

sunday pioneer

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Women's safety gov't's top priority; we made strict laws: PM

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Banking sector must CONTINUE to innovate: FM



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Dr Alagu Varshini: PERSEVERANCE in Action



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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Centre is delaying the 33% Women's Reservation Bill's execution despite its passage in Parliament in 2023. This delay is politically affecting women across the country, as seen in the recent elections in Maharashtra, Delhi and Haryana, where many women lost out on legislative positions due to the lack of reservation. If the Census is speeded up, more women could secure seats in the upcoming elections in states like Bihar and Tamil Nadu



- Kalvakuntla Kavitha, BRS MLC P4

DON'T MISS...

Amendment to Waqf Act opposed

Maulana Mohammed Fazlur Rahman, Secretary of the Muslim Personal Law Board, criticised the Centre's move to amend the Waqf Act without prior consultation, alleging that the BJP-led NDA government was infringing upon the constitutional rights of minorities. Addressing a protest organised by the Muslim Personal Law Board at Dhama Chowk in Vijayawada on Saturday, he accused the government of disregarding public opinion despite seeking feedback. The demonstration saw participation...

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'PM firm on 33% quota for women'

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to providing 33 per cent reservation for women in legislative bodies. The Union Minister, along with Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker K Raghurama Krishnam Raju, District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani, and SP Adnan Nayeem Ashmi, flagged off a rally at Prakash Chowk on Saturday to mark International Women's Day. A large number of women and girls students participated...

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Delhi gov't allocates Rs 5,100 cr for MSY

The BJP government in Delhi approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana on Saturday to provide a monthly assistance of Rs 2,500 each to women from poor families in the city and allocated Rs 5,100 crore for the scheme. Addressing a party programme on International Women's Day at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here, BJP president J P Nadda said the Delhi Cabinet has approved an allocation of Rs 5,100 crore for implementing the Mahila Samridhi Yojana and congratulated Chief Minister Rekha Gupta for it...

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GTRI: Withdraw from all talks with US

India should withdraw from all negotiations with the US and prepare to engage with the Trump administration in the same way as countries like China and Canada are doing, economic think tank GTRI said on Saturday. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder, Ajay Srivastava said the US is exerting heavy pressure on India to accept trade demands that largely favour American interests. US President Donald Trump and his officials have criticized India mostly by using incorrect data, he said. "Trump is insulting India publicly using wrong data. No balanced outcome is possible in such circumstances. India should withdraw from all negotiations and prepare to deal with them like other countries are doing." Srivastava said...

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Women true architects of society: Pawan

Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan extended his greetings to women on the occasion of International Women's Day, emphasising that women are the true architects of society. He highlighted their significant contributions across various fields, from managing households to excelling in governance, administration, business, and industry. In a statement on Saturday, Pawan Kalyan reaffirmed the state government's commitment to women's economic empowerment. He announced that a special programme is being designed to provide financial assistance of Rs 4,000 crore to benefit around 11.5 lakh women.

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CM unveils women's welfare schemes

Anganwadi workers receive gratuity benefits ranging from Rs 1.09 lakh to Rs 2.32 lakh



- Roadmap introduced to support women entrepreneurs in agriculture, manufacturing, services, and business sectors.
- Sakti teams launched to enhance the safety of women and children in public spaces.
- The WowGenie app facilitates the sale of over one lakh DWCRAs products, generating Rs 5.13 cr in revenue.
- Urban women receive bank loans worth Rs 645.52 crore, while rural women were given Rs 1,826 crore in productive loans.
- Flipkart partners with the State to market DWCRAs products, alongside training in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.
- MoUs signed with MS Swaminathan Research Foundation and Centre for Collective Development for agro-based initiatives.
- Handloom 'rathams' introduced to boost the marketing of handloom products, with free yarn distributed to women.
- Govt distributing 1.5 lakh sewing machines along with tailoring training for economic empowerment.
- Gatos Cafe partners with govt to train DWCRAs women in small-scale hotel businesses.
- Home Triangle providing training and job opportunities for 18,515 service providers, ensuring stable monthly incomes.
- Women Rapido riders receive financial benefits, and 1,000 electric vehicles were provided exclusively for women.
- Nature Araku Coffee partners with the government to expand Araku coffee's global reach and create employment for women.
- Gratuity for Asha workers approved, with Rs 1.90 cr allocated for pending dues since June 2024.
- Under the PM-Viswakarma scheme, 1,000 women receive business loans of up to Rs 1L.

'Our govt will turn 1 lakh women into entrepreneurs'

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has reiterated his government's commitment to fostering women entrepreneurs, stating that one lakh women will be supported in business ventures with a 45 per cent subsidy on investments. Addressing women on the occasion of International Women's Day on Saturday, Naidu warned those who harass women, asserting that such actions would have severe consequences. He highlighted the launch of the 'Sakti' app, aimed at ensuring women's safety and security. The Chief Minister informed that agreements have been signed with 24 organisations to promote women in business and assured marketing support for their products. He also promised initiatives to enhance women's dignity in society, including the implementation of the 'Talliki Vandanam' scheme for all mothers, irrespective of the number of children.

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VIVEKA MURDER CASE



Re-postmortem conducted on Ranganna's body

A re-postmortem was conducted on the body of Ranganna, the late YSRCP leader YS Vivekananda Reddy's watchman and a key eye-witness in his murder, in Pulivendula on Saturday. This action follows concerns raised by Ranganna's wife, Susheela, regarding the circumstances of his death. Ranganna was a crucial witness in the high-profile murder of former minister YS Vivekananda Reddy. In response to Susheela's doubts, the government ordered a second post-mortem examination. Ranganna's body was exhumed from the Pulivendula burial ground. Forensic experts from Mangalagiri and Tirupati, along with a medical team from RIMS hospital, arrived at the site with the necessary equipment. The postmortem was carried out within a makeshift tent, under the supervision of the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO). The forensic team meticulously examined the body for any signs of injuries. They also collected hair strands, nail samples, and tissue samples from vital organs, which will be sent to a laboratory for further analysis. Susheela, Ranganna's wife, was present during the procedure. To maintain the integrity of the investigation, police restricted access to the area within a 200-meter radius of the makeshift tent. Y.S. Vivekananda Reddy was murdered on March 15, 2019.

Maternity leave extended for all deliveries

In a major policy shift, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced on Saturday that government female employees will now be entitled to maternity leave for all deliveries, irrespective of the number of children. Previously, maternity leave was granted only for the first two deliveries, with each leave period spanning six months with full pay. However, in line with his advocacy for population balance, Naidu emphasised the need for larger families to address the country's ageing population crisis. He cautioned against the risks of strict population control, citing challenges faced by Western nations. Following the coalition government's assumption of power, the rule barring individuals with more than two children from contesting local body elections was also revoked through legal amendments. Announcing the decision during International Women's Day celebrations, Naidu stated that this move reaffirms the government's commitment to supporting women in the workforce by ensuring maternity leave benefits for every childbirth.

AP gears up for AI revolution: Lokesh

Andhra Pradesh is poised to transition seamlessly from IT to AI, leveraging its strategic strengths, said Minister for IT, Electronics, Education, and Human Resources, Nara Lokesh, at a conclave in Delhi on Saturday. He emphasised the need to equip students and the workforce for the AI-driven future. "Karnataka has Bengaluru, Tamil Nadu has Chennai, and Telangana has Hyderabad, but Andhra Pradesh has Chandrababu Naidu as its competitive advantage," Lokesh remarked, crediting his father, the four-time Chief Minister, for shaping modern Hyderabad's digital infrastructure. Recounting his 226-day 'padayatra' covering over 3,000 km in 2023, Lokesh said the journey provided invaluable insights into governance. "Walking through villages and towns helped me understand issues in a way no classroom could," he stated. Announcing plans to develop a 'Data City' in Visakhapatnam, Lokesh said the initiative aims to replicate Hyderabad's success with Hitec City. "We are at the cusp of the next revolution, and a strong ecosystem is crucial to attract investments," he asserted. Addressing concerns over population control and delimitation, Lokesh stressed that such measures should not disadvantage Southern states. He expressed confidence in the NDA government's assurance of maintaining the existing ratios to prevent political imbalances. On linguistic diversity, he opposed any imposition of Hindi, advocating for states' autonomy in promoting regional languages. "Every state is unique and should have the freedom to develop its language policies," he said, while also supporting the inclusion of global languages like German and Japanese in education to boost job opportunities. Highlighting gender equality, Lokesh called for curriculum reforms to break stereotypes. "We are revising textbooks to ensure a balanced representation of men and women in household roles," he stated, stressing that change begins with education.

Continued on Page 2

Woman gang-raped on Women's Day eve

In a shocking incident that casts a shadow over International Women's Day, a 26-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped by two men in Tavalam village, Nimmanapalle mandal of Annamayya district, on the night of Friday. Sub-inspector Thippe Swamy informed the media that the victim, a 26-year-old resident of the village, had gone to the local milk depot to sell milk, a common practice for many rural women. As she was returning home, she was waylaid by two persons, identified as Nagendra and Surendra. They forcibly dragged her behind parked buses and subjected her to a brutal sexual assault. Following the heinous act, the accused reportedly attempted to murder her by pushing her into an irrigation well. Fortunately, the woman managed to escape their clutches and immediately informed her husband and relatives. They filed a police complaint. SI Thippe Swamy visited the crime scene and initiated an investigation. The timing of this appalling crime, occurring on International Women's Day, has sparked outrage and calls for swift justice.

Amaravati works from March 12: Narayana

Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister P. Narayana has announced that construction work in Amaravati will commence on March 12, marking a major step in the capital's development. Speaking to the media at the Rajahmundry Municipal Corporation office on Saturday, he stated that with the conclusion of the MLC election code, the government is now able to open tenders and finalise contract firms for the project. The minister revealed that tenders worth Rs 40,000 crore have been opened, and within two days, Letters of Acceptance (LoAs) will be issued to the selected contractors after obtaining necessary approvals. He clarified that the original designs approved between 2014 and 2019 would remain unchanged. Narayana attributed the delay in construction to legal challenges over the past seven and a half months.

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Posani remanded to judicial custody

Film actor and YSRCP leader Posani Krishna Murali has been remanded to judicial custody until March 20th by the Vijayawada Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) court. Krishna Murali was brought from Kurnool district jail to Vijayawada on a Production Transfer (PT) warrant. He was taken to Bhavanipuram police station, where cases were registered against him based on a complaint filed by JSP leader Shankar. Following a medical examination, he was presented before the CMM court.

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Trump says India agreed to cut tariffs way down

US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there. "Our country, from an economic standpoint and financial standpoint and a trade standpoint, has been absolutely ripped off by almost every country in the world," Trump said in remarks from the Oval Office on Friday. "Canada, Mexico and then you just go right down the line. India charges us massive tariffs, massive, you can't even sell anything into India. It's almost, it's almost restrictive. It is restrictive. We do very little business inside," he said. "They've agreed, by the way, they want to cut their tariffs way down now because somebody's finally exposing them for what they've done. And the same thing with China, same thing with a lot of other countries, and the EU has been a terrible abuser of this country," Trump added. Trump's comments came following Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's visit to the US for trade talks with his counterpart Howard Lutnick. This was the third time this week that Trump has criticised the high tariffs charged by India. On Thursday, Trump said India is a very high-tariff nation and reiterated that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2. In his address to the joint session of Congress on Tuesday, the first of his second term in the White House, Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries and termed them as "very unfair". Addressing lawmakers from the US Capitol, Trump announced that reciprocal tariffs will kick in next month. In the past, Trump has called India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser". Last month, during a joint press conference with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the White House, Trump said that India has "been very strong on tariffs". "I don't blame them, necessarily, but it's a different way of doing business. It's very hard to sell into India because they have trade barriers, very strong tariffs," he had said.

Revanth's Delhi Trips: Walking KCR's Path to Isolation?

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's frequent trips to Delhi have sparked comparisons to the final stretch of Ex CM KCR's tenure. The striking resemblance has not gone unnoticed, with journalists and political circles murmuring about how the CM appears more accessible to the national leaders and media than to his own state. His engagements now seem exclusively reserved for Delhi, raising eyebrows and fueling speculation about his priorities. A senior journalist, clearly unimpressed, remarked, "We all saw what happened to the last Chief Minister who chose to take the Delhi route." The reference to KCR's fall after his repeated attempts to become national leader is hard to miss. If Revanth Reddy continues down the same path - prioritizing Delhi over Telangana - many believe he might end up facing a similar fate sooner rather than later. Political history in the state has shown that Chief Ministers who lose touch with their backyard often pay the price, and murmurs suggest that Revanth is already treading dangerously close to that territory.

Bhatti's meeting, media left in the lurch!

At the all-party MPs' meeting chaired by Bhatti Vikramarka, the media faced an unexpected snub. Journalists who arrived at Praja Bhavan for coverage were denied entry, leaving them stranded outside for hours. Despite their repeated attempts, there was no response from the organisers, forcing them to wait on the road under the scorching sun. As the heat became unbearable, the journalists found refuge in the nearby residence of Seethakka, who, upon learning about their plight, arranged food for them. Interestingly, when Bhatti finally addressed the press, most journalists chose to skip it, making it clear that they weren't amused by the cold shoulder they had received earlier. However, Bhatti seemed unbothered by their absence, adding another layer to the already brewing discontent.

Women leaders in demand, but not all play along

On International Women's Day, women politicians are in high demand, gracing events and making the most of the attention. Some see it as an opportunity, while others quietly step aside. Minister Seethakka, much like during Bathukamma, is once again in the spotlight, attending multiple programs and ensuring visibility. But what remains a mystery is why Minister Konda Surekha is unable to capitalize on such occasions despite her stature. On the other end of the spectrum is BRS MLC Kavitha, who has taken a starkly different approach. Unlike many, she stopped giving Women's Day interviews nearly a decade ago, believing that women's voices shouldn't be restricted to just one day. Women's voice matters every day, and inclusivity in discourse strengthens democracy, is her line of reasoning. Many journalists who reached out for interviews were left disappointed, as she simply wouldn't entertain the idea. However, for the sake of appearances, Kavitha did manage to attend a small celebration at Telangana Bhavan. One thing is clear - when it comes to Women's Day, not every woman leader is playing by the same rulebook.

Kishan Reddy's plea: 'Don't ask a About CM's criticism'

Telangana BJP president and Union Minister for Coal and Mines Kishan Reddy found himself in an awkward spot on Saturday when he practically begged reporters not to question him about Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's criticism of the BJP. In a rare moment of appeal, Kishan Reddy requested the media to avoid posing queries on the CM's remarks, particularly those concerning delimitation. "There is no truth in Revanth Reddy's criticism, so I should not have to answer such questions," he insisted, sidestepping the issue altogether. Instead, he took a swipe at both Telangana CM Revanth Reddy and Tamil Nadu CM Stalin, alleging that neither leader was working for the welfare of the people and was instead stirring up baseless controversies. "I am requesting my media friends with love - not to ask me about the CM's criticism. Congress has nothing to teach us about Telangana's interests," he said, making it clear that he wasn't in the mood for tough questions. While Kishan Reddy may have hoped to shut down the debate, his plea only fueled curiosity, leaving many wondering why BJP's state chief was so reluctant to counter the CM's remarks head-on.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has taken serious note of Narasaraopet MLA Chadalavada Aravind Babu's disruptive antics at the State Excise Commissioner's office. The MLA landed himself in controversy after a video surfaced showing him aggressively pressuring Excise Commissioner Nishant Kumar to remove ten contract employees and replace them with his own picks. The drama unfolded when Aravind Babu stormed into the commissioner's office, demanding immediate appointment orders within an hour. Without waiting for a response, he left, only to return two hours later and find the commissioner absent. What followed was nothing short of a spectacle - furious over being made to wait, the MLA staged a sit-in, even bringing pillows and lying on the floor, refusing to budge for nearly three hours. Despite attempts from senior TDP leaders, including state president Palla Srinivasa Rao, and top officials to defuse the situation, Aravind Babu remained adamant. He finally left only after assurances that his demand would be reviewed. However, the incident, which quickly went viral on social media, caught the attention of Naidu, who wasted no time in summoning the MLA for an explanation and issuing a reprimand over his behavior. The episode has left TDP leadership red-faced, with many within the party privately questioning the MLA's aggressive tactics and the potential embarrassment it brings at a time when the party is trying to project a disciplined image.

REPORTERS' DIARY

BJLP's Prediction: 'Congress will be empty in six months'

Bharatiya Janata Legislature Party (BJLP) leader Alleti Maheshwar Reddy has been relentless in his attacks on the Congress and Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, but his sharp criticism has also sparked speculation about his own political future. While Congress leaders mock him for lacking a proper position even within the BJP state office, Maheshwar Reddy continues to go all out against his former party, raising serious allegations against the Congress government. Interestingly, sources suggest that Maheshwar Reddy regrets his decision to quit Congress and join the BJP. However, a senior Congress leader dismissed any possibility of his return, quipping that Maheshwar Reddy's aggressive stance against the party was nothing more than an attempt to gain attention, hoping for an invitation back into the fold. In a recent chat with journalists, Maheshwar Reddy stirred controversy when he pointed out that the Adilabad district lacks ministerial representation. A journalist playfully suggested that Congress would be happy to offer him a ministerial post if he rejoined the party. Without missing a beat, Maheshwar Reddy shot back, "Congress will be empty in six months. Why would I even think of joining?" While his statement has raised eyebrows, Congress leaders are brushing it off, maintaining that Maheshwar Reddy is only trying to stay relevant. Whether his prediction holds any truth or is just wishful thinking remains to be seen, but his words have certainly added more fuel to the ongoing political chatter.

Naidu pulls up MLA over excise office drama

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief and

Jagan slams budget, mocks Pawan's oppn dtatus remark

YSRCP chief and former chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy took a dig at the Andhra Pradesh government's 2025-26 budget, claiming it failed to live up to the grand promises made during the elections. In a two-hour-long media interaction, Jagan dissected the budget allocations, arguing that the numbers on paper do not match the assurances given to the people. However, the real fireworks began when a journalist brought up Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan's recent comment about the status of the Leader of the Opposition. Pawan had quipped that if YSRCP wanted opposition status based on its 40% vote share, they should try their luck in Germany, where such provisions exist. The remark, intended as a jibe, sparked a sharp reaction from Jagan, who wasted no time in ridiculing Pawan's political stance. "Corporator ki ekkuva - MLA ki takkuvu. Jeevithamlo okkasari MLA iyadu," Jagan remarked sarcastically, implying that Pawan is politically insignificant - more than a corporator but still falling short of an MLA, given that he has only held the position once. The comment quickly set social media on fire, further fueling the ongoing rivalry between the two leaders. Meanwhile, JSP leaders didn't take the insult lightly and swung into action, filing cases against Jagan for his remarks on Pawan Kalyan. With tensions escalating, it's clear that the war of words between the two political heavyweights is far from over.

(With inputs from Naveena Ghanate, Dr Kolishetty Venkateswarulu, C Pradeep Kumar)

HM reaffirms commitment to women's safety and welfare

Announces new initiatives for female police personnel, launches 'Shakti' App, and proposes women & child safety wing

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

State Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha has reinforced the government's dedication to women's safety and welfare, addressing the challenges faced by female police personnel during an interactive session at the Vizianagaram district police office. Speaking during an interactive session, 'Ishta Goshiti', on the eve of International Women's Day celebrations, Minister Anitha acknowledged the difficulties of balancing professional responsibilities with childcare. She assured attendees that a proposal for a police department childcare centre would be raised with the Chief Minister. Additionally, she announced that the government is considering extending childcare leave benefits to a third child, beyond the existing provision for two children. The event brought together female police officers, women's welfare police, and other department staff. Addressing broader welfare



concerns, Minister Anitha stated that the feasibility of granting weekly offs for police personnel would be reviewed, with a decision expected in the near future. In a key policy announcement, Minister Anitha revealed that a Women Child Safety Wing would be established to raise awareness on drug abuse and women's security. She urged parents to actively monitor their children's activities and emphasized the government's commitment to tackling crimes against women. As part of these measures,

she introduced the 'Shakti' mobile app, a safety tool that enables women in distress to press an SOS button, instantly transmitting their location details to the nearest police station and emergency services (112). This initiative aims to ensure a swift police response and enhance protection for women.

Minister Anitha also outlined plans to bolster the Women Protection Police and confirmed that the police department would take full oversight of Mahila Police Services (MSPs). Additionally,

in response to a suggestion, she expressed support for making NCC, NSS, or Scouts training mandatory for students from Class 6 onwards, stating that the proposal would be presented to the Education Minister for consideration in both private and government schools.

As part of International Women's Day celebrations, Minister Anitha honoured female police personnel for their dedication, presenting them with mementoes and certificates of appreciation. She also awarded students who excelled in elocution, essay writing, and painting competitions, organized across the district as part of Women's Empowerment Week.

In a symbolic move, she unveiled a women's safety logo, designed by the District Police Department. Demonstrating camaraderie, Minister Anitha, alongside District SP and local MLA Aditi Gajapati Raju, personally served meals to female police employees and joined them for a communal meal.

Jagan extends Women's Day greetings

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy extended his greetings and best wishes to women on the occasion of International Women's Day. In a statement, he emphasised his belief that "when women thrive, families prosper; when families prosper, the state flourishes; and when the state flourishes, the nation progresses." He highlighted his government's efforts during its tenure to empower women across all sectors.

YS Jagan stated that his administration implemented over 32 schemes aimed at boosting women's confidence and supporting their progress. He noted that his government introduced a pioneering law reserving 50 per cent of nominated positions for women, a first-of-its-kind initiative. He also pointed out that tribal and Dalit women were given key positions, including Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister, in recognition of their contributions. He further underscored the launch of the "Disha" system to enhance women's safety and security. Quoting the saying, "Where women are revered, divinity resides," he reiterated his government's commitment to women's welfare.

Bhuvaneshwari for tech-driven sustainable growth

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Nara Bhuvaneshwari underscored the crucial role of technology in sustainable development while addressing the ALEAP International Conference organised by the Association of Lady Entrepreneurs of India (ALEAP) on International Women's Day.

Speaking as the chief guest at the three-day event, Bhuvaneshwari highlighted how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and renewable energy can empower women entrepreneurs to build successful and eco-friendly businesses. "We are at a turning point where technology and sustainability can work together to create a better future. Making these tools accessible to everyone is key," she said, lauding ALEAP for promoting digital



inclusion and green financing. She further emphasised the potential of Industry 4.0, marked by smart automation and circular economy models, in fostering business growth while minimising environmental impact. She urged entrepreneurs to adopt these innovations to enhance efficiency, generate employment, and ensure long-term success. Expressing concern over the rising threat of cybercrime,

Bhuvaneshwari noted that even tech professionals and law enforcement personnel are not immune to online fraud. Describing cybercriminals as "faceless, heartless, and ruthless," she called for heightened vigilance and stronger digital awareness. She stressed the need for individuals to educate their families and communities about online threats and adopt preventive measures in an increasingly digital world.

Women true...

Continued from Page 1

Acknowledging the Centre's efforts, he praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives, including the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which have significantly improved the lives of many women. He expressed gratitude to PM Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for their continued focus on women's welfare.

Pawan Kalyan noted that government initiatives at both the central and state levels are enhancing financial literacy among women, leading to stronger families and a more prosperous society. He assured that the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, prioritises women's safety and welfare. He also warned that strict action would be taken against those who speak disrespectfully about women, whether on social media or any other platform. The Deputy CM reiterated that ensuring the protection and empowerment of women remains a fundamental responsibility of the government.



YSRCP marks Intl Women's Day with criticism of TDP govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) celebrated International Women's Day at its party office on Saturday, with former minister RK Roja and Women's Wing President Varudu Kalyani leading the event. The programme commenced with floral tributes to the statue of former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Addressing the gathering, Roja criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, accusing him of failing to fulfil promises made to women, including the Rs 1,500 monthly 'Aadabidda Nidhi' scheme. She alleged that under the TDP-led coalition, women's safety had deteriorated due to the rise in liquor and drug-related issues, even in Naidu's own constituency, Kuppam.

She described his leadership as a "misfortune" for women and contrasted it with the empowerment initiatives of YS Rajasekhara Reddy and YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Varudu Kalyani echoed similar concerns, accusing the government of dismantling the Disha initiative and neglecting women's security. She criticised the failure to implement free bus travel for women and claimed the state was turning into "Madyandhra Pradesh" due to rampant liquor and drug problems. She urged women to rally behind YS Jagan Mohan Reddy in the upcoming elections.

Party leaders Shaik Noor Fatima, Krupa Jyothi, and Rajani also spoke at the event, vowing to counter misinformation against Jagan and continue the fight for women's rights.

'Our govt will turn...

Continued from Page 1

Announcing several welfare measures, Naidu declared that women government employees would receive maternity leave regardless of the number of deliveries. He also claimed that ever since the TDP-led NDA assumed power, the use of objectionable language on TV debates and social media had been curbed. Strict action would be taken against those indulging in offensive language, he warned.

The Chief Minister stated that ganja cultivation had been eradicated in the state through the 'Eagle' surveillance system, expressing concern over the rising number of people addicted to the drug. He further mentioned that the work-from-home model was being encouraged for women, with plans to set up workstations in rural areas.

AP gears up for...

Continued from Page 1

Sharing a personal note, he credited his wife, Nara Brahmani, for efficiently managing work-life balance, emphasising that Women's Day should be celebrated every day. Lokesh reiterated the state's commitment to aligning education with industry needs and fostering innovation. "We are actively competing to attract investments and drive technological advancements, ensuring the next generation of thought leaders emerges from Andhra Pradesh," he concluded.

Amaravati works from...

Continued from Page 1

He criticised the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government for failing to support farmers and delaying Amaravati's development. He stated that 4,000 acres of land are currently available in Amaravati and that land prices are expected to rise significantly once infrastructure is in place.

He assured that the capital's construction will be funded entirely through land sales, without burdening taxpayers. Addressing concerns over financial feasibility, Narayana dismissed apprehensions about debts amounting to Rs 10 lakh crore and expressed confidence that the construction would be completed within three years.

Posani remanded

Continued from Page 1

The cases against him stem from allegations of making offensive and defamatory comments against Chandrababu Naidu, Nara Lokesh, and Pawan Kalyan.

TODAY	
ALMANAC	
Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Dashami:	Mar 08 08:16 AM to Mar 09 07:45 AM
Ekadashi:	Mar 09 07:45 AM to Mar 11 12:51 AM
Nakshatram:	
Punarvasu:	Mar 08 11:28 PM to Mar 09 11:55 PM
Pushya:	Mar 09 11:55 PM to Mar 11 12:51 AM
Rahukalam:	4:51 PM to 6:19 PM
Yamagandam:	12:26 PM to 1:55 PM
Varjyam:	07:49 PM to 09:15 PM
Gulika:	3:24 PM to 4:52 PM
Amritakalam:	09:28 PM to 11:06 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:02 PM to 12:50 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER	
Forecast:	Sunny
Temp:	34°C
Humidity:	69%
Sunrise:	6:20 AM
Sunset:	6:16 PM
Updated:	March 8, 2025 5:00 PM

Women's empowerment key to 'Team NTR's success: DC



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

NTR District Collector Dr G. Lakshmi highlighted the crucial role of women's empowerment in the success of 'Team NTR', which is driving holistic development across multiple sectors in the district. He also acknowledged the significant contributions of women in the fight against poverty.

To mark International Women's Day, the NTR District Police Commissionerate organised a 3K Run Rally on Saturday, drawing around 2,000 participants. The rally, which started at Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium and concluded at Benz Circle, was flagged off by Collector Dr Lakshmi and Police Commissioner S.V. Rajasekhara Babu.

The event witnessed enthusiastic public participation and featured cultural performances by students of Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala, children's skating activities, and a drone show led by women police officers. Senior officials, including DCPs K.G.V. Saritha, Tirumaleswara Reddy, A.B.T.S. Udaya Rani,



and Krishnamurthy Naidu, actively took part in the rally. Following the rally, the Collector and the Police Commissioner attended International Women's Day celebrations at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram, where they participated in drumming activities. Addressing the gathering, Collector Lakshmi stressed the importance of women's involvement in achieving the government's 'Swarnadhara@2047' vision. He also underscored the need for women's participation in the Public, Private, and People

Participation (P4) Survey and reiterated Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's goal of fostering entrepreneurship in every family, with a special focus on women entrepreneurs. Police Commissioner Rajasekhara Babu extended his greetings to all women and highlighted various initiatives undertaken over the past week to celebrate their achievements and empowerment. He stated that these programs, conducted across different government departments, aim to recognise women's pivotal role in societal development and ensure they

receive the support and respect they deserve. The Police Commissioner also informed that the state government has introduced the 'Shakti' mobile application, developed by the police department, to provide women with immediate access to safety resources. He noted that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu officially launched the app during an International Women's Day event in Markapuram, Prakasam district. DRDA Project Director K. Srinivasa Rao, DM&HO Dr M. Suhasini, and other officials were present.



CM honours Kennedy School principal on Women's Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu felicitated Nadipalli Ratna Kumari, Principal of Kennedy High School, Nunna, during the International Women's Day celebrations organised by the State government in Markapur, Prakasam district, on Saturday. She was honoured for her contributions to education in rural areas.

Ratna Kumari was the only recipient of this honour from the erstwhile Krishna district. Her father-in-law, Nadipalli Sundarachari, founded Kennedy High School in Vijayawada in 1969. She later expanded this legacy by establishing Kennedy High School in Nunna, Vijayawada Rural mandal, where she has helped numerous students achieve academic success.

Among her former students is a judge serving in the Illenduru Court, Telangana. She has mentored many individuals who have risen to prominent positions.

Speaking at the event, Ratna Kumari expressed happiness over receiving the recognition from the Chief Minister. She reiterated her commitment to providing rural students with quality education and said the honour further strengthened her resolve.

APSRTC wins national awards in 4 categories



APSRTC Vice-Chairman & Managing Director Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao received the awards from former IPS officer Kiran Bedi, in a programme held in New Delhi on Saturday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Public Transport Department (APPTD), formerly known as the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC), has won the prestigious National Bus Transport Excellence Awards in four categories for 2023-24. These awards were conferred by the Association of State Road Transport Undertakings (ASRTU), a Central Government public sector organisation.

APSRTC was recognised

for excellence in Technology Initiatives, Fuel Efficiency (Highest Kilometre per Litre - KMPL), Non-Fare Revenue Generation, and Lowest Accident Rate. APSRTC Vice-Chairman & Managing Director (VC & MD) Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, Executive Director (Zone II) G Vejayaratnam, and Deputy Chief Engineer (IT) Y Srinivasa Rao received the awards from former IPS officer Kiran Bedi at a ceremony in New Delhi on Saturday.

Expressing his delight at this achievement, APSRTC

VC & MD Dwaraka Tirumala Rao credited the dedication of officials and staff for securing the prestigious honours. He noted that APSRTC has previously received several awards from the Central Government for its outstanding performance among state transport corporations.

He further stated that under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, APSRTC would continue to expand and enhance its services, striving for greater efficiency and excellence.

Man attacked over parking dispute despite police presence

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a shocking incident on Friday night, a group of 20 individuals allegedly attempted to murder a young man following a dispute over car parking at an apartment complex in Shivaparthi Nagar, near Vijayawada. Disturbingly, the attack unfolded in front of police officers, with one of the assailants even attempting to stab the victim.

According to police reports, the victim, identified as Rabbani, lives with his family in the apartment complex. Trouble began when an outsider, Veeraiah, tried to park his car in the premises, leading to a heated argument between the two. Matters

escalated when Veeraiah allegedly brandished a coconut-cutting knife and attempted to attack Rabbani. Sensing danger, Rabbani rushed to his apartment, locked himself inside, and alerted the Penamaluru police.

Responding swiftly, the police arrived at the scene. However, as soon as Rabbani stepped out of his apartment, Veeraiah and his group pounced on him. Despite the presence of police personnel, the attackers managed to assault him, forcing Rabbani and other residents to flee in panic. The victim sustained serious injuries and was later shifted to the Government Hospital in Vijayawada for treatment.

VCCI and UCCIL forge stronger trade ties in Odisha

High-level talks at Raj Bhavan highlight collaborative opportunities in seafood, technology, and skill development



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A high-profile delegation from the Vizagapatnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) has engaged in crucial talks with the Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL), aiming to bolster trade relations between the burgeoning economies of India's eastern coastline. The meeting, hosted by Dr. Kambhampati Haribabu, Governor of Odisha, at the Raj Bhavan in Bhubaneswar, signals a concerted effort to unlock the region's economic potential.

The Governor, in his address, emphasised the complementary strengths of both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, highlighting the pivotal role the chambers could play in driving regional growth.

He underscored Odisha's often-overlooked advantages, including its abundant mineral

resources, business-friendly policies, streamlined bureaucracy, robust higher education network, and focus on skill development. He encouraged entrepreneurs to leverage the state's attractive incentive schemes. "Odisha's recent success in mining auctions has generated significant wealth, and I assure you that all incentives promised to industries will be honoured," the Governor stated, seeking to reassure potential investors.

Discussions between VCCI and UCCIL members identified numerous opportunities and challenges in expanding bilateral trade. Key areas for collaboration were pinpointed, including seafood processing and exports, technological innovation, skill development, and a range of other industrial sectors. M Sudarshan Swamy, President of VCCI, who led the delegation, expressed his sincere gratitude to the Governor for his hospitality

and conveyed optimism about the future of trade relations. "This meeting marks a significant step towards strengthening the economic ties between our two metro economies," he said.

Dr. Prabod Mohanty, President of UCCIL, echoed these sentiments, reaffirming the commitment of both chambers to fostering robust economic partnerships. "We are determined to work together to unlock the vast potential of this region," he stated.

The meeting underscores the growing recognition of the east coast's economic dynamism and the strategic importance of interstate cooperation in driving sustainable growth.

The focus on leveraging Odisha's resources and Vizag's established industrial base points towards a future of enhanced trade and investment, potentially transforming the economic landscape of the region.

Govt committed to women's safety, rights: Dola

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Minister for Social Welfare, Disabled and Senior Citizen Welfare, and District In-charge Minister Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy reiterated the state government's dedication to prioritizing women's safety and empowerment. Speaking as the chief guest at the International Women's Day celebrations on Saturday, he emphasized the importance of recognizing and honoring successful women across all constituencies while encouraging their economic independence.

Addressing a large gathering, Minister Swamy highlighted the significance of discussions on women's rights, equality, and empowerment, strongly advocating for equal property rights for girls. He acknowledged the remarkable achievements of women in education and employment, underscoring the government's initiatives, including granting house titles in women's names and implementing stringent laws for their protection.

To further enhance financial independence, Minister Swamy announced the distribution of SHIO autos and two-wheelers to women beneficiaries. He also revealed that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is launching the "Shakti App" to bolster women's safety. Emphasizing the government's special initiatives for women's economic development, he announced that self-help groups (SHGs) in the state are poised to achieve recognition in the Linka Book



Minister Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy hands over Rapido scooters and autos to SHG beneficiaries.

of Records for online sales.

District Collector MN Harendira Prasad echoed the government's commitment, emphasizing the significance of large-scale International Women's Day celebrations and assuring continued support for women's advancement. He stressed the importance of financial stability through self-help groups, announcing new schemes and bank linkages. Assets were distributed to 153 SHGs via DRDA and 1,469 via MEPMA, while 200 women secured employment through Rapido. He urged women to believe in their potential and strive for success.

TDP State President and

Minister Swamy highlighted the significance of discussions on women's rights, equality, and empowerment, strongly advocating for equal property rights for girls. He acknowledged the remarkable achievements of women in education and employment, underscoring the government's initiatives, including granting house titles in women's names and implementing stringent laws for their protection

MLAs Palla Srinivasa Rao, Ganta Srinivasa Rao, and Vishnu Kumar Raju highlighted women's vital roles in society, history, and daily life. They praised NT Rama Rao's efforts toward gender equality and reaffirmed the coalition government's commitment to women's development. Lauding CM

Chandrababu Naidu's self-help group initiatives, they emphasized women's equal contributions across various sectors.

Visakhapatnam Police Commissioner Shankabatha Bagchi acknowledged women's contributions, including in national defence, and commended female police person-

nel. He reaffirmed the commitment to their safety, encouraged women to report concerns directly, and warned against rising online fraud. Assuring confidentiality, he also advised women to prioritize their health.

The event featured vibrant cultural performances, followed by the distribution of cheques to SHGs and awards for students excelling in various fields. Women with exceptional talents were honoured, and participating children received mementoes. Minister Swamy also inspected women-run stalls and distributed Rapido scooters and autos to SHG beneficiaries, further promoting financial independence among women.

Vizag to bolster emergency response with new CBRN medical hub

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam is set to become a regional stronghold for managing complex health emergencies, from industrial mishaps to widespread outbreaks, with the establishment of a cutting-edge Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Medical Management Centre at the Visakha Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS). This initiative marks a substantial leap in Andhra Pradesh's capacity to handle critical incidents.

The VIMS campus has been designated as the site for this crucial facility, a key component of a nationwide strategy to

deploy ten such specialized centres across India. The state and central governments formalised their collaboration last November, paving the way for the centre's development.

With a central government investment of approximately Rs 15 crore, the project will equip VIMS with state-of-the-art resources and specialized personnel. The central government will also provide expert technical support, while the state will augment the workforce with additional staff. The initial three years will see shared funding for salaries and allowances, after which the state will assume full operational responsibility.



Currently, individuals affected by industrial accidents, particularly those from the region's

pharmaceutical and manufacturing sectors, are typically treated at King George Hospital

(KGH) or referred to private hospitals under government schemes. However, lacking spe-

New facility to strengthen Andhra Pradesh's emergency response to industrial accidents, outbreaks, and radiation exposure

cialized equipment and trained personnel often hinders optimal treatment. The new CBRN centre aims to bridge this gap by offering advanced medical facilities and expert care.

The center will feature specialized units tailored to man-

age various emergency scenarios. A dedicated biological unit will handle gas leaks and viral outbreaks, such as COVID-19. A radiological unit will address incidents involving radiation exposure from industrial accidents. Recognizing the presence of nuclear material handling industries, along with naval and military installations in the vicinity, a dedicated nuclear unit will also be established at VIMS, ensuring rapid medical intervention in case of radiation leaks or exposure.

Dr. K. Rambabu, Director of VIMS, confirmed that the land required for the center's construction has been secured,

and the central government is poised to commence construction shortly. The facility will be equipped with the latest medical technology and infrastructure. Dr. Rambabu also emphasized that the center will extend its services to road accident victims, broadening its reach and providing comprehensive emergency medical care to a wider segment of the population.

This specialised centre is expected to significantly enhance the state's preparedness for medical emergencies, guaranteeing swift and effective responses during industrial accidents, natural disasters, and health crises.

PM committed to 33% reservation for women: Union Minister Varma

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to providing 33 per cent reservation for women in legislative bodies.

The Union Minister, along with Legislative Assembly Deputy Speaker K Raghurama Krishnam Raju, District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani, and SP Adnan Nayeem Ashmi, flagged off a rally at Prakash Chowk on Saturday to mark International Women's Day.

A large number of women and girls students participated in the rally, raising slogans and holding placards advocating for women's leadership in all sectors. The rally concluded at the



Alluri Sitarama Raju memorial.

Addressing the gathering, Srinivasa Varma stated that India holds women in high

regard, a distinction that, he claimed, sets it apart from other nations.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to ensuring

33 per cent reservation for women in legislative bodies. The government believes in providing equal opportunities to women across all sectors,

recognising their vital role in family welfare and financial stability," he said.

The Union Minister expressed confidence that women would take on more significant roles in various fields in the coming years and achieve financial independence. He assured that all necessary support would be extended to help women achieve their goals.

District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani urged girls to excel in education, emphasising that it is the key to success. She also stressed the need for equal opportunities for women in all sectors.

MLA Pitani Satyanarayana also spoke on the occasion. SP Adnan Nayeem Ashmi, MLC Borra Gopi Murthy, and DRO M Venkateswarlu were among those present at the event.



Minister reviews R&B works in Annamaiah district

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI

District in-charge Minister and Minister for Roads and Buildings, Investments, and Infrastructure Development BC Janardhan Reddy visited Rayachoti in Annamaiah district on Saturday to review ongoing infrastructure projects.

Senior officials from the Roads and Buildings (R&B) department welcomed the minister with a bouquet and a shawl. They apprised him that Rs 14 crore had been allocated for pothole repairs in the district, with 99 per cent of the work completed. They also informed him that all bills for the completed works had been uploaded for review.

The minister assured that

payments to contractors, who had completed the work on time, would be released without delay. He directed officials to ensure quality standards were maintained throughout the process.

When he inquired about projects under GO No. 2, officials stated that no work had been allocated yet. They cited a shortage of work inspectors and the need for fresh recruitment, which was causing delays in project execution. The minister suggested deploying secretariat staff as an interim measure and assured that he would take up the issue with the district collector.

Officials also briefed him on the incomplete 4.5 km stretch of the Rayachoti ring road, stating

that Rs 8 crore would be required to complete the bypass construction.

A proposal to build an R&B guest house near the Veligallu project was also discussed. Mandipalli Lakshmi Prasad Reddy, the minister's brother, informed him that government land was available for the project and that the facility could help promote tourism. The minister responded positively and assured his support.

Later, BC Janardhan Reddy, accompanied by Minister S Savitha, visited the residence of MLA R Madhavi in Kadapa. They felicitated MLA Madhavi and Srinivasa Reddy, in the presence of Telugu Desam Party leaders and workers from the Kadapa constituency.



Waste-to-energy plant to be set up between R'mundry & K'nada

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Minister for Municipal Administration P. Narayana has announced that a Waste-to-Energy plant will be established between Rajahmundry and Kakinada to address the garbage disposal issues of 20 municipalities.

The Minister visited the Anaparti constituency on Saturday, accompanied by officials, to inspect potential sites for the project. Speaking on the occasion, he stated that the government is taking steps to generate electricity from waste, turning garbage into a valuable resource.

"I visited several locations in

Balabhadrapuram and Kapavaram villages in Anaparti constituency to identify a suitable site for the plant. Officials briefed me on the available land options," Minister Narayana said.

He further mentioned that discussions were held regarding the feasibility of various locations, with the primary focus on ensuring accessibility for 20 municipalities across two districts.

"Our aim is to contribute towards making Andhra Pradesh a cleaner and greener state, in line with the vision of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu," he added.

Govt partners with Rapido to boost women's financial independence

PNS ■ MARKAPURAM

The Andhra Pradesh government has partnered with Rapido under the Mission for Elimination of Poverty in Municipal Areas (MEPMA) to provide livelihood opportunities for women. As part of the collaboration, Rapido has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support Self-Help Group (SHG) members in becoming self-reliant micro-entrepreneurs in the mobility sector.

Under this initiative, 1,000 women captains across Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Nellore, Guntur, Kurnool, Tirupati, Kakinada, and Rajahmundry will gain access to job opportunities. Additionally, they will receive an EMI subsidy of Rs 1,000 per month for a year to help them procure electric vehicles.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu lauded the initiative, stating, "We are committed to empowering self-reliant women micro-entrepreneurs across Andhra Pradesh. Rapido's support in providing financial assistance for vehicle procurement and creating job opportunities in



the mobility sector is a major step towards a women-centric transport solution. This partnership will strengthen the state's efforts to promote women's empowerment and financial independence."

Welcoming the initiative, MEPMA Mission Director N. Tej Bharath said, "Our goal is to improve the quality of life and create an environment for inclusive growth. Through this collaboration with Rapido, we aim to provide SHG women with job opportunities, skill training, and

financial literacy to help them succeed and grow."

Rapido Co-founder and CEO Aravind Sanka expressed gratitude to MEPMA and the Andhra Pradesh government, stating, "At Rapido, we believe mobility is more than just movement—it's a gateway to economic empowerment. This International Women's Day, we are proud to partner with MEPMA to support SHG women, equipping them with skills and opportunities in the micro-mobility sector."

Govt committed to women's financial empowerment: Minister Manohar

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendra Manohar reaffirmed the government's commitment to making women financially self-reliant and ensuring their security. Speaking at an International Women's Day programme held at CR Reddy Degree College on Saturday, he highlighted various welfare initiatives aimed at women's empowerment.

Manohar announced that under the Deepam-2 scheme, more than one crore women in the state would receive three free LPG cylinders per year starting from the next financial year. He noted that 96.40 lakh women are already benefiting from free gas distribution, and the expansion of the scheme would further enhance economic stability for households.



The minister also stressed the government's focus on training women as entrepreneurs, stating that financial independence is key to their overall empowerment. He added that more than 3.85 lakh women in Eluru district had already received free gas cylinders under the initiative.

Criticising the previous YSRCP government, Manohar alleged that over 20,000 women and girls had gone missing in the past five years. He assured support for the anti-women

trafficking bill in Parliament, acknowledging Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan's efforts in highlighting the issue.

Eluru district ranks fifth in implementing the Swarnandhra-2047 Action Plan, and the minister expressed his commitment to elevating it to the third position. He also noted that free cancer screening for women was being conducted statewide, emphasising early detection as key to prevention.

MP Putta Mahesh Kumar urged women to utilise the

numerous state and central government schemes designed for their economic upliftment.

District Collector K Vetri Selvi highlighted that 4,589 women were being trained in tailoring under the BC Corporation, with sewing machines worth Rs 11.45 crore being distributed.

ZP Chairperson Ghanta Padmasri, Mayor Sk. Noorzahana and MLAs Badeti Radhakrishnaiah and Chintamaneni Prabhakar also addressed the gathering.



'Women must step forward as entrepreneurs'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Women must take the lead as entrepreneurs to drive economic development and empowerment, said Kesineni Janaki Lakshmi, wife of MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni). She emphasised the need for female educators to raise awareness about self-employment among women from middle-class families.

Addressing the International Women's Day celebrations at KBN College on Saturday as the chief guest, Janaki Lakshmi highlighted the achievements of women across various fields. She urged them to step forward with confidence and face challenges bravely. Encouraging women to draw inspiration from Nara Bhuvaneshwari, wife of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, she praised her for successfully balancing family responsibilities while excelling as an entrepreneur.

She also pointed out that the government is offering a 45% subsidy on MSME loans to support women entrepreneurs and boost economic growth.

As part of the event, Janaki Lakshmi presented awards to winners of various sports competitions.

Dr V Narayana, AO SKPVV Group of Institutions, Principal Dr G Krishna Veni, T Hemavathi Rajalakshmi, A Sridevi, and several female faculty and staff members of KBN College were present.

2,137 women to receive Rs 5.34 cr aid: Collector

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

District Collector P. Prasanthi announced that 2,137 women from BC, EBC, and minority communities in East Godavari district will receive financial assistance of Rs 5.34 crore under a self-employment scheme. These women will also be trained in tailoring to enhance their livelihood opportunities.

Marking International Women's Day, Collector Prasanthi, along with MLA Adireddy Srinivas and BC Welfare Officer B. Seshank, inaugurated a tailoring training centre in the district on Saturday. Speaking at the event, she emphasised that the state government is distributing sewing machines free of cost to empower women from economically weaker sections.

She further stated that the

selection of beneficiaries would be conducted transparently and that additional training centres would be established soon.

MLA Adireddy Srinivas highlighted that 802 women from the Kapu community would receive training and financial assistance of Rs 2.01 crore, while 1,335 women from economically backward Kamma, Reddy, EBC, Arya Vaishya, Brahmin, and Kshatriya communities would receive Rs 3.34 crore in aid.

He also noted that efforts are underway to provide Rs 57.78 crore in financial assistance to 2,213 beneficiaries under the BC Corporation, EBC, Kapu Corporation, and other welfare schemes for backward classes in the state. BC Welfare Officer B. Seshank, Assistant BC Welfare Officers M. Subba Rao and P. Ramakrishna, and other officials were present at the event.



Amendment to Waqf Act opposed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Maulana Mohammed Fazlur Rahman, Secretary of the Muslim Personal Law Board, criticised the Centre's move to amend the Waqf Act without prior consultation, alleging that the BJP-led NDA government was infringing upon the constitutional rights of minorities.

Addressing a protest organised by the Muslim Personal Law Board at Dharna Chowk in Vijayawada on Saturday, he accused the government of disregarding public opinion despite seeking feedback. The demonstration saw participation from leaders of various Muslim minority groups, representatives from Jamaats, public organisations, and political parties.

Maulana Fazlur Rahman claimed that the proposed amendment was a deliberate attempt to dispossess Waqf properties. He pointed out that despite the establishment of a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to review the concerns of minority groups and opposition parties, the Centre had ignored all 44 recommendations submitted to it.

Large consignment of Yanam liquor seized in WG



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major crackdown on illegal liquor transportation, the Prohibition and Excise Department of West Godavari seized 219 liquor bottles, including 209 liquor bottles and 10 tins of beer, being transported from Yanam to Kantheru village in Iravaram mandal.

Acting on a tip-off, Assistant Excise Superintendent R. Prasad Reddy directed Tanuku Prohibition and Excise Inspector Y. Manikantha Reddy and his team to conduct vehicle inspections in Kantheru. During the operation, officials intercepted a

car carrying 43.1 litres of illicit liquor, valued at around Rs 1 lakh in the black market. The vehicle used for transportation, worth approximately Rs 5 lakh, was also seized. The prime accused, Kovvuri Venkata Srinivasa Reddy, was arrested at the spot. He has a history of involvement in illegal liquor trafficking and is wanted in multiple excise cases across Tadepalligudem, Bhimadolu, and Devarapalli stations. Officials stated that he was previously engaged in smuggling Goa liquor as well.

Another suspect, Konaala Venkata Satyanarayana Reddy, also known as Bharat Reddy or

Chinni, has been identified as a co-accused, while Baadarla Prem Kumar has been named as the supplier of Yanam liquor.

Excise Commissioner Nishanth Kumar and Enforcement Director Rahuldev Sharma reiterated their commitment to curbing illegal liquor trade and preventing revenue loss. Principal Secretary Mukesh Kumar Meena appreciated the successful operation. The raids were conducted as per the directives of Deputy Commissioner of Prohibition and Excise (Eluru) B. Sripatha and Assistant Commissioner Prabhu Kumar, officials confirmed.

Kavitha demands implementation of Women's Reservation Bill

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BRS MLC Kavitha has demanded the immediate implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill without linking it to the census.

Speaking at the International Women's Day celebrations at Telangana Bhavan, she criticised the Centre for delaying the Bill's execution despite its passage in Parliament in 2023.

She warned that this delay is politically 'harming' women across the country, as seen in the recent elections in Maharashtra, Delhi and Haryana, where many women lost legislative posts due to lack of reservation.



She stressed that if the census is speeded up, more women could secure seats in the upcoming elections in Bihar and Tamil

Nadu. Kavitha also lashed out at the TG Congress Government, reminding them of their poll promise to pay Rs 2,500 per

month to women. She declared that the BRS would relentlessly pursue the Congress Government until this promise is fulfilled.

Accusing the Congress of neglecting women's welfare, she slammed them for failing to increase the wages of Anganwadi and ASHA workers.

Kavitha stressed the importance of women's participation in governance, recalling that under KCR's leadership, the BRS had championed women-centric policies. She criticised the Congress Government for rolling back schemes introduced by the BRS administration.

ACROSS THE STATES



All-women crew operates train in Jharkhand

All-women crew operated the Ranchi-Tori Passenger train in Jharkhand on the occasion of International Women's Day on Saturday, an official said. The team comprised the loco-pilot, assistant loco-pilot, train manager, three ticket checkers and four RPF personnel, he said. The initiative was taken by the Ranchi division of the South Eastern Railway (SER), he added. "I feel proud to be a part of the Indian Railways. Women are capable of doing any job, they just need opportunities. Women are rising in every field, whether it's airlines, sports, or railways," said Train Manager Anupama Lakra. SER's CPRO Nishant Kumar said the railway division was committed to women's empowerment. The train left the Ranchi station at 9 am and reached Tori around 11.30 am. It had a total of 14 stoppages.



TN CM announces hostels for working women

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin presented 100 pink autos to women beneficiaries on behalf of the state social welfare and women empowerment department at a function held at the Nehru Indoor stadium here on the occasion of International Women's Day. He announced that new working women's hostels (Thozhiyar Viduthi) would be built at a cost of Rs 72 crore in Kancheepuram, Erode, Dharmapuri, Sivaganga, Theni, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam, Ranipet, and Karur districts. The hostels with 700-bed facility will have many amenities including biometric entry, Wi-Fi facility, purified drinking water, and 24-hour security, the Chief Minister said. He handed over 50 electric autos to women members of urban Self Help Group on behalf of the Environment and Climate Change department. Later, he interacted with the beneficiaries.



Bajrang Dal storms college over Iftar party

Bajrang Dal workers on Saturday stormed the Rishikul Ayurvedic College here in protest against some Muslim students organising an Iftar party on the campus and inviting outsiders to it. Police placated the right-wing workers, who left but before creating a ruckus and warning of a more aggressive agitation if no action was taken in the matter within three days. On Friday, some Muslim students reportedly organised an Iftar party on the college campus. Bajrang Dal official bearer Amit Kumar alleged that the party had been organised in the "Hindu religious city" as part of a conspiracy to bring outsiders to the college campus. "Rishikul Ayurvedic College has historical importance. This medical college was established under Rishikul Vidyapeeth, established by Pandit Mahamana Madan Mohan Malviya.

Women's safety govt's top priority; we made strict laws: PM

PNS ■ NAVSARI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has given top priority to women's safety and framed stricter laws and rules to prevent crimes against them, besides making a provision for capital punishment to those indulging in heinous crimes like rape.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the colonial-era criminal law (Indian Penal Code), has strengthened the legal provisions related to women's safety, and made filing of complaints easier and delivery of justice faster, he said.

Addressing a huge gathering at Vansi Borsli village in Navsari district of Gujarat on International Women's Day, Modi said that India is walking on the path of women-led development for rapid progress of the country.

"When a girl returns (home) late, her parents ask questions. But they don't do the same when a boy comes late... They should do it. In the past decade, we have given women's safety the highest priority, and in order to prevent crimes against



them, we have made stricter rules and laws," the PM said. "My government changed the law to introduce capital punishment for heinous crimes like rape," he said.

To ensure swift justice in serious crimes against women, the government has set up fast-track courts, he said, adding that around 800 courts have been approved across the country, most of which are now operational.

"The newly-implemented Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which wiped out the colonial law, further strengthened provisions related to women's safety. A separate chapter has

been added in it to address crimes against women and children in new criminal laws," he said.

Victims facing delay in justice was a common grievance earlier. But in order to address this, the new law mandates that charges in cases of heinous crimes, like rape, be framed within 60 days and verdicts delivered within 45 days, he added.

The new laws allow for e-FIRs to be filed from anywhere, making it easier for the police to take immediate action. Under the provision of zero FIR, any woman can file an FIR at any police station if she faces

atrocities, the prime minister said.

The police can now record the statements of rape victims through audio-visual medium, which has been legally recognised, he added.

"A time-frame of seven days has been fixed for doctors to forward medical reports, providing significant assistance to the victims," he said.

Underlining that the new provisions in the BNS are already showing results, Modi recalled charges were framed in a gang-rape case in Surat within 15 days of the incident and the culprits were sentenced to life imprisonment within a few weeks.

Modi said blessings of women were his greatest strength and protective shield. "I am the wealthiest person in the world."

My statement will raise hackles of some listeners. But I will reiterate that I am the wealthiest person in the world -- not in terms of money, but because of the blessings from crores of mothers, sisters and daughters. These blessings are my greatest strength, capital, and protective shield," Modi said.

'Modi's guarantee was a jumla': Atishi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AAP leader Atishi on Saturday launched a scathing attack on the BJP-led Delhi government, accusing it of failing to deliver on its election promise of providing Rs 2,500 per month to women before International Women's Day. She called Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee a "jumla" and alleged that the saffron party had misled voters.

"The women of Delhi are waiting to see Rs 2,500 messages on their phones. The BJP government has proved that Prime Minister Narendra Modi lied to them.

Need to filter out those leaders who work for BJP, says Rahul

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said there was a need to filter out leaders and workers from his party who were working for the BJP and warned of strict action, even removals.

Addressing party workers on the second day of his two-day Gujarat visit, the party's first job was to separate two groups of Congress workers and leaders -- ones who carry the party ideology in their hearts and stand with the public and the others who were cut off from the public, "half of whom are with the BJP".



Gandhi's visit to the state is focused on the 2027 assembly polls, for which he has hinted at a major overhaul in the party's state unit and assured a strong plan to defeat the BJP.

"There are two types of people in the Gujarat Congress leadership and among workers. Those who are honest with people, fight for them, respect

them and have the ideology of the Congress in their heart. And the others who are cut off from the people sit far away, do not respect them, and half of whom are with the BJP," he said.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said the party's first job should be to filter these two groups, even if it means taking strict action of removing people.

Till the two groups are separated, the people of Gujarat will not believe in the party, he said.

Gandhi said, "For our district, block presidents and senior leaders, the party should find a place in their hearts.



High degree of collusion between Pak, China: Army chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a veiled reference to China and Pakistan, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday said there is a "high degree of collusion," which must be accepted.

"What it means, as far as I am concerned, the two-front threat is a reality," he said in response to a question on proximity between China and Pakistan during an interactive session at the India Today Conclave here.

During the session, he fielded a broad range of questions about the army's preparedness for the future, lessons from ongoing conflicts, the situation in Bangladesh, and at the Line of Actual Control and the Line of Control.

"Now, the second thing that you have brought out is collaboration or the relationship between our western neighbour and Bangladesh. "As far as I am concerned, since I have said that the epicentre of terrorism is in a particular country, they have a relationship with any of my neighbouring country, I should be looking worried, because as far as I am concerned, the terrorism route can be used from that country also, which is my major concern as of today," Gen Dwivedi said.

The General said it was "too early" to take a call on the role of Bangladesh, where a change in government may bring about a change in the relationship between it and India.

"Because as far as I am concerned, I am very clear, the present military to military relationship is very strong. And, we exchanging note on regular basis, to avoid any kind of a misgiving," he added.

He was also asked how the Indian Army looked at the Pakistan-China equation.

"What we have to understand is that... we have to be very clear that there is a high degree of collusion, which we must accept. In terms of the virtual field, it's nearly 100 per cent; in terms of physical, I would say most of the equipment there is of Chinese origin," the Army chief said. "So, this is the situation as of today, as far as collusion is concerned. What it means, as far as I am concerned, the two-front threat... is a reality for me," he said. In January 2021, the then Army chief Gen M M Naravane too said that when it comes to Pakistan and China, "the threat of collusion cannot be wished away."

General Dwivedi also spoke about the situation along the LAC in eastern Ladakh since the Special Representative-level (SR-level) meeting in December 2024, following an agreement that was finalised between the two countries last year.

"I think Assassin's Mace has lived through its life. It may not be more relevant today. And, if you see, as far as the terrain of the Himalayas is concerned, the terrain plays a very favourable role as far as India is concerned.

MAHILA SAMRIDHI YOJANA

Delhi govt allocates Rs 5,100 crore for scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP government in Delhi approved the Mahila Samridhi Yojana on Saturday to provide a monthly assistance of Rs 2,500 each to women from poor families in the city and allocated Rs 5,100 crore for the scheme.

Addressing a party programme on International Women's Day at the Jawahar Lal Nehru Stadium here, BJP president J P Nadda said the Delhi Cabinet has approved an allocation of Rs 5,100 crore for implementing the Mahila Samridhi Yojana and congratulated Chief Minister Rekha Gupta for it.

Talking to reporters on the sidelines of the programme, the chief minister said a committee headed by her has been formed to oversee the implementation of the scheme, with ministers Ashish Sood, Parvesh Verma



and Kapil Mishra being the other members of the panel. "The Cabinet meeting, attended by all the ministers on Saturday, approved our Sankalp Patra promise made in the run-up to the (Delhi) election to provide Rs 2,500 each to poor women under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana. We have also made a budget provision of Rs 5,100 crore for it," Gupta said.

The work to register the applicants under the scheme will start immediately through a portal and after intensive deliberations on the terms and conditions of the beneficiaries, she added.

Gupta said it has also been decided that her government will work for the safety and prosperity of the women of Delhi.

Earlier, addressing the

gathering at the programme, the chief minister said the Delhi government will set up "one-stop centres" in all the districts to strengthen women safety by providing them with assistance, including police help and legal counselling.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in its "Viksit Delhi Sankalp Patra" for the Assembly polls held in February, had promised to provide Rs 2,500 per month under the Mahila Samridhi Yojana to women from poor families.

A statement issued by the Delhi government said the scheme will leverage advanced technology to ensure transparency, efficiency and seamless disbursement of the financial benefits.

An Aadhaar-based e-KYC authentication process will be employed to screen the applicants, the statement said.

Take Parliament into confidence

Cong to PM on Trump's tariff claim

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take Parliament into confidence on US President Donald Trump's claims that India has agreed to cut its tariffs. The opposition party's general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh asked whether the interests of Indian farmers and manufacturers are being compromised.



"Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington DC to talk trade with the Americans. Meanwhile, President Trump says this..." he said in a post on X, tagging a video of the US president speaking on trade tariffs. US President Donald Trump said India has agreed to cut its tariffs "way down" as he reiterated his claim that the country charges America massive tariffs that make it difficult to sell products there.

Ramesh said, "What has the Modi Government agreed to? Are the interests of Indian farmers and of Indian manufacturing being compromised? The PM must take Parliament into confidence when it resumes on March 10."

Both houses of Parliament will meet on Monday as the second part of the budget session resumes. In the video shared by

Ramesh on X, Trump is heard saying, "Our country, from an economic standpoint and a financial standpoint and a trade standpoint, has been absolutely ripped off by almost every country in the world -- Canada, Mexico, and then you just go right down the line."

"India charges us massive tariffs. You can't even sell anything in India... It is restrictive. We do very little business inside.

PNS ■ KOLKATA / KATWA (PURBA BARDHAMAN)

Threatened, ostracised and pushed to the edge, a group of about 130 Dalit families in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district are pinning their final hopes on police and district administration to end a caste-based discriminatory tradition of three centuries and receive their Constitutionally-guaranteed right to worship their God.

The families at Daspara area of Gidhgram village, all having 'Das' surnames and belonging to the traditional community of cobblers and weavers, have allegedly been forced to stay away from the steps of Gidheswar Shiv temple, the only place of worship in the locality, by the shrine committee and other villagers on grounds that they belong to a "low caste", victims alleged.



At their wits' end, victims at the receiving end of this discrimination now plan to take "the fight to the end" and even seek legal recourse if the state administration fails to resolve the crisis.

The discriminatory practice almost unheard in modern Bengal and violative of Article

25 of the Constitution which guarantees equal freedom of citizens to worship as a fundamental right has reportedly been in vogue ever since the temple was founded some 300 years ago, locals claimed.

Recent interventions from police and administration in the presence of two MLAs to

facilitate the entry of Das families to pray at the temple during Shivratri on February 26 and an on-paper truce agreement between the two opposing communities have failed to break ice.

Indeed, the matter has escalated grassroots tensions, prompting the police and administration to allegedly "play safe" for now.

Besides, economic ostracisation of Dases, who currently work as farm labourers and rear cattle, at the village dairy centre has been enforced, the victims alleged.

It began with a written appeal to Katwa SDO by six Das families on February 24, which informed their decision to pray at the temple on Shivratri and sought the administration's protection, prompting it to pull its socks and take notice of the medieval practice.

"We are abused, mistreated and thrown out of the temple whenever we go to pray. A section of villagers says we are untouchable cobblers belonging to low castes and, as such, have no right to visit the temple. Lord Mahadev will turn impure if we worship him at the temple," the appeal, written in Bengali, read.

Although the victims failed to offer Shivratri prayers in the wake of persisting ground resistance, an administrative meeting on Friday, February 28 -- attended by Katwa and Mangalkot MLAs, both from the ruling Trinamool Congress, SDO and SDPO (Katwa), a local community development officer and six members each of the temple committee and the Das families -- passed a signed resolution to allow the aggrieved families to pray at the temple in.



The Power of HER Plates

Celebrating the women in food, shaping flavours, traditions, and the future of cooking with passion, says **TEAM AGENDA**

CHEF MANSI'S CULINARY JOURNEY



Hailing from Lucknow, the cultural heart of Awadh, Mansi Kapoor grew up surrounded by a rich culinary heritage where diverse communities contributed unique flavours and traditions. Coming from the UP Khatri community, traditionally strict vegetarians who exclude even onions and garlic, she was raised with a deep respect for food. However, the influence of close friends and a shared love for cooking led her family to embrace a more diverse range of culinary experiences, broadening their appreciation for flavours beyond their own traditions. Her passion for food is deeply rooted in her family's love for hospitality. She learned to cook alongside the women in her household, who instilled in her the belief that cooking is not just about following recipes but about pouring one's heart into every dish. Whether preparing a simple dal or an elaborate zaffrani biryani, she believes that good food requires patience, care and attention to detail. As a home chef, Mansi remains committed to personally preparing every dish she serves, following

traditional recipes without compromise. She strongly believes in the philosophy of "sahaj pake so meetha hoye", meaning slow-cooked food is the most flavourful, embracing a methodical and mindful approach to cooking. By using fresh, seasonal and local ingredients, she ensures that every meal she prepares is not just nourishing but also a sensory delight. Her culinary talents have been widely recognised at food festivals and her Awadhi tables, hosted at her home, have received high praise from renowned connoisseurs. Mansi's dedication to preserving and celebrating authentic flavours makes her a true ambassador of Awadhi cuisine.

ZAFRANI PHIRNI

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 litre full-cream milk
- 60g basmati rice
- 150g granulated sugar
- A pinch of saffron
- ½ tsp cardamom powder
- 1 tsp kewra water (optional)
- 10 almonds, blanched and finely chopped
- 10 pistachios, sliced
- Rose petals for garnish (optional)

METHOD:

- Wash and soak the rice for about 30 minutes. Drain and grind it into a semi-coarse paste.
- Soak the saffron in 2 to 3 tsp of warm water.
- Heat the milk in a saucepan or karahi, then add the cardamom powder, sliced almonds and saffron.
- Bring the milk to a boil, then

lower the flame. Gradually add the rice paste while stirring continuously to prevent lumps.

- Cook until the rice is fully cooked and the mixture thickens.
- Add sugar and stir until it dissolves completely.
- Mix in the kewra water for a fragrant touch.
- Pour the phirni into pre-soaked earthenware bowls (sakoras) or

- glass serving dishes.
 - Garnish with sliced pistachios and rose petals.
 - Refrigerate for at least an hour before serving chilled.
- A slow-cooked delicacy infused with saffron and cardamom,

Mansi's Zaffrani Phirni is a perfect celebration of traditional Awadhi flavours, offering a rich, creamy and aromatic treat.



CHEF NISA YIMTHONG'S CULINARY JOURNEY

Chef Nisa Yimthong boasts an impressive professional history that spans continents and has left an indelible mark on esteemed establishments worldwide. Her odyssey began as a junior sous chef at Bangkok's revered Blue Elephant Thai Restaurant, where she honed her craft. She ascended through prestigious roles, including Chef de Partie at the Dusit Thani Hotel and Junior Sous Chef at the Bolan Thai Restaurant in Bangkok.

Chef Nisa's journey took her to international opportunities, where she showcased her culinary prowess at esteemed establishments such as the Sukhothai Hotel in Bangkok and the Leela Palace in Chennai. Her expertise truly blossomed during her first stint at Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, where she wowed diners with her exceptional skills in the realm of Thai cuisine at Tamra. This journey led to her assuming the esteemed role of Chef de Cuisine Thai at Intercontinental Century City Chengdu in China, solidifying her reputation as a true maestro of gastronomy.

Adding depth to her culinary mastery is Chef Nisa's educational foundation; she holds a bachelor's degree in hotel management from Suan Dusit Rajabhat University in Thailand. Her expertise extends beyond traditional culinary offerings, encompassing the intricate art of fruit and vegetable carving, creative food presentation, and innovative menu development. Her unwavering commitment to cleanliness and hygiene underlies her steadfast pursuit of culinary excellence.

Colorful Swirl Mathri

- 200 gms Maida
- 75 ml Refine oil
- 2gm Ajwain
- 2gm Red food colour
- 2gm Green food colour
- 2 gm Baking soda
- 2 gm Salt



METHOD:

- In a bowl mix the flour, salt, carrom seeds and salt and mix it properly
- Add the oil to the flour mix and incorporate it nicely and little warm water and knead it to a tight and smooth dough without ant granules
- Divide the dough into 3 equal portions and add the red and green food coloring each to two portions and knead it properly so that the colour gets incorporated in each dough.
- To give equal colour roll out separately all 3 doughs into thin sheets and place it on top of each other according to the colours you want in your swirl and roll it out like cigar.
- Roll carefully into a cigar shaped roll brushing a little water at the end so that it sticks properly.
- Finally cut the roll into thin slices
- Meanwhile heat the refine oil for frying in a wok, fry the dough slices 5-6 together in a medium sized wok for 5-6 minutes in medium low flame till they are cooked properly.



RANGO KE GUBAARE : A PALETTE OF TRADITION

BY TEAM AGENDA

Recipes by Chef Ashu Chugh, Executive Chef, Jaypee Greens Golf Resort, Greater Noida
Servings: 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup rava, 1 ½ tsp whole wheat flour, 1 tsp gram flour
- Salt, pepper, red chilli powder, fennel powder, baking soda
- 1 tsp oil, water as needed, oil for frying
- 50g fried makhana, 100g moong sprouts, 100g boiled potatoes
- 20 mini bhalle (optional), chopped onions, tomatoes, green chillies, green apple
- 200g yoghurt, 4 tsp blueberry compote, 4 tsp green & tamarind chutneys
- Black salt, cumin powder, chaat masala, red chilli powder
- 8-10 papdi, sev, 4 tsp pomegranate arils, coriander

INSTRUCTIONS

- Make Dough: Mix flours, spices, oil and water into a firm dough. Rest 30 mins.
- Fry Kachori: Roll into discs, fry until crisp and golden.
- Assemble: Break the top, fill with sprouts, potatoes, bhalle, onions, apple.
- Top & Serve: Add yoghurt, chutneys, spices, crushed papdi, sev, pomegranate and coriander. Serve immediately.

A crunchy, tangy Holi special delight!



A CLASSIC HOLI TREAT BURSTING WITH FLAVOUR

BY TEAM AGENDA



Recipes by Chef Amardeep Singh Bhatia, Executive Chef, Jaypee Siddharth

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg refined flour, 1 kg khoya
- 50g each cashew nuts, pista, almonds
- 5g green cardamom, 20g fennel seeds
- 100g coconut powder, ghee as required
- Sugar syrup as required

METHOD

- Mix flour, ghee, and water to form dough. Knead and rest for 10-15 minutes.
- Prepare a sugar syrup by boiling 2 cups of sugar with 5 cups of water.
- Roll out small dough balls into thin circles.
- Fill with the khoya mixture, fold, and seal edges.
- Fry in ghee until golden brown.
- Drain excess oil and serve warm or at room temperature.

EMBRACING THE SPIRIT OF HOLI SWEETNESS

BY TEAM AGENDA

Holi is a festival of colours, but it's also a festival of flavours. It's the time when kitchens fill with the aroma of saffron, cardamom and slow-cooked khoya, as families come together to prepare festive treats. The first bite of a perfectly crisp Rango ke Gubaare, breaking into a rich, nutty filling or the cool, spiced embrace of Thandai Rasmalai, soaked in saffron-infused milk, these are the tastes that make Holi special. Each sweet carries a story of tradition, celebration and the simple joy of sharing, making Holi as much about food as it is about colours.



By Chef Vaibhav Bhargava - Consultant Chef, Food Stylist and Entrepreneur

Chenna Rasmalai Thandai

- A delightful fusion of saffron-infused chenna, served in chilled thandai.
- Preparation Time: 20 minutes
- Cooking Time: 2 hours
- Total Time: 2 hours 20 minutes
- Course: Dessert
- Cuisine: Indian
- Servings: 4

Thandai Recipe

- #### INGREDIENTS:
- Milk - 250ml
 - Water - 1500ml
 - Sugar - 375g
 - Fennel seeds (saunf) - 7g

- Cardamom powder - 3g
- Almonds - 15g
- Pistachios - 15g
- Skinned watermelon seeds - 15g
- Poppy seeds - 7g
- Rose water - 3g
- Whole peppercorns - 3g
- Dried or fresh rose petals - 50g

METHOD:

- Soak the almonds, pistachios, and watermelon seeds for 3-4 hours, then drain and grind them into a fine paste.
- Lightly roast the cardamom, fennel seeds, and peppercorns, then grind them into a fine powder.
- In a pan, bring the milk to a boil. Add saffron and sugar, then let it cool to room temperature before refrigerating.
- Once chilled, mix in the ground nuts

- and spice powder.
- Add rose petals and rose water for a fragrant finish. Your Thandai is now ready.
- Rasmalai Recipe

INGREDIENTS:

- Milk - 1000ml
- Refined flour - 5g
- Granulated sugar - 500g
- White vinegar (for curdling milk) - 60ml
- Water - 1500ml

METHOD:

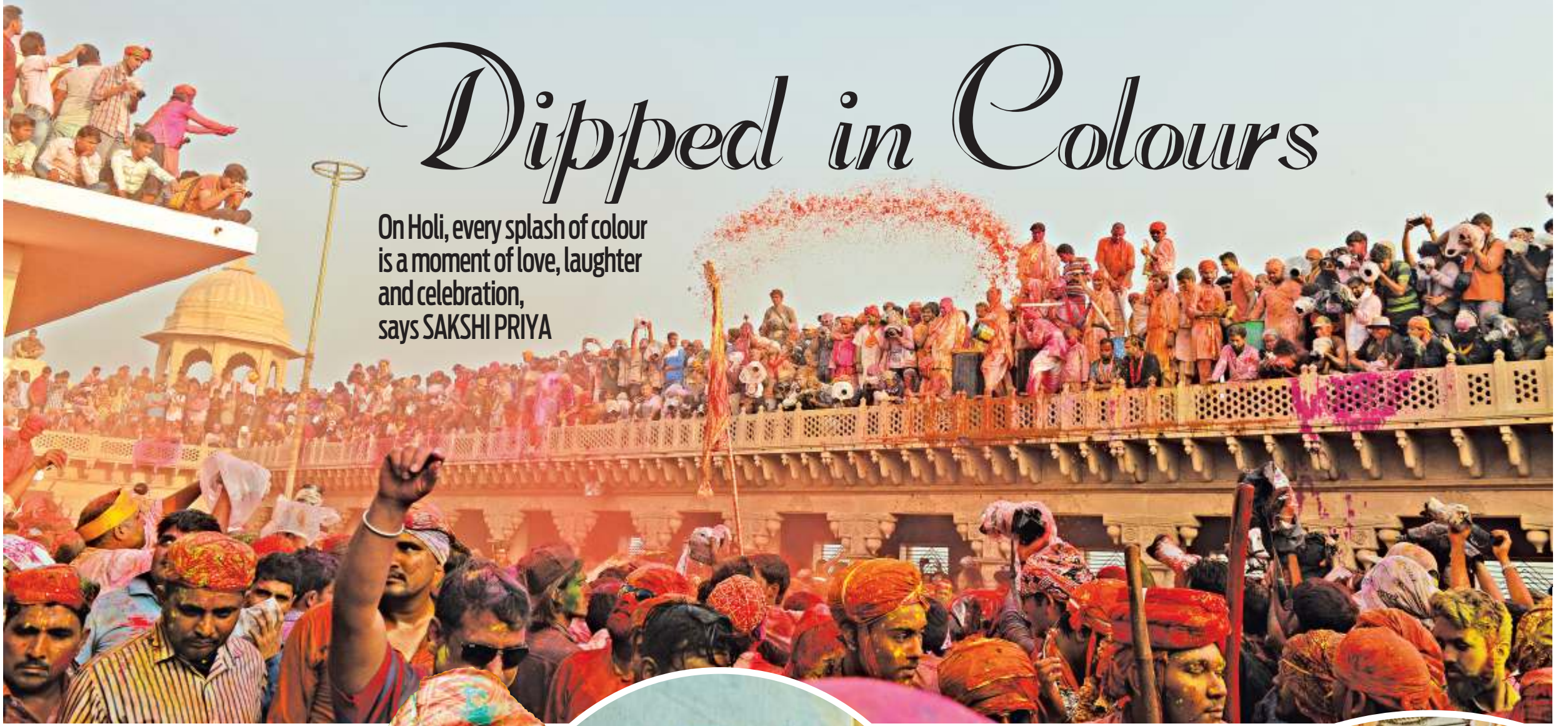
- Dilute the vinegar with 2-3 cups of water.
- Bring the milk to a boil and slowly add the diluted vinegar. Stir until the milk curdles and forms soft chenna.
- Add 2-3 cups of water and ice cubes to

cool it down, then strain to remove any vinegar traces.

- Drain excess water by placing the chenna in a muslin cloth and hanging it for 2-3 hours.
- Knead the chenna until smooth, then mix with refined flour to form a soft dough.
- Shape the dough into small dumplings.
- Prepare a sugar syrup by boiling 2 cups of sugar with 5 cups of water.
- Add the dumplings to the boiling syrup and cook for 5-10 minutes. Your Rasmalai is ready.
- Assembly - Thandai Rasmalai
- Squeeze the excess syrup from the Rasmalai.
- Submerge them in the chilled Thandai.
- Garnish with nuts and serve elegantly.

Dipped in Colours

On Holi, every splash of colour is a moment of love, laughter and celebration, says SAKSHI PRIYA



Rang barse bheege chunar wali, rang barse..." a song that instantly reminds everyone of Holi, bringing back memories of laughter, colours and streets filled with celebration.

This timeless Bollywood song has become the soundtrack of the festival, capturing its playfulness and joy. Whether it is Amitabh Bachchan's deep baritone or Ranbir Kapoor's youthful energy, cinema has long celebrated.

As Holi approaches, the streets fill with music, laughter and a riot of colours begins. Holi as a time of revelry. People come together, smearing each other with colours, dancing and setting aside their worries for a day. "Bura na maano, Holi hai!" becomes the anthem, inviting everyone to join in the fun.

Beyond the festivities, Holi holds deep cultural and religious significance. It symbolises the victory of good over evil, with the *Holika Dahan* on the eve of Holi marking this victory. The festival also signifies the arrival of spring, a time of renewal and joy. While Holi is celebrated across India in different ways, the traditions of *Braj*, especially in Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana and Nandgaon, are among the most vibrant and unique.

HOLI IN VRINDAVAN

A short distance from Barsana and Nandgaon, Vrindavan is home to one of the most visually stunning Holi celebrations. Here, Holi is an expression of devotion.

At the Banke Bihari Temple, the celebrations begin days in advance, with priests and devotees showering each other with gulal and flower petals. Unlike the lively Lathmar Holi, the atmosphere here is more devotional. The temple doors open and the deity of Krishna is brought closer to the devotees, as if participating in the celebrations. Pilgrims sing bhajans, dance in joy and immerse themselves in a Holi that is deeply spiritual.

I also spoke to Ananya Patel, who experienced Holi in Vrindavan for the first time. "It was about colours, it felt like

a blessing," she said. "The temple was packed, but there was this beautiful sense of harmony. When the petals started falling from above, it was almost surreal. Everyone around me had their hands raised, singing, completely lost in the moment. It was Holi, but in the purest, most peaceful form." As locals and visitors immerse themselves in a tradition that has been carried forward for generations. One of the most mesmerising aspects of Vrindavan's Holi is the Phoolon Ki Holi, the Holi of flowers, where instead of coloured powders; fragrant flower petals fill the air. The sight of thousands of petals raining down in the temple premises is breathtaking, a serene contrast to the more boisterous celebrations outside.

Lathmar Holi

Holi in Barsana and Nandgaon, two villages in Uttar Pradesh, is unlike anywhere else. Here, the festival takes on a unique and playful form known as Lathmar Holi, where women chase men with sticks while the men protect themselves with shields. It is a spectacle that draws thousands of visitors each year, blending tradition with festivity in a way that is both energetic and deeply rooted in local culture.

Curious about what it feels like to experience Lathmar Holi firsthand, I spoke to Aneesh Sharma, a traveller who recently visited Barsana during the festival. "The moment we entered the village, it felt like stepping into a different world," he recalled. "Women stood ready with sticks in hand, their faces filled with excitement. The men from Nandgaon, laughing and teasing, willingly walked into this playful battle. It wasn't aggression, it was pure joy."

He described the sounds of dhols filling the air as colours flew in every direction. "At one point, I just stood there watching. The energy was surreal. One of the men near me held up his shield, pretending to be terrified of the women approaching him, and everyone burst into laughter. It's a Holi unlike anything I had ever seen before."

THE SIGHT OF THOUSANDS OF PETALS RAINING DOWN IN THE TEMPLE PREMISES IS BREATHTAKING, A SERENE CONTRAST TO THE MORE BOISTEROUS CELEBRATIONS

A week before the main Holi celebrations, men from Nandgaon visit Barsana. As they enter the village, they are welcomed with colours, teasing and, most famously, sticks. The women of Barsana, dressed in traditional attire, await them with lathis (sticks) in hand, ready to chase them away in a playful mock battle. The men, armed with shields, try to dodge the blows, but many willingly surrender, laughing and embracing the spirit of the festival.

The next day, the women of Barsana visit Nandgaon, continuing the celebration on the men's home ground. The entire event is accompanied by traditional folk songs and the beating of dhols, with chants of "Shri Radhe!" and "Jai Kanha!" filling the air.

While it may seem intense to an outsider, Lathmar Holi is all in good fun, a symbolic exchange rather than a true battle. It represents the spirited playfulness that defines Holi in this region, where joy, music and community come together in a festival unlike any other.

WOMEN STOOD READY WITH STICKS IN HAND, THEIR FACES FILLED WITH EXCITEMENT. THE MEN FROM NANDGAON, LAUGHING AND TEASING, WILLINGLY WALKED INTO THIS PLAYFUL BATTLE. IT WASN'T AGGRESSION, IT WAS PURE JOY

A FESTIVAL THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

Holi is a festival of colours, it is a festival of unity. Whether it is the playful combat of Lathmar Holi, the devotional celebration in Vrindavan or the modern citywide festivities, Holi breaks down barriers. For one day, differences fade away and people come together in laughter and celebration.

In a world often divided by differences, Holi serves as a reminder

of shared joy and togetherness. The act of applying colour on someone is a playful gesture; it is an acceptance, a moment of unity. Strangers become friends, old grievances are set aside and for those few hours, life is lived in its most carefree and joyous form.

So, as Holi nears, whether you celebrate with lathis in Barsana, bhajans

in Vrindavan or Bollywood beats in your own city let the spirit of the festival take over. Dance freely, laugh without restraint and embrace the colours of Holi with open arms.

Bura na maano, Holi hai!



PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

IN BRIEF



BL Agro launches Rs 1,000 cr dairy breeding project

Leading FMCG company BL Agro on Saturday inaugurated a high-tech cattle breeding and dairy centre in Bareilly at an initial investment of Rs 1,000 crore with an aim to transform local agriculture. The state-of-the-art Centre of Excellence for Cow Breeding and Dairy Technology, a part of the subsidiary firm BL Khamdhenu, was inaugurated by Union Food Processing Industries Minister Chirag Paswan, the company said in a statement. The project, "Satat Kamdhenu", with a focus on circular practices in dairy sector was unveiled on the occasion. The "BL Kamdhenu Farms" will initially house 5,000 indigenous cows, eventually doubling to 10,000, as part of the company's Satat Kamdhenu initiative. "The initial investment in the project is around Rs 1,000 crore and the whole project once it is up to full capacity will cost Rs 3,000 crore," BL Agro Managing Director Ashish Khandelwal said.



J&K has debt of Rs 1.25 lakh crore: Govt

The Jammu and Kashmir government on Saturday said its total debt stands at over Rs 1.25 lakh crore, including Rs 27,900 crore in general provident fund (GPF) for the Union Territory in the last financial year. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who is also the finance minister of the UT, said in a written reply to Assembly member Sajad Gani Lone that as of March 31, 2024, Jammu and Kashmir's total debt is Rs 1,25,205 crore. "This includes Rs 69,894 crore in loans from the Reserve Bank of India and state development, Rs 27,901 crore in GPF, Rs 14,294 crore in reserves, Rs 5,758 crore in outstanding national small savings fund, Rs 4,032 crore in negotiated loans, Rs 2,616 crore in UDAY power loans, and Rs 710 crore in Government of India advances", he said. Abdullah further said the total outstanding liability in treasuries as of February 27, 2025, under various account heads amounts to Rs 5,429.49 crore.



'On track to achieve 30 pc women representation'

Vedanta on Saturday said it is on track to achieve 30 per cent women representation by 2030. Notably, 28 per cent of its women representation is in decision-making roles, highest among metals and mining companies in the country. Vedanta is bridging the talent gap by adding qualified women into its fold, a statement said. Aligned with Vedanta's sustainability goals, the company has implemented progressive people policies to support its workforce, including rich job content, targeted hiring, mentorship programs, accelerated career-growth opportunities in high-growth businesses. Policies such as 'no questions asked' work-from-home option for women, flexible work hours, year-long sabbatical for childcare and spouse hiring among others, support their growth during different life-stages. Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc has launched the Women of Zinc campaign, attracting women to metals sector on International Women's Day 2025.

Banking sector must continue to innovate: FM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the banking sector must continue to innovate and lead amid changing global landscape, and exuded confidence that the country's largest bank SBI will embrace technology, sustainability and inclusivity as its guiding principles.

Speaking at the launch of Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Foundation Day of State Bank of India (SBI), the minister also said SBI has continuously evolved to meet the changing landscape and retained its position as a market leader despite regulatory tightening.

"The world is changing rapidly, and the banking sector must continue to innovate and also to lead. I am confident that SBI will rise to the occasion embracing technology, sustainability and inclusivity as its guiding principles," Sitharaman said.

She said SBI is reinventing its personal distribution channels to align with evolving customer expectations. "As the largest commercial



"The world is changing rapidly, and the banking sector must continue to innovate and also to lead. I am confident that SBI will rise to the occasion embracing technology, sustainability and inclusivity as its guiding principles," Sitharaman said

bank in the world's most populous nation, catering approximately to about 5.6 per cent of the global population, SBI has become more agile and competitive than ever before," she added.

Sitharaman said SBI, the largest bank in the Indian subcontinent, is now ideally positioned to deliver superior value creation through sustainable growth.

SBI aims to achieve this by enhancing its operational excellence across lending performance, asset quality, profitability and capital generation, thereby driving wealth creation, she said.

Register on e-Shram Portal for formal recognition

Labour min urges gig, platform workers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Labour and Employment on Saturday said it has urged gig and platform workers to register on the e-Shram Portal for formal recognition and access to AB-PMJAY benefits.

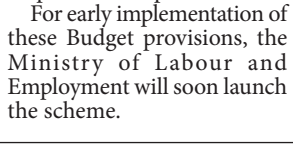
The gig and platform economy is expanding, offering new jobs in sectors like ridesharing, delivery, logistics, and professional services, a labour minister statement said.

Niti Aayog has projected that the gig economy in India will employ over 1 crore workers in 2024-25, subsequently reaching 2.35 crore by 2029-30, it added.

Recognising the contribution of the gig and platform workers to the nation's econ-

omy, Union Budget 2025-26 has announced provisions for registration of online platform workers on the e-Shram portal, issuance of identity cards, and healthcare coverage under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

The AB-PMJAY health scheme provides a cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation across over 31,000 public and private empanelled hospitals in India. For early implementation of these Budget provisions, the Ministry of Labour and Employment will soon launch the scheme.



'Will prevent Rs 60k cr sops stress from hitting investments'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Pre-election sops like the Ladki Bahin scheme is extracting Rs 60,000 crore from the Maharashtra government and attempts are being made to ensure that it doesn't impact capital investments, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has said.

Assembly elections were held in Maharashtra in November 2024.

Days before the announcement of the state budget on Monday, Fadnavis said Maharashtra is trying to channelise the money paid to the beneficiary women into productive purposes by helping them pool the resources for sustainable businesses.

"It is true that when you undertake such expenditure (on welfare schemes), it has a stress on the budget but we are able to manage it. And we are attempting that this does not impact our capital investments," Fadnavis said at a Moneycontrol event on Friday evening.

"We are trying to balance budget without reducing the capital investment," he added.

It can be noted that the sops have been widely credited for being among the fac-

tors leading to the MVA government's success in retaining power, but concerns have also been raised about the fiscal impact of such payouts.

Fadnavis said his government looks at this as a "social sector investment", and cited one example of the money being channelised through a women's group, which needs to be replicated.

The chief minister said a bunch of women beneficiaries in his home district of Nagpur have pooled in money to create a corpus of Rs 30 lakh which is being given as loans to women entrepreneurs for starting their businesses.

Maharashtra is seeking to create such "finance societies" in every part of the state, he said, adding that the government's aim is to create 1 crore "Lakhpati Didis" or over a crore women earning Rs 1 lakh or above.

Meanwhile, Fadnavis said the state has paid a huge price for resisting the mega-refinery project.

Fadnavis admitted that there is a proposal to split the project into three parts of 20,000 metric tonne per annum each, and he also met the central government recently with a request to have the project

India, Mauritius to sign several pacts during PM Modi's visit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Mauritius will sign several pacts providing for cooperation in the areas of capacity building, trade and to tackle cross-border financial crimes during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the country from Tuesday.

Modi is travelling to Mauritius primarily to grace the island nation's national-day celebrations as the chief guest on March 12.

At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misra said on Saturday that the two sides will sign several agreements in the fields of capacity building, bilateral trade, tackling cross-border financial crimes and promoting small and medium enterprises. The visit will enable both sides to take stock of the bilateral ties and provide orientation to engagement in the coming months and years, he said. Describing Mauritius as a close maritime neighbour,

Misra said India has been privileged to be a preferred development partner for the island nation.

In the last 10 years, the relationship has deepened significantly, he said.

A contingent of Indian defence forces will participate in the national-day celebra-



tions of Mauritius, along with a ship from the Indian Navy. India has close and longstanding relations with Mauritius, an island nation in the Western Indian Ocean. A key reason for the special ties is the fact that Indian-origin people comprise nearly 70 per cent of the island nation's population of 1.2 million (12 lakh). Since 2005, India has been among the largest trading partners of Mauritius.

UP biggest destination for investment in country: Yogi

PNS ■ NOIDA

Uttar Pradesh is the biggest destination for investment in the country and Microsoft's upcoming research and development centre is a testament to this, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Saturday.

The chief minister laid the foundation stone of Microsoft's India Development Center (IDC) here.

Speaking on the occasion, Adityanath said, "I have been told that Microsoft's India Development Center will become the largest centre of research and development outside their headquarters... After Hyderabad, now Uttar Pradesh is going to be the home of Microsoft in the form of a new campus".



IDC Noida will not only enhance India's technical ecosystem through AI and cloud computing but also advance Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision more effectively. It will serve as a hub for innovations in AI, cloud computing, and cyber-

security, he added.

He also inaugurated the AI Engineering Center of MAQ Software and Sify Data Center in Gautam Buddha Nagar.

The state's policies are being shaped in line with the demands of the modern era, the needs of the youth, and the evolving global landscape through research and development, the chief minister.

He also lauded the single-window clearance system Nivesh Mitra, which exemplifies the state's transparent approach and pro-industry policies.

The Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj was the world's largest human gathering, where we utilised Artificial Intelligence (AI), Adityanath stated.

AI was used extensively in Maha Kumbh, as a result of which more than 66 crore devotees came to Prayagraj and returned safely to their destination after taking a holy dip of faith, he noted.

He also inaugurated a statue of Maharana Pratap in Dadri.

INDIA-US TRADE TALKS

Goyal returns from Washington visit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday returned from Washington after holding trade talks with his US counterparts, an official said.

During his week-long visit, Goyal held talks with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

These deliberations assume significance as India and the US are planning to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement, the official said.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce to USD

partner. In 2023, the US-India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 190.08 billion (USD 123.89 billion in goods and USD 66.19 billion in services trade). That year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at USD 83.77 billion, while imports were USD 40.12 billion, leaving a trade gap of USD 43.65 billion in favour of India.

The country's services export to America was USD 36.33 billion in 2023, while imports

were aggregated at USD 29.86 billion. The trade gap (difference between imports and exports) was USD 6.47 billion in favour of New Delhi.

During 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of India. The US is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus.

In 2023-24, the US was the largest trading partner of India with USD 119.71 billion bilateral trade in goods (USD 77.51 billion worth of exports, USD 42.19 billion of imports, with USD 35.31 billion trade surplus).

India has received USD 67.8 billion in foreign direct investments from America during April 2000 and September 2024.



India should withdraw from all talks with US: GIRI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India should withdraw from all negotiations with the US and prepare to engage with the Trump administration in the same way as countries like China and Canada are doing, economic think tank GTRI said on Saturday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) Founder, Ajay Srivastava said the US is exerting heavy pressure on India to accept trade demands that largely favour American interests.

US President Donald Trump and his officials have criticized India mostly by using incorrect data, he said.

"Trump is insulting India publicly using wrong data. No balanced outcome is possible in such circumstances. India should withdraw from all negotiations and prepare to deal with them like other countries are doing," Srivastava said.

Against US tariffs, China and Canada have announced retaliatory measures.

On Friday, Trump claimed that India had agreed to cut tariffs on American imports after his administration "exposed" what he called unfair trade practices.

"This is patently incorrect and intended to pressurise India. India's silence is baffling



and India needs to counter with facts. Whole world is watching as Trump and his officials belittle India every day," he added.

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has also said that India needs to open its

agriculture market, emphasising that it can not be 'off the table' when the country is negotiating with its largest trading partner. He has pitched for a macro, large and grand trade agreement with India, and not 'product-by-product'

arrangement to promote bilateral trade.

According to a GTRI report, a comprehensive trade deal would open the door to US demands, not just on tariff reductions, but also on government procurement, agricultural subsidies, patent laws, and unrestricted data flows, all of which India has consistently opposed.

"Second, Trump's history of disregarding negotiated trade agreements is evident from his decision to scrap the US-Mexico-Canada FTA, which he himself finalized in 2019, and his imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian and Mexican imports now," it said.

It suggested India consider a macro-level reciprocal tariff arrangement covering over 90 per cent of industrial goods under a "Zero-for-Zero" approach, where India eliminates tariffs only if the US does the same.

"However, agriculture, passenger cars, and other sensitive sectors must remain excluded," it said adding India must avoid making the same mistake as the auto sector contributes to one third of manufacturing GDP. Citing an example, it said Australia's domestic car industry collapsed after it reduced car import tariffs from 45 per cent to 5 per cent in the late 1980s.

FROM NATURAL WONDERS TO FORGOTTEN LEGENDS

Embark on a journey through the Heart of Arabia, where timeless escapes intertwine with deep cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes and memorable experiences. For those seeking unforgettable and unexpected getaways, Saudi offers the chance to be among the first to explore its hidden gems. From ancient cities to untouched natural wonders, these sites invite couples to connect deeply with the spirit of Saudi while creating timeless memories. Here are the top five getaways in Saudi that are sure to leave a lasting impression.

TOP ESCAPE GETAWAYS IN SAUDI

Taif Rose Farms: Where Love Blooms in the City of Roses. Nestled in the cool heights of Taif, the blooming rose farms are the epitome of romance, offering a sensory journey through fields of the world's most fragrant roses. For centuries, Taif has been renowned for its production of rosewater and perfumes, with over 2,000 farms cultivating this delicate flower. Couples can wander hand-in-hand through the rose fields, breathe in the sweet scent of love in bloom, and indulge in luxurious rose-infused products. This destination is a celebration of the land's deep connection to nature and tradition, where the essence of romance is captured in every petal.

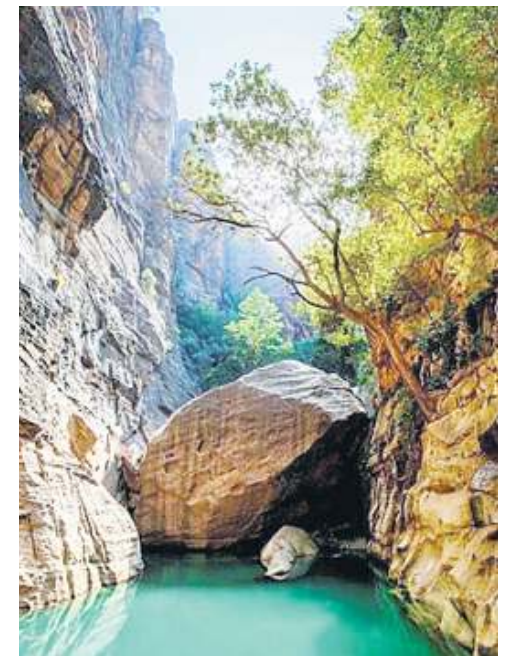
Wadi Lajab: A Love Carved in Nature (Jazan). Hidden within the Jazan region lies Wadi Lajab, a natural wonder known as the "Grand Canyon of Saudi." This verdant, narrow canyon invites adventurous couples and families to explore its dramatic cliffs, freshwater streams and lush foliage. As you traverse the winding paths and cool waters, take in the awe-inspiring surroundings. Get the adrenaline flowing by hiking, swimming, or just sitting back and admiring this hidden gem, all while connecting with the cultural history of the Jazan region. Wadi Lajab's untamed beauty and steep paths is

Nature's ultimate endurance test—its raw beauty a demonstration that life can flourish even in the most remote and unexpected places.

Al Wahbah Crater: A Sparkling Declaration of Love (Taif). Step into a surreal landscape where passion meets the extraordinary at Al Wahbah Crater, a natural volcanic wonder near Taif. This vast crater, with its gleaming salt flats at the base, is steeped in local legend and offers a captivating setting for romantic moments. Couples can hike to the rim, where the sweeping views of the crater and surrounding desert are breathtaking, especially at sunset. The shimmering crystals that light up the crater's floor create a dazzling spectacle, making it an ideal spot for stargazing enjoying a quiet picnic, or for a phantasmagoric proposal. Al Wahbah Crater embodies the allure of the unexpected, where love finds its spark in the most mystical of places.

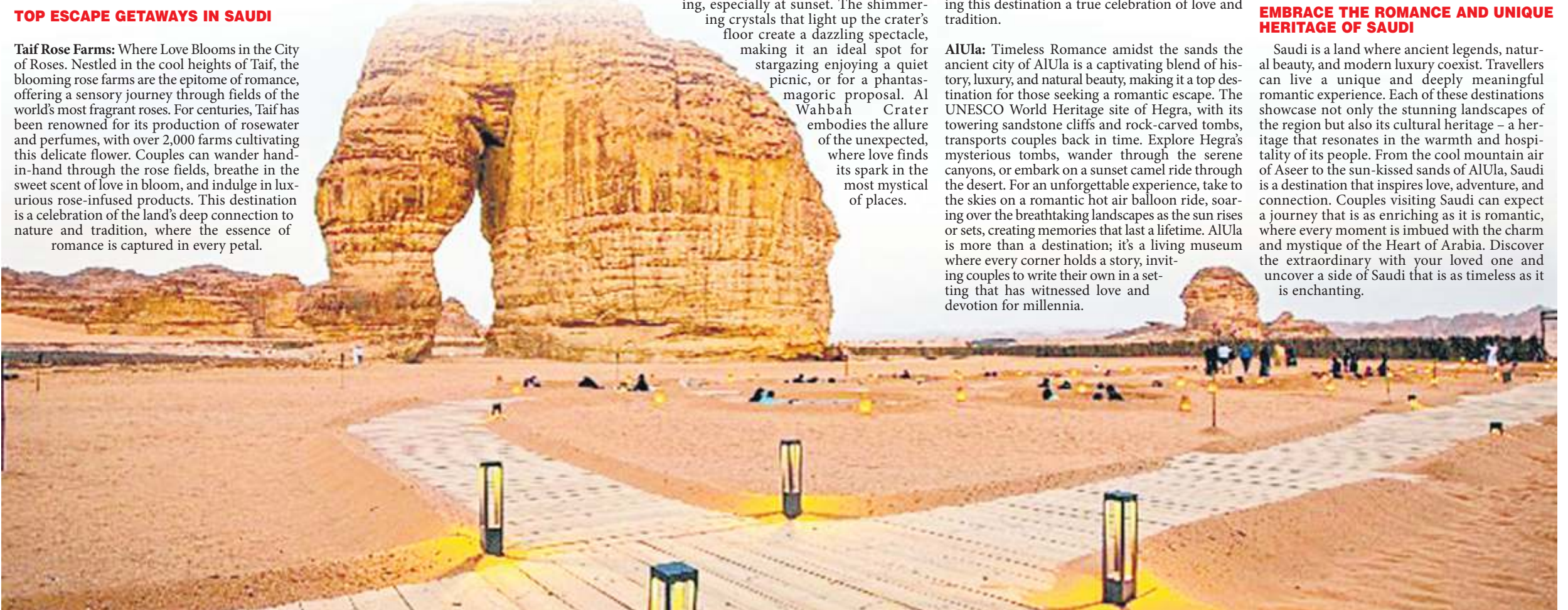
Fog Walkway: A Stroll in the Clouds (Aseer) High above the clouds, the Fog Walkway in the Aseer region offers couples an ethereal experience of walking among the mist-shrouded mountains. This elevated pathway in the city of Abha invites visitors to lose themselves in the romantic embrace of nature as they take in panoramic views of the lush green valleys below. The cool, crisp air and the soft, rolling fog create a dreamlike atmosphere, perfect for a quiet stroll or a shared moment of serenity. Complementing the walkway, local markets, folklore performances, and cozy mountain eateries offer an authentic taste of Aseer's cultural heritage, making this destination a true celebration of love and tradition.

AIUla: Timeless Romance amidst the sands the ancient city of AIUla is a captivating blend of history, luxury, and natural beauty, making it a top destination for those seeking a romantic escape. The UNESCO World Heritage site of Hegra, with its towering sandstone cliffs and rock-carved tombs, transports couples back in time. Explore Hegra's mysterious tombs, wander through the serene canyons, or embark on a sunset camel ride through the desert. For an unforgettable experience, take to the skies on a romantic hot air balloon ride, soaring over the breathtaking landscapes as the sun rises or sets, creating memories that last a lifetime. AIUla is more than a destination; it's a living museum where every corner holds a story, inviting couples to write their own in a setting that has witnessed love and devotion for millennia.



EMBRACE THE ROMANCE AND UNIQUE HERITAGE OF SAUDI

Saudi is a land where ancient legends, natural beauty, and modern luxury coexist. Travellers can live a unique and deeply meaningful romantic experience. Each of these destinations showcase not only the stunning landscapes of the region but also its cultural heritage—a heritage that resonates in the warmth and hospitality of its people. From the cool mountain air of Aseer to the sun-kissed sands of AIUla, Saudi is a destination that inspires love, adventure, and connection. Couples visiting Saudi can expect a journey that is as enriching as it is romantic, where every moment is imbued with the charm and mystique of the Heart of Arabia. Discover the extraordinary with your loved one and uncover a side of Saudi that is as timeless as it is enchanting.



WHAT'S NEW

CELEBRATING WOMEN TODAY, NOW AND FOREVER

Celebrating women shouldn't be confined to a single day or occasion. Every day is an opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the incredible contributions, strength, and resilience of women around us. So here we bring to you a list of gifts to gift the lovely ladies in your life, on every occasion.

ADJUST, RELAX, AND REJUVENATE

This Comfort Support Cushion by FRIDO is designed to provide relief and comfort for various needs. It helps alleviate acid reflux and GERD symptoms, while also offering support for the back, neck, and shoulders. Additionally, it provides essential support during pre and post-pregnancy, as well as during recovery from surgery. The cushion's unique design contours to the body's natural curves, and its adjustable feature allows for customized elevation of the head, neck, or legs, promoting improved circulation and discomfort relief.



TIMELESS ELEGANCE

A timeless handbag is more than just an accessory—it's a statement. SVJ Bags offer a blend of sophistication and practicality, making them the perfect Women's Day gift. With structured silhouettes, premium craftsmanship, and contemporary designs, SVJ Bags are designed for the modern woman who balances style and functionality effortlessly. Whether she loves classic totes or chic crossbody bags, there's an SVJ piece to match her personality.

SKINCARE ESSENTIALS FOR A #BOSSBABE GLOW

Unlock your inner #BossBabe with a specially curated selection of skincare essentials, specially chosen to help you radiate confidence and glow! Kaya Brightening Day Cream is the perfect solution for radiant skin in just 7 days. It protects against UV damage while improving skin texture for a visible glow. Kaya Brightening Night Cream works overnight to rejuvenate, brighten, and refine skin texture. It helps skin recover from daily environmental stressors, revealing a refreshed and radiant look by morning. The brightening cleanser is formulated with gentle exfoliating beads that help remove dead skin cells, revealing a brighter and smoother complexion.



JEWELLERY THAT SPEAKS YOUR MIND

With the onset of the festivities, it's time to take the style game a notch higher with jewellery trends that have the runways blazing! 2025 is all experimenting with these new style trends and letting your jewellery take centre stage! This year jewellery isn't simply about accentuating a look or just following but about adapting that trend to express your mood, mark your moments and create a statement that is sure to make heads turn. Be it the bold statement pieces or the versatile and more functional designs for frequent wear, exquisitely crafted pieces from Platinum EVARA by PGI offers something for every mood and occasion.



FIND CALM IN CHAOS

In today's fast-paced world, stress and anxiety have become common concerns, affecting overall health and productivity. Recognizing the need for a natural and effective solution, Vedistry, a consumer healthcare brand under Charak Pharma, offers Mentacalm—a clinically proven Ayurvedic stress buster designed to reduce cortisol levels and help individuals manage stress, enhance emotional balance, and improve psychological well-being.



ELEVATE YOUR SENSES

A luxurious quartet of botanical-infused body mists, perfect for switching up your scent based on your mood. From floral to fruity, this set offers something for everyone.

- Pomegranate Body Mist** - Sweet & Refreshing
- Black Grape Body Mist** - Juicy & Energizing
- Hibiscus Body Mist** - Fresh & Uplifting
- Lotus Body Mist** - Floral & Calming

Price: Rs. 1,145



THE ULTIMATE THROWBACK DRIP IS HERE!

Get ready to enter your nostalgia era—ONLY just dropped a fire collab with the Peanuts gang, and it's serving major vibes! The ONLY x Peanuts collection is a limited-edition lineup that blends vintage feels with modern streetwear. Inspired by Charles Schulz's legendary comic strip, this collection is all about celebrating friendship, fun, and a little bit of mischief. Whether you're rocking Snoopy's effortless cool or channeling Charlie Brown's underdog energy (but make it a win), these pieces bring the Peanuts universe straight to your closet.

HOROSCOPE



ARIES

You will need lots of love. Those who are related to you will find it difficult to deal with your illusions. You rely much on friends for emotional stability.



TAURUS

The desire for power and fame will enable you to excel at work. You are mentally optimistic and expansive about your family. You thrive in thinking out of the box.



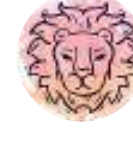
GEMINI

Success will be the hallmark of your career. You will prove to be independent. Complications in love life may get you into some bewildered situations.



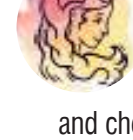
CANCER

Tenacity and obsession for perfection will bring you success at work. Think more about prospects for your personal growth. Try to be in control.



LEO

You are a person of high esteem. The main menace to your physical situation is your emotions. There may be a trip to a beautiful place which you will enjoy.



VIRGO

Harmony seems to be the keyword for you. A sense of joy and cheerfulness will fill you. You tend to act like a person who is curious about everything around them.



LIBRA

You need plenty of changes and challenges. Give job change a try if you have been considering it. You will find yourself aloof from your family members.



SCORPIO

Lack of communication will cause family disputes. Seek out some time from your work and spend it with your dear ones. You will prove yourself to be honest.



SAGITTARIUS

Whatever projects you indulge in will become fruitful. Support from relatives and friends will shower bliss upon you. There may be business-related short trips.



CAPRICORN

Work is your source of excitement. Your love for games and challenges will make life pleasant for you. You will experience a new atmosphere and new friends.



AQUARIUS

Your power for reasoning will make you see the world in black and white. You will feel much relieved. Students must try to concentrate on their studies.



PISCES

Your casual attitude towards love will disappoint your lover. Minor misunderstandings will make your days dull. You may be prompted to take a few days off.



The Pioneer AGENDA

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair"
— Shirley Chisholm

SHE is a daughter, a mother, a wife, and a leader. From sacrifices at home to commanding spaces once deemed unimaginable, women have done it all. Every woman's life is a symbol of already fought societal norms, unbreakable strength, unshattractive confidence and living grace. SHE is a force, a beacon and change, writes
ABHI SINGHAL

कोई सीता, कोई राधा
कोई झांसी की रानी।
हर रूप में नारी ने
दुनिया है संभाली।।



WAAH WOMANIYA!

Me being a woman have always heard and read that for HER the sky is the limit, but SHE, in every role and everytime knows that the limit doesn't stop at the sky.

The Durga Incarnates

Despite being nature's greatest marvel, women have long been denied the respect and autonomy they deserve. Forced to navigate paths imposed by others, many Indian women have dared to challenge these norms, rewriting the rules and forging their destinies. They dare, they challenge societal norms. Here are a few of them who have excelled and made their mark despite all odds in different fields that were a taboo.

KIRAN BEDI: THE FIRST WOMAN IPS OFFICER

As India's first female IPS officer, she broke barriers in a male-dominated force, transforming challenges into opportunities. Her journey from towing the Prime Minister's car for illegal parking to reforming Tihar Jail, demonstrates how determination and the right support can overturn deep-seated biases. Raised in an environment where education and independence were encouraged, she never let societal expectations define her aspirations. "Any girl child who is loved by her parents and given the vision and resources to realise her potential is ready to take on the world, as I was," says Kiran Bedi.

But entering a profession dominated by men was not without its challenges. The biases and prejudices were apparent. "The prevailing biases and prejudices inspired me to question them. And prove them wrong. Which I did. It gave me a sense of achievement" she added.

NIDHI SALGAME: THE OFF-ROADER MAKING HER PATH

Nidhi Salgame, founder of Wander Beyond Boundaries, exemplifies excellence in a field where skill matters more than gender. An accomplished off-roader and explorer, Nidhi has overcome stereotypes and judgment by letting her actions speak for themselves. Nidhi says, "You just have to prove yourself again and again. I faced judgment, and immense stereotyping. I had to prove myself twice over, just for people to acknowledge my skills. That's not a burden any man would carry, yet it was placed on me. But in the end, actions speak louder than words." She further added that the outdoors does not judge you by gender. The machine doesn't treat you differently. It is a leveller. And that's what makes it so liberating. Her journey has never been about fitting into stereotypes or shattering them, it has been about mastering what she does and doing it exceptionally well.

In off-roading extreme overland expeditions, capability is the measure of success.

POOJA SHARMA: AN ACTIVIST WHO DEFIED TRADITIONS

A social activist who turned personal tragedy into a mission of dignity. After witnessing her brother's untimely death, she vowed to honour those forgotten by society. Defying long-held traditions that barred women from performing last rites, Pooja armed herself with knowledge from ancient scriptures and has since bestowed dignity on over 5,000 unclaimed bodies. In a society where women are excluded from cremation grounds, Pooja stood as a lone warrior.

When she attempted to perform the last rites, temple priests blocked her path. "I started reading the Vedas, our scriptures, the Shiv Puran, the Garud Puran. Nowhere is it written that women cannot perform last rites" said Pooja. Armed with knowledge, she fought against centuries-old beliefs and proved that religion did not forbid women from giving dignity to the departed. Together, these women embody a spirit that transcends societal constraints. They remind us that while rules may exist, they do not define the power of a woman, the true force of creation, resilience, and change.

BIDISHA MUKHERJEE: BREAKING BARRIERS IN GOVERNANCE AND TOURISM

Entering the IAS amid a traditionally male realm, she now leads initiatives at the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board that empower women and promote sustainable tourism. Her work proves that when women lead, they not only participate but they redefine the landscape. Under her leadership, initiatives like women-run hotels, such as Amaltas, have not only created economic independence for women but also reshaped the tourism landscape in Madhya Pradesh.

"The desire to create meaningful change led me from teaching to public administration. While the gender imbalance in governance was a challenge, I saw it as a chance to redefine norms," said Bidisha. Her initiatives have set new benchmarks, proving that when women are given platform, they don't just participate they lead.

— BY DIVYA BHATIA

Now you don't have to picture such women, you can also see them behind the wheels of the massive DTC buses, their presence a powerful symbol that defies the notion that such roles are for men.

grew up in a normal middle-class joint family. From a young age, I have seen my mother, a master's degree holder in Mathematics which was a huge deal in the 1990's, working eighteen hours a day as a homemaker. Her journey, fraught with obstacles and setbacks, revealed the harsh reality of how women's dreams were systematically stifled, even after years of dedication, sacrificed in the name of marriage and domesticity. It was a revelation that struck a deep chord for a silent lament for countless unfulfilled aspirations. In the same family, my sister and I had strict timings for returning home.

Mahila, Aurat, Nari, whatever you call her, she has always been categorised into different bases in life in vast job roles, but those were always restricted to the domain of her home. In India, women have largely been confined within the four walls of their homes, entrusted with the responsibility of managing the household and raising children. Their clothing choices, curfews, lifestyle, and behavior have long been dictated by societal norms and patriarchy. Any deviation from these expectations is seen as defiance and often equated with a decline in moral values.

Time moved forward, western influence came in and scenarios started taking turns, women started stepping out for work and everything changed. Slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, the rigid structures that had defined a woman's existence began to show cracks. The long-held idea of women confined to hearth and home with domestic threads, began to fray. The world outside, once a forbidden territory, beckoned. Doors, previously firmly shut, creaked open, revealing the promise of new horizons for the literate women. This **International Women's Day**, it's important to remember the countless struggles faced by generations of women. The fight for equality has been long and arduous, marked by societal barriers and entrenched prejudices. Even now, despite significant progress, women continue to move through a world where their contributions are often undervalued. They strive not just for financial independence, but for something far more profound: respect and dignity. The desire to live a life on their own terms, free from the constraints of outdated expectations, fuels their determination. Many women are working tirelessly, balancing professional ambitions with personal responsibilities. They seek a future where their voices are heard, their talents are recog-

nised and their dreams are within reach and not pressure.

Yet, amidst the general narratives of limitation, stories of extraordinary defiance emerge. Women, with an undying spirit, have ventured into segments previously deemed unimaginable, shattering the foundations of societal expectations. They carved paths where none existed, proving that ambition knows no gender. Consider the women who drive auto rickshaws through the chaotic city streets, their hands firm on the wheel, their eyes fixed on a future they are building. Witness the rural women at a construction site, carrying their babies on the back and bricks on their head.

A recent example was witnessed during the Mahakumbh Mela. A video from New Delhi Railway Station went viral, showing a mother in uniform with her child strapped to her front, holding a lathi in one hand while maintaining peace and order at the station.

Each of these roles comes with its own set of hardships and often the lack of respect from those who are not used to seeing women in these roles. Stories of such women are etched in courage and perseverance, are the true celebration of Women's Day. They deserve our respect, support, and endless celebration.

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FROM PERSONAL PASSION TO POWERHOUSE ATELIER

Inside Gauri Khan's creative process & aesthetics

With a signature aesthetic that fuses timeless elegance with bold innovation, the OG Gauri Khan continues to push creative boundaries, proving that great design isn't just about spaces—it's about storytelling. In an exclusive chat, Gauri Khan takes *The Pioneer* through her extraordinary journey—and as she celebrates 13 years of Gauri Khan Designs, she reflects on how her passion evolved into an award-winning design atelier, her collaboration with Sussanne Khan in Hyderabad and more

TEJAL SINHA
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Gauri Khan's journey into interior design was never a calculated career move—it was an organic evolution of her love for history, art and aesthetics. What started as a passion project, redesigning her family's home in Delhi, soon led to the transformation of Mannat, the iconic residence of Shah Rukh Khan. These deeply personal projects became the foundation of Gauri Khan Designs (GKD), which has since grown into one of India's most sought-after design ateliers, known for its distinctive fusion of contemporary elegance and traditional craftsmanship.

For over thirteen years, Gauri has shaped spaces with an intuitive understanding of luxury and a keen eye for detail, redefining the interiors of celebrity homes, boutique hotels, and commercial spaces. Now, as she expands her vision with a dedicated showcase in Hyderabad, in collaboration with fellow designer Sussanne Khan, and prepares to launch an exclusive experience centre in Delhi, she reflects on her design philosophy, inspirations and the journey that has brought her here.

Gauri Khan's foray into design began long before she was recognized as a creative force in the industry. Contrary to popular belief, her love for interiors wasn't first ignited by Mannat—it started in her childhood home. "It actually began when I redesigned my Delhi home—my mother had put me in charge of renovations," she recalls. "I was new to the process but created a blueprint, hired experts and enjoyed sourcing art, accessories

and furniture to bring it to life. That's when I knew I wanted to do more."

Mannat followed and with it came a deeper understanding of the power of design. "Working on these personal projects gave me the confidence to launch Gauri Khan Designs. What began as a passion grew into something much bigger, making this journey both organic and deeply fulfilling."

Over the past thirteen years, Gauri Khan Designs has emerged as a benchmark in the world of luxury interiors. When asked what has been key to this enduring success, Gauri emphasises the importance of evolution. "The key is staying true to my design philosophy while always evolving," she says. "Every project brings new challenges and inspirations, and working with different clients and spaces has kept things exciting."

Collaboration and innovation remain central to her approach. "I'm lucky to have a talented team, explore new materials, dive into R&D, and collaborate with some of the best in the industry—it all keeps me growing."

Gauri Khan Designs recently made its mark in Hyderabad, occupying an entire floor in Sussanne Khan's flagship store. The city's cultural richness and contemporary sensibilities made it an ideal destination for expansion. "Hyderabad is a city that beautifully blends heritage with modernity, which is what my label also does, making it the perfect canvas for design exploration," she explains. The collaboration with Sussanne Khan was a seamless fit, built on years of friendship and mutual respect for each other's aesthetics. "Sussanne and I have known each other for years, and our design sensibilities are very different, yet they complement each other in a way that feels organic. So when she invited me to

collaborate, I was happy to do so." The Hyderabad showcase is more than just a space to display furniture—it is an immersive experience that allows visitors to engage with the artistry behind Gauri Khan Designs.

"This year marks 13 years of Gauri Khan Designs. Our Hyderabad showcase highlights our distinct design language with bespoke art, furniture, home accessories and soft furnishings—blending contemporary style with India's rich craftsmanship. More than a showcase, it's an experience, where every piece tells a story and reimagines luxury interiors." Among the curated selections at the Hyderabad store, Gauri shares some of her personal favourites.

"There is a sleek white dresser with clean lines, topped by a mirror framed with soft, built-in lights. Paired with a chic white chair accented in plush faux fur, it's a perfect blend of elegance and luxury," she describes.

Another standout is a signature mirror that doubles as art. "Its frame is sculpted from rich, golden wood with fluid, uneven edges, as if shaped by nature, blending luxury with organic beauty." For those looking to elevate their living spaces, Gauri highlights timeless bedroom and living room sets. "Upholstered in elegant, neutral hues and framed in beautifully carved brown wood, these pieces exude refinement and sophistication."

As Gauri Khan Designs gears up for the launch of its flagship experience centre in Delhi at the end of April, she shares how this space will redefine the way people engage with interior design. "The Delhi experience centre is being developed as an exclusive space, open to clients by appointment only," she reveals. "Unlike traditional showrooms, this offers a highly personalized journey—visitors can expect tailored interactions, private viewings,

and a thoughtfully curated showcase of our signature pieces, making the experience truly unique." Gauri's signature aesthetic is often described as a refined fusion of elegance and bold innovation. While her style has always been rooted in classic design principles, she acknowledges that it has evolved over time. "My style has always been classic. Over time, I've found a balance between elegance and innovation—I love mixing textures, materials, statement pieces and bold layouts to keep it fresh."

One piece that perfectly embodies this balance is part of the Hyderabad collection. "A signature mirror that doubles as art—its frame sculpted from rich, golden wood with fluid, uneven edges, as if shaped by nature. It blends luxury with organic beauty."

She also enjoys introducing bold accents in her designs. "We have living room and bedroom sets with refined, timeless silhouettes. Upholstered in elegant, neutral hues and framed in beautifully carved brown wood, some accented with bold prints that bring a vibrant, summery charm." Gauri thrives on collaboration and some projects have challenged her to push the boundaries of her creative process. One such project was working with Falguni and Shane Peacock, known for their avant-garde fashion sensibilities. "With clients like Falguni and Shane Peacock—pioneers in their field who have a clear design perspective—it became a dynamic exchange of ideas," she shares. "With three strong creative minds at work, our collaboration resulted in something truly unique, seamlessly blending their style with mine."

One of the most exciting aspects of this collaboration was designing custom wallpapers that complemented the designers' collections. "It made the process both exciting and rewarding," she adds. While Gauri Khan Designs is synonymous with luxury, its impact extends beyond celebrity homes and high-end hotels—it is about shaping the way people experience design in their everyday lives.

"Design is a reflection of lifestyle, and I believe the spaces we create influence the way people experience life," she says. "Whether it's a celebrity home or a boutique hotel, the goal is to make interiors wonderful yet relatable." She also notes a growing shift in how people approach interior design. "I see a growing shift where people now prioritize design in their everyday spaces—be it homes, offices, or even cafes."

With Hyderabad now part of her expanding design universe and Delhi's experience centre set to open soon, Gauri Khan continues to redefine the landscape of luxury interiors—one meticulously crafted space at a time.



REVOLUTIONISING HIGHER EDUCATION

There has been a tremendous transformation in India's higher education landscape with the integration of advanced technologies. This change is promoting personalised learning experiences and enhancing student engagement, aligning with global educational trends. The adoption of modern technologies including digital tools, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) are reshaping traditional learning methods, creating a new era of personalized learning and student engagement. Technology is not just an enabler but a game-changer in making education truly student-centric and industry-relevant. Personalised learning is an educational model where the content is delivered to every student individually according to his or her requirements, interests, and learning rate. In India, this approach has gained momentum with the support of technology. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises the integration of technology to facilitate personalised learning paths, aiming to improve educational outcomes across various levels. Institutions across India are adopting AI-driven tools to offer adaptive assessments, real-time feedback, and data-driven learning insights. A 2024 survey by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) revealed that 70% of higher education institutions have adopted hybrid models to enhance accessibility and inclusivity. This flexibility promotes lifelong learning and skill development of the students.

According to a report by NASSCOM, India's EdTech sector surged to an impressive USD10 billion in 2024, powered by innovations in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) and Augmented Reality (AR). These technologies are not just enriching classrooms but also democratising access to quality education for learners in remote and far-flung areas. It has been observed that continuous engagement of students is a critical factor in academic success, encompassing behavioural, cognitive and emotional involvement in the learning process. The integration of technology in Indian higher education has been pivotal in promoting this engagement. Digital tools and platforms have enabled interactive and immersive learning experiences, making education more engaging for students. In 2024, Indian universities formed significant global partnerships, enhancing education and research. Institutions collaborated with international universities and tech giants to develop industry-relevant curricula and pioneering research. These advancements elevated India's global academic standing and improved student employability, setting an example for global education systems. Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a transformative force in India's higher education sector. AI-driven platforms analyse vast amounts of data to provide insights into student performance, learning patterns, and areas needing improvement. This data-driven approach enables educators to tailor instructions to individual student needs, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. AI-powered learning management systems (LMS) have been implemented to manage learning environments effectively. These systems utilise AI to provide personalised learning paths, adaptive assessments, and real-time feedback, thereby enhancing the overall



learning experience. In spite of the progressive advancements, there are different challenges of the integration of technology in India's higher education system. One area of grave concern is the digital divide, with disparities in access to reliable internet connectivity and digital devices across different regions. This gap can hinder the equitable implementation of technology-driven personalised learning. In addition to this, there should be proper training for educators to effectively utilise these technologies. Even the NEP 2020 emphasises the importance of teacher training in digital literacy and the effective use of EdTech tools. Further, data privacy and security are also critical considerations, especially with the increased use of AI and data analytics in education. Ensuring the protection of student data and maintaining ethical standards in AI applications are paramount to building trust and

safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders. Despite the challenges, there is a silver lining on the horizon as the future of technology-driven personalised learning in India's higher education appears promising. With continued investments and innovations, the potential to create more inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments is substantial. India's ed-tech market, which was valued at \$7.5 billion in 2024, is projected to reach \$29 billion by 2030, revealed a report titled 'Impact Study of EdTech in India: Driving Innovation and Creating Opportunities.' In terms of economic growth, the sector is expected to contribute 0.4% of India's GDP in 2029, up from 0.1% in 2020. This report was prepared by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and consultancy firm Grant Thornton. Student success stories highlight the transformative power of technology-enabled learning across institutions. Graduates secure roles in top companies and launch startups, leveraging tech-driven education

to create significant industry impacts. Looking ahead to 2025 and beyond, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and blockchain will further revolutionize higher education. These innovations promise immersive learning experiences, enhanced skill verification, and increased accessibility to quality education. The future of higher education depends on balancing technological advancement with human-centric learning. Institutions must prioritise developing well-rounded professionals who are not only technically proficient but also possess critical

thinking skills and adaptability. This evolution ensures students are prepared for the dynamic demands of the future workplace.

(The author, Piyush Nangru, is the Co-Founder and COO of Sunstone.)



Dr ALAGU VARSHINI: PERSEVERANCE IN ACTION

Dr Alagu Varshini VS - a 2012 batch

IAS officer, shares her journey from a childhood steeped in education to navigating the challenges of civil service. In a freewheeling conversation with *The Pioneer's* Naveena Ghanate, she reflects on her career — from overseeing land acquisitions for Kaleshwaram to managing critical COVID-19 initiatives — highlighting the trials, triumphs and unwavering commitment that have defined her path



A CHILDHOOD ROOTED IN EDUCATION

I was born in Pollachi, Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu into a family that deeply valued education. My father, VS Soma Sundaram a physics teacher and my mother, M Selvanayagam, a chemistry teacher. My father's vision was to establish a school where children, regardless of their backgrounds, could receive quality education without the pressure of merely achieving academic success. That dream materialised into the Sivalik Matriculation Higher Secondary School. Today, it stands in its 40th year. I studied in the same school and my house was within the premises. My parents ensured I was treated equally to my brother Dr VS Shri Ramu. I actively participated in sports like volleyball and kho-kho. However, my mother was particular about ensuring I learned household chores too, sending me to my grandmothers' homes where I mastered farming at a very young age.

UPSC FOR MANAGEMENT QUOTA FEE

My goal was to specialize in oral and maxillofacial surgery and provide free cleft lip and palate surgeries. But limited government seats and my father's refusal to pay management quota fees forced me to rethink my options. My father, once aspired to be a civil servant. We both took a challenge that, if I cleared prelims, he would have to pay money for management quota admission for specialisation in Oral and maxillofacial surgery. After my first failed attempt, I realized the magnitude of the UPSC challenge and dedicated myself to preparation, eventually clearing the exam and joining the Indian Postal Service. I worked as a Deputy Division Manager for Postal Life Insurance, and by God's grace, I was part of the officer training team when the postal banking system was introduced. My exposure to banking and insurance in Bihar gave me valuable insights into the financial sector. When I got into the postal service, my parents were incredibly happy. In my hometown, societal expectations for women were very different. By the time I was preparing for PG, most of my classmates were already married, and some had children. At 25, people around us started questioning my parents about my marriage. Clearing UPSC silenced all those who ridiculed them and a proof I had chosen a path of significance and a validation of their sacrifices.



AN AVERAGE STUDENT WITH A PASSION FOR SERVICE

While I was mischievous, always pulling my friends out of study time to play, I was also drawn to the idea of service from a young age. Seeing my father's cousin, a gynecologist, drive her own car and command immense respect in our town, I was inspired. I initially thought I'd marry into a joint family and lead a simple, service-oriented life, but my journey took a different path. I couldn't get MBBS seat for my rank, and my dad didn't want to pay for management quota as they are normally in cash or black money. So I opted for BDS at Meenakshi Ammal Dental College in Chennai, where I won state-level best paper awards in prosthodontics and endodontics.

ONE ATTEMPT BEFORE GETTING MARRIED

As I spent more time in the system, I realized that IAS or Foreign Service would give me a broader scope to implement change. My parents were searching for grooms for marriage, I asked my father if I could attempt the IAS exam once more. He just said, 'We will do our work of finding a groom, and you do yours'. By 29, I entered the IAS which felt like a takeoff in an aircraft, where life is smooth on the runway and then suddenly accelerates to incredible speeds. I was the first girl from my entire village to become an IAS officer. Horse-riding was a mandatory part of our IAS training. Most female officer trainees would stop at the trot, but I wanted to push myself further. One day, while trotting, my horse decided on its own to break into a gallop to catch up with another rider. I had no control over it, but the horse ensured I didn't fall. That experience built my trust, and from then on, I went on to master cantering, galloping, and even jumping. I might be the only IAS officer to have done all levels of equestrian training, including jumps.

KALESHWARAM CHANGED MY FATE

I was going through a high risk pregnancy, when one of my most challenging assignments was land acquisition for the Kaleshwaram project as Peddapalli collector. This was a massive task - over 8,000 acres across 110 kilometers had to be acquired. Telangana had no separate land acquisition act at the time, so I worked under the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Act of 2013 in which the District collector was the authority. I handled the acquisition including Annaram and Meddigadda. When it came to Sundilla, I encountered roadblocks in places like Ramagundam. In one village, Goliwada, people refused to part with 57 acres - land critical to the project. The matter went to court, and a stay order was issued. Only one negotiation went on, we issue notices to the party, we call them for another negotiation and if they don't accept the quoted rate, we deposit the amount in court and go ahead. But then the CM said that the machinery would start working. I was on a call with the Secretary to the CM, who mentioned that the CP would handle the 144 bandobast, etc., and that the acquisition would be carried out immediately. I explained that it was not possible and that we needed at least two weeks. At the time, I was pregnant, and there was a court stay order in my name, which would amount to contempt. If we sent the machinery by force, I would be held accountable and could be sent to jail. This is such an open and shut case and I can't even defend in court as people videograph everything. I said you allow me to go on leave and you keep anybody. Even if CP goes to the acquisition, the Collector is the responsible authority. Then the secretary said, CM is on loud speaker, I stood my ground, asked to give me 2 weeks and it will be done as per law. CM took offence and transferred me.

SAREE GIFT AND BIG LESSON

I joined Nellore as assistant collector and my mentor Collector Nagulapalli Srikanth. First time I got a gift was a saree and then he told 'Varshini, think if you want to accept it or you want to return it because this is now your initiation for a bribe and it is not going to see any end'. Then I returned that saree and since then I don't accept any gifts from anybody. Personal values and professional ethics matter the most. My first posting was as Sub-Collector in Vikarabad, in newly formed Telangana. The focus at that time was to ensure that policies conceptualized at the State level were efficiently implemented at the grassroots. Because of a shortage of officers, I was promoted in early 2015 and posted as CEO of Zilla Parishad Medak. I was the only IAS officer in that position, and I still remember the call from the Chief Secretary, who told me, 'You have been personally selected by the Chief Minister for his own district, so go and do good work.' Soon I was appointed as the District Collector, a role that I had dreamed of since my early days in service and wanted my father to witness. I was the first collector of the newly formed Peddapalli district, I did Sand Tax policy which got a national award.



MARRIED A SOFTWARE ENGINEER

I put Andhra Pradesh as my second State preference, while home State was first choice, because I learnt Telugu during my BDS. Just as I received my State cadre allocation, my husband's match came in, and everything fell into place. Looking back, I realize that the partner Karthik Palaniswamy I found at 30 was exactly the kind of person my family would have envisioned for me had I married at 22. A good family, a kind and supportive husband, and just a one-year age difference - everything aligned at the right time. Sometimes, life has its own timing, and I am grateful for how things worked out. We discussed the challenges of a civil servant's life even before marriage, and I made it clear that I would not be moving back to Tamil Nadu after marriage. Either I would serve in my state cadre Telangana which I truly like or in the Government of India. He simply said, 'When problems come, we'll solve them together.' That's how it has been for us since then.

PROFESSIONAL EXILE AND PERSONAL SUFFERING

2017 was a period of professional exile and personal suffering. In January 2017, my brother's 2-day old daughter passed away. In March, I was in the second month of high risk pregnancy and threatened abortion symptoms. In May, I was transferred unjustly without posting. In June, I lost my father and November, I delivered a pre-term. My brother and mother were grieving. My husband, my baby and I were there. Bureaucrats abandoned me - calls and messages went unanswered, and I was left out in the cold. Only one officer, K Ramakrishna Rao, the Finance Secretary, spoke to me during this tough phase - he would call regularly and ask about health checkups and if I needed a car to go to hospital. After months of waiting, I contemplated quitting IAS and starting my own clinic in my hometown serving people and even my brother is a doctor. But just when I was ready to leave, I was given an opportunity in the health department. I joined as Director of the Indian Institute of Health and Family Welfare.

HANDLING COVID

Director IHHFW wasn't an IAS post, but gratitude to the then Principal Secretary, who is now the Chief Secretary supported me. When I was appointed, it wasn't even a prominent post, but then Covid happened and it suddenly became very important. Our team - comprising Commissioner of Health, Commissioner of Aarogyasri, and myself - worked tirelessly. We trained 87,000 personnel, set up quarantine and call centres, and handled 27,000 calls daily. I was pregnant at the time but chose not to take leave and in fact was visiting covid areas. The pandemic was a once-in-a-lifetime challenge. Post-pandemic, I realized our work lacked documentation. I got a Fulbright scholarship in 2022 and was part of the Edward Mason Program, Masters in Public Administration, Harvard Kennedy School. When I went to Harvard, my husband took care of my kids. I worked on 13 policy projects for Telangana, including public distribution reforms and climate resilience strategies at Harvard.



GOING ON CENTRAL DEPUTATION

When I joined as Secretary TSWREIS, I worked 38 days straight, literally spending time only for work without taking breaks - to get an understanding. There were too many issues surrounding food poisoning incidents and others. You know these students come from a very traumatic life as they see domestic violence, abuse, discrimination and poverty. We need to take care of them carefully. It took me some time to understand the system and politics around it. No human in their right mind wants children to suffer. As I prepare for my new role in Delhi, for mandatory Central deputation, I remain committed to public service. My journey has been filled with battles - some won, some lost - but every challenge has shaped me into a stronger officer. Recognition has been elusive, but I believe in karma. The good I do today will eventually make an impact. Telangana will always be close to my heart, and I will serve in whatever capacity I can.

HUSBAND'S SUPPORT

My husband Karthik has been my pillar of support. He always tells me, 'You're passionate about change; my role is to support you.' He supports in and out. My husband is very good at data crunching and works in Infosys. When I went to Harvard, my husband took 1 year work from home to take care of both the kids here. At the same time, not many women get opportunities like Fulbright scholarship, Harvard - it is once in a lifetime opportunity. When my daughter was born, I was really happy as I could procreate. When pregnancy was difficult and all I wanted was to hold a baby. I have two kids Sarasswathy Karthik and Guhan Arun Karthik. My daughter is in first standard in HPS. Guhan will be going to LKG now. I participate in marathons, I play badminton and I am learning to paint. I sing well but I do it only for my children.



QUICK BYTES

Fav Colour - Purple

Movies - *Chak De India* or any movie with historical significance

Last movie I watched - *The boy who harnessed the wind*

Fav song - I like *Tamil State Anthem* and gives goosebumps

Fav actor - Rajnikanth

Fav book - *When breath becomes air*

Strength - My husband