and minor surgeries. He also acknowledged the contributions of the oncology specialists, Dr. K. Shilpa (Medical Oncology), Dr. Panduranga Kumari (Radiation Oncology), and Dr. Nayak (Surgical Oncology), who have helped improve patient care. Importantly, patients at KGH receive high-cost treatments, including surgeries worth lakhs of rupees, completely free of charge and within a timely manner.



Serving patients from North Andhra districts, East and West Godavari, Odisha, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, KGH has become a key healthcare provider for the region, offering critical cancer care. Dr. Panduranga Kumari mentioned that the Radiation Oncology department treats approximately 800 patients annually. A major enhancement to the hospital's cancer treatment

infrastructure is the recent installation of a Rs 40-crore Linear Accelerator (Linac) machine. This advanced equipment, which replaces the older Cobalt-60 machine, provides precise targeting of cancer cells, ensuring timely and effective treatment. The hospital has also introduced advanced techniques for treating brain tumours, typically within a week of diagnosis.

Dr. Sivananda emphasised that cancer treatments at KGH are highly cost-effective compared to private hospitals, where similar procedures can cost between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. While the Linac machine has been installed, it will be fully operational in the next three months.

Following the State government's directives, KGH is also conducting cancer awareness programmes at the village-level to ensure early detection and timely referrals. Special OPD services are available twice a week, and comprehensive awareness campaigns, especially on breast cancer, are educating the community about cancer and the hospital's services.

Dr. Sivananda attributed these advancements to the leadership of Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav, Health Principal Secretary M.T. Krishna Babu, and Director of Medical Education Narasimhulu, acknowledging their crucial support in reinforcing KGH's role as a premier cancer treatment centre in the region.

## YSRCP wants Tirupati Corporation polls to be postponed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MLC Lella Appireddy has strongly condemned the violent incidents surrounding the Tirupati Corporation by-elections and demanded their postponement. He stated that elections should not be conducted in an atmosphere of unrest and accused the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) of undermining the electoral process through attacks and violent activities. Addressing the media, Appireddy revealed that the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) had already lodged a complaint with the State Election Commission (SEC) regarding the deteriorating law and order situation. He stated that the party had requested an increase in police forces to ensure the safety of YSRCP corporators, but no action had been taken. He questioned how hundreds of TDP activists could take to the streets despite the imposition of Section 144 and why the police failed to control them.

Appireddy criticized the governance in Andhra Pradesh, accusing the TDP of coercing YSRCP-elected corporators and councillors through inducements, threats, and violent attacks.

## Dr. Errol D'Souza takes charge as GITAM University VC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Dr. Errol D'Souza, a distinguished economist and former Director of the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIM-A), officially assumed office as the Vice-Chancellor of GITAM Deemed to be University on Monday. His appointment brings a wealth of academic leadership and expertise to the institution.

Dr. D'Souza holds a Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University and an M.A. in Economics from the University of Mumbai, where he was awarded the prestigious Kashinath Trimbak Telang Gold Medal for academic excellence. His impressive academic credentials are complemented by decades of leadership experience in academic governance and national economic policy. Besides, Dr. D'Souza has been instrumental in shaping India's economic landscape. He has served on the Technical Advisory Committee on Monetary Policy at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and has held board positions at renowned institutions such as the National Institute



of Public Finance and the National Housing Bank.

Dr. D'Souza's governance expertise extends to several prominent institutions, where he has held significant

positions, including the Governing Council of CMC Vellore and the Board of Directors of Shram Sarathi, Udaipur. His editorial contributions to esteemed academic journals, such as Journal of Quantitative Economics and Indian Journal of Labour Economics, further reflect his commitment to advancing scholarly discourse. An accomplished author, Dr. D'Souza's latest book, Conceptualizing the Ubiquity of Informal Economy Work, has been widely praised for its insightful exploration of the informal economy and its implications for policy and development.

## TTD conducts first 'annual Vissha Puja'

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

For the first time, TTD conducted Vissha Puja as an annual ritual on the auspicious occasion of Vasanta Panchami on Monday. Vissha Puja, introduced by TTD in the early 90s, used to be performed as a weekly Arjita Seva every Monday in the Srivari temple.

However, the TTD Board has decided to conduct Vasantotsavam, Sahasra Kalasabhishekam and Vissha Puja once a year as per the suggestions of Jeeyangars, Archakas and Agama Pundits, to prevent any damage of the ancient Utsava Murtis and protect them for future generations.

As per the decision, the annual

Vissha Puja was celebrated on the occasion of Vasanta Panchami at Kalyana Mandapam of Srivari Temple on Monday. The priests worshipped Srivevi Bhudevi Sameta Sri Malayappa Swamy and performed special puja.

Starting with Punyahavachanam, various other rituals were performed including Chaturdasa Kalasa Avahanam, and it concluded with Purnahuti.

Henceforth, TTD will conduct the Vissha Puja on the auspicious day of Vasanta Panchami every year.

TTD Additional EO Ch Venkaiah Chowdary, Deputy EO Lokanatham and other officials were present.



## 1,100-year-old Rastrakuta sculptures lie in utter neglect

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Beautiful life-size sculptures of the Rastrakuta period (ninth century CE) were found lying in bushes in a state of utter neglect at Nayakallu in Kalluru mandal, Kurnool district, said Dr E Sivanagi Reddy, archae-

ologist and CEO, Pleach India Foundation.

He visited the village on Sunday as part of the awareness programme 'Preserve Heritage for Posterity' launched by Pleach India to sensitise the villagers on the historical significance of artefacts in neglect

and the need to protect them for future generations. They noticed a good number of sculptures on the outskirts of the village.

The sculptures of Siva Dwarapalaka, Mahishasura Mardini, and Nandi fashioned in typical Rastrakuta style of art,

reflecting the artistic dexterity and skills of the artisans, are waiting for caring hands. Dr Reddy added that there are two temples built in Kadamba Nagara style of architecture located in the fields, and a beautiful black basalt Nandi sculpture amidst the thickly

grown thorny bushes.

After sensitising the local people on how to safeguard these antiquities, Sivanagi Reddy made an appeal to shift the sculptures to inside the village and erect them on pedestals with proper labelling for the benefit of the future generations.



# Sayyad Tahaseen elected Deputy Mayor of Nellore

PNS ■ NELLORE

Sayyad Tahaseen was elected as the Deputy Mayor of Nellore Municipal Corporation on Monday.

She was elected to the Municipal Corporation from the 48th division. The Deputy Mayor election was held at the Corporation office, with Joint Collector K. Kartik acting as the presiding officer. Independent candidate Tahaseen defeated her rival Sk. Karimullah by 12 votes.

YSRCP Corporators Bobbala Srinivas Yadav and Veluru Umamahesh proposed the name of Sk. Karimullah for the Deputy Mayor post. Tahaseen secured 41 votes, while her rival Sk. Karimullah managed to get only 12 votes. Presiding Officer K. Kartik officially declared Sayyad Tahaseen as the elected Deputy Mayor.

Speaking on the occasion, the newly elected Deputy Mayor, Sayyad Tahaseen, stated that she would work towards the development of the city and ensure better civic amenities. She assured that she



would always be accessible to the public and address their grievances. MLA Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy expressed confidence in winning 54 divisions in the upcoming municipal corporation elections in Nellore.

After her election as Deputy Mayor, Tahaseen met Municipal

Administration Minister P. Narayana and Endowments Minister Anam Ramanarayana Reddy to thank them for their support. MLAs Kotamreddy Sridhar Reddy and Daggumati Krishna Reddy congratulated her on her victory.

Meanwhile, MLC Parvatareddy Chandrasekhar Reddy alleged that

the Deputy Mayor election was conducted in an undemocratic manner. He announced that the YSRCP would approach the court to challenge the election results. He further claimed that voting was conducted twice and criticised that the winning candidate was unable to specify which political party she belonged to.

# Umamaheswar Rao, Durga Bhavani elected Deputy Mayors

PNS ■ ELURU

Pappu Umamaheswar Rao and Vandana Durga Bhavani were unanimously elected as Deputy Mayors of Eluru Municipal Corporation on Monday. Umamaheswar Rao represents the 30th division, while Durga Bhavani represents the 47th division.

The election for the Deputy Mayors was held at the Municipal Corporation conference hall, with Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy serving as the presiding officer. A total of 30 municipal corporators participated in the election.

Bhimavaram Hemasundari, the corporator from the 36th division, proposed Umamaheswar Rao's name for the post of Deputy Mayor, while Karri Srinivasa Rao, the corporator from the 12th division, proposed Durga Bhavani for the second Deputy Mayor post.

Since no other corporator filed a nomination for the position, Umamaheswar Rao and Durga Bhavani were declared elected unopposed by Joint Collector Dhatri Reddy. MLA Badeti Radhakrishnaiah and Mayor Sk. Nurjahan extended their congratulations to the newly elected Deputy Mayors.



# Village celebrates first-ever electricity supply

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Residents of Neelabandha, a remote tribal village in Anakapalle district, are celebrating a momentous occasion: the arrival of electricity for the first time. This development aligns with District Collector Vijaya Krishnan's vision to provide essential amenities, including roads and basic infrastructure, to every remote village in the district. The Electricity Department successfully energised Neelabandha, located in Arla panchayat, Rolugunta mandal.

Villagers expressed immense joy and gratitude as they witnessed the electrification of their village, which had previously lived in darkness. Anakapalle Circle SE Arigugu Prasad shared details of the initiative, explaining that under the



guidance of District Collector Vijaya Krishnan, and on the orders of APEPDCL CMD Imadi Prithvi Tej, electricity has been extended to tribal settlements in remote areas. These areas, previously lacking basic electricity access, now have free electricity connections for homes.

The electrification project faced significant challenges, particularly in Neelabandha. The village, home to 20 people in four families, migrated from Pitruddada village in Rolugunta mandal about a decade ago and lacks road access. This required the arduous transportation of electricity poles for six kilometres to establish the network. Despite these obstacles, the dedicated team succeeded in bringing power to the village, with each household receiving free electricity connections.

Furthermore, electricity has also been extended to the Sompurambanda settlements in Cheemalapadu panchayat, located in the Ravikamatham section, further contributing to the development of remote areas in the district.

# Learn self-defense techniques, WG Collector tells girls

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has urged girls to learn self-defense techniques to protect themselves and build confidence.

Inaugurating the Aadapillala Atmarakshna programme at Venugopala Swamy High School in Neggipudi village, Penumantra mandal, the Collector announced that the Rani Lakshmbai Self-Defense Pre-training programme would be conducted in all schools across the district for 32 days, from today until March 15. The training will be held for one hour a day, over 20 weekdays, to ensure every girl has the opportunity to participate. Fifty karate instructors from the Rupesh Welfare



Society have been assigned to implement the programme.

Emphasizing the initiative's objectives, the Collector said it aims to empower girls, enhance their confidence, and raise awareness about self-defense. Designed to be transforma-

the, the training will equip girls with skills in Judo, Taekwondo, and Karate, while also fostering a sense of safety, resilience, and awareness.

"This programme goes beyond physical self-defense. It seeks to instill mental strength, discipline,

and the ability to face challenges independently," she stated.

Highlighting the programme's reach, she noted that it would benefit nearly 25,000 girls from Classes 6 to 9, spanning 80 upper primary schools and 230 high schools across West Godavari district.

Encouraging girls to stay strong, both physically and mentally, the Collector advised them to continue their education without interruption until they turn 18, limit screen time on mobile phones and tablets, and focus on their studies while understanding the value of time.

The event was attended by District Educational Officer (DEO) E. Narayana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan APC P. Shyam Sundar, Headmaster Ch. China Suryanarayana Reddy, and other officials.

# Officials directed to initiate operation of sand reaches

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prashanthi has instructed officials to take necessary steps to commence operations at sand reaches located along the riverbanks.

A district-level sand committee meeting was held on Monday evening under the chairmanship of Collector Prashanthi. Addressing the meeting, she stated that out of the designated capacity of 10,39,350 metric tonnes of sand in 15 open sand reaches across the district, 8,62,719 metric tonnes are currently available.

She further informed that 4.20 lakh metric tonnes of sand are in



storage across coastal areas. Officials briefed the Collector that the public hearing for

57,82,950 metric tonnes, as part of the legal clearance process, is set to be completed by February 13.

She emphasised that efforts should be made to expedite the legal process in parallel while adhering to guidelines.

The committee directed that the draft mining plan for Kadiyam, Peravali, and Nidadavolu be approved and that the six key points proposed by the Eluru Mines Officer be given priority.

Discussions were also held on guidelines and permissions for sand reaches both within and beyond coastal areas. District Joint Collector S. Chinna Ramudu, RDO R. Krishna Nayak, AD Mines D. Phani Bhushan Reddy, and other officials participated in the meeting.

# TDP clinches Hindupur municipality

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has clinched the Hindupur municipality. Sixth ward councillor Ramesh was elected Hindupur municipal chairman in the election held on Monday. Rameh was polled 23 votes out of the 40 councillors. YSRCP candidate Lakshi secured only 14 votes. The councillors did not turn out for voting today. Hindupur MLA N Balakrishna and MP Parthasarathi also took part in the voting for the municipal chairman.



# 'Drugs will devastate society'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Police Commissioner SV Rajasekhar Babu has advised students to stay away from drugs, emphasising that drug use not only harms individuals but also devastates society as a whole. He reported that ganja cultivation in the North Coastal districts has decreased to 100 acres from 9,000 acres since the establishment of the Eagle Wing initiative. He also mentioned that the Police Department is using drones to detect illegal ganja cultivation.

# 13 KG GANJA SEIZED, 2 PEDDLERS ARRESTED

PNS ■ TIRUPATI



The police seized 13 kg of ganja and arrested two peddlers at Pakala railway station.

Pakala CI Sudharan Prasad told the media that on a tip off a police team conducted a raid at the railway station and arrested two drug peddlers Vishnu Mohan Reddy and Pandiyan.

They were taking the 13 KGs cannabis to Madurai in Tamil Nadu from Vijayawada in a train. The police seized 13 kg of ganja and two mobile phones from the peddlers. The two drug peddlers were produced before the media.

# 2 ROBBERS ARRESTED, BOOTY RECOVERED

PNS ■ TIRUPATI



The police have arrested two notorious robbers and recovered gold jewellery, two auto rickshaws, and two mobile phones.

CI Murali Mohan informed the media on Monday that a robbery occurred on the Alipiri-Cherlopalli road near the Science Centre on January 12.

The victim, Suresh Babu, had lodged a complaint at the West Police Station. A case was registered, and special teams were formed to apprehend the robbers. Following their investigation, the police team successfully apprehended the two criminals, identified as Shivaji and Kiran Chenna Reddy.

The police recovered 24 grams of gold jewellery, two auto rickshaws, and two mobile phones from the arrested robbers were presented before the media.

# Cong manipulated BC population figures: Kavitha

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



BRS MLC Kavitha has accused the Congress Government of misrepresenting the population figures of Backward Classes (BC) in Telangana. She asked how the BC population could have declined compared to previous estimates and demanded that the state government introduce a Bill in the Assembly to increase BC reservations instead of holding mere discussions.

Addressing a press conference in Karimnagar on Monday, Kavitha said, "Rahul Gandhi coined the slogan 'As much as we are, that much is our share.' Going by that, with 46.3 per cent BCs and 10 per cent BC Muslims, the total BC reservation should be 56 per cent. Why is Rahul Gandhi, who travels across the country talking about the Constitution, backing out when it comes to BCs?"

During her visit to Peddapalli district, Kavitha paid floral tributes at social reformer Mahatma Jyotirao Phule's statue in Karimnagar.

Later, addressing the media, she pointed out the discrepancies in the population surveys conducted over the years.

"According to the 2011 Census, Telangana had 83 lakh households and a population of 3.5 crore. The comprehensive survey conducted under KCR in 2014

showed 1.03 crore households and 3.68 crore people. The latest survey by the Congress Government claims 1.15 crore households and 3.7 crore people. If 20 lakh new houses were added between 2011 and 2014, logically, in the 10 years from 2014 to 2024, around 60 lakh new families should have been added. This means the BC population should be between 50 to 52 per cent. However, the Congress government has reduced it to 46.2 per cent. Can Chief Minister Revanthy Reddy put his hand on his heart and say these figures are correct?" she asked.

# SEIL wins four prestigious BBS awards

PNS ■ NELLORE

SEIL Energy India Limited (SEIL), One of the largest independent power producers (IPP) in India has announced that it has received four prestigious BBS Awards from BESAFE (Forum of Behavioral Safety).

The awards were presented in Mumbai at the 9th Annual National BBS Conference jointly organized with IIM - Mumbai. The winning awards include the 'Platinum Benchmarking Award' for SEIL for the second consecutive year and the 'Leadership Award' for our CEO Mr. Raghav Trivedi for his outstanding efforts and enthusiasm in driving the BBS initiative. Under his lead-



ership, the company has made significant strides in fostering a safety-first culture.

Additionally, Mr. Niji James,

AGM - Operations, and Mr. J. Venkata Ramji, Senior Engineer - Operations, received the Best BBS Observer Awards for their excep-

tional contributions to the company's safety initiatives.

"We are delighted to receive this prestigious Platinum bench-

marking award for the second consecutive year," said Mr. Raghav Trivedi on Monday. "This recognition is a testament to our team's tireless efforts to prioritize safety and well-being. We remain committed to our Zero Harm objectives and will continue to strive for excellence in all aspects of our operations," he added.

This prestigious recognition is a testament to SEIL Energy India Limited's unwavering commitment to implementing Behaviour Based Safety (BBS) practices at its supercritical power generation complex in Nellore. The company's relentless pursuit of a Zero Harm objective has yielded remarkable results, earning it this esteemed award.





ACROSS THE STATES



Delhi HC summons Shashi Tharoor in defamation case

The Delhi High Court on Monday summoned Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on a defamation plea filed by BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar. Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav posted the matter on April 28. "Let the plaintiff be registered as a suit. Issue summons to the defendant (Tharoor). List before the joint registrar on April 28," said the court. In his suit, Chandrasekhar claimed Tharoor made false and defamatory statements at various public fora in April, 2024 that severely damaged his professional and personal reputation. Chandrasekhar has sought to restrain Tharoor from making any defamatory statements. While seeking a public apology, he sought Rs 10 crore in damages from Tharoor for allegedly defaming and tarnishing his reputation. The BJP leader filed the defamation case over Tharoor's purported statements during an interview to a television channel where the latter allegedly said Chandrasekhar offered money to voters during 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The BJP politician is represented by law firm Karanjawala



Duke of Edinburgh visits British-era bunker in Mumbai

The Duke of Edinburgh Prince Edward visited a British-era bunker at Raj Bhavan in Mumbai, an official said on Monday. The bunker is spread over 15,000 square feet and has 13 rooms. After it was discovered in 2016, restoration was carried out and it was converted into a museum, Raj Bhavan Public Relations Officer Umesh Kashikar said. The duke visited the bunker and also met Maharashtra Governor C P Radhakrishnan on Sunday. He was also shown some of the historically significant sites in Raj Bhavan premises. Prince Edward, the youngest son of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the youngest sibling of King Charles III, started the visit with the Raj Bhavan lawn, which overlooks the sea. He was informed that the lawn was the venue for the reception hosted in honour of then Prince of Wales, his brother Charles in 1980. Prince Edward later visited the 'Jai Lakshmi' VIP guest house usually reserved for the President and the Prime Minister of India.



Ex-serviceman killed, wife and niece injured in J&K

In the first non-combatant killing of the year, terrorists shot dead an ex-serviceman and injured his wife and 13-year-old niece in an attack in South Kashmir's Kulgam district on Monday, officials said here. Details so far indicate that two terrorists armed with pistols arrived at the residence of Manzoor Ahmad Wagay in Beehi Bagh, approximately 10 kilometers from the district headquarters, and opened fire on his family members, which included his wife and niece. According to initial statements recorded by police and army officials, Wagay, a former member of the Territorial Army, sustained additional bullet wounds while attempting to protect his niece. The terrorists, believed to be from banned Lashkar-e-Taiba, fired upon Wagay as he returned home, and all three victims were rushed to a nearby hospital, where Wagay succumbed to injuries. Police have taken cognizance of the incident and initiated an investigation into the attack. The incident marks the first attack on a civilian this year as Wagay had retired from the Territorial Army in 2021. Family members said that after his military service.

'Women-led startups making global mark'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Monday said some of the women-led startups from India are making a global mark. Not only this, he said, even in difficult sectors like space, women-led projects have been hailed worldwide and cited the example of India's solar mission "Aditya L1" which is led by Nigar Shaji who became known as ISRO's "Sunny Lady".

"Women-led development is a key priority of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's governance agenda with the vision that women-led startups will place India on the global map in the years to come and our women entrepreneurs have the potential to realise that goal," said Singh, the Minister of State for Personnel.

Speaking to a delegation of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry-Ladies Organisation (FICCI-FLO), led by its YFLO (Young FICCI Ladies Organisation) Delhi President Payal Kanodia, the minister said Modi has laid out the vision of Indian startups lead-



ing the global innovation race, with women-led businesses at the forefront across sectors. He said that from 2014 onwards, women's empowerment has got a practical meaning with many of the welfare schemes, including entrepreneurship-promoting schemes like PM MUDRA and PM Vishwakarma, largely benefiting the women workforce.

Singh said, women entrepreneurship is being promoted in a big way under the leadership of Modi. He said the paradigm shift in women's empowerment

has enabled womenfolk to increasingly assume leadership roles in every sphere of life and every profession, moving away from a long-held participatory role. Singh said the Modi government has taken several revolutionary steps to provide employment avenues to its youth populace by launching various schemes and revolutionising the work culture in the country.

The government did this by combining the best features of Indian tradition with modernity, keeping in view the diversity of the country, Singh added.



SC junks plea for recalling TN Governor

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea seeking directions to recall Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi for walking out of the legislative assembly without delivering the customary address.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar was hearing a plea filed by C R Jaya Sukin who alleged that the Governor "violated the entire Constitution" and "insulted the people of Tamil Nadu" by abruptly leaving the Assembly session. The governor on January 6 exited the assembly session without delivering the customary address, reportedly in protest against the Tamil Nadu state anthem being played instead of the national anthem at the start of the proceedings.

The governor called it "disrespect" to the Constitution and the national anthem. The petitioner sought directions to the President of India to recall the Governor, citing Article 156 of the Constitution, which states that a Governor holds office at the pleasure of the President.

2020 DELHI RIOTS

Court acquits 6, raises doubt over prosecution's case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has acquitted six persons in a 2020 Delhi riots case, raising doubts over the testimony of two key police witnesses regarding identifying the accused.

Additional sessions judge Pulastya Pramachala was hearing the case registered by Gokalpuri Police Station against the accused persons.

According to the prosecution, the six accused were part of a riotous mob that committed arson, theft and mischief by fire or explosives across various properties and shops in Gokalpuri on February 25, 2020.

In an order dated January 24, the court said the prosecution relied upon two key prosecution witnesses, assistant sub-inspectors, Vanvir and Jahangir, to establish the identity of the accused persons but they were examined only in December 2020.

"This delay in examining these two police officials, who were posted in the same police station, certainly casts doubt over the veracity of the prosecution's case. The investigating officer (IO) did not tender any reason for such delay in recording the statement of these witnesses," it said.

The court noted the statements of both the police offi-



cial about being the beat officers of the locality and that they knew the accused persons before the riots.

"If they knew the names of the accused persons and if they had seen these persons in the mob of rioters, then there was no need and occasion for them to identify the accused persons in any video," it said.

Their testimonies, however, referred to identifying accused persons in a video, which Vanvir said, did not pertain to the incidents, the court said.

The court said Jahangir could not identify three accused persons in the court. "I do not find it appropriate to rely upon the evidence of PW 16 and PW 18, to assume participation of accused persons in the incidents in question," it said.

It acquitted the six accused persons, Arjun, Gopal, Dharamveer, Umesh, Dheeraj and Manish, saying the charges against them were not proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

Now, visually challenged can read Indian Constitution

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Governor of Karnataka Thawar Chand Gehlot launched on Monday a Braille-enabled version of the Indian Constitution, to mark 75 years of the Constitution.

The project was done in collaboration with Sankara Eye Hospital Bengaluru and CII Young Indians (YI) Bengaluru. "This initiative aims to empower those who



are blind or have low vision by enabling them to read and understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens," said Dr Kaushik Murali, President of Medical

Administration, Quality & Education at Sankara Eye Foundation India, in a press statement issued on Monday.

The Braille version will be distributed to key institutions, ensuring wider access, he added. Darshan Mutha, National Chair of Accessibility at CII Young Indians, said the initiative aims to raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity and create a more accessible world for all.

DELHI POLLS

Win at least 55 seats in Delhi: Kejriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday asserted his party will win 55 out of the 70 seats in the Delhi assembly, and reiterated his claim the BJP will discontinue all free schemes in the city if it were to come to power.

In a post in Hindi on social media platform X, Kejriwal said, "According to my estimate, the Aam Aadmi Party is going to get 55 seats but if women put in a lot of effort -- they should go out to vote and also convince the men in their family to vote for the Aam Aadmi Party -- then it can get more than 60 seats."

The party had won 67 seats in the 2025 assembly polls and 62 in the 2020 elections.

On the last day of campaigning for the February 5 polls, Kejriwal addressed a rally in south Delhi's Chhatrapur and urged people to vote for the AAP.

"Let me tell you why you have to vote for the AAP. You gave me a responsibility 10 years ago and I have done a lot of work for Delhi. There is 24-hour electricity supply for the people of Delhi," he said.



High-octane campaign ends

AI spoofs, roadshows set stage for February 5 battle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The high-octane campaigning for the February 5 Delhi Assembly elections concluded at 6 pm on Monday, with big guns from all three major parties holding roadshows, public meetings, padayatras and bike rallies in a final push to sway voters.

As the canvassing wrapped up, the mandatory silence period began, which would remain in effect till voting begins at 7 am on Wednesday.

The Aam Aadmi Party remains confident of securing a third consecutive term, highlighting its governance record and welfare schemes.

On the last day of campaigning on Monday, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, along with

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, addressed three rallies, including one in Kalkaji, to mobilise supporters.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), aiming to reclaim power in Delhi after more than 25 years, held 22 roadshows and rallies across the city. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP President J P Nadda, and several BJP chief ministers were at the forefront of the canvassing on Monday.

The Congress, seeking a revival after failing to win any seats in the last two elections, also intensified its efforts. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi held separate roadshows in Kalkaji and Kasturba Nagar, aiming to regain the party's lost foothold in the capital.

'Only BJP can increase Delhi's pace of development'

3PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said the world today listens to India due to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi while earlier the country was not taken seriously on global platforms.

Participating in a roadshow in Chhatrapur to seek votes for BJP candidate Kartar Singh Tanwar on the last day of campaigning for the Delhi polls, Singh said the ruling AAP has cheated the people and asserted that only the saffron party can increase the



city's pace of development.

"Earlier, India's voice was not taken seriously on global forums but now under the leadership of PM Modi, the world listens to India carefully. India was the 11th largest economy in 2014, now it is at the fifth position and will be at the third spot in the

coming years. "Delhiites have seen that the country is growing rapidly under the leadership of PM Modi ji but due to the AAP government, Delhi has not been able to develop at the same pace. The people of Delhi have been constantly misled and deceived," Singh said.

Exuding confidence that the BJP will get a two-thirds majority in Delhi, Singh said, "The people of Delhi have understood the truth and have made up their mind that the real development of Delhi will happen only after the BJP comes to power".



70 lakh voters added in Maha, alleges Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged that about 70 lakh voters, equivalent to Himachal Pradesh's population, were added to the electoral rolls in Maharashtra between the Lok Sabha and state elections, and demanded the Election Commission furnish data to opposition parties in the state.

Speaking to the Motion of Thanks on the President's address, Gandhi raised several questions over the integrity of the Maharashtra polls held in November last year in which the BJP-led Mahayuti won a massive mandate, and said he was confident the EC would not provide the details sought by the opposition parties.



'Constitution gave us right to speak, not Manu Smriti'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday invoked the Constitution's significance in empowering all sections of society, saying it was the Constitution, not Manu Smriti, that enabled the Finance Minister to present the Budget and gave everyone the right to speak in Parliament.

Leading the Opposition's charge during the debate on the Presidential address in the Rajya Sabha, Kharge launched a sharp attack on the government while warning against "Manuwadi" ideologies.

"It is because of the Constitution the Finance

Minister got the opportunity to present the Budget, not because of Manu Smriti. We have got the right to speak because of the Constitution. Don't listen to Manuwadi," he said.

Kharge was carrying a copy of Manu Smriti to the Upper House and asked if the Chair had read it fully.

The Manu Smriti is an ancient Hindu legal and ethical text attributed to a legendary figure Manu, considered the first man and lawgiver according to Hindu mythology. It contains 2,694 verses across 12 chapters that outline social duties, laws, rituals, and Hindu cosmogony.

REMARKS ON PRESIDENT BJP MPs file privilege notice against Sonia Gandhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A group of BJP MPs from the tribal community filed a breach of privilege notice on Monday against Congress parliamentary party leader Sonia Gandhi for using "derogatory and slanderous" words against President Droupadi Murmu.

Led by BJP leader and former union minister Faggan Singh Kulaste, they met Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and sought disciplinary action against Gandhi, contending her

remarks lowered the dignity of the office of the President.

The notice was filed over Gandhi's remark on President Murmu after her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on Friday. Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were seen discussing the speech on the Parliament complex.

"The poor lady, the President, was getting very tired by the end... she could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi was purportedly heard saying in a video doing the rounds on social media.

2 cr take 'Amrit Snan' without hitch at Maha Kumbh

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

The third 'Amrit Snan' at the Maha Kumbh proceeded smoothly on Monday with lakhs of people taking a dip on the occasion of Basant Panchmi and akharas resuming the grand processions curtailed last week when a stampede killed at least 30 people.

By 4 pm, an estimated two crore devotees had taken the ritual dip at the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati, according to figures shared by the Uttar Pradesh government.

After the stampede that

broke out at the Sangam on 'Mauni Amavasya' (January 29), the state government mounted up safety measures with Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath directing officials to adopt a 'zero-error' approach.

Unlike the Mauni Amavasya dip when crowd pressure built up at the Sangam, many devo-

tees this time took to other ghats instead of jostling for space at the confluence exhibiting self-awareness amid heightened security and crowd con-

trol measures in the Mela area, according to officials.

Chief Minister Adityanath monitored the situation from his official residence in

Lucknow since 3.30 am, they said. DIG (Maha Kumbh) Vaibhav Krishna told PTI Videos that in light of the January 29 stampede, additional force was deployed at all pressure points for crowd management.

"Everything is running smoothly today," he said during a pre-dawn patrolling in the Mela area. Later in the day, the DIG and some other senior officers went around the Mela area on horseback to assess crowd management. "Our crowd management has been good today, which is visible. No untoward incident has been reported from anywhere yet."







## FIRST COLUMN

### A PARENTING GUIDE FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

This new era of parenting demands a thoughtful, proactive approach to raising future-ready generations



SHAINY SHARMA

The 21st century has introduced new challenges and opportunities in parenting. As we raise Generation Alpha (born 2012-2024) and Generation Beta (born 2025-2039), it is crucial to adapt parenting strategies to their digital upbringing, rapid technological advancements and changing societal norms. Ensuring these children grow up healthy, happy and disciplined requires a balance of traditional values and modern approaches.

There is no denying that, unlike previous generations, Generation Alpha and Generation Beta are growing up with easy access to technology, which affects their lifestyle habits. It is of utmost importance that parents/guardians take proactive steps to ensure their children's wellbeing such as providing balanced nutrition such as a diet rich in proteins, vitamins and fibres while limiting processed foods and sugary snacks; reducing screen time and promoting physical activities such as cycling, swimming and team sports to improve fitness and social skills; setting screen-free bedtime routines to ensure quality sleep, which is crucial for the cognitive and emotional development and encouraging children to spend time offline by engaging in hands-on activities like painting, gardening and DIY projects.

Not only these, but in an era of social media influence and fast-paced lifestyles, parents/guardians need to support their children by creating a strong emotional connection; encouraging resilience and a growth mindset; guiding them in reducing digital overload, and engaging them in mindful activities such as yoga, meditation, journaling, or simple relaxation exercises to help them cope with



stress. Above all, what matters the most is the art of discipline. With instant gratification becoming a norm in the digital age, parents/guardians must realise that these generations will grow up in an AI-driven world, requiring skills beyond academics. Parents/Guardians can help prepare them by encouraging critical thinking and creativity and providing problem-solving challenges, STEM activities and artistic outlets.

They can also provide proper guidance on responsible internet usage, cybersecurity and online ethics, followed by developing social skills in a hybrid world. Raising healthy, happy and disciplined Gen Alpha and Gen Beta children requires a thoughtful blend of love, guidance, and adaptability. Parents/Guardians must embrace new-age parenting by integrating digital awareness with traditional values while fostering emotional resilience and self-discipline.

By prioritising wellbeing, education and strong moral foundations, one can ensure these generations grow into responsible, fulfilled, and future-ready individuals. Also, by providing proper nutrition, encouraging physical and mental wellbeing, fostering social skills, and setting positive examples, parents/guardians can create an environment where children thrive. It is aptly said that a happy and healthy child is not just the result of luck but of consistent efforts, care and understanding from those who nurture them.

*(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)*

## The impact of tariffs: Global shifts and the US dilemma



ATUL SEHGAL

From China's rapid economic ascent to the stagnation facing developed nations, trade tariffs have profound effects, influencing international trade



The present world is witnessing a situation of several impending tariffs on international trade. Tariffs in international trade are an instrument to reduce imports from specific countries and to promote indigenous production of goods and services. Countries grow rich by producing and selling value-added goods and services. The buyers of these goods and services can be within the country or outside. Obviously, more buyers are outside than inside and for this reason, exports hold the prime key to countries' enrichment.

The newly installed government in the USA is proposing to impose trade tariffs on several countries ostensibly to reduce the burden of taxes on the domestic population and promote indigenous manufacturing of goods. For any country, it is the balance of trade i.e. the excess of exports over imports that determines its buying capacity in the international market as well as the strength of its monetary currency vis-a-vis the international ruling currency US Dollar. This is true of every country except the USA because its currency is not pegged to gold whereas other currencies are. For this reason, we see how post World War 2 (1939-1945), Japan and Germany developed fast a big indigenous manufacturing capability based on modern technologies and through extensive exports of valued added industrial goods like machinery, automobiles and other technological products.

The currencies of these countries gradually strengthened and a stage was reached when their products became price uncompetitive in exports. For example, the Japanese Yen which was equivalent to approximately 0.01 USD in the year 1994 is now traded for USD 0.0064 in 2025. This was true of most of the developed countries at that time (1990 to 2000). The result was that diminishing price competitiveness in exports led to an industrial and economic decline. This led to the consti-



THE CASE OF THE USA IS TYPICAL AND DIFFERENT. IT HAS BEEN EXPORTING HIGH-TECHNOLOGY GOODS AND LIBERALLY IMPORTING LOW-END CONSUMER GOODS FOR A LONG PERIOD

tution of WTO and GATT through which this stagnation hit the economies of the developed countries that sought a revival of high trade and growth. However, the advent of China and its rapid rise on the world economic horizon changed the scenario dramatically and rather unexpectedly. The controlled tariff regime and its regulation under the GATT were greatly leveraged by China through a unique model of economic growth based on high borrowing, mega-scale production and export focus.

While all the above was going on, even the Chinese economic model began to falter because it was unsustainable, being heavily debt and export-dependent. The stagnating economies of Europe and many other countries sought to revive growth through tariffs. Tariffs are basically import duties enabling higher costs of landed goods imported from specific countries. The agreed tariffs under GATT helped the developed countries to grow, albeit to a small degree because of the limitations imposed by demographic factors and technological obsolescence, besides the economic blizzard unleashed by China.

The result of the above developments was that in the last 5-10 years, countries have become increasingly protective and insular in their trade practices and have started putting tariff barriers to protect and bolster their domestic industries.

The case of the USA is typical and different. It has been exporting high-technology goods and liberally importing low-end consumer goods for a long period. But high technology goods including arms and ammunition export could not keep pace with its requirements due to ever-changing secu-

rency scenarios, absorption or development of high technology in countries like India, Brazil and South Africa. This has led to the debt of the USA touching an astronomically high figure of 33 trillion USD. This is long-term unsustainable. With the growth of domestic technologies and production facilities in the erstwhile third-world countries, of which India is a prime example, export prospects of US-made products have fallen considerably.

This is also due to the emergence of Chinese multinational companies which are giving a serious challenge to the existing MNCs in Europe and the USA. But the tariff war by the USA on specific countries of the world is not going to be a panacea for its impending economic ills. Its population will have to be made more productive.

With a very high cost of production due to the high cost of services and labour, the US economy is presently not in a favourable position to compete for international exports of lower-end consumer goods in general. Even for high technology goods like warfare and space technology products, it cannot today compete with emerging industrial economies like China and India. What is happening to the USA is quite opposite to what happened to Japan and Germany in the late nineties and thereafter. The continuing strengthening of the USD is due to the flight of the dollar from various countries to the USA by the operations of FIs and FIIs. Excess of money supply in the US economy will lead to runaway inflation which will further impact adversely its middle and lower class population. The imposition of high tariffs on imported goods will have the same effect.

If the USA chooses to abolish income tax alongside import tariff increase, it could very well end up with huge domestic fiscal deficits which will have to be met by debt or currency printing. Thus what the present US government contemplates could well land it into an economic inflationary spiral.

This situation will be exactly a more intense version of what the government desires to remedy presently. It could be almost something like falling from the frying pan into the fire. The possibility of all this happening becomes pronounced because of the coming together of BRICS nations and the usage of parallel currencies for international trade. Also, the fact that many countries could well retaliate with counter-tariffs on the USA after the US imposed tariffs strengthens further the above possibility.

Given this, the best course of action for the US would be to link once again its currency with gold — a process of reversal of what was done in 1971. This will lend stability and sustainability to the US economy and also to the global economy. In general, the matter of trade tariffs is best left to individual countries, looking at their resources and economic circumstances.

Global countries have always been historically interdependent because of their specific areas of strengths and weaknesses in resources. The naturally existing areas of resource abundance and deficiency will remain. However social and political factors are dynamic and will always impinge on policy pronouncements. The prudent and perseverant will win even in this arena.

*(The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)*

## The colours of identity: Unraveling the layers of race, bias and belonging

Among the many facets of identity, skin colour remains one of the most prominent yet divisive markers of difference

Variety. A singular word that carries depth, stretching across every horizon within our periphery. Everything, whether tangible or intangible, holds a streak of diversity, existing in more than just one form. The human race is the finest testament to this theory, embodying an expansive fluctuation of diversity in ways unparalleled. No two humans are exactly the same, no matter the similarity. From the obvious—gender, ethnicity, nationality—to the microscopic strands of DNA, variety defines existence.

Among the many dimensions of human diversity, skin color stands as one of the most visible yet most divisive. The spectrum of human skin spans hues of black, brown, white, and even shades of yellow,



ALINA HUSSAIN

forming a palette that should symbolise coexistence. However, rather than being embraced as a natural manifestation of diversity, this spectrum has historically been distorted into a hierarchy. The darker shades, unfairly positioned at the bottom, contrast starkly with the privileges afforded to the lighter tones at the top. This stratification of color has shaped life experi-

ences, often determining opportunities, treatment, and social perceptions. India, with its rich cultural and genetic diversity, encapsulates nearly the entire range of this scale. To the global eye, Indians and their South Asian neighbours fall in the middle—brown. This stain of brownness seeps beyond national borders, appearing across continents where South Asians have migrated and settled. However, unlike colors on a painter's palette, which blend to create new shades, human societies tend to resist seamless integration. Instead, racial identities remain dissonant, sometimes even immiscible. The concept of being "white-washed" is one such manifestation of this resistance—an observation aimed at those who adopt

Western customs, implying a dilution of their native culture under the influence of whiteness.

South Asians, however, have long held a deep connection to their cultural roots. Even in foreign lands, communities of brown-skinned individuals tend to cluster together, finding comfort and belonging among their own. This natural act of unity transcends national identities, allowing individuals from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to identify simply as brown in predominantly white societies. Migration dissolves political boundaries, fostering a sense of kinship rooted in shared experiences rather than nationality.

The primary reason for South Asian migration to the West



has historically been the pursuit of a better livelihood. The roots of this movement can be traced back to 19th-century colonisation, where white Europeans established themselves as the superior race while relegating the browns and blacks to a lower status. This racial hierarchy was not only imposed but deeply internalised, embedding itself into the psyche of societies across generations. The consequences of this structured superiority

continue to persist, subtly influencing perceptions and opportunities to this day. Though the era of overt, institutionalised racial discrimination has passed, its remnants linger. Silent racism manifests in subtle yet persistent ways—being followed in a store, being presumed guilty before proven innocent, or being typecast into stereotypes like "smelly" or "uncivilised."

The unspoken biases that people of color endure may be so ingrained in social interactions that they sometimes question whether their experiences of discrimination are real or imagined. But just because racism has grown quieter does not mean it has disappeared. At times, however, this silence gives way to overt expressions of prejudice. The question

then arises: can racism be unlearned? Can deep-seated biases, cultivated over centuries, be eradicated? Some argue that racism is built on a foundation of illusion—a false construct designed to uphold power structures rather than any scientific or logical basis. Commerce, globalisation and education might pave the way toward dismantling these biases, but the journey is long and uncertain.

Yet racism is not a one-way street. Just as people of color face discrimination in white-majority societies, white individuals experience racism in South Asian countries as well. Whether rooted in resentment from the colonial past, an ingrained inferiority complex, or sheer ignorance, racism in India and other parts of the

region is equally loud and apparent. This internal bias is a lingering vestige of colonial influence, stubborn and deeply embedded in the collective consciousness.

Ultimately, our skin color is an inescapable part of our identity. But as history has shown, social constructs evolve. Just as oppression once seemed an immutable reality but has gradually been challenged and deconstructed, so too can racial prejudices fade with time. While the road to a world free of color-based biases is long, there remains a glimmer of hope—a strip of rainbow amidst the storm, promising a better, more inclusive tomorrow.

*(The writer is a law student and a freelance writer; views are personal)*





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Quest for clean energy

With a strong financial backing, the country is poised to make nuclear power a cornerstone of its energy mix

As India continues its journey toward energy transition and sustainability, the role of nuclear power has become increasingly vital. The Union Budget 2025-26, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, earmarked Rs 20,000 crore for the Nuclear Energy Mission, aiming to significantly enhance India's nuclear energy capacity. This ambitious initiative is set to propel India towards achieving at least 100 GW of nuclear energy capacity by 2047, a significant leap from the current 8 GW. Presently, nuclear energy constitutes less than 2 per cent of India's total energy mix. With an installed capacity of 8 GW, India's nuclear sector lags behind other energy sources, such as coal, solar and wind. The Modi government is prioritising nuclear power as a stable and clean energy source. The July 2024 Budget had already set the stage for nuclear expansion by highlighting the need to amend the Atomic Energy Act of 1962 to allow private sector participation in nuclear power generation. The 2025-26 Budget builds upon this foundation by reinforcing the push for small modular reactors (SMRs). India's ambitious renewable energy targets include achieving 500 GW of non-fossil fuel energy capacity by 2030. While solar and wind energy play a crucial role in this mix, they are subject to weather conditions and require large-scale energy storage solutions. Nuclear energy, on the other hand, provides continuous, low-carbon power without the intermittency issues of renewables. SMRs, with a capacity of up to 300 MW, offer distinct advantages over conventional nuclear reactors. Their modular design allows for quicker assembly, reduced costs and enhanced safety features. By promoting indigenously developed SMRs, India aims to increase its self-reliance in nuclear technology and reduce dependency on foreign nations. The allocation of Rs 20,000 crore under the Nuclear Energy Mission signals a clear intent to boost nuclear power generation. This funding will support research and development in indigenous nuclear technologies, particularly SMRs. Infrastructure development will be a key focus, with plans to set up at least five SMRs by 2033 as part of a long-term nuclear expansion plan. Despite its benefits, nuclear energy in India faces several challenges. Regulatory barriers exist due to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, which currently limit private sector involvement and require amendments. Public concerns on safety remain a significant issue, as nuclear accidents worldwide have created scepticism, necessitating stringent safety protocols. Technological monopolies present another challenge, as nuclear technology is concentrated among a few global players, making domestic capacity-building initiatives essential. But a push for nuclear energy is the need of the hours. It will reduce country's carbon footprint, enhance energy security, and meet its growing electricity demands sustainably.



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## PICTALK



People fly kites at the annual Basant Panchmi festival in Amritsar

# Budget 2025: A game changer for MSMEs and startups



MANISH SINGHAL

With focus on financial accessibility, technology and market linkages, the budget will strengthen India's startup ecosystem and boost employment

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of India's economic structure, contributing nearly 30 per cent to GDP, 45 per cent to our exports and generating employment for over 200 millions. The budget for 2025-26 holds much promise for the 5.7 crore MSMEs in India. As India chases its 'Viksit Bharat' dream, Agriculture, the MSME sector, Investment and Exports have been identified as the key engines for driving growth. MSMEs account for about 27 per cent of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), positioning themselves as the backbone of economic activity and growth.

Ranging from small-scale artisans and local service providers to growing businesses across rural and urban India, MSMEs are diverse and significantly contribute to industrial output and innovation in India. In line with the government's recognition of MSMEs as the 'second engine' of economic expansion, the 2025-26 Budget introduces key reforms to enhance financial accessibility, technological adoption, and market linkages. A notable step was the enhancement of the credit guarantee cover for MSMEs from Rs 5 crores to Rs 10 crores, leading to additional credit of Rs 1.5 lakh crore over the next 5 years. By enhancing the investment and turnover limits, the 20.09 million registered MSMEs (19.4 million micro-enterprises, 5,54,000 small enterprises and 52,000 medium enterprises) now have greater and easier access to capital for technological upgradation and to build efficiencies. Traditionally, MSMEs have battled limited access to affordable and timely credit, inadequate infrastructure, and complex regulations. The increased guarantee cover addresses one of the major pain points for MSMEs and start-ups while the budget's continued emphasis on skilling promises an ongoing supply of skilled labour. As of January 2025, India has over 159,000 recognised startups, securing its place as the



world's third-largest startup ecosystem. The special funding options for start-ups and first-time entrepreneurs in the budget are likely to encourage more individuals to start businesses, innovate and generate employment. In this regard, to additional Rs 10,000 crore Fund of Funds Scheme (FFS) and the proposed Deep Tech Fund will provide crucial capital for startups, particularly in AI, Climate Tech, and Agri Tech. Enhanced MSME support and policies will improve the ease of doing business and further accelerate growth for future entrepreneurs. The new simplified taxation and regulatory framework will attract private capital, which in turn will further accelerate growth. Many MSMEs are labour-intensive. Key industries like leather, and textiles are major employment generators. The focus on improving productivity and quality of the leather industry goods through Government schemes that support design, machinery etc will positively impact the sector's export potential and generate employment too. With the Government's aim to make India a global hub for toys, MSMEs can consider setting up units in identified clusters to create an ecosystem that manufactures world-class toys while pro-

THE DIRECT TAX BENEFITS PROVIDED IN THE BUDGET WILL BOLSTER CONSUMPTION-LED DEMAND THROUGH ENHANCED DISPOSABLE INCOMES IN THE HANDS OF TAXPAYERS. THIS WILL FURTHER GIVE IMPETUS TO MSME PRODUCTION AND ENHANCE THEIR OVERALL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

moting Indian toy makers, who can perhaps use the infrastructure in these clusters to explore overseas markets. Food processing is another sector that has received attention in the budget and which can make the MSME sector in our country more robust. It gives our farmers an opportunity to sell their produce, gives businesses an opportunity to add value and also generates employment in the north-east region which needs more economic opportunities. The direct tax benefits provided in the Budget will bolster consumption-led demand through enhanced disposable incomes in the hands of taxpayers. This will further give impetus to MSME production and enhance their overall growth and development. Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy and has rightfully received attention in the budget. Most of our farmers hold small and medium land areas and come under the MSME category. By focusing on 100 districts with low productivity, moderate crop intensity and below-average credit parameters, the farming output will get a boost. Missions promoting pulse cultivation, and fruit and vegetable cultivation are bound to improve agricultural practices, infrastructure,

employment opportunities, access to credit and promote the food processing industry. It will also help develop the backward areas of rural India and curtail urban migration significantly. The substantial increase in credit through Kisan credit cards is also commendable. India's traditional textiles have received a lift with the mission to improve cotton production using sustainable practices and technological support. Not just cotton farmers, but the Indian textile industry has a chance to reclaim its past glory, especially with the political upheaval in neighbouring Bangladesh pushing textile units there into a tailspin. The proposal to transform India Post into a large supply chain across rural India will link up rural artisans to entrepreneurs and markets. While these measures could significantly enhance the growth trajectory of MSMEs and startups, solidifying their role as key drivers of the Indian economy, the need for simpler cross-border payments to enable seamless global trade and include service exports under interest equalisation schemes could further reduce operational hurdles and encourage more units to be set up. (The writer is Secretary General, ASSOCHAM, views are personal)

## The human touch in AI: Why we anthropomorphise machines



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

As AI continues to evolve, it is crucial to maintain clear boundaries between machine intelligence and human cognition

In an era increasingly defined by artificial intelligence (AI), a curious psychological phenomenon has emerged—humans are anthropomorphising AI tools. From virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa to large language models like ChatGPT, people often ascribe human-like emotions, intentions and even personalities to these systems. While this tendency may seem benign or even endearing, it has profound implications for society, ethics, and the way we perceive technology. By giving AI tools human-like names, voices and personalities, developers create a sense of familiarity and comfort. For instance, when Alexa responds with a cheerful "Hello!" or when ChatGPT uses conversational language to explain complex topics, users are more likely to feel at ease. This human-like interaction fosters trust, making people more willing to rely on AI for tasks ranging from scheduling appointments to providing emotional support. A lot of evidence points to psychological causes for this behaviour. As a species, we have an innate propensity to



attribute human characteristics to things that do not exist. Even inanimate things, like animals and objects, can have feelings and purposes. The advent of AI has amplified this tendency to an unprecedented degree by creating tools that can engage in decision-making, interactive communication and natural language processing in ways that are reminiscent of humans. Incorporating human-like characteristics into AI systems takes advantage of this natural propensity, making them appear more relatable and trustworthy. While the benefits of anthropomorphising AI are evident, the practice is not without its pitfalls. When AI tools are designed to mimic human behaviour too closely, users may forget they are interact-

ing with a machine. This blurring of lines can lead to over-reliance, misplaced trust, and even exploitation. For instance, a user might confide deeply personal information to a chatbot, unaware that their data could be stored, analysed, or misused. Deploying AI tools in delicate situations raises even more serious ethical concerns. Take into account the application of AI in counselling and treatment. Although a chatbot designed to mimic human behaviour can offer some assistance, it can't replace a human expert when it comes to empathy and moral reasoning. Users' potential misunderstanding of AI as a substitute for human therapists highlights the importance of openness and limits. The ethical ramifications of anthropomorphisation need to be considered by regulators and lawmakers as AI becomes more integrated into everyday life. AI tools do not yet possess awareness, emotions, or free will; thus, companies must be forthright in informing consumers of these limits. Another important point is

that AI could be used in a deceptive way. Companies and governments might use human-like AI to make convincing and emotionally engaging connections. AI chatbots used for customer service or political campaigns might quietly sway people's views and choices, which raises concerns about ethics and whether users agree to this influence. While AI can enhance productivity, creativity, and convenience, it is essential to maintain a clear distinction between human intelligence and machine intelligence. Designers should focus on developing efficient and useful AI without encouraging unrealistic emotional attachments. Additionally, individuals should cultivate a healthy scepticism toward AI interactions, recognising the sophisticated abilities yet realising that they are fundamentally non-human. The moment humans forget social interactions and machines start social interactions, it's the end of humanity. (The writer is the Dean-Academic Affairs, at Garden City University; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### AMERICA RAISES TARIFFS

Madam—The United States has decided to increase tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China. This step can be considered significant in enhancing America's self-reliance and strengthening domestic industries. From the American perspective, this policy aims to boost their economy, increase domestic employment opportunities, and reduce the trade deficit. It will lead to a higher demand for local products in the US, thereby strengthening its production capacity.

For India, this situation could open new opportunities. The additional 10 per cent tariff on China may benefit Indian exporters, as it could make Indian products more competitive in the US market. Sectors such as textiles, IT and automobiles are particularly likely to experience growth in exports. Moreover, this decision could also support India's 'Make in India' initiative. If India strengthens its manufacturing capabilities, it could become a better alternative to China for the US. This situation has the potential to further deepen India-US trade relations. Thus, while this policy might pose challenges for some countries, it could create new opportunities for developing nations like India. If India aligns its production and export strategies effectively, it can emerge as a key player in global trade.

R K Jain | Barwani

### TAX RELIEF FOR MIDDLE CLASS

Madam—This year's Union Budget of FY 2025-26 is one of the most special ones among every such Union Budget being presented in Modi's prime ministerial term. One of the welcoming aspects of the budget is its substantial focus on the middle class section of society. So far, in the last decade, the Budget's on the table were serving the two extremes of the society, either the poor class or the rich class. In an attempt to please these extreme sections of society, the government often misses the opportunity to cater to the aspirations of the larger line of society formed by the middle class. The cherry on the cake for the

## Women U-19 win T20 World Cup



India beat South Africa by nine wickets in the 2025 U-19 T20 World Cup final at the Bayuemas Oval in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur. Champions India won all their group-stage matches against West Indies, Malaysia and Sri Lanka before getting the better of Bangladesh and Scotland in the Super Six. In the semifinal, they defeated England to make it six wins on the bounce. Meanwhile, South Africa topped Group C with wins over New Zealand, Samoa, and Nigeria.

In the Super Six round, South Africa defeated Ireland but had to share points with the USA after the game was abandoned due to rain. In the semifinal, they defeated Australia by five wickets to seal their spot in the final. In the final, India defeated South Africa by nine wickets to win the coveted trophy.

Jayanthi S Maniam | Mumbai

middle class people is the increase in the personal income tax slab from erstwhile 7 to 12 lakhs. Just like the government tries every possible attempt to lure the state of Bihar with multiple announcements, similarly, the government's focus on the middle class is welcoming.

The nutritional scheme-like revamping of the poshan abhiyaan, the establishment of five centres of excellence for skilling, Saksham Anganwadi, the National Manufacturing Mission, and so on are among the welcoming initiatives from the side of the government. We hope that the middle-class section of society will happily enjoy the upcoming year with quality improvement on their wellbeing and attentive focus. Hopefully the middle class businessmen as well as the salary class will gain from the welcoming developments announced in the budget 2025-26.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

### SONIA GANDHI DRAWS FLAK

Madam—Apropos of the headlines (February 1) 'Rashtrapati Bhavan Slams the Congress' and PM Modi's scathing attack

on Congress, Sonia Gandhi's unsavoury comments on President Draupadi Murmu have been widely criticised in public. The slangs like 'boring', 'tired', and 'poor lady' demean the supreme constitutional authority and supreme commander of armed forces. In the presidential elections, Congress had opposed President Murmu. Embroiling the president in a political wrangle must be condemned. Congress is setting new records of low politics. The ruckus the Congress party created on Hindenburg reports in the Parliament, media, and demonstrations met the inevitable tragic end when the Hindenburg Research wound up its operations. Nothing could be proved, but of course, it misled the people. Congress has not spared any constitutional authority from the Election Commission, CAG, Supreme Court and now the President herself. Congress has finally written its script of losing credibility as a political party.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## IN BRIEF



### Rupee falls 55 paise to breach 87 level against USD

The rupee plunged 55 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.17 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as global market sentiments were impacted after the Trump administration slapped tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China. Forex traders said the Indian rupee touched a fresh all-time low on a surge in the US Dollar index and weak global markets after Trump Tariffs on Canada Mexico, and China triggered fears of a broad trade war. Donald Trump slapped Canada and Mexico with 25 per cent duties and China with a 10 per cent duty. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 87.00 and touched an intraday low of 87.29 against the American currency during the session. The local unit finally settled at a record closing low of 87.17 (provisional), lower by 55 paise over its previous close. On Friday, the rupee settled flat at 86.62 against the American currency. "We expect the rupee to trade with negative bias on strong US Dollar and FI outflows amid a weak trend in the domestic markets."



### Lupin gets USFDA nod for generic HIC drug

Drug maker Lupin on Monday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market a generic medication for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. The company has received tentative approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for Darunavir, Cobicistat, Emtricitabine, and Tenofovir Alafenamide tablets, the company said in a statement. The company's product has been found to be therapeutically equivalent to the reference listed drug Symtuza tablets, 800 mg/150 mg/200 mg/10 mg of Janssen Products, LP, it added. Lupin is the exclusive first-to-file for this product, it stated. As per the IQVIA MAT December 2024 data, Darunavir, Cobicistat, Emtricitabine, and Tenofovir Alafenamide tablets had estimated annual sales of USD 1,374 million in the US. Shares of Lupin were trading 1.29 per cent down at Rs 2,028.70 apiece on BSE.



### 'US duties provide export opportunities for India'

The imposition of customs duties by the US on imports from China, Canada, and Mexico provides huge export opportunities for India to America, exporters say. The tariffs would affect exports from China, Canada, and Mexico to the US as they would push prices of their goods in the American market, making them less competitive. "The move can create opportunities for Indian exports due to the trade diversion effects as US buyers will seek alternative suppliers to avoid higher costs," Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) Director General Ajay Sahai said. He said the extent of benefits depends on India's production capacity and competitiveness. "The sectors which are likely to gain are electrical machinery and components, auto components, mobile, pharma, chemicals, apparel, fabrics," Sahai added. US President Donald Trump on Saturday signed an order to impose stiff tariffs on imports from Mexico, Canada and China, fulfilling a campaign promise but raising the prospect of increased prices for American consumers.

### Cipla to infuse ZAR 900 mn in South African arm

Pharma major Cipla Ltd on Monday said it will invest about ZAR 900 million (nearly Rs 415 crore) in equity share capital of its South African arm Cipla Medpro South Africa Proprietary Ltd. Cipla Medpro South Africa Proprietary Ltd (CMSA), is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cipla, and is the holding firm for the group operations in South Africa. The group is involved in the manufacturing, marketing, and supply of pharmaceutical products. "The investment will be utilised to reduce intergroup debt and improve the capital structure of CMSA and its subsidiaries," Cipla said in a regulatory filing. The transaction is expected to be completed on or before February 28, 2025 or such other date mutually agreed between the parties, it added.

## Large number of investors coming to explore biz opportunities: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A large contingent of investors from four European nation bloc EFTA and Israel are visiting India next week to explore business opportunities, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Visit of more than 100 investors from EFTA member countries assumes significance as it has signed a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with India on March 10, 2024.

Under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates, and cut and polished diamonds at lower or



zero duties. The pact is expected to come into force by the end of this year.

Goyal said EFTA representatives are coming with over 100 investors. More than 200 investors are expected to visit from Israel. The three-day visit will start from February 10.

"Big companies are coming. People with interests in technology and setting manufacturing units (are coming)," he added.

The EFTA bloc committed an investment of USD 100 billion -- USD 50 billion within 10 years after the implementation of the agreement and another USD 50 billion in the next five years -- which would facilitate the creation of 1 million direct jobs in India.

This is a first-of-its-kind pledge agreed upon in any of the trade deals signed by India so far. EFTA countries are not part of the European Union (EU). It is an inter-governmental organisation for the promotion and intensification of free trade. It was founded as an alternative for states that did not wish to join the European community. India is separately negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement with the EU, the 27-nation bloc. India-EFTA two-way trade was about USD 24 billion in 2023-24 against USD 18.65 billion in 2022-23. The trade gap is in the favour of the bloc. Switzerland is the largest trading partner and investor in India followed by Norway in the bloc. India received USD 10.72 billion in foreign direct investment from Switzerland during April 2000 and September 2024.

## FM to address RBI board on 8<sup>th</sup>

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to address the Reserve Bank of India's central board on February 8 and highlight key points of the Budget FY26, including significant income tax relief to boost demand. The meeting

would take place a day after the RBI announces the outcome of the Monetary Policy Committee meeting amid wide expectation of a rate cut by the central bank to boost moderating GDP growth. The post-budget meeting has been scheduled for February 8

where the finance minister will address the board members and talk about announcements made in the Budget 2025-26 that strike a fine balance between growth and fiscal prudence, sources said. It is customary for the finance minister to address the RBI board

after the budget. Unveiling the Budget on February 1 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said, "our endeavour will be to keep the fiscal deficit each year such that the central government debt remains on a declining path as a percentage of the GDP."

## Sensex snaps 5-day rising streak, declines by 319 points

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday tracking weak global markets amid concerns over US President Donald Trump imposing tariffs on some of its trading partners.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 319.22 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,186.74, snapping its five-day rally. Intra-day, it tumbled 749.87 points or 0.96 per cent to 76,756.09. The NSE Nifty declined 121.10 points or 0.52 per cent to 23,361.05.

From Sensex shares, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, ITC, Power Grid, NTPC and Reliance Industries were the major laggards.

Among the gainers, Bajaj Finance jumped over 5 per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel and Maruti also ended higher.

The 25 per cent tariff on most imports from Canada and Mexico and 10 per cent tariff on goods from China will take effect from Tuesday.



The BSE smallcap gauge tanked 1.77 per cent and mid-cap index declined 0.89 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, capital goods tanked 4.29 per cent, industrials (3.79 per cent), power (3.30 per cent), utilities (2.71 per cent), oil & gas (2.52 per cent) and metal (1.99 per cent).

BSE healthcare, IT, consumer durables, tech and BSE Focused IT were the gainers. As many as 2,877 stocks declined while 1,139 advanced and 168 remained unchanged on the BSE. Meanwhile, India's manu-

facturing sector growth started the year 2025 on a strong footing and touched a six-month high in January, fuelled by the steepest upturn in exports in nearly 14 years, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from December's one-year low of 56.4 to 57.7 in January supported by the fastest upturn in new export orders since February 2011.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled sharply lower.

Markets in Europe were trading with deep cuts. US markets ended lower on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.15 per cent to USD 76.50 a barrel.

The BSE Sensex has closed marginally up 5.39 points at 77,505.96 on Saturday. The Nifty dipped 26.25 points to 23,482.15. The domestic equity markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget

### Gold jumps Rs 400 to breach Rs 85,000-mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices jumped Rs 400 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 85,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday on the back of continued demand by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Traders said sharp depreciation in rupee and firm trends in the international markets lifted gold rates to record high levels.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 84,900 per 10 grams on Saturday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose for the fourth straight session by climbing Rs 400 to hit another record high of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams. The yellow metal ended at Rs 84,500 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Rallying for the fifth consecutive session, silver increased Rs 300 to Rs 96,000 per kg on Monday. The white metal finished at Rs 95,700 per kg in the previous market close.

## India, UK to resume talks on proposed trade agreement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the UK are expected to resume the talks for the proposed free trade agreement from February 24, an official said.

The UK trade minister is likely to visit the national capital soon, the official said.

The talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

The agreement is aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investments.

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

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

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

items. Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services, including banking and insurance.

The talks for the agreement may get an impetus as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman



on Saturday proposed to raise the foreign investment limit to 100 per cent in the insurance sector as part of new-generation financial sector reforms.

Presenting Union Budget 2025-26, the Finance Minister has said the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit for the insurance sector will be raised from 74 per cent to 100 per cent.

The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which includes goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

## RBI may cut interest rate by 25 bps, say experts

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The RBI is likely to reduce the key interest rate by 25 basis points this week after keeping it on hold for two years, complementing the Union Budget initiatives to push consumption-led demand, though the sliding rupee continues to be a concern.

As the retail inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone (less than 6 per cent) for most of the year, the central bank can take rate action to boost growth hit by sluggish consumption, opined experts.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept the repo rate (short-term lending rate) unchanged at 6.5 per cent since February 2023.

The last time the RBI had reduced the rate was during the Covid times (May 2020) and thereafter, it was gradually raised to 6.5 per cent.

Newly appointed Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra will be chairing his first Monetary Policy

Committee (MPC) meeting starting Wednesday. The decision of the six-member panel will be announced on Friday (February 7).

"There is a higher probability of a rate cut this time for two reasons. First, the RBI has already announced liquidity enhancement measures, which



have improved conditions in the market. This appeared to be a prerequisite for cutting rates," said Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda.

Sabnavis further said the Union Budget has provided a boost and it may be appropriate to lower the repo rate in tandem to support the same.

The Reserve Bank has announced measures to infuse Rs 1.5 lakh crore worth of liquidity in the banking system on January 27.

## Govt working on uniform toll policy: Gadkari

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The road transport ministry is working on a uniform toll policy to benefit national highway users, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Monday.

Gadkari also asserted that now India's highway infrastructure matches that of the US.

"We are working on a uniform toll policy. It will address the problem faced by the commuters," he told PTI in an interview, without elaborating further.

Gadkari was responding to a question on simmering discontent among users of



National Highways on account of high toll charges and sub-par road-user experience.

The longest-serving road transport and highways min-

ister said that the ministry has decided to initially implement a barrier-less global navigation satellite system (GNSS)-based toll collection system on national highways.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Gadkari said, has been taking the complaints made by commuters on social media very seriously and is taking strong action against contractors involved.

At present, while private cars constitute about 60 per cent of the traffic on national highways, the share of toll revenue from these vehicles is barely 20-26 per cent.

Toll charges have increased on highways even as more and more stretches have come under the tolling system over the past 10 years, often leading to rising user discontent.

Total toll collection in India touched Rs 64,809.86 crore in 2023-24, a 35 per cent rise over the previous year. The collection was Rs 27,503 crore in 2019-20.

All user fee plazas on National Highways are established as per the provision of National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008 and the respective Concession Agreement.

## 'AI skills will boost career growth'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 94 per cent of Indian professionals surveyed believe that mastering AI skills will fast-track their career growth, according to 2025 Global Workplace Skills Study conducted by Emeritus.

The study underlined that India is experiencing a transformative wave of Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration in workplaces, prompting working professionals to learn the necessary skills and tools for the future.

The study, which surveyed over 6,000 respondents across 18 countries aged 21-65 work-



ing across sectors such as finance and insurance, manufacturing, software & IT services, and education, among others, revealed that Indian professionals are leading the global AI adoption curve. "An impressive 96 per cent

of Indian professionals are using AI and generative AI tools at work, significantly higher than the 81 per cent in the US and 84 per cent in the UK. As a result, 95 per cent of Indian workers report increased productivity due to

these technologies, outpacing the global average," it revealed. Indian professionals are prioritising AI skills to stay competitive, with 90 per cent considering AI and generative AI crucial for future career success.

Moreover, 94 per cent view AI expertise as essential not only for career advancement but also for diversifying across industries -- far surpassing the global average of 87 per cent.

Notably, machine learning is among the top five most sought-after skills in India, with professionals twice as likely as global counterparts to focus on it, as per the report.

## White-collar hiring up 4 pc: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

White-collar hiring activities in January witnessed 4 per cent growth driven by traditional sectors, including FMCG, pharma and insurance, according to a report released on Monday.

"In 2024, January had greeted us with a disappointing 11 per cent de-growth in hiring. In contrast, 2025 seems to have started on a positive note. The 4 per cent hiring growth is tempered as IT recovery settles in, however, strong growth in most core sectors, including FMCG, pharma, insurance and hospitality is a good sign and augurs well for a cracking 2025 in terms of white collar hiring," Naukri Chief Business Officer Pawan Goyal said in a statement quoting NaukriJobSpeak Index.

The report revealed a steady hiring environment with strong performances in core sectors like FMCG (16 per cent), insurance (15 per cent), and pharma (11 per cent), and hospitality by 8 per cent, while IT hiring remained flat, the report added.

The Naukri JobSpeak is a monthly index representing the Indian job market and hiring activity based on new job listings and job-related searches by recruiters on the resume database

of Naukri.com.

Meanwhile, Rajasthan emerged as a standout performer in January's hiring landscape with cities like Jodhpur and Udaipur recording impressive growth rates of 35 per cent and 32 per cent, respectively.

Jaipur also continued its upward trajectory with 21 per cent overall growth, said the report.

This regional dynamism extends beyond IT, with multiple sectors showing strong growth in



non-traditional hubs, it added. It was also witnessed in the aviation and aerospace industry, which recorded an exceptional 33 per cent year-on-year growth, with Delhi-NCR witnessing a staggering 77 per cent surge in hiring.

The sector's growth is strategically focused on building mid-level expertise, with a 22 per cent increase in hiring for professionals with 4-7 years of experience, added the report.



## VICKY KAUSHAL: HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DREAM TO STAR IN A FILM WITH AR RAHMAN'S MUSIC

A few collaborations transcend music - they become immortal, etched in the hearts of generations. The reunion of Academy Award-winning legend AR Rahman and Padma Shri recipient Arijit Singh has delivered yet another masterpiece, Jaane Tu, penned by the lyrical genius Irshad Kamil. This timeless track from Laxman Utekar's historical action drama Chhaava encapsulates the undying, spiritual bond between Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Maharani Yesubai, portrayed by Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna.

For Vicky Kaushal, this was a dream come true. Speaking about Jaane Tu, he shared, "The song and the portrayal of characters go way beyond the conventional idea of love. It's about an eternal connection, a bond that transcends time. I hope people experience the depth of this spiritual relationship. The coming together of three maestros - AR Rahman sir, Padma Shri laureate Arijit sir, and Irshad



Kamil sir - is what makes this piece of music truly special. It has always been a dream to star in a film with Rahman sir's music, so thank you to Dinesh Vijan sir for

making it happen. A big thanks to Laxman Utekar sir, our director, for bringing us together in this epic saga called Chhaava." Rashmika Mandanna echoed his senti-

ments, expressing her gratitude for being part of this extraordinary musical journey. She says, "It's my first time having AR Rahman sir's name in the same film, and I am truly honoured. And, as Vicky mentioned, the relationship between Maharani Yesubai and Maharaj Sambhaji is not just a portrayal of love; it is a spiritual bond that goes beyond human understanding. It was one of the main reasons why I wanted to be part of this film - because it represents something divine, something that connects us to a deeper realm."

The song's grand unveiling in Hyderabad was a regal spectacle. Mirroring a pivotal moment from the track, Rashmika Mandanna performed the tilak ceremony on Vicky Kaushal at the event, adding a symbolic touch to the launch. With social media already buzzing and Jaane Tu making it to countless loop lists, the film's stars opened up about what it meant to be part of a project that features Rahman's soul-stirring music.

## Shekhar Kapur's daughter Kaveri steps into Bollywood with Kunal Kohli's next

Kaveri Kapur, the daughter of legendary filmmaker Shekhar Kapur, is set to make her acting debut with the upcoming streaming project. She will be seen sharing the screen with Vardhan Puri in 'Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story'.

The film is directed by Kunal Kohli. While this will be her first Bollywood venture, Kaveri is not new to facing the camera, having already 4 music videos under her belt. And now, the uber talented daughter of Shekhar Kapur and Suchitra Krishnamoorthi, is all set to conquer the movie space as well.

Details for the film, which has been shot completely in the UK, have been kept tightly under the wraps. The first look of the project dropped today and has been receiving rave reviews. Earlier, it was speculated that Kaveri will be making her film debut with Shekhar Kapur's 'Masoom- the next generation'. However, the honour of launching her will now go to Kunal Kohli.

'Bobby Aur Rishi Ki Love Story' is set to stream on Disney+ Hotstar on February 11.

Earlier, Kaveri shared the video of herself reciting a poem, presumably penned by herself. Shekhar Kapur is known for films like 'Bandit Queen', 'Elizabeth', 'Mr. India', and others.

In her poem, Kaveri said how she felt throughout the year, and what emotions she went through. She said in the video, "In January, I learned that I don't know me. In February, I met a man, he taught me who I'm, who is my body. In March, I fell apart trying to mould flesh into art hoping someone would deem me worthy. In April, I got bored, I was no longer satisfied being a piece of meat for a carnivore".

She further mentioned, "In May, I fell from grace. I told lies, I healed hearts. In June, I looked in the mirror, and saw a light and a dark. In July, I saw emptiness start to

fill up with parts and pieces that flowed into the pit of my identity. I took a break to realise that we are all the same, you and me. In August, I tried to clear my mind of things I didn't like. But, all it did was exemplify. So, in August, I danced with my demons and talked with my secrets, and drank the nights away".

"September was gloomy weather, and everytime the rain swept me away and would appear. She is bolder, wiser, and has a lot more to say. So, October was me trying to get hold of her. Just as I was doing the very first day. October was confusion and chaos and a lot of mistakes. By November, I discovered love and the cosmic mess that it makes. By December, I knew that I'm every force of nature, the sinner and the saint", she added.



## FROM SUHAAG TO WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE Ahmed Khan reflects on his journey with Akshay Kumar

Director Ahmed Khan recently praised Akshay Kumar for his unwavering hard work and dedication, highlighting the lengths the actor goes to for his films.

Khan, who has teamed up with the actor for his next project, 'Welcome to the Jungle', expressed his admiration for Kumar's commitment to his craft, emphasizing how the actor consistently goes the extra mile to deliver exceptional performances. In a statement, the filmmaker shared, "This is a journey of a 33-year-old friendship and work collaboration between Akshay and me, which started from Suhaag 1993 to Welcome to the Jungle 2025, and this relationship is getting stronger, and I remember Suhaag was the film before Rangaela when Akshay told me to do this music piece. He's very innovative, and so he wanted me to do that and we did his introduction bit, and I swear, no hero would do that or any choreographer would attempt that because it was his intro, and the character looked like just out of the Baywatch series; he pulled it off so well."

Ahmed added, "When we shot it, we had fun, and it turned out brilliant, and then I went on with my

career with Rangaela and all the stuff and many, many songs with Akshay till we reached Welcome to the Jungle, where I'm directing him. The relation has always been the same, and Akshay is the same person I have known from that time till now."

The filmmaker went on to add, "Akshay's enthusiasm, his energy, and the best thing, which I learned from him, is that he's got everything he wants, what he deserves, and what he achieved, but one thing is that he's never got aggressive. He's such a humble person; he never shows his anger. If things go wrong also with anybody around him, he just takes it with a pinch of salt and moves ahead. He always looks at the positive side, and he's been a very good support as a friend to me and I have enjoyed all my work with him till date. So that young Akshay from Suhaag till Welcome to the Jungle, the superstar. I have had a great journey with Akshay."

Meanwhile, Ahmed Khan is ready to begin the final marathon schedule of 'Welcome to the Jungle', which will be filmed in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Helmed by Ahmed Khan and produced by Firoz Nadiadwala, the film also stars Sanjay Dutt, Disha Patani, Jacqueline Fernandez, and others.

## Ed Sheeran brings his historic 6-City India tour to Hyderabad with a mesmerising performance

February kickstarter melodically as Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad transformed into a vibrant hub of energy, excitement and music as global superstar Ed Sheeran brought his record-breaking Tour to India. Produced and promoted by AEG Presents Asia and BookMyShow Live, the Hyderabad concert marked the highly anticipated debut of Sheeran to the city, bringing his unmatched talent to fans in one of the most intimate and electrifying performances seen.

This performance was not just a concert, but a monumental event that set the stage for an unforgettable journey across the country.

Before Ed Sheeran took the stage, the evening started off with an electrifying performance by Armaan Malik, the sensational singer-songwriter. Known for his smooth vocals and chart-topping hits, Armaan captivated the audience with a stunning set, including fan favourites like 'Pehla Pyaar', 'Sau Aasman' and 'Main Rahoona Ya Na Rahoona' leaving the crowd eagerly anticipating Ed's performance.

As the sun began to set, the anticipation in the air was palpable and the moment Ed Sheeran took the stage donning a t-shirt that said 'Hyderabad' celebrating the city, the crowd erupted in cheers! Opening with 'Castle on the Hill', the atmosphere instantly ignited and fans couldn't help but join in, singing along to every word. The evening was set ablaze with energy and it was clear that the concert

would be more than just a typical performance - it was a shared experience. The interaction between Sheeran and the audience was seamless, creating an intimate bond that transcended the usual artist-fan dynamic. Before performing 'Give Me Love', Ed shared a heartfelt moment, saying, "When I close my eyes, I think I'm playing to an empty room and when I open my eyes, I see all of you wonderful people."

His words deepened the connection with the crowd, making the performance even more special.

Sheeran's remarkable stage presence and connection with the audience only grew stronger as the night unfolded. A special highlight came when Armaan Malik joined Sheeran on stage for a powerful duet of '2step' infusing the performance with even more magic. Afterward, Armaan beamed at the crowd and said, "A round of applause for this man here. He's all love!" Hits like 'Shivers', 'I'm a Mess', 'Photograph', 'Happier' and 'Love Yourself', a song he wrote that was beautifully brought to life by Justin Bieber, had the crowd buzzing, but it was the fan-favourite 'Perfect' that truly set the venue on fire when it began as fans belted out the lyrics louder than Ed himself, creating an unforgettable moment of pure excitement. The energy in the air was electrifying, as Sheeran's voice resonated through the venue, creating a sense of unity that only live music can evoke.



### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



#### NANCY



#### GINGER MEGGS



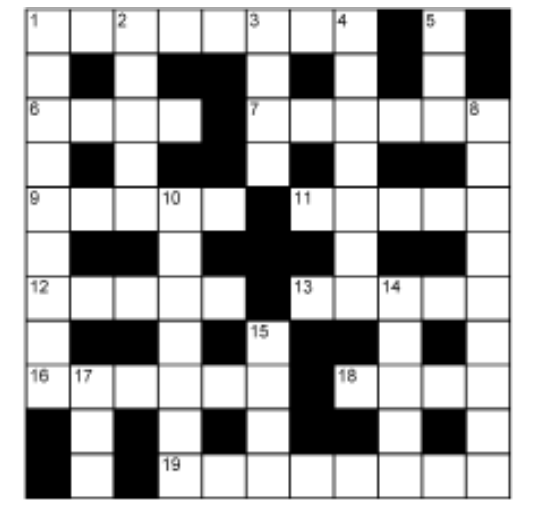
#### REALITY CHECK



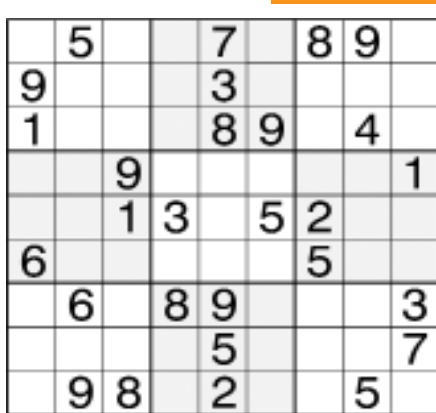
#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- 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

- Sparkling precious stones
- A machine for weaving
- This vehicle has no wheels and is pulled over snow
- Make a rough estimate
- Clamber up
- Prepare for a sports match
- Where a cow stores its milk
- A dry land with few plants
- A long soft seat
- A group of words which makes sense

- False hair on the head
- Bears do this in the winter
- These spin webs
- Die under water
- Astound
- A female sheep

#### DOWN

- Extremely pleased
- Overhead
- A bird makes this
- Detected with the nose





## 'I'm happy Sidharth Shukla and I could dominate Bigg Boss just the way we did'

In an exclusive chat with The Pioneer, Karan Veer Mehra reflected on his journey through the high-pressure world of reality television, from winning Khatron Ke Khiladi 14 to becoming the back-to-back champion of Bigg Boss 18. Whether navigating misunderstandings over his sharp humour or staying focused on personal connections over strategy, he proved that real victory comes from being genuine

TEJAL SINHA  
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Winning Khatron Ke Khiladi 14 was no small feat, but Karan Veer Mehra didn't stop there. He went on to conquer Bigg Boss 18, and become a back-to-back winner of two of India's most challenging reality shows. With his trademark resilience, sharp wit, and unwavering authenticity, he proved that he wasn't just playing a game - he was living it. Whether facing extreme stunts or navigating the mind games of the Bigg Boss house, he remained true to himself, earning not just the trophy but the admiration of countless fans. As he steps into the next chapter of his journey, he reflects on the rollercoaster ride that tested his strength, shaped his perspective, and reinforced his belief that real victory lies in staying true to who you are.

While many contestants enter these competitions with a clear game plan, he insists his journey was about authenticity and self-discovery, in this exclusive chat with The Pioneer.

Reflecting on his Bigg Boss 18 experience, he described it as a "mini-life" he lived inside the house. "It made me learn a lot of things, and I hope to implement all of that in the real world now. I really enjoyed being inside and would have loved to stay longer," he shared.

Known for his fitness discipline, he became synonymous with rigorous workout sessions in the Bigg Boss house. However, he acknowledged that this was

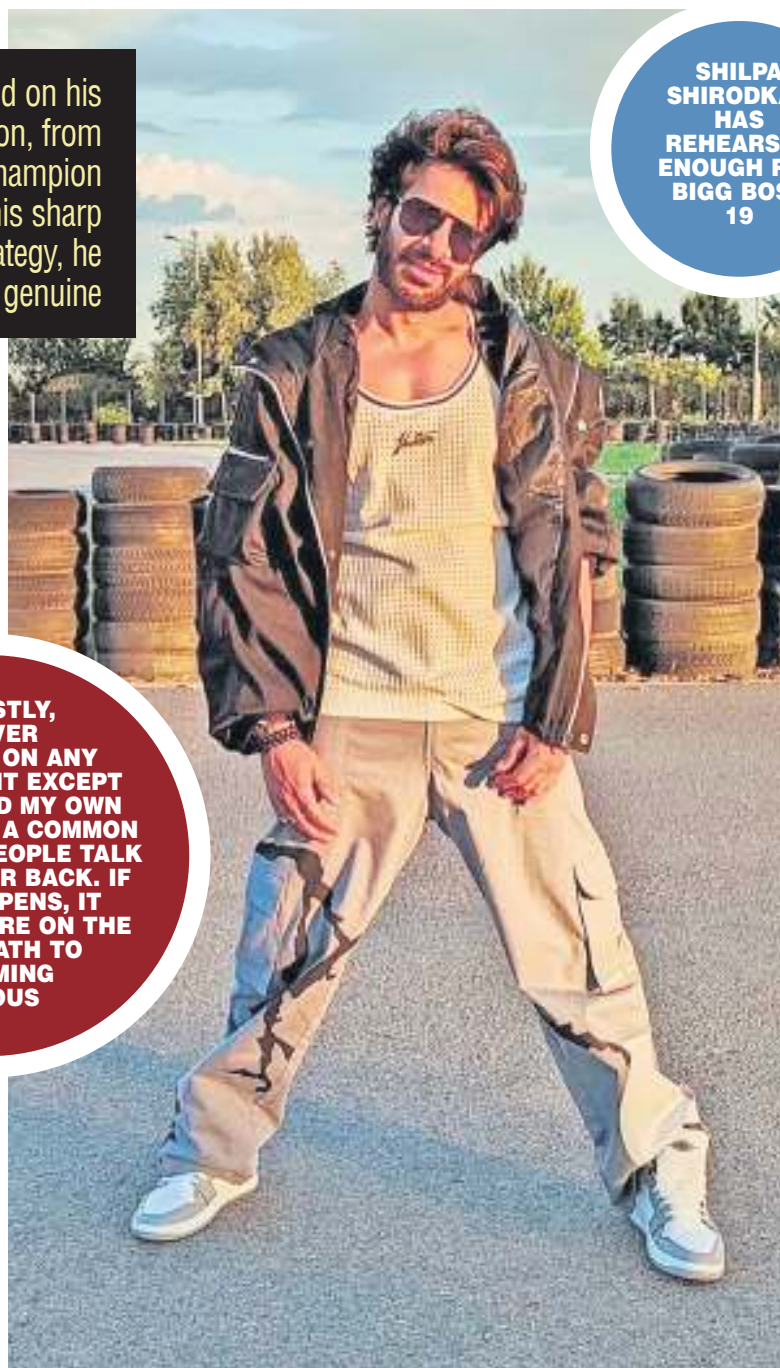
a reason that initially made him focus on himself rather than the rest. "I was not really chilling - I was too much in the gym. That's what I was made to realize," he admitted.

Apart from his workouts, Mehra's sharp wit and one-liners also stirred controversy. He explained that his humor was often misinterpreted. "I was coming up with one-liners that people couldn't comprehend. Once they told me that my one-liners were actually demeaning, that's when the fights began. That's when I had to start clearing my point of view," he explained.

Unlike many contestants who strategize to form alliances, he approached relationships organically. "I never forced a relationship. It started off with a task - 'Rajmata' and her two Yuvraj. You have to understand, the only person who plays the game is Bigg Boss himself. You just have to be honest and true to yourself," he remarked.

Speaking about his Bigg Boss housemate Vivian, he described him as 'a nice guy' who needed more time to process situations. "I think 105 days weren't enough for him. Maybe if he had stayed longer, he would have understood the relationships more clearly," he said.

Addressing speculation about post-



SHILPA SHIRODKAR HAS REHEARSED ENOUGH FOR BIGG BOSS 19

HONESTLY, I NEVER FOCUSED ON ANY CONTESTANT EXCEPT MYSELF AND MY OWN PEOPLE. IT'S A COMMON FACT THAT PEOPLE TALK BEHIND YOUR BACK. IF THAT HAPPENS, IT MEANS YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT PATH TO BECOMING FAMOUS

show get-togethers, he clarified that he harbors no grudges. "If I throw a party - which I'm definitely talking about myself - I will invite everybody, including Vivian and Nouran."

He also spoke about Eisha's public apologies for her behavior in the house but admitted that he never paid much attention to the drama surrounding other contestants. "Honestly, I never focused on any contestant except myself and my own people. It's a common fact that people talk behind your back. If that happens, it means you're on the right path to becoming famous."

"Let me be the king who has won hearts. I don't aspire to be a legend; I'm simply enjoying my kingdom," Karan shares with a smile, as we discuss the viral cake picture that took over social media after Vivian's party.

Reflecting on his Bigg Boss 18 victory, Karan acknowledges, "I must have been a tough competitor, and that's why some people didn't clap when I won. I always say, it's okay to lose a battle, but never act like a loser. Unfortunately, some people behaved like that. I would never have done that."

As the conversation shifts, Karan hints at what's next for the Bigg Boss universe, mentioning Shilpa's upcoming season. "She's finally ready for her next season. She's rehearsed enough for Bigg Boss 19," Karan humorously teases, suggesting there's more to come in the world of reality television.

On his bond with fellow contestant Chum, Karan revealed that they are still adjusting to life outside the house. "We're still acclimatizing to the fact that we've come out of the house. We're taking it slow. Of course, we are very good friends, and what happens from here will happen naturally," he shared.

He acknowledged that he was seen as a strong competitor, which led to mixed reactions. "It must have been tough competition, and that's one of the reasons some people didn't clap when I won. But I always say, it's okay to lose a battle, but don't behave like a loser. Some people, unfortunately, did just that," he remarked.

Throughout his Bigg Boss 18 journey,

Mehra experienced numerous high points. He recalled the intense task, where he carried his fellow contestant Edin for about four hours, as well as fun moments like dancing, jumping in the pool, and late-night parties.

However, he admitted to one small regret. "I cut Rajat's beard, though he looked good in it, but later, I kind of regretted it. I even offered to let him cut my beard in return."

Many fans have compared Bigg Boss 18 to the legendary Bigg Boss 13, a season that remains one of the most popular in the show's history. Mehra was humbled by the comparison and proud of how his season was conducted.

"I'm a big fan of Bigg Boss 13, and I'm happy that our season is being compared to it. The digital reach has expanded, so obviously, every season will keep growing. But what I'm really proud of is that this was a clean season - no excessive abusive language, no physical fights, and none of the extreme incidents like throwing urine, which I had seen in earlier seasons. I hope every season from now on is compared to Bigg Boss 18," he said.

He was also honored to be mentioned in the same breath as the late Sidharth Shukla. "Sidharth was a very different guy - large-hearted and strong. He won Khatron and the Bigg Boss. I'm just happy that only two of us could dominate Bigg Boss the way we did. Let that be history," he stated.

Despite winning, he insisted that he never entered Bigg Boss with a competitive mindset. "Not for a moment did I think I couldn't go till the end - because I wasn't in a race. I wasn't trying to impress someone. I wasn't playing for the trophy. I was just living," he said.

He revealed that he was so immersed in the experience that he could have stayed even longer. "I told the makers, 'This is just getting started. I could have stayed another 105 days.' I was just living a parallel life," he reflected.

Now that he has conquered reality television, Mehra is focused on what's next. "The next step is going to be the main step. I just want to make sure I don't let my audience down. I want to do something as big as Bigg Boss, if not bigger," he said.

## This wedding season, skip costly polluting gifts

The great Indian wedding is deeply rooted in cultural traditions and specificities. The rituals may vary from region to region, but the celebratory spirit remains universal. Weddings are also occasions where family members and friends express their affection via thoughtful gifts for the couple. This wedding season, why not consider a few environmentally friendly gift options to make the celebrations even more meaningful?

### GIFTING A GROVE

Planting a sapling in the couple's name is a meaningful gift as it nourishes ecologically sensitive areas by preserving biodiversity, expanding wildlife habitats and naturally purifying the air. Social enterprises like Grow-Trees.com provide a unique way - the 'Grove concept' - to celebrate weddings through group gifting that creates a lasting impact. Friends and family can plant trees to honour the couple, symbolising their union and commitment to a greener future.

### ECO-FRIENDLY KEEPSAKES

A keepsake is a small, meaningful item meant to be cherished forever. Why not make it even more special by choosing eco-sensitive options? Consider gifts like lockets with real flowers, handmade diaries, hand-painted tote bags crafted from natural fibres, or steel, copper, and earthen curios and utensils. These thoughtful yet impactful

gestures not only create lasting memories but also reflect a commitment to the environment, adding deeper significance to your gift.

### ZERO-WASTE WEDDING KITS

Are you thinking of a wedding gift hamper? Why not choose a zero-waste option? For instance, a bamboo box filled with eco-friendly items such as a seed kit, a diary or journal made from recycled materials, a stainless-steel straw set, a jute or linen tote bag, recycled pens, a handmade luxury soap bar, and a coconut shell soy wax candle. These earth-friendly hampers are not only thoughtful for the bride and groom but also beneficial for the planet.

### PLANTABLE WEDDING CARDS

The bride and the groom too can make their wedding zero waste by making mindful choices. They could opt for seed paper invitations that can be planted to grow into beautiful plants. These thoughtfully crafted cards leave a minimal carbon footprint, allowing the couple to plant a love for posterity. The seeds can be carefully chosen based on the season of the wedding, as certain varieties thrive better during specific months.



## Winter hair woes? Tips for your healthy locks

Our hair suffers the most during the winter months, which can result in increased hair loss and other issues. Knowing how winter impacts our hair is crucial so that we can take the appropriate precautions to keep them nourished and healthy. Let's look at some easy ways to keep your hair healthy and fight winter hair fall.

### OIL MESSAGES

For a refreshing and soothing experience, try oil massages for your hair during the winter. Hair oils encourage the production of natural oil by moisturising hair follicles and increasing blood flow to the scalp. Massage with some warmed coconut, olive, or almond oil, then rinse. For optimal effects, heat the hair oil until it is lukewarm before applying it to the scalp. Oil your hair twice a week.

### CONSUME HYDRATING, NUTRIENT-DENSE FOODS

Your hair, like your body, longs for the nice things in life. Make sure your diet is well-balanced and full of important minerals and vitamins, including omega-3 fatty acids and vitamins A, E, and D. Stuff it

full of hydrating meals, such as fresh vegetables and juicy fruits. These include every vitamin and mineral your hair requires to remain healthy and beautiful.

### AVOID CHEMICAL TREATMENTS

You must exercise patience because hair loss does not occur suddenly. Stick to a hair care regimen that includes shampoo, conditioners, oiling, and hair masks and avoid trying out new products. Frequent testing and chemical treatments could worsen the damage and exacerbate hair loss. Select reliable hair brands and use the appropriate product for

your hair type and issues.

### USE HYDRATING HAIR CARE PRODUCTS

Select hair care products designed especially for dry, winter-prone hair. Get deep conditioning treatments for your hair on a regular basis. By nourishing and rehydrating your hair, they can keep it from becoming fragile and brittle. Even while it could be tempting to have a hot shower in the winter, too much heat can make you feel dry. Instead, use lukewarm water to prevent the loss of essential oils in your hair.

### ANTI-HAIR FALL AYURVEDIC SUPPLEMENTS

Winter can worsen hair fall as the cold weather makes the scalp dry and brittle, leading to hair loss. Combat this with an anti-hair fall Ayurvedic supplement enriched with potent herbs like Bhringraj, Amla, Brahmi, and Ashwagandha. These ingredients strengthen hair from the roots, improve blood circulation to the scalp, and nourish hair follicles, reducing seasonal hair fall. Infused with natural antioxidants, this supplement also helps balance doshas, promoting overall hair health.



(The author, Dr. Swathi Ramamurthy, is the Head, R&D at Purely Yours.)

## CARDIOVASCULAR RISKS SPIKE FOR MOTHERS OF TWINS

Women who give birth to twins face twice the risk of developing heart-related complications compared to those with singleton pregnancies, according to a new study published in the European Heart Journal. The research high-

lights a significant rise in cardiovascular risks for mothers of twins, particularly within the first year post-partum.

Conducted by researchers from Rutgers University, the study analyzed data from 36 million hospital deliveries across the U.S.

Wood Johnson Medical School, explained the physiological burden of carrying twins. "The maternal heart works harder for twin pregnancies than for singleton pregnancies,

and it takes weeks for the maternal heart to return to its pre-pregnancy state," she said.

Lin emphasized that even mothers of twins who did not experience pregnancy-related high blood pressure should be aware of the increased short-term cardiovascular risks. The study found that among twin pregnancies with normal blood pressure, the rate of hospitalizations for heart-related conditions was nearly twice as high as in singleton pregnancies.

For mothers of twins who had preeclampsia or other hypertensive disorders during pregnancy, the risk of hospitalization for heart disease soared more than eightfold compared to mothers of singletons with normal blood pressure.

Interestingly, the study also noted that while the risk of heart disease is initially higher in twin pregnancies, the long-term mortality rate—including deaths from heart disease—was greater in mothers of singletons who had high blood pressure during pregnancy. This suggests that while twin pregnancies pose an immediate cardiovascular challenge, mothers of singletons with hypertension may have underlying heart health risks that persist beyond the first year postpartum.

The study's findings come at a time when twin pregnancies are becoming more common due to increased maternal age and the widespread use of fertility treatments. Dr. Lin stressed the importance of monitoring heart health in high-risk pregnancies, particularly among older mothers or those with pre-existing conditions like obesity, diabetes, or hypertension.

"Patients undergoing fertility treatments should be advised that twin pregnancies may increase complications related to heart disease in the short term," she said, urging healthcare providers to extend postpartum monitoring for up to a year to ensure better health outcomes.

With rising global rates of twin births, the study underscores the need for improved maternal care strategies, ensuring that women receive the necessary cardiovascular support both during and after pregnancy.



# Praggnanandhaa beats Gukesh to clinch Tata Chess title

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE

The Indian juggernaut in international chess remained unstoppable as Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa fought through exhaustion and nerves to defeat world champion D Gukesh in a clash of compatriots to clinch the Tata Steel Masters title for the first time in his prolific career. The bespectacled 19-year-old from Chennai, a city that has become the cradle of Indian chess, came from behind to upstage the 18-year-old world number three 2-1 in the tiebreaker of the event's 87th edition here on Sunday. This was after both players ended up tied on 8.5 points after losing their 13th-round games. While Gukesh lost to fellow Indian Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa went down to Vincent Keymer of Germany. In the tie-breaker, there was huge drama typical of two young players looking to win each and every game they played in the tournament as they played the tie-

break. "I am still shaking, it was such a crazy day. I don't know how to express. I didn't really expect to win. Somehow things went my way," Praggnanandhaa told the official tournament website after his triumph. Asked if it was the most tense day of his chess career, which began when he was a mere two years of age. "Today is more special because I won the tournament. Definitely most stressful day," he responded. The teenager became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the title. Anand won it thrice (2003, 2004 and 2006) individually when it was called the Corus Chess Tournament, named on the title sponsor of that time. The legend also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) in its earliest form of Hoogovens Tournament. Praggnanandhaa faced the Benoni with reversed colours in the first game of the tie-break and it seemed like he had equalised easily in the middle game. However, Gukesh had other



thoughts as he kept trying and won, thanks to a blunder by Praggnanandhaa that cost him a full rook. In a must-win second game of the tiebreaker, Praggnanandhaa employed the Trompowsky opening, and this time Gukesh could claim a slight advantage with his black pieces. "I was just trying to relax, to rest a bit. It was a very difficult game. Against Vincent I didn't play anywhere close to the level I was playing here. I should buy something for Arjun. At some point I thought Gukesh was better," the former world youth champion quipped. "For sure, (this win) it is the highlight. When I came here, I wanted to win but the field was very strong. I didn't really think about it much until yesterday," he added. "I am completely exhausted. I was also quite tired. I just want to get some rest now." During the tie-break, by just keeping his position together, Praggnanandhaa patiently waited and capitalised on an unforced

error from Gukesh to first knock down a pawn and then his technical abilities were enough to see the normal blitz games through with a 1-1 score. This took the match into sudden death, where Praggnanandhaa drew white and once again Gukesh was better with some imaginative play on the queen side that netted him a pawn. The sudden death had a time control of two minutes and thirty seconds for white against three for black but that did not deter Praggnanandhaa from trying to defend an inferior endgame. Just while the position looked completely drawn and another game was on the cards, Gukesh lost control in the battle of nerves and first lost a pawn then his last remaining knight. Praggnanandhaa showed perfect technique to take the full point and his maiden victory at the Masters. For Gukesh, this was the second year running when he tied for first position and lost the tiebreaker. In the previous edition, Gukesh had lost to Chinese Wei Yi.



## Bevan inducted to Cricket Australia's Hall of Fame

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former batter Michael Bevan, widely regarded as one of the greatest ODI finishers who displayed impeccable game awareness and mastered difficult run chases with minimal risk, has been inducted to Cricket Australia's Hall of Fame. The 54-year-old, who was a part of Australia's 1999 and 2003 World Cup-winning teams, made 6912 ODI runs at a brilliant average of 53.58 in 232 games, batting in middle-order, mostly at number six. During his career that ran from 1994 to 2004, Bevan exemplified maximum returns at minimum risk, and was a genius in keeping the required rate during chases in check by picking singles and twos that would often lull the opposition and ultimately steer Australia over the line. "Congratulations to former Australian player Michael Bevan on his induction to the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame," Cricket Australia posted on X. Speaking to 'cricket.Com.Au', the imposing left-hander, who has also dabbled in coaching, said his ODI success was down to a deep understanding of the format. "When I reflect on my one-day career, and get an understanding of why I performed like I did, how I was able to manage the innings, or the run rate...I think that was sort of natural to me," he said. "Minimising risk,

understanding which bowlers to target, what types of shots to play in certain situations, and the ability to understand when to put your foot down, and when to take the foot off the accelerator as well...(were) the principles that I used," he added the owner of 67 unbeaten ODI knocks who struck 46 half-centuries and six hundreds in the format. He could never really replicate that success in Tests and Bevan said he accepted that the traditional form was not really meant for him quite early. Bevan played only 18 Tests. He made his debut in 1994 and played the five-day game only till 1998. "I wasn't ready to play Test cricket. I had my own demons," he said. His long-time captain Steve Waugh was a huge fan of his work ethic in the nets and in his book, he mentioned that Bevan "would literally invent strokes to fuel his search for greatness and his desire to attain new levels of excellence." Bevan could maneuver Australia out of trouble with his tenacity and the ability to find the gaps in the tightest fields to keep the scoreboard ticking and eventually chase down targets for victories by the thinnest of margins. "...I felt with the one-day game, I always did what I did - I had the ability to win close games, and that was always there. It wasn't something that I learned or had to go through, it was really just intrinsic, which is kind of a bit weird," he said of his career.

## Buttler praises Abhishek Sharma's innings

PTI ■ MUMBAI

England captain Jos Buttler has heaped high praise on Abhishek Sharma for smashing a whirlwind 54-ball 135 in India's 150-run win in the fifth T20I here, describing the record knock as one of the finest examples of "clean ball striking". Abhishek entered record books with the second fastest T20I century by an Indian batter off 37 balls and hit 13 sixes -- the most in an innings for any player from the country, powering the hosts to 247 for nine. "Yeah, (we are) obviously disappointed (with the result), they (India) played a fantastic batting innings. I think credit to Abhishek Sharma, I thought that's as clean a ball striking as I've seen, I thought he played fantastically well," Buttler told the media after India recorded their second biggest T20I win by runs on Sunday. Buttler denied England were "shellshocked" from Abhishek's onslaught on his bowlers but said there were only two options for his side -- either to go boom or bust. "We always sit down and think



what more could we have done or how we could have stopped him, but some days I think you have to give a lot of credit to the opposition, I thought he played brilliantly well," Buttler said. "Shellshocked's not quite the word, I think. It can be difficult sometimes when a player gets on a roll and they play as well as he did," Buttler said. "Looking back at the last IPL, him and Travis Head were the same at the top of the order for Sunrisers (Hyderabad) and obviously he's brought that into India." "He (Abhishek) played a brilliant innings and sometimes you want to credit

the opposition. You always think of what more could you do, how could we get him out, how could we slow him down and, but yeah, credit to us for, you know, sticking in there and fighting back and keeping them down to 240 after the start they got," Buttler said. The England captain acknowledged the pitch remained the same for his batters as the visitors were bowled out for 97 in 10.3 overs with Phil Salt scoring a 23-ball 55. "I've played in a few games like this and it generally goes one of two ways, you either get actually somewhere near or you fall in a heap and today was that day," he said.

"The way Phil Salt went out there and struck the ball, it was obviously a really good wicket, you needed someone to go with him and one or two guys to catch fire and that's the way you're going to chase that down. "Like I said, you either get quite close in games like this and surprise yourselves or it doesn't work but, no, we certainly won't change the way we want to play. We need to, you know, keep backing that, be even more committed and you're desperate to do well and execute that," he said. Buttler said he wouldn't want England to change their style of play after a 1-4 series loss to India. "We've had our moments actually in all the games bar the first one probably and today. We had moments in Chennai, Pune and obviously the game we won in Rajkot," he said. "As we get more experienced, more committed to the style we want to play and the nuances of the game of how we're going to win those moments, then (we would) go on to win the match and win series," he added.



## CT 2025 Trophy tour concludes in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The trophy tour for the ICC Champions Trophy concluded in India with the coveted prize touring cities of Mumbai and Bengaluru ahead of the tournament beginning February 19. The upcoming edition of the eight-team 50-overs tournament will be held in Pakistan and Dubai from February 19 to March 9. "The Trophy Tour has covered all eight participating nations during its global journey and, with the conclusion of India leg, it will now travel to its final stop in Pakistan," the ICC said in a statement on Monday.

The tour in Mumbai included trophy's visits to the Wankhede Stadium, Shivaji Park, the Gateway of India, Carter Road, historic Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, and Bandstand among other locations. It was also displayed during the celebrations to mark the completion of 50 years of the Wankhede Stadium. In Bengaluru, the trophy visited venues including Nexus Shantiniketan Mall, Bengaluru Palace, Freedom Park, KR Market, Town Hall, St Mary's Basilica, M Chinnaswamy Stadium, Church Street and Vidyarthi Bhavan.

## We want to play high-risk, high-reward cricket in T20s: Gambhir

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India head coach Gautam Gambhir said the team is ready to push the barriers in T20 Internationals with the adoption of a fresh "high-risk, high-reward" approach, and the target is now "to get 250-260 regularly" in the format. That shift in mindset was evident in India's 4-1 mauling of England in the just-concluded five-match series. In the fourth T20I at Pune, India kept attacking England despite losing wickets to eventually set a match-winning 181 for 9, and at Mumbai on Sunday, the hosts raced to 247 for 9, their fourth highest total in this format. "That's the kind of T20 cricket we want to play. We don't want to fear losing a game of cricket. We want to play high-risk, high-reward cricket.

And these guys have adopted that ideology really well," Gambhir told the host broadcaster after the match on Sunday. Gambhir said they are looking to post tall totals in the vicinity of 250 in every game, and he doesn't mind getting out for a low score in some matches while attempting to achieve the task. "We want to try and get to 250-260 regularly. And in trying to do that, there'll be games where we'll get bundled out for 120-130. And that is what T20 cricket is all about. "Unless and until you don't play that high-risk cricket, you won't get those big rewards as well. Most importantly, I think we're on the right track. Come those big tournaments, we want to



continue playing this way and we don't want to fear losing anything," he added. "I think the ideology of this T20 team is based on selflessness and fearlessness, and I think in the last six months, these guys have done

it day in, day out." Gambhir used the breathtaking 54-ball 135 of Abhishek Sharma to further validate his point. "We want to keep backing players like Abhishek Sharma. We have to be patient with

these boys. I haven't seen a better T20 hundred against bowlers who are bowling at 140-150 kph consistently," he added. Gambhir also lauded spinner Varun Chakravarthy for reinventing himself and coming back stronger to international cricket. "I think his transformation from IPL to international T20 cricket has been phenomenal. This series was probably the benchmark as well because England is a high-quality side. "They've got some really quality cricketers and the kind of surfaces we've played on - I think they were fantastic batting wickets and the way he's bowled those tough overs has been phenomenal," said Gambhir. Chakravarthy was the highest wicket-taker in the series with 14 scalps at an average of 9.85

and economy rate of 7.66. There were talks about rifts in the Indian dressing room after the team's disastrous outing in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series against Australia. Gambhir said everything will fall in place once the team returns to winning ways. "They (these players) have played a lot of cricket against each other. That's all Indian cricket is all about us. "When results start going your way, everything goes well. Our players know what it means to represent 140-150 crore Indians," he added. On the controversy surrounding Harshit Rana coming in as a concussion sub for Shivam Dube in the previous match at Pune, Gambhir said rather lightly: "He (Dube) probably bowled four overs today."

## Head wins Allan Border medal, Sutherland receives Belinda Clark honour

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Star batter Travis Head was named the winner of the prestigious Allan Border Medal for the top Australian men's cricketer, while young all-rounder Annabel Sutherland was awarded the Belinda Clark Medal at the Australian Cricket Awards held here on Monday. Head, who had an outstanding year across all three formats with 1,427 runs since the start of the polling period, received 208 votes to secure the top honour, surpassing Josh Hazlewood (158 votes) and Pat Cummins (147 votes). "Pretty hard to believe. It's been a good year. Very pleased I've been able to fit in, do a role, and lucky I've been able to play all formats. It's a nice accomplishment, and I'll enjoy it," Head said in a recorded interview from Galle. The 31-year-old Head also took home the Men's ODI

Player-of-the-Year award and finished second in the Twenty20 and Test Player-of-the-Year awards. Head won the ODI honours despite figuring in just five of the 11 ODIs that Australia played during the eligibility period. His standout performance, including a magnificent 154 not out against England at Trent Bridge, helped him edge past Alex Carey, Steve Smith, and Xavier Bartlett for the top prize. For Sutherland, it was a first Australian Cricket Award, which came just days after her maiden Test century at the MCG, becoming the first woman to make a ton on that ground. The 23-year-old all-rounder began the 12-month voting period with an impressive 210 against South Africa at the WACA and later scored her third Test century -- a brilliant 163 in the Ashes. Sutherland received 168 votes, surpassing Ashleigh Gardner



(143 votes) and Beth Mooney (115 votes) to win the Belinda Clark Medal. "Pretty surreal. To win an award named after Belinda Clark is pretty special," said

Sutherland. Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood claimed the Men's Test Player-of-the-Year award. It marked his first Australian Cricket Award, with



Hazlewood taking 30 wickets at just 13.16 in Tests against the West Indies, New Zealand, and India. Young cricketer Sam Konstas, who made an impressive debut at 19 during

the Boxing Day Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India, was named Young Cricketer of the Year. Konstas scored 113 runs across the last two Tests,

including a memorable 60 off 65 balls on debut. He became an instant sensation after he took down star India pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who had been a menace to Australian batters throughout the five-Test series, which Australia ultimately won 3-1. Though the award night was devoid of the stars, as they were busy in the ongoing Test series in Sri Lanka, allrounder Mitchell Marsh stole the spotlight with a hilarious Bumrah anecdote that had the audience in stitches at the Crown Casino here. "My little nephew, Ted, is four years old. We played backyard cricket the other day, and he came in with Bumrah's action... And the nightmare continues," Marsh joked. In other awards, Ashleigh Gardner was named Women's ODI Player of the Year after finishing as Australia's leading run-scorer in the format with 385 runs. Beth Mooney was crowned Women's T20 Player

of the Year for the third time, having scored 618 runs during the voting period. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa won Men's T20I Player of the Year after taking 35 wickets in 21 T20Is, edging out Head by three votes. Cameron Green was awarded the Community Impact Award for his efforts in raising awareness about kidney disease. The award ceremony also saw Michael Clarke, Michael Bevan, and Christina Matthews inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame. Other awardees included Beau Webster and Georgia Voll, who won Men's and Women's Domestic Player of the Year, and Chloe Ainsworth, who was named Young Cricketer of the Year. Glenn Maxwell and Cooper Connolly were named joint winners of the BBL Player of the Tournament, while Ellyse Perry and Jess Jonassen shared the WBBL Player of the Tournament award.



# I won't change my stand and character for someone: Bunny Vasu

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Bunny Vasu is the talking point in the industry as his film 'Thandel' is releasing on February 7. Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi are playing the lead in this love story directed by Chandoo Mondeti. Bunny Vasu is also one of the few people who worked closely with top producer Allu Aravind and his son Allu Arjun. Interestingly, he is also very close to Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan.

Actually, his name was on the list to contest in the last elections, but at the last minute, he dropped out. When asked about it, he said he is close to Pawan Kalyan and also to Allu family. So with the differences cropping up between those two families, people talk more about Bunny Vasu, whether he is under pressure and also can he handle the situation well?

"Yes, hundred per cent it is true and I can handle the situation and I have the talent and courage. But for me, the timely incidents and the situation are causing some embarrassment. But when I was open and genuine, people could misunderstand. But in the long run, my stability and how I took my stand definitely proved me as being perfect," said Bunny Vasu. He added that he won't change anything for someone. "Whatever they think about me, I won't change my character and also my stand. I will go with my flow. Then only everything will fall in place," said Bunny Vasu.

He even got an opportunity to contest in the last elections, but he took a decision not to contest. "Yes, it is true that I got an opportunity to contest in the last elections. But I think two things, one is I have to look at financial strength, because politics is not that

**THANDEL PRODUCER BUNNY VASU TALKS ABOUT WHY HE DIDN'T ENTER INTO POLITICS, THE ALLU AND MEGA FAMILY DISPUTES, HANDLING ISSUES REGARDING THE ALLU ARJUN INCIDENT, THE RISK TAKEN FOR HIS FILM AND MANY MORE...**

easy, I have a few responsibilities as a family person. When I decide to contest, I have to spend time with people and I can't sit here. If I give the commitment to Kalyan garu, I have to abide by it. If I can't stand by my commitment, he will put me aside, and it would be very difficult for me to reach Pawan Kalyan again. So, I decided not to take it, which is my call," said Bunny Vasu about his political entry.

When asked whether there are reports that he is distancing himself from Geetha Arts, he said in a diplomatic way, "My attachment with Geetha Arts is 25 years and after Aravind garu, our generation is going and now we have to train for the next generation which will go for the coming 10 years."

In the recent incident that happened around Allu Arjun, he was not guided properly and asked about that, he said he will wait till the legal issues are over. "What is the situation and what happened there, we have discussed very deeply and we have clarity about it. Now, the issue is in court and once it is cleared I will speak about it definitely," said Bunny Vasu.

The makers of 'Thandel' announced that Allu Arjun will be the chief guest, but he didn't turn up. When asked about why he didn't attend the event, he said, "Till evening 6

pm everything looked good. But I don't know what happened as I was busy with the event till 11.30 pm. Morning when I asked Aravind garu about it, he said Arjun had some health issues, so he didn't attend." He added that he woke up today and was busy with the promotions of the film. "Once after the promotions, I will go and meet Allu Arjun," he said.

Talking about his 'Thandel', he said, it's a high budget film and also a risky one. "As the story demands, we put money according to it, though we have a budget in our mind, it has gone higher," he said. "That's why in most of the areas we are releasing the film on our own, which is definitely a risky one. We have to make the film a hit and get our money back," he said. He added that the digital rights are sold out. Apart from Telugu, the film is releasing in Tamil and Hindi. The ticket price was also normal in Telangana, but he applied for a Rs 50 hike in Andhra Pradesh. "It is not yet confirmed, but I applied for a Rs 50 hike in Andhra Pradesh and it is under process," he said.

About the film 'Thandel' he said it all started with his classmate Bhanu, who introduced Karthik with this story. "Karthik inspired by true incidents and wrote the story. We did our research and met many people and got to know a few incidents. So with the true incidents we created a love story. So, it is fiction

with some real incidents," said Bunny Vasu. In the trailer, he said they showed only the love story which everyone knows. "But there is a very interesting story and you all will definitely be surprised. What happened in Pakistan, the situation in India at that time, how they survived in Pakistan are not known to many," he said.

They shot this film in many areas. "We shot at Mangalore coast, Kerala, Visakhapatnam, Srikakulam and Wagah border and many other places. There is only one scene we shot in the studio, but most of the sea scenes were shot at sea," he said.

There are a few films made about Indian prisoners struggling in Pakistan jails. "But each one has a different story and I took one story. More than that these stories are there in newspapers and other platforms. So, anyone can pick up a story and we took one story with a love angle in it," he said.

Karthik narrated a story to Bunny Vasu and he accidentally met Naga Chaitanya the next day. "I went to meet him for some personal work. So, he asked me if there was any story. Immediately I told this story and he was excited to do it. But I told him about the fisherman's life and the slang, and the look. I was shocked to see him after he moulded himself for the character and the slang. You will definitely be surprised after seeing Chaitanya's performance, especially the last half-an-hour in peaks," he said about the film.



## Archana talks high about Karmasthalam

Archana Sastry is back to films after a few years gap and now coming up with a film titled 'Karmasthalam'. Rocky Sherman is the director, while Srinivas Subrahmanya is the producer. From the film, the makers recently released Archana's look which stands out prominently. Talking about the film, Archana said that it is a concept-based one. "This film is based on the concept of Mahishasura Mardini, and I am thankful to Rocky sir for bringing such a wonderful subject to life with a powerful title like 'Karmasthalam'," said Archana. The actress said when the director narrated the story to her, she was a

bit doubtful about how the new director handled it. "But he narrated it brilliantly. Many people can tell a great story, but translating it on to the screen is a different challenge altogether," said Archana.

She added that director Rocky has done an exceptional job. "I am extremely happy and satisfied to be part of this film which is releasing in all languages," she said. "This movie is very special to me, and it holds a place close to my heart. The first look is stunning, and I still remember the day we shot the fight sequences, which have turned out incredibly well. If the poster is creating such an impact, the film will surely leave an even greater impression. I thank everyone who worked on this project," said Archana.



## Finally, Prabhas look from Kannappa is out

Vishnu Manchu's prestigious pan-Indian project 'Kannappa' generated much curiosity among the people, because of the story and also how Prabhas is going to look in it. Now, the makers released the look of Prabhas, as he appeared as powerful Rudra in the film. The poster introduces Prabhas in a powerful role that is both divine and awe-inspiring, further amplifying the anticipation surrounding the film.

Prabhas' character, named Rudra, is portrayed as a figure of immense power and spiritual significance. Described as the raging storm, the guide through times past and future and is ruled by Lord Shiva's command, the character embodies a perfect blend of divinity and strength.

His calm expression contrasts strikingly with the backdrop of destruction, symbolized by a statue of Lord Shiva in the background. Now, this picture of Prabhas is going viral on the internet and social media.

There are a few scenes between Prabhas and Vishnu Manchu, which are going to be the highlights of the film, says a source. Directed by Mukesh Kumar Singh and produced by Mohan Babu, the film is all set to hit the screens on April 25.

## ANIL SUNKARA TO PRODUCE A MULTI-STARRER

Producer Anil Sunkara is all set to come up with a multi-starrer soon. According to a source, the producer has roped in Sai Durgaha Tej and Teja Sajja for his upcoming film to be directed by Veeru Potla. The film will be officially launched in the coming days as the producer may announce the film soon.

If you recall, Anil Sunkara earlier did a couple of films, 'Bindaas' and 'Eedu Gold Ahe' with Veeru Potla as director. Both were commercially successful and were released long back.



"From then onwards, Veeru Potla has come up with a period story with some fantasy elements, which is very interesting and Anil Sunkara wanted to make it as a multi-starrer," said a source. Though this project was delayed for a few reasons, but now, Anil feels that it is the right time to produce it.

Veeru Potla started his career as a writer with blockbuster films like 'Varsham' and 'Nuvvostanante Nenoddantana'. He then turned as director with 'Bindaas' which was an instant hit.

## Kiran Abbavaram's new film K-Ramp launched

Among the young actors, it is Kiran Abbavaram, who is in demand. The actor's last film 'KA' was very successful at the box-office and he is now on a roll. The actor's new film titled 'K-Ramp' was launched on Monday morning at a private studio in Hyderabad. It is produced by Ramesh Danda and directed by a newcomer Jains Nani. He is making his debut as a director with this film.

Generally, Kiran is encouraging new talent, in his earlier films too. His last film 'KA' was also directed by a debutante. Now, 'K-Ramp' is also introducing a new director and he is now coming up with a variety of subjects.

The recently released title poster offers a glimpse of Kiran Abbavaram, which hints at a high-octane action sequence. The title logo, featuring a medicine bottle, and a football, is sparking a lot of intrigue. What the story will unfold into remains a mystery, making the title poster an exciting conversation starter.

Yukti Thareja is playing the female lead, while Chaitan Bharadwaj is the music director. Senior actor VK Nareish is playing an important role in it. It seems the story revolves around a father and son.



## Sandeep Vanga praises Sai Pallavi

Sandeep Reddy Vanga's 'Arjun Reddy' was a sensational hit that stars Vijay Deverakonda and Shalini Pandey. The film was released nearly eight years back and it was also remade into Hindi as 'Kabir Singh' and there also it was a huge hit. Though the film was released long back, director Sandeep revealed about his first choice of the female lead in an event on Sunday.

"Initially, I wanted to cast Sai Pallavi. So, I contacted a coordinator from Kerala. I told him that it was a romantic film and the coordinator asked 'how romantic?' I told him it was more than what we see in usual Telugu cinema," said Sandeep. Then the guy immediately replied to him 'forget about it'. The girl won't even wear sleeveless. Sandeep revealed this now, though the film was released nearly seven years back.

"Eventually, actresses change over a period of time, based on the opportunities they get. But Sai Pallavi is not changing at all. It is really a great thing," said Sandeep about Sai Pallavi. The director wanted to tell that Sai Pallavi is the same from then onwards till now.