VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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India, Kiwi sign defence pact, to step up maritime **safety** 5



INDIAN RAILWAYS IN SOUND FINANCIAL HEALTH, SAYS MIN VAISHNAW 8



What If a Vehicle Had a Life? *Tuk Tuk* Director Shares **HIS VISION** P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

It will take time to get a grip on the administration. The media is saying I haven't got a grip on the administration. I am asking what grip. Changing two ministers or sending two officers to jail doesn't mean having a grip on governance. We want to coordinate and take along everyone and give good governance. It is easy to break but to make something, it will take time



P4

— *Revanth Reddy, Chief Minister, Telangana*

DON'T MISS...

SSC exams off to a smooth start

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Public Examinations for Class 10 students commenced without any issues on Monday in the NTR and Krishna districts. Both District Collectors, Dr G Lakshmisha and DK Balaji, carried out unannounced inspections of examination centres in their respective areas to ensure the exams were conducted smoothly. The educational authorities in both districts established a total of 311 examination centres for the SSC public exams.In the NTR district, there were 27,711 regular students, with....

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BJP TN chief Annamalai detained

BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai, the party's women's wing national chief Vanathi Srinivasan and senior state leader H Raja were among the party leaders who were detained here on Monday by the police ahead of their protest against the alleged irregularities in state-run liquor retailer TASMAC. The saffron party had announced a picketing protest of the TASMAC headquarters here over the alleged Rs 1,000 crore irregularities, as claimed by the Enforcement Directorate recently. The BJP found...

-PAGE: 5

Maruti , Tata Motors to hike vehicle prices

Maruti Suzuki India and Tata Motors on Monday announced plans to increase vehicle prices from April in order to partially offset the impact of rising input costs. Maruti Suzuki said it plans to hike prices of its entire model range by up to 4 per cent from next month. Tata Motors said it will increase the price of its commercial vehicle range by up to 2 per cent from next month. In light of rising input costs and operational expenses, the company has planned to increase the prices of its cars...

-PAGE: 8

'Cricket would always be my greatest ally'

From incessant boos to frenzied adulation star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya has seen it all in the last few months, during which his life underwent a "360 degree turnaround" and keeping him afloat in the turmoil was his determination to "never leave the battlefield". As he gears up for his second IPL season as Mumbai Indians captain, Pandya can expect a markedly warmer reception at the Wankhede after playing crucial roles in India's T20 World Cup and the ICC Champions Trophy triumphs...

-SPORTS

SWARNANDHRA VISION - 2047

CM unveils segment-wise plans

Pilot vision documents prepared for Kuppam, Pithapuram, Mangalagiri, Uravakonda

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

- The action plan to be executed at the mandal and municipal levels through village and ward secretariats, with a district-level document to be released soon
- Naidu urges MLAs to attract industries to Andhra Pradesh, contrasting it with the previous government's alleged failure in industrial growth



- State goals aligned with Viksit Bharat Vision-2047, targeting sustainable economic development
- Rayalaseema's transformation from a drought-prone area to a hub for horticulture and renewable energy highlighted
- Concerns raised over the lack of development in water-rich districts like Vijayawada, Srikakulam, and Adilabad
- The government aims to provide home ownership, allotting land to families and setting a target for housing completion by 2029
- A phased poverty alleviation plan targets 35 lakh people, with government recognition for those adopting the underprivileged
- State revenue from agriculture and industries is projected to grow significantly by 2028-29, with the unemployment rate expected to decline

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced that development plans are being formulated for each Assembly constituency in the State as part of the Swarnandhra Vision-2047. Addressing the Assembly, he urged all MLAs to take proactive steps in implementing these plans, reinforcing the government's commitment to comprehensive progress.

As part of the pilot initiative, vision documents have been prepared for four Assembly segments—Kuppam, Pithapuram, Mangalagiri, and Uravakonda. These documents detail specific developmental strategies, with the government set to work closely with MLAs to ensure their effective execution. The Chief Minister emphasised that the vision document is not merely a blueprint but a call to action, urging every representative to actively engage with their constituencies to drive progress.

The action plan outlined in the vision document will be implemented at the mandal and municipal levels through village and ward secretariat units. A district-level vision document is also set to be released soon at the upcoming district collectors' meeting. Naidu assured that the government is dedicated to fulfilling public aspirations and ensuring inclusive development.

Highlighting the state's focus on industrial growth, Naidu encouraged MLAs to attract industries to Andhra Pradesh. He contrasted this with the previous government's policies, which, he claimed, had driven industries out of the state. The Chief Minister underscored the critical role of industries in employment generation and revenue enhancement, stressing the need to prioritise the agricultural sector for sustainable economic growth.

Continued on Page 2



Cabinet approves key proposals

YSR district to be renamed as YSR Kadapa district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Cabinet sanctioned 22 projects worth Rs 22,607.11 cr, empowering the APCRDA Commissioner to issue Letters of Award (LOAs). Besides, it approved 37 projects valued at Rs 15,095.02 crore, funded by the World Bank, ADB, HUDCO, and KfW.

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, led by Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, convened an e-Cabinet meeting at the state Secretariat on Monday, approving several key proposals across various departments, including education, urban development, energy, and infrastructure.

The Cabinet approved the establishment of Vasireddy Venkatadri International Technological University (VVITU) in Pedakakani, Guntur district, under the Brownfield category. It also cleared an amendment to the Andhra Pradesh Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Act, 2016. Additionally, the Andhra Pradesh Teachers Transfer Regulation Act, 2025, was approved to streamline teacher transfers in government, district, mandal, and municipal schools. The bill aims to ensure equal opportunities based on municipal limits, house rent allowances, and transport facilities, aligning with the Right to Education Act, 2009.

The Cabinet approved the review of land allocations in the CRDA region and Amaravati based on ministerial recommendations. Administrative approval was given for major road and drainage projects, including Rs 834.46 crore for road construction and floodwater drainage expansion up to National Highway-16, and Rs 307.59 crore for similar works in Mangalagiri.

Continued on Page 2



TTD to entertain TG MLA & MLC letters for darshan

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) will facilitate Srivari Darshan for devotees based on recommendation letters from public representatives of Telangana, following directives from Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu. This will come into effect from 24 March.

As part of the new system, VIP Break Darshan recommendation letters from Telangana public representatives will be accepted only on Sundays for Monday darshan and on Mondays for Tuesday darshan. Similarly, letters for Rs 300 darshan tickets will be received only on Wednesdays and Thursdays for darshan on the same day. Each recommendation letter will be valid for a maximum of six people.

Meanwhile, recommendation letters from Andhra Pradesh public representatives, which were previously accepted on Sundays for Monday darshan, will now be received on Saturdays for Sunday darshan.

'Only people studying in mother tongue excel'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu underscored the significance of education in one's mother tongue, stating that it enhances understanding and knowledge acquisition. Speaking in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Monday, he stressed that true learning is best achieved when imparted in the native language, noting that many who studied in their mother tongue have gone on to achieve greater success.

Clarifying the government's stance, Naidu asserted that language should not be used as a tool to spread hatred. He recognised Telugu as the State's mother tongue, Hindi as the national language, and English as a global medium of communication.

Highlighting the advantages of multilingualism, he pointed to Andhra Pradesh residents thriving in countries like Japan and Germany by learning the local language, which he said opens doors to better opportunities.

The Chief Minister urged people to view language as a means of communication rather than a political issue. While mastering multiple languages is beneficial, he emphasized that Telugu must always remain a priority, calling for its preservation without political interference.



Teen's AI App wows CM, detects heart ailment in a jiffy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

At just 14, Siddharth Nandyala is already making waves in medical technology. The young NRI student has developed 'CircadiaV,' an AI-powered app that detects heart disease in a stunning seven seconds—using only a smartphone.

His groundbreaking work caught the attention of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who invited Siddharth for a chat.

Continued on Page 2

Polavaram Phase-1 by June next: Min

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Minister for Water Resources Development Nimmala Ramanaidu has announced that the Polavaram project will be completed by June 2026 under Phase-1, along with the completion of the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) process.

Speaking in the Assembly during the Question Hour on Monday, he emphasized the government's commitment to providing compensation to the displaced families and ensuring justice for them.

"The coalition government prioritizes the construction of the Polavaram project while also giving equal importance to the well-being of those who sacrificed their lands, properties, and homes," he stated.



Nimmala asserted that by rectifying the lapses of the previous YSRCP regime, the coalition government would complete the R&R package for the 41.15-meter level under Phase-1 by June 2026. He also revealed that estimates for the R&R package for the 45.72-meter level in Phase-2 had been submitted to the Centre. "Funds for the second phase will be secured, and the project will be completed up to the 45.72-meter level, ensuring justice for the displaced families," he assured.

The Minister pointed out that before the 2019 elections, there was no mention of Phase-1, Phase-2, or the 41.15-meter and 45.72-meter levels in the Polavaram project. He criticized the previous Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government for introducing these classifications after coming to power.

He also recalled that in February 2019, the Telugu Desam government had secured approvals for Rs 55,000 crore from the Centre.

VSP revival talks in Amaravati on March 31

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Industries & Commerce Minister TG Bharat has announced that the Secretary of the Ministry of Steel is scheduled to meet Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu in Amaravati on March 31. The meeting will focus on deliberations regarding the revival and operational enhancement of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

Addressing a query from Visakhapatnam South MLA Vamsi Krishna Srinivas in the Legislative Assembly on Monday, Minister Bharat informed that the first installment of Rs 6,783 crore was released on January 30, 2025.

Continued on Page 2

'YSRCP govt stalled fee reimbursement'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh has launched a scathing attack on the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government, accusing it of neglecting fee reimbursements and stalling IT sector growth in Andhra Pradesh. Speaking in the Assembly, he dismissed YSRCP's claims on fee reimbursement, stating that dues were cleared only after a 16-month delay under their administration. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to settling outstanding payments and ensuring transparency with official documentation.

Continued on Page 2

Drogo, Singareni tie up to set up India's first GIS Hub for mining

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major step towards digital transformation in the mining sector, Drogo has joined hands with Singareni Collieries to establish India's first Geographic Information System (GIS) Hub. The initiative aims to digitise and optimise mining operations using real-time data analytics and advanced mapping technology.

The GIS Hub is expected to enhance operational efficiency, improve safety standards, and enable precision monitoring across Singareni's extensive mining regions. By integrating drone technology and GIS mapping, the project will revolutionise traditional mining practices, ensuring better resource utilization and streamlined processes.



Drogo CEO Yeshwanth Bonthu described the partnership as a game-changer for the mining industry, stating that the centralized GIS hub would modernize operations and set a benchmark for smart mining in India.

With expertise in drone-powered data intelligence, Drogo has been driving technological advancements across various sectors, including agriculture, defence, and infrastructure.

Nellore's lifeline dying: Penna pollution crisis deepens

C PRADEEP KUMAR
cpk007@gmail.com
■ NELLORE



Once a vital source of water and scenic beauty, the Penna River in Nellore is now at the heart of an environmental disaster. Once flowing with pristine waters and attracting visitors, the river has turned into a toxic wasteland, plagued by garbage, animal carcasses, and untreated waste. The worsening pollution has triggered public outrage, with opposition leaders pointing fingers at municipal negligence.

For decades, the Penna River has sustained nearly 2,00,000 residents of Nellore. Today, its banks are lined with heaps of garbage, and its waters are contaminated with animal remains and domestic waste. The stench of decay and burning garbage pollutes the air, making life unbearable for those living nearby. What was once a cherished landmark has now become an environmental and health hazard.

Local residents are hesitant to speak on the record but express deep concern over the river's deteriorating state. Many say they have been forced to avoid the river altogether, fearing the health risks associated with its polluted waters. Despite repeated complaints, the problem continues to worsen, with little visible action from municipal authorities.

Political blame game

Opposition leaders have taken a strong stance against the ruling administration, accusing them of turning a blind eye to the crisis. YSRCP MLC P Chandrashekhar Reddy has openly criticised the municipal corporation for its failure to manage waste effectively. He pointed out that in the city's 5th division, Bodigadi Tota, cattle carcasses are regularly dumped into the river, worsening the pollution. He also revealed a shocking lack of waste disposal infrastructure, with not a single designated yard in any of the 54 divisions, leading sanitation workers to discard waste directly into the river.

The pollution has spread over a stretch of nearly 20 km, with residential colonies and businesses also contributing to the crisis. The absence of proper monitoring has encouraged unchecked waste disposal, further exacerbating the problem. Reports suggest that garbage piles are often set on fire, releasing toxic smoke that affects residential areas and even causes disruptions on nearby highways.

Official response and public frustration

Municipal authorities have remained largely unresponsive, offering little reassurance to the concerned public. Minister Ponguru Narayana acknowledged past instances of cattle and garbage being dumped into the river but claimed such practices had been stopped.

Continued on Page 2

Anagani alleges widespread corruption under YSRCP rule

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Revenue, Registration and Stamps Minister Anagani Satya Prasad launched a scathing attack on the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government during a discussion in the Legislative Council, accusing it of rampant corruption across multiple sectors, including land, sand, liquor, education, and mining.

Satya Prasad directly targeted former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleging that his tenure destabilised the state's revenue system. He likened Jagan's governance to the mythological figure Bakasura, claiming that under his rule, numerous "Bakasuras" emerged in every village, exploiting public resources.

The minister further alleged that corruption extended beyond public lands, affecting the properties of impoverished citizens, non-resident Andhra residents, and even forest lands. He asserted that while a ruler has to safeguard public assets, Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership had instead facilitated their exploitation.

Satya Prasad particularly singled out former Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, accusing him of large-scale land encroachments. He claimed that Peddireddy had illegally occupied 104 acres of government land in Mangampet village, Chittoor district, where he constructed a lavish mansion. Investigations, he said, revealed that Peddireddy, along with his family and associates, had taken over nearly 238 acres in the area. Additionally, he alleged that Peddireddy had illegally acquired three acres of land worth over Rs 100 crore in Tirupati city and had converted 982 acres of government land into patta lands, with 600 acres unlawfully transferred to his associates.



Satya Prasad particularly singled out former Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, accusing him of large-scale land encroachments. He claimed that Peddireddy had illegally occupied 104 acres of government land in Mangampet village, Chittoor district, where he constructed a lavish mansion. Investigations, he said, revealed that Peddireddy, along with his family and associates, had taken over nearly 238 acres in the area

The minister also accused several other influential figures of land grabbing, including Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and former MLAs Kethireddy Venkataramireddy and Usha Sri Charan.

He further alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy's family had been involved in land encroachments in Kadapa district, with similar activities by other leaders in Vizag and Macharla, amounting to a scandal worth around Rs 1,000 crore.

Satya Prasad said the state government had decided to repeal the Land Titling Act and implement the Land Grab Prevention Act to curb illegal land occupations and ensure justice for the people.

He asserted that the YSRCP's alleged corruption had sparked public outrage, which was reflected in the recent elections.

APNGGO Assn urges govt to address employees' concerns

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

President of the Andhra Pradesh Non-Gazetted and Gazetted Officers (APNGGO) Association, KV Siva Reddy, has criticised the State government for failing to address employees' concerns, despite nearly nine months passing since the NDA government, led by the TDP, took office. He urged the government to prioritise resolving both financial and non-financial issues, which have been cooperatively conveyed to them. Reddy emphasised that the APNGGO Association had given the government sufficient time to manage the financial challenges inherited from the previous administration.

On Monday, the Andhra Pradesh Joint Action Committee (APJAC) Secretariat held a meeting at the APNGGO Association Hall in Gandhinagar, Vijayawada, to discuss issues affecting employed teachers, labour pensioners, and other related matters. During the session, A. Vidyasagar from the APNGGO Association was unanimously elected as the State JAC Deputy Secretary General.



Later, addressing the media, Siva Reddy expressed disappointment over the government's lack of response. He warned that continued inaction could lead to growing dissatisfaction among employees, teachers, workers, and pensioners. The JAC secretariat meeting focused on the difficulties faced by these groups, the prevailing situation, and critical issues requiring the state's attention.

He stressed that employees are an integral part of the community and called for swift action to resolve their concerns. Reddy pointed out that, since the coalition government assumed power, employees have received no additional benefits apart from the regular payment of salaries and pensions on the first of each month, with no further measures implemented.

APNGGO State General Secretary and newly appointed JAC Deputy Secretary General, Alaparthi Vidyasagar, highlighted that the previous government had formed a wage revision committee, set to begin its review in July 2023. However, he lamented that, following the resignation of the committee's chairman last year, two years had passed since the committee's term expired, yet the government had not appointed a new chairman. He urged the government to take immediate action to fill the vacancy in the PRC committee.

APJAC Secretary General KSS Prasad, Co-Chairmen M. Raghunath Reddy, G. Hrudaya Raju, D. Chandrasekhar, Y. Srinivasa Rao, N. Chandrasekhar, Ch. Manjula and others were present at the meeting.

Teen's AI App...

Continued from Page 1

What followed was a lively half-hour discussion where the CM explored the teenager's innovation, praised his efforts, and shared his vision of elugu talent making a global impact.

"Dreaming of innovations like this is one thing, but seeing young minds turn them into reality is incredible," said the CM, assuring Siddharth of the Andhra Pradesh government's full support.

Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan also joined in congratulating the prodigy. Siddharth, whose roots trace back to Anantapur, moved to the US in 2010 with his family.

Accompanied by his father, Mahesh, and Health Minister Satyakumar Yadav, he left the meeting with not just encouragement—but the promise of a future brimming with possibilities.

Nellore's lifeline...

Continued from Page 1

However, locals continue to report fresh cases of illegal waste dumping, suggesting that the issue remains unresolved. His failure to provide a concrete plan of action has only fueled public frustration.

With the Penna River's future hanging in the balance, environmentalists and locals are demanding urgent intervention. If authorities fail to act swiftly, the river may soon become irreversibly polluted, jeopardizing future water supply projects and public health.

The crisis is no longer just an environmental issue — it is a call for accountability and immediate corrective measures. Without intervention, Nellore's lifeline may soon be lost to pollution.

AP Chambers seeks extension of GST Amnesty Scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation (AP Chambers) has appealed to the Central Board of Indirect Taxes & Customs (CBIC) to extend the GST Amnesty Scheme and the deadline for filing Form 9 (Annual Return) and Form 9C (Reconciliation Statement), citing challenges faced by taxpayers and professionals.

In a letter to the CBIC Chairman, AP Chambers President Potluri Bhaskara Rao and General Secretary B Raja Sekhar highlighted persistent technical issues on the GST portal, an increasing compliance burden, frequent amendments, and economic disruptions affecting businesses' ability to meet deadlines. They noted that MSMEs, in particular, are struggling due to resource constraints and complexities in GST reconciliation.

Pointing out the interdependence of Form 9 and Form 9C filings, the Chamber stressed that both deadlines should be extended to ensure accuracy. They urged CBIC to push the deadline to 30 June 2025, which they argued would not only ease compliance pressures but also enhance government revenue through timely filings.

AP Chambers called on CBIC to consider the request favourably and announce an extension at the earliest to prevent undue hardships for businesses and tax professionals.

11 social media influencers booked for online betting apps promotion



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Police have intensified their crackdown on social media influencers allegedly promoting online betting apps. As part of this effort, Panjagutta Police on Monday registered cases against 11 actors and influencers, including Imran Khan, Harsha Sai, Tasty Teja, Kiran Goud, Vishnu Priya, Shyamala, Rithu Chowdhary, Bandaru Sheshayani Supritha, Ajay, Sunny and Sudheer, for their alleged involvement in endorsing gambling platforms.

The move follows a complaint by Vinay Vangala, a private employee from Matrusri Nagar, who alleged that online betting apps and websites were violated the Public Gambling Act of 1867. According to his complaint, these platforms are not only illegal but also target students and unemployed youth, leading to financial distress and addiction. Vinay stated that while attending training classes in Ameerpet for career growth, he observed that many students actively discussed betting apps on social media. Concerned by the growing influence of these platforms, he approached the police, urging action against those promoting them.

Authorities noted that these applications and websites, despite being banned, continue to operate through various means. Their promotional campaigns, often featuring celebrities and influencers, mislead the public into believing online betting is legal and lucrative. The police emphasised that such activities violate gambling laws and warned that strict action would be taken against those found guilty of promoting or engaging in illegal betting activities.

Ex-Test cricketer MSK lauds AP's new sports policy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Former Indian Test cricketer and ex-chairman of the BCCI Selection Committee, MSK Prasad, met Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh (SAAP) Chairman Animini Ravi Naidu at the SAAP headquarters in Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium on Monday. Their discussions focused on strengthening sports infrastructure and talent development in the state.

Prasad commended the New Sports Policy introduced under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, calling it a transformative initiative aimed at enhancing Andhra Pradesh's sporting landscape. He highlighted key measures such as increased financial incentives for medal winners, a rise in job reservations for athletes from 2% to 3%, and grassroots talent promotion.

The policy also emphasizes organizing competitions to identify young talent, hosting international events to boost visibility, and promoting sports tourism. Prasad expressed his commitment to collaborating with SAAP to implement these initiatives and elevate the state's sports ecosystem.

SAAP Chairman Ravi Naidu reaffirmed the government's dedication to fostering sports excellence. He urged athletes to enhance their performance and credited Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Minister for Human Resources and IT Nara Lokesh for their active role in improving sports infrastructure.

He also outlined the state's newly launched 'Adoption' system for sports, introduced through a Public Private Partnership (PPP). This initiative seeks the support of industrialists and business leaders to fund promising athletes and establish world-class sports academies.

Following the discussions, Ravi Naidu felicitated MSK Prasad at the SAAP office, acknowledging his contributions to Indian cricket and his ongoing efforts to promote sports development in Andhra Pradesh.

'YSRCP govt'...

Continued from Page 1

Lokesh also questioned YSRCP legislators for boycotting discussions on education in the Legislative Council. Addressing concerns over the privatization of universities, he pointed out gaps in the Private Universities Act of 2016, which he said had hindered the entry of reputed institutions. He assured that necessary amendments would be made to attract global universities, some of which were already in talks to establish campuses in the state.

Highlighting the state's low enrollment ratio in higher education compared to Tamil Nadu and Kerala, Lokesh stressed the need for stronger research initiatives. He announced plans to set up a Deep Tech University in Visakhapatnam to boost research and innovation.

Cabinet approves...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, the Cabinet sanctioned adjustments to the currency ceiling regulations for the construction of government buildings, including the Legislative Assembly, High Court, Secretariat, and HOD Towers.

The Cabinet greenlit major energy initiatives, including a 4000 MW renewable energy project in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts under the AP Integrated Clean Energy Policy 2024, allocation of 350 hectares of forest land for an off-stream closed-loop pumped storage project in Annamayya and YSR districts, and a joint venture agreement with NHPC for new pumped storage and renewable energy projects.

Several investment proposals received approval, including those from M/s Premier Energies Limited, M/s Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Limited, and M/s Lulu Global International. The Cabinet also approved the development of the 'Oberoi Villas' resort by M/s Mumtaz Hotels Limited in Jammalamadugu, creating 1,500 jobs, and a Mayfair Hotels & Resorts Limited project in Bhimili, Visakhapatnam, which is expected to generate 750 jobs.

The Cabinet approved free electricity for handloom workers (up to 200 units) and powerloom units (up to 500 units). Additionally, it sanctioned Rs 1.8 crore for repairs at the Budameru Diversion Regulator and Rs 37.97 crore for flood protection along the Budameru Channel.

Key administrative approvals included renaming YSR District as YSR Kadapa District, changing 'YSR Tadigadapa Municipality' to 'Tadigadapa Municipality,' implementing recommendations on the sub-categorization of Scheduled Castes (SC), outsourcing three photographer and two videographer posts for the Chief Minister's office, and approval for 517 flood-affected projects across Krishna, Guntur, and West Godavari districts at a cost of Rs 63.73 crore.

The Cabinet sanctioned 22 projects worth Rs 22,607.11 crore, empowering the APCRDA Commissioner to issue Letters of Award (LOAs). Additionally, it approved 37 projects valued at Rs 15,095.02 crore, funded by the World Bank, ADB, HUDCO, and KfW. These decisions reflect the government's focus on strengthening education, infrastructure, energy, and social welfare in Andhra Pradesh.

V'wada rly divn sets record with Rs 101.65 cr scrap sales

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Vijayawada Division of South Central Railway (SCR) has set a new benchmark by achieving its highest-ever scrap sales of Rs 101.65 crore in the financial year 2024-25, the highest by any division in the zone's history. This milestone was reached three months before the end of the financial year, surpassing the initial target of Rs 79 crore set by SCR Headquarters in December 2024.

For the first time, the division's scrap sales have crossed the Rs 100 crore mark in a single financial year. A total of 18,908 metric tonnes of scrap, including rail scrap, signal and telecom waste, engineering waste, and various metals, was disposed of through a transparent e-auction process.

Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Narendra A Patil congratulated the team, commending Senior Divisional Material Manager KB Tirupataiah for his leadership in achieving this milestone. He emphasised that this accomplishment underscores the division's focus on efficient asset management, revenue optimization, and sustainability.

Patil reiterated the commitment to making Vijayawada Division scrap-free and environmentally sustainable.

VSP revival talks in...

Continued from Page 1

This disbursement is part of the Central Government's approved Rs 11,440 crore revival package. The package includes an equity infusion of Rs 10,300 crore, of which Rs 500 crore was already disbursed in September 2024, and the conversion of a Rs 1,140 crore Government of India loan into 7% non-cumulative preference share capital, redeemable after a decade.

As part of the plant's revitalization strategy, the Central Government is also working towards securing captive mines through the National Mineral Development Corporation Limited (NMDC). This initiative follows a model similar to the one being implemented for the ArcelorMittal steel plant currently under construction in the Anakapalli district.

The financial aid package comes with a request from the Centre for the Andhra Pradesh Government to waive VSP's power and water charges for three years.

CM unveils segment...

Continued from Page 1

Chandrababu Naidu also shared the ambitious targets set under the Viksit Bharat Vision-2047, which aims for India to become a $30 trillion economy with a per capita income of $18,000. In alignment with this, Swarnandhra Vision-2047 has laid down goals for the state's sustainable development across all sectors.

Focusing on Rayalaseema, Naidu highlighted the region's transformation from a drought-prone area to a hub for horticulture, solar, wind, and pumped storage energy. He recalled how Anantapur was once considered a challenge due to persistent droughts but expressed confidence that with sustained efforts, the region would continue to prosper.

The Chief Minister also voiced his concerns over the lack of development in water-rich districts like Vijayawada, Srikakulam, and Adilabad. He noted that Anantapur has now risen to the fifth position in state-wide development rankings and expressed hope that it could claim the top spot in the future.

As part of his vision for inclusive growth, Naidu announced plans to ensure home ownership for every family within their respective Assembly segments. He stated that three cents of land would be allocated per family in rural areas, while two cents would be provided in urban areas. The government has set a target to construct homes for all families by 2029.

Addressing poverty alleviation, Naidu revealed that approximately 35 lakh people in the state are currently below the poverty line. He outlined a phased strategy to uplift the underprivileged, with the first phase targeting 20 lakh individuals and the second phase covering the remaining 15 lakh. The government also plans to recognise and reward individuals and organisations that adopt and support the

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	
Chaturthi:	Mar 17 07:33 PM to Mar 18 10:09 PM
Panchami:	Mar 18 10:09 PM to Mar 20 12:37 AM
Nakshatram:	
Swati:	Mar 17 02:47 PM to Mar 18 05:51 PM
Vishaka:	Mar 18 05:51 PM to Mar 19 08:50 PM
Rahukalam:	3:23 PM to 4:53 PM
Yamagandam:	9:24 AM to 10:54 AM
Varjyam:	12:09 AM to 01:57 AM
Gulika:	12:24 PM to 1:54 PM
Amritakalam:	07:56 AM to 09:44 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	12:00 PM to 12:48 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly Cloudy
Temp: 36°c
Humidity: 73%
Sunrise: 6:13 AM
Sunset: 6:18 PM

Updated: March 17, 2025 5:00 PM

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT CHIT TENDER NOTICE
No. 17 to 406/2024-25 Dt. 07.03.2025
The Executive Engineer of Rural Water Supply department, Paderu of Alluri Sitaramaraju district invites tenders for execution of **390 works** worth **Rs 4503.93 lakh**, to be taken up with JANMAN-PVTG & JJM grant funds. Availability of tenders: **From 11.00 am on 18-03-2025 to 3.00 pm on 28-03-2025.** For details, contact http://www.apeprocurement.gov.in.
Sd/- Executive Engineer, RWS&S Division, Paderu.
DIPR RO.No: 1594/5/CLIAO/TI/1/(3)021-22, Dt:12.03.2025

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
TRIBAL WELFARE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
SHORT E-PROCUREMENT NOTIFICATION
NIT No. 147 to 149/2024-25/SE/Tribal Welfare/DB Dt. 16-03-2025
Online tenders are being invited for execution of three works worth **Rs. 2092.00 lakh** under the limits of the Visakhapatnam Tribal Welfare Department's Engineering Circle. Commencement of tender schedules: After **4.00 pm on 18-03-2025.** The last date for submission of tenders: **4.15 pm on 25-03-2025.** For details, contact www.apeprocurement.gov.in or call 0891-2783210.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Tribal Welfare, Visakhapatnam
DIPR RO.No: 1593/5/CLIAO/TI/1/(3)021-22, Dt:17.03.2025

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The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | MARCH 18, 2025

SSC exams off to a smooth start in NTR, Krishna dists

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



In the NTR district, there were 27,711 regular students, with 27,443 attending the first language exam on the opening day. Additionally, 39 out of 44 private students were present across all 168 centres in the district. Collector Dr Lakshmisha visited the examination centre at CVR Municipal Corporation High School in Vijayawada.

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Public Examinations for Class 10 students commenced without any issues on Monday in the NTR and Krishna districts. Both District Collectors, Dr G Lakshmisha and DK Balaji, carried out unannounced inspections of examination centres in their respective areas to ensure the exams were conducted smoothly. The educational authorities in both districts established a total of 311 examination centres for the SSC public exams.

In the NTR district, there were 27,711 regular students, with 27,443 attending the first language exam on the opening day. Additionally, 39 out of 44 private students were present across all 168 centres in the district. Collector Dr Lakshmisha visited the examination centre at CVR Municipal Corporation High School in Vijayawada.

During his inspection of the centre, he provided valuable recommendations to the Education department officials to enhance the facilities available for students during the exams. Furthermore, NTR District School Education Department Officer (DSEO) UV Subba Rao and other officials conducted inspections at various examination centres throughout the district.

Conversely, in the Krishna district, 20,822 regular students participated in the first language examination. Of the total 21,072 candidates, 250 were absent on the first day. Among the private candidates, 90 were registered, with 54 attending the Class 10 exams. Collector DK Balaji and District Education Officer (DEO) PVJ Rama Rao inspected several examination centres and engaged with officials regarding the administration of the exams.

KRU WOMEN'S BALL BADMINTON TOURNEY

Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala clinches title

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The Ball Badminton team of Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala (SDMSMK) emerged victorious in the Krishna University Inter-Collegiate (KRUIC) Women's Ball Badminton Tournament held at their college premises in Vijayawada on Monday.

In the final, Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala defeated YVNR Government Degree College, Kaikaluru, to claim the championship. Sri Padmavathi Mahila Hindu College, Machilipatnam, and Dr LHRS Government Degree College, Mylavaram, secured third and fourth places, respectively.

Notably, SDMSMK players M. Uma Maheswari, P. Bhuvaneswari, K. Saraswathi, and A. Sri Rajini have been selected to represent the Krishna University Women's Ball Badminton Team at the All India Inter-University Ball Badminton Tournament, set to take place in Karaikudi, Chennai, from March 29 to April 1.

Congratulating the team, college principal Dr. S. Kalpana lauded their stellar performance in the championship. College convener Srilalitha Prasad, special officer Dr. R. Madhavi, and physical director Dr. N. Hema also extended their best wishes to the players.

40-hr mediation training for rural advocates begins

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A 40-hour training programme on 'Mediation for Advocates from Rural Areas,' organised by the AP Legal Services Authority, began at the District Court Complex on Monday.

Senior trainers S. Arunachalam and Beena Devaraj from the Supreme Court Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee are conducting the sessions for 30 advocates from ten Mandal Legal Services Committees.

Principal District and Sessions Judge Alapati Giridhar emphasized the need to promote mediation in India's legal system.

NDRF holds CSSR contest for SDRF teams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The 10th Battalion of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), based in Kondapavuluru village in Gannavaram mandal oif Krishna district, hosted a Regional-level Collapsed Structure Search and Rescue (CSSR) competition for State Disaster Response Forces (SDRF) from the South and South-Central Zone on Monday. Seven teams from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, and the Fire Department of Kerala participated in the event.

This competition is part of a multi-level series conducted across four zones—South & South-Central, North, West Central, and East & North-East Zones. The winners and runners-up from each zone will advance to the National-level competition at the 8th Battalion NDRF in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, where they will compete for the National Champion title. The winning team will receive a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh, while the runners-up will be awarded Rs 50,000.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, DIG NDRF Hari Om Gandhi highlighted the competition's role in enhancing search and rescue capabilities, fostering knowledge exchange, and strengthening coordination among disaster response teams. The event was also attended by Nagendra Sharma, Commandant of the 3rd Battalion, and other senior officials.

State's first Mother's Milk Bank launched at AP Hospitals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



A dedicated Mother's Milk Bank, aimed at providing vital nutrition to neonates deprived of maternal milk, was inaugurated at Andhra Hospitals on Sunday. The initiative, supported by the Rotary Club of Vijayawada with funding of Rs 37.24 lakh, marks the establishment of Andhra Pradesh's first permanent facility of its kind.

Actress and philanthropist Namrata Maheshbabu launched the project, emphasizing the critical role of mother's milk in neonatal care. The facility will serve around 7,200 newborns annually, relying on donations from lactating mothers with surplus milk. Andhra Hospitals has provided the necessary infrastructure for the project.

Addressing the gathering, Namrata praised the collaborative efforts of Andhra Hospitals and the Rotary Club in bringing this initiative to life. She also lauded the hospital's Pediatric Cardiac Team, which has successfully conducted over 4,500 pediatric heart surgeries and interventions in the past decade.

Andhra Hospitals Managing Director Dr. PV Ramana Murthy, Head of Children's Services Dr. PV Rama Rao, and Fetal Medicine Consultant Dr. P Padma were among those present. They expressed gratitude to Maheshbabu and Namrata for their continued support through the MB Foundation, which has been instrumental in aiding children with congenital heart conditions.

YSRCP seeks white paper on State debt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Malladi Vishnu, YSRCP Central Constituency Coordinator and former MLA, has demanded that the coalition government release a White Paper on the state's debt. He accused the government of borrowing Rs 1.26 lakh crore in just 10 months and urged Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan to disclose how the funds were utilized instead of "hiding like a thief."

He also criticized the government for failing to deliver on its "Super Six" promises despite accumulating massive debt. Vishnu dismissed claims that the coalition had benefited the public, calling them baseless. He contrasted this with the previous YS Jagan Mohan Reddy government, which borrowed Rs 3.39 lakh crore over five years but, he claimed, spent much of it on welfare schemes through Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT).

He highlighted that poverty in Andhra Pradesh fell from 11.77% to 6.06% under the YSRCP rule.

Questioning where the Rs 1.26 lakh crore borrowed by the current government had gone, Vishnu alleged that CM Naidu lacked financial understanding.

He also called Naidu's statements on Amaravati's funding misleading, pointing out that the central government had granted only Rs 1,500 crore for the capital while the rest was in the form of loans.

Scribe acquitted in SC/ST atrocities case

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

A local court on Monday acquitted Press Trust of India (PTI) reporter Manne Someswara Rao in a case filed under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The case was registered against Someswara Rao on March 10, 2011, by the then DSP Y Balashowry under IPC Sections 353, 506, 290, and Section 3(1) of the SC/ST Act.

In a statement issued on Monday, Someswara Rao said that the complaint was lodged by the then Krishna district Deputy Public Relations Officer (DPRO) Kancharla Jaya Rao. The complaint alleged that the journalist had entered the DPRO's office, abused him by his caste name over the issuance of an accreditation card, obstructed him from performing his duties, and issued threats. The case was registered at Chilakalapudi police station.

NABARD's 'Stall in Mall' records Rs 49 lakh sales in three months

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



NABARD General Manager Dr Prasad Babu visits a stall at the 'Stall in Mall' event at PVP Mall in Vijayawada on Monday.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's (NABARD) 'Stall in Mall' initiative has recorded sales of approximately Rs.49 lakh in just three months, providing a crucial marketing platform for rural artisans.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the initiative at PVP Mall on Monday, NABARD General Manager Dr KVS Prasad Babu emphasized that the program was designed to promote rural handicrafts and create employment opportunities. He announced that NABARD will continue to support Self-Help Group (SHG) members and youth by offering specialized training in handicraft production.

Organized by the Nestam Voluntary Organisation with NABARD's financial backing, the 'Stall in Mall' showcased handcrafted products such as cotton garments, jute bags, Kalamkari textiles, Kondapalli toys, and pearl jewellery—items that resonated strongly with shoppers.

Dr Prasad Babu highlighted that SHG members from Tamil Nadu, Odisha, and Telangana actively participated, with NABARD providing transportation and accommodation support. He reaffirmed the organization's commitment to empowering artisans not only by expanding their market reach but also by enhancing their craft skills.

AP welcomes ASEAN Buddhist pilgrims

State develops Buddhist trail to attract visitors from Southeast Asia

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM





The government has devised an extensive Buddhist Circuit, encompassing key sites like Nagarjuna Konda, Amaravati, Guntupalli, Ghantasala, Bhimavaram, Adurru, Kapavaram, Kotturu, and Salihundam, in addition to the Visakhapatnam sites.

Andhra Pradesh is actively promoting its rich Buddhist heritage, aiming to capitalise on its historical ties with Southeast and East Asia. With direct air routes to Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, alongside connections to China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, the State is establishing itself as a leading destination for Buddhist pilgrimage.

Recognizing the substantial Buddhist populations of 200 million in ASEAN and 620 million in East Asia, Andhra Pradesh has been showcasing its attractions at international travel fairs, including SATTE and ITB Berlin. These efforts have yielded initial success, with the first group of Buddhist tourists recently exploring significant historical locations in Visakhapatnam, such as Bavikonda, Thotlakonda, Pavurallakonda, and Bojjannakonda.

K Vijay Mohan, of the Andhra Pradesh Tourism Forum, expressed optimism about the initiative, noting a cultural event where students from Sri Prakash School performed traditional dances for the visiting delegation. The state's dedication to religious tourism was evident in the warm welcome from local officials, including District Collector MN Harendhira Prasad, Joint Collector Mayur Ashok, and VMRDA Commissioner K. Viswanathan.

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During a recent tourism dialogue with Vietnam, officials stressed the importance of creating compelling narratives around these historical locations. Ajay Jain, Special Secretary of Tourism, proposed the "Footsteps of Buddha" program, designed to connect historical and spiritual elements to enhance the pilgrim's journey. This strategy involves promoting Kalachakra, or the "Wheel of Time," a core Buddhist teaching, reinforcing Amaravati's significance as a spiritual centre following the Dalai Lama's 2006 Kalachakra initiation.

Further supporting this vision, senior official Amrapali Kata detailed plans for a Buddhist Monastery, intended to serve as a centre for Buddhist studies, drawing scholars and pilgrims globally. With strong governmental support and a focused strategy, Andhra Pradesh is set to become a vital Buddhist tourism hub, strengthening cultural connections with ASEAN and East Asian countries.



74 Vikas students earn Hyundai Mobis jobs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Seventy-four students from the Vikas Group of Institutions in Nunna, near Vijayawada, have secured job offers from Hyundai Mobis, a major supplier of key components and services to KIA. The company has offered an annual salary package of Rs 2.20 lakh along with accommodation for the selected candidates.

Hyundai Mobis conducted a campus recruitment drive on Monday, targeting engineering and diploma students. Of the 120 students who participated in the written test, group discussions, and interviews, 74 were selected. Company representatives Jannarayana and Vijay later handed over the offer letters to the successful candidates.

At a ceremony on the college campus, Secretary of the Vikas Group of Institutions, Naredla Satyanarayana Reddy, congratulated the selected students. Among them, 60 were diploma holders, while 14 were from the engineering programme. He reiterated the institution's commitment to securing placements for its students with leading companies.

The event was attended by Principal Dr PS Srinivas, Training and Placement Officer G Vaddikasulu, Head of the Computer Science Engineering Department Kishore Reddy, and other faculty members.

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Collector asks officials to submit reports on targets

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

East Godavari District Collector P Prasanthi has instructed officials from 38 priority departments to compile reports aligning with the targets and key performance indicators set at both the state and district levels.

During a review meeting held on Monday, Collector Prasanthi emphasised the importance of preparing comprehensive reports that reflect the progress of each department. She noted that prescribed report formats have already been sent to department heads and directed them to submit their reports before the review session scheduled for Tuesday.

She stressed that the reports must integrate implementation strategies for priority issues and align with government-mandated programs and field-level plans.

She further instructed officials to include long-pending issues in their PowerPoint presentations, along with policy decisions required from the state government, pending fund releases, approvals, and other administrative concerns.

"The reports should be concise, clear, and comprehensive, ensuring accuracy in data related to government priority programs and welfare schemes," she said.

The meeting was attended by Joint Collector S Chinna Ramudu, DRO T Seetharamamurthy, Special Deputy Collector (GAIL) M Raja Ramesh Prem Kumar, DNDOs P Veena Devi and A Sliwa Reddy, along with other district officials.



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Naidu failed to safeguard AP's water rights, says Kakani

PNS ■ NELLORE

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) Nellore district president and former minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, accusing him of failing to safeguard Andhra Pradesh's water rights. He alleged that Chandrababu's inefficiency had allowed Telangana to draw water from Srisailam at 798 feet, leaving Andhra Pradesh powerless to protect its share.

Addressing the media on Sunday, Kakani claimed that Chandrababu deliberately stalled the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme over the past 10 months out of envy. He criticised the Chief Minister's inability to effectively present the state's case before the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), which recently halted the project. According to Kakani, Telangana's Chief Minister Revanth Reddy was taking advantage of Andhra Pradesh's weakened stance, pushing Rayalaseema and Nellore into drought-like conditions.

Kakani compared the current administration's failures with former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's initiative to provide irrigation and drinking water through the Rs. 3,825 crore Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme. The project, approved in May 2020, was designed to lift 3 TMC of water daily from Srisailam, benefiting Chennai and over 9.6 lakh acres of farmland. However, Kakani alleged that a petition filed with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) during the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) regime in 2020 and the EAC's recent intervention on February 27, 2025, had stalled the project due to negligence.

Further criticizing Chandrababu, Kakani accused him of compromising on key projects such as Polavaram and Almatti, causing harm to Andhra Pradesh's farmers. He also pointed to Chandrababu's inaction between 2014 and 2019 regarding Telangana's Palamuru-Rangareddy (Rs. 35,200 crore) and Dindi (Rs. 6,190 crore) projects, linking it to his alleged involvement in the "vote-for-note" case. According to Kakani, this negligence allowed Telangana to divert 44,000 cusecs of water from Srisailam, which remains inaccessible when water levels drop below 880 feet.

The former minister highlighted the YSRCP's plan to transfer 58.83 TMC of water—15 TMC for Chennai and 8.6 TMC for Rayalaseema—via the Velugodu, Somashila, and Kandaleru reservoirs. However, he stated that political interference had delayed its implementation. Kakani also dismissed Chandrababu's claim of renaming Nellore after freedom fighter Potti Sriramulu, asserting that it was Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's government that issued the relevant government order on May 22, 2008. He criticized a section of the media for allegedly propagating what he termed as misleading narratives.



Kakani accused Chief Minister Chandrababu of compromising on key projects such as Polavaram and Almatti, causing harm to Andhra Pradesh's farmers. He also pointed to Naidu's inaction between 2014 and 2019 regarding Telangana's Palamuru-Rangareddy (Rs. 35,200 crore) and Dindi (Rs. 6,190 crore) projects, linking it to his alleged involvement in the "vote-for-note" case. According to Kakani, this negligence allowed Telangana to divert 44,000 cusecs of water from Srisailam, which remains inaccessible when water levels drop below 880 feet.



Court grants one-day police custody of Posani

PNS ■ GUNTUR

A court here on Monday granted the CID police custody of Posani Krishna Murali for questioning for one day.

The CID will take him into custody at 10 a.m. on Tuesday and question him on various matters. He is currently in judicial remand at the sub-jail in Guntur. Cases were registered against him for making disparaging comments against Chandrababu Naidu, Nara Lokesh, and K Pawan Kalyan.

Meanwhile, the court is set to hear his bail petition on Tuesday.

Priority to road projects in Nunna, says Yarlagadda



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gannavaram MLA and Government Whip Yarlagadda Venkat Rao has assured that key road projects in Nunna, a rapidly developing area in Vijayawada Rural Mandal, will be prioritised. He emphasised that funds would be allocated for the construction of a metal road connecting the Sai Baba Temple to the local bypass and for the development of the route from the Ramavarappadu flyover to the National Bypass via the Vijayawada Inner Ring Road.

On Monday, farmers from Nunna met MLA Venkat Rao at his office in Guru Nanak Colony, Vijayawada, to submit two key proposals aimed at easing traffic congestion in Vijayawada City. They stressed that improving these roads would provide much-needed relief and noted that the road from the Ramavarappadu flyover to the National Bypass would not require any land acquisition.

The farmers also highlighted the benefits of the proposed road from the National Bypass to the Ramavarappadu flyover, which would serve residents of Pathapadu, Mustabada, and Surampalli in Gannavaram Mandal. Additionally, they pointed out that the Sai Baba Temple Road, just a kilometer from the local bypass, has remained neglected for years and urged immediate action.

After a detailed discussion, MLA Venkat Rao reaffirmed his commitment to Nunna's development, recognizing its significance in the Gannavaram constituency.

He assured the farmers that he would push for the timely completion of these road projects to improve connectivity and ease traffic burdens.



Undeterred by cobra bite, boy appears for SSC exam

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

A 10th-class student, bitten by a cobra and undergoing treatment at the Area Hospital, remained undeterred in his determination to appear for his exam on Monday.

Y Nissy, a student at Ambedkar Gurukul School in Lakshmi Narasapuram, Anaparthi mandal, was preparing for his examination under a tree on Saturday when he suddenly felt a sharp bite. Upon overturning the stone he had been sitting near, he discovered a cobra beneath it.

He immediately informed the hostel staff, who rushed him to the Area Hospital in Anaparthi, where he has been receiving treatment for the snakebite.

Despite the ordeal, Nissy went straight from the hospital to the examination centre and wrote his exam as scheduled. After completing the exam, his father took him back to the hospital for further treatment.



P-4 policy aims to eradicate poverty: Collector

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K. Vetri Selvi stated that the State Government is implementing the P-4 policy to eliminate poverty and achieve Swarnandhra-2047, a vision for comprehensive development.

Launching the 'Zero Poverty P-4' wall poster at the Collectorate on Monday, she said the policy envisions a poverty-free society through the collaborative efforts of the government, donors, and the public. It aims to uplift every household and foster progress in villages by engaging the top 10 per cent of the Telugu diaspora in supporting the poorest 20 per cent of society.

The Collector urged people to share their opinions on the initiative by March 25 through the website https://swarnandhra.ap.gov.in/p4.

Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy, DRO Visveswara Rao, CPO Vasudevara Rao, RDO Achyuta Ambareesh, DRDA PD R. Vijayaraju, and Special Deputy Collector K. Bhaskar attended the event.

Meanwhile, the Collector conducted a surprise inspection of the SSC examination centre at KPDT School in Ashok Nagar on Monday. She noted that all registered students appeared for the exam at the centre.

Across the district, 23,064 out of 25,179 students (91.60%) attended the Telugu examination, while 2,115 were absent.

The Collector stated that flying squads inspected 54 exam centres and emphasized strict conduct of the Class 10 exams. She directed officials to ensure the availability of drinking water, other essential facilities, and a medical camp. Personally inspecting the arrangements, she was accompanied by DEO M. Venkata Lakshmamma.



TG to provide jobs to 5L youth

CMRevanth allocates Rs 6,000 crore

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy launched the Rajiv Yuva Vikasam scheme on Monday on Telangana Assembly premises, announcing a major initiative to provide jobs to five lakh unemployed youth with an allocation of Rs 6,000 crore.

Speaking at the event, Revanth highlighted his government's commitment to youth empowerment.

"After just 48 hours of assuming power, we implemented the free bus travel scheme for women and increased the Aarogyasri health coverage to Rs 10 lakh. Now, with Rajiv Yuva Vikasam, we are taking another big step," he said.

It will take time to get a grip on the administration. The media is saying I haven't got a grip on the administration. I am asking what grip. Changing two ministers or sending two officers to jail doesn't mean having a grip on governance. We want to coordinate and take along everyone and give good governance. It is easy to break but to make something, it will take time.

The CM listed his government's achievements, stating that in the last 15 months, over 57,000 government posts had been filled, 50 lakh families were receiving 200 units of free electricity, and 43 lakh families were benefiting from the Rs 500 LPG cylinder scheme.

He also emphasised the transparency in job recruitment and teacher transfers ensuring no corruption or favouritism. Revanth announced that under the Rajiv Yuva Vikasam, financial assistance ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 4 lakh would be provided for self-employment, with applications opening from Monday.

The final list of beneficiaries will be announced on June 2. "This is not a party programme. It is a people's programme," he declared, thanking opposition MLAs for attending the event.

Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka called Rajiv Yuva Vikasam a transformative scheme that would change the destiny of Telangana's youth. He praised the Congress Government for allocating Rs 6,000 crore for self-employment programmes, something unprecedented in the state's history.

Slamming the BRS government, Bhatti alleged that for over a decade, youth were neglected, and SC, ST, BC, and Minority corporations were completely ignored.

"In just a year, we have given appointment letters to 56,000 government employees. Unlike the BRS government, which never conducted a Group-1 exam, we successfully held the exam and released the results," he said.

MP urges action on pending railway issues

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) raised several long-pending railway issues in the Lok Sabha on Monday during discussions under the Demands for Grants (DFG) for the Railway Ministry.

He questioned the lack of funding for the development of Vijayawada railway station, which has been part of the Amrit Bharat Station scheme for three years. Despite being one of the highest revenue-generating stations, Vijayawada has yet to receive funds for upgrades under the scheme. He urged the central government to allocate the necessary funds for its development.



The MP also highlighted delays in key railway projects, particularly the Gunadala-Vijayawada Railway Over Bridge (ROB), which has been awaiting approval. He pointed out that frequent gate closures at the level crossing—nearly 150 times a day—were causing severe traffic congestion. He urged the government to expedite approval for the project to ease public inconvenience.

Sivanath further emphasized the need for a second ROB at Ajith Singh Nagar to address worsening traffic congestion.

The existing single ROB, he noted, causes long delays, with commuters stuck for nearly an hour during peak hours. He stressed the urgency of constructing a second bridge to improve traffic flow.

40 women workers hurt as bus overturns

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Forty women employees of a private firm sustained injuries when the bus carrying them to work overturned near Narsipatnam railway station road in S Rayavaram mandal on Monday.

According to police, the injured workers were employed at Coastal Cold Prawns Limited in P Dharmavaram. The accident occurred while they were on their way to the firm in the company bus, which lost control and overturned.



Eleven employees who suffered major injuries were shifted to a private hospital in Anakapalli for advanced treatment. The injured workers belong to Panduru and Lingapuram villages in Kotauratla mandal. Police have registered a case and are investigating the incident.

Tribals celebrate as long-awaited road project resumes

PNS ■ PADERU

Buruga and Chinakonal a residents perform 'Dhimsa' dance after overcoming forest approval hurdles for vital connectivity



Tribal people dancing after the District Collector accords forest permission for laying a road, in Alluri Sitharama Raju district on Monday.

Buruga and China Konala villages in Ananthagiri mandal's Rompalle Panchayat, nestled in the Alluri Sitarama Raju (ASR) District, erupted in celebration as tribal residents performed the traditional 'Dhimsa' dance. The joyous occasion followed the long-awaited forest approvals for a vital road construction project that promises to transform their daily lives. Home to over 1,200 people, these villages and surrounding settlements have long struggled with inadequate infrastructure, making access to essential services a challenge. The newly approved road is expected to bridge this gap by connecting them to key commercial routes and healthcare facilities.

The demand for improved connectivity gained momentum in 2024, following a heart-wrenching incident that underscored the dire need for a proper road. When villager Somulu Tammayya's son tragically passed away, the absence of a motorable route forced family members to carry his body for eight kilometres. The distressing episode galvanized local efforts, leading to a sanctioned budget of ?3 crore under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). Construction commenced in February 2025, offering hope to the community.

However, progress came to an abrupt halt when forest authorities intervened, citing missing approvals. Undeterred, villagers mounted protests, appealing to ASR District Collector AS Dinesh Kumar for intervention. With backing from the ST Commission Chairman, their efforts bore fruit as approvals were expedited, clearing the way for construction to resume.

In the wake of this breakthrough, residents gathered on Sunday morning in a spontaneous celebration, adorning their faces with traditional paints and performing the spirited 'Dhimsa' dance. Rompalle Panchayat ward member Somila Appalaraju poignantly remarked, "India gained independence 77 years ago, but for us, real independence comes with this road." Expressing gratitude, CPM district executive committee member K. Govindarao acknowledged the district collector's role in addressing the villagers' long-standing demand, marking a significant step toward regional development and inclusivity.

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ACROSS THE STATES



Over 2,600 villages in Odisha don't have mobile network

A total of 2,603 villages in 167 blocks of Odisha do not have any mobile network, while 10 panchayats lack broadband connectivity, a state minister said on Monday. He said in the assembly that 375 villages in Kandhamal district have no mobile network services, followed by Rayagada (274), Gajapati (241), Koraput (223), Malkangiri (216), Kalahandi (203) and Nayagarh (184). Electronics & Information Technology Minister Mukesh Mahaling was replying to a query by BJD MLA Arun Kumar Sahoo in the House. In terms of mobile connectivity, the top three districts are Balasore (only one village without mobile network), Jagatsinghpur (two) and Puri (three). Mahaling said installation of new mobile towers is underway under the Digital Bharat Nidhi (DBN) telecom project, which is likely to be completed by June. The 10 panchayats that lack broadband connectivity are likely to get the services through satellite, he added.



700 MW nuclear power plant connected to northern grid

India's home-built 700-MW nuclear power plant at Rawatbhata in Rajasthan was connected to the northern grid early Monday, taking the total installed capacity of nuclear energy to 8,880 MW, officials said. The Unit 7 of the Rajasthan Atomic Power Project (RAPP) at Rawatbhata was connected to the Northern Grid at 2:37 am Monday, after complying with all pre-requisites including those stipulated by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), India's nuclear operator, said in a statement. The power level of the unit will be increased in steps to full in line with the regulatory clearances. The RAPP-7 is the third reactor of the 700 MW series of 16 indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR) being set up in the country. Its twin unit RAPP-8 is expected to be operational in 2025-26. The RAPP-7 unit achieved first criticality on September 19 last year.



SC calls sports associations in India 'ailing bodies'

The Supreme Court on Monday observed that sports associations in India are "ailing bodies". A bench of justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh made the observation while hearing a plea filed by the Maharashtra Wrestling Association challenging an October 8, 2024, order of the Bombay High Court which dismissed the state body's petition against its de-affiliation by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI). "All these sports associations, there is nothing like sports in them. They are all ailing bodies…," the bench observed, as it posted the matter for hearing on March 24. On January 15, the top court issued notices to the Centre and the WFI, seeking their response on the plea filed by the Maharashtra wrestling body.

Maha: Task force to tackle pollution in rivers

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Minister Pankaja Munde on Monday announced in the state legislative council that a task force will be set up to tackle pollution in rivers.

The state environment and climate change minister said the task force will involve collaboration between the environment, the urban development and rural development departments to ensure better implementation of pollution control measures.

Munde made the announcement while responding to BJP legislator Uma Khapare's calling attention motion in the Upper House.

"It is true that 55 rivers in Maharashtra were found to be polluted, primarily due to untreated sewage from urban areas being released into the water bodies," Munde said.

She said her department plans to establish a task force that will coordinate with various departments for the effective implementation of pollution control measures.

Munde pointed out that while industries are not allowed to release untreated waste into rivers, 29 municipal corporations in Maharashtra generate vast amounts of untreated sewage, contributing significantly to the problem.

India, Kiwi sign defence pact, to step up maritime safety

Modi conveys concerns over 'anti-India' activities

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



India and New Zealand on Monday inked an ambitious pact to institutionalise defence ties and vowed to boost cooperation in the Indo-Pacific even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged concerns to his Kiwi counterpart Christopher Luxon over certain pro-Khalistani elements indulging in anti-India activities in the island nation.

Following talks between Modi and Luxon, the two sides signed six agreements to ramp up cooperation in several areas including education, sports, agriculture and climate change, and decided to prepare a roadmap for cooperation in the defence industry sector.

Both prime ministers welcomed the launch of negotiations for a "balanced, ambitious, comprehensive, and mutually beneficial" free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries to achieve deeper economic integration.

Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs Jaideep Mazumdar indicated that the two countries will try to seal the FTA by the end of this year.

In his media statement, Modi said India and New Zealand support a free, open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific, adding "We believe in the policy of development, not expansionism", remarks that came amid growing global concerns over China's expansionist behaviour in the region.

The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to supporting an Indo-Pacific where sovereignty and territorial integrity are respected, according to a joint statement.

Luxon arrived in the national capital on Sunday on a five-day visit primarily to push for deeper economic engagement between the two sides.

In the context of the negotiations for the trade deal, the two sides agreed to start discussions on an arrangement facilitating the mobility of professionals and skilled workers, primarily to address the challenge of irregular migration, according to a joint statement.

Within the context of FTA negotiations, Modi and Luxon agreed to discussions between respective authorities on both sides to explore early implementation of cooperation in the digital payments sector.

In his remarks, Modi, referring to the 2019 Christchurch terror attack and the 26/11 Mumbai strike, said that terrorism in any form is "unacceptable".

"Strict action is necessary against those guilty of terrorist attacks. We will continue to cooperate together against terrorist, separatist and radical elements," he said.

"In this context, we shared our concern about anti-India activities by some illegal elements in New Zealand. We are confident that we will continue to get the cooperation of the New Zealand government against all these illegal elements," he said.

At a media briefing, Mazumdar said the issue of activities of some pro-Khalistani elements in New Zealand came up for discussion at the Mod-Luxon talks.

"We do alert our friends to the activities of anti-India elements in their countries and their abuse of freedom of speech and other democratic freedoms to glorify terrorism and to threaten attacks against our diplomats," he said.

"The government of New Zealand has been receptive and has taken our concerns on board in the past as well," he said, adding, "This was also the reaction that we got today".

In his remarks, Modi said



both sides decided to strengthen and institutionalise defence and security partnership and a roadmap will be prepared for cooperation in the defence industry sector.

In his remarks, Luxon said he and Modi discussed a strategic outlook for the Indo-Pacific.

"I reiterated our strong commitment to address shared concerns over our respective interests in contributing to a prosperous Indo-Pacific," he said. On the proposed FTA, Modi said mutual cooperation and investment will be encouraged in areas like dairy, food processing and pharma.

Prime Minister Modi also delved into the India-New Zealand defence ties.

"We have decided to strengthen and institutionalise our defence and security partnership. Along with joint exercises, training, port visits, a roadmap will be made for mutual cooperation in the defence industry as well," he said.

Govt takes all assurances by ministers in Parl seriously: Rijiju

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday assured the Rajya Sabha that the government takes all assurances given by the ministers on the floor of both houses of Parliament seriously as it is important for democracy.

Replying to questions in the Rajya Sabha, he said, "We understand the importance of Parliamentary democracy. If Members of Parliament ask questions and the government responds, then it is utmost important that the assurance should be fulfilled."

"If they (assurances) are not fulfilled, it will be a blot on Parliament democracy," he added.

Rijiju said there is a Parliament rule that the assurances given by the government should be fulfilled within three months and there are procedures for extension also.

"We take seriously all assurances given by the government in Parliament. We can not take them lightly," he said.

The minister said there should not be any laxity in fulfilling the assurances given on the floor of Parliament. "This is our responsibility".

Rijiju said he has recently written letters to all ministers in the government to ensure that the assurances get fulfilled in a time-bound manner.

He said the letters written by MPs should also be answered within one month.

The minister said the Online Assurances Monitoring System (OAMS) has helped in ensuring that the assurances get fulfilled.

L Murugan, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, informed the House that 99 per cent of the assurances have been implemented.

The OAMS, jointly implemented by the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs with secretariats of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, is a digital platform aimed at ensuring that assurances made by ministers in Parliament are systematically tracked, monitored, and fulfilled, he added.

Murugan said the system enhances accountability, transparency, and efficiency by integrating key features and mechanisms. The minister said the OAMS provides a single digital repository where all assurances are recorded, ensuring transparency and eliminating the risk of losing track of commitments for timely fulfilment of assurances.

Government examining impact of US tariff : MoS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is examining the impact of 25 per cent tariff imposed by the US on steel and aluminium imports, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

As per Proclamations issued by the president of the US dated February 10, 2025, the US government has imposed the import duty with effect from March 12, 2025, he said in a written reply.

No proclamation has been issued on pharma, automobile and semiconductor sectors so far, he said.

"As informed by Department of Commerce, the impact of the above proclamations on India is being carefully examined and evaluated," he said.



BJP TN chief Annamalai, party leaders detained

PNS ■ CHENNAI

BJP Tamil Nadu president K Annamalai, the party's women's wing national chief Vanathi Srinivasan and senior state leader H Raja were among the party leaders who were detained here on Monday by the police ahead of their protest against the alleged irregularities in state-run liquor retailer TASMAC.

The saffron party had announced a picketing protest of the TASMAC headquarters here over the alleged Rs 1,000 crore irregularities, as claimed by the Enforcement Directorate recently.

The BJP found support from the most unexpected corner, with its strident critic and DMK ally VCK welcoming the protest, from the prohibition point of view.

Annamalai lashed out at the ruling DMK and its party president and Chief Minister M K Stalin, alleging the "rupee symbol and budget drama" were an attempt to divert attention from the recent ED raids at the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC), besides other entities.

Annamalai, clad in a black shirt, was detained near his house along with his supporters by the police.

In a social media post, the BJP state chief alleged senior party leaders including former state president and ex-Governor of Telangana, Tamilisai Soundararajan have been placed "under house arrest" by the police.

Senior BJP leaders including H Raja, Pon Radhakrishnan, BJP Mahila Morcha chief and Coimbatore South MLA Vanathi Srinivasan, the party's legislators Dr C Saraswathi, MR Gandhi, Nainar Nagenthran and functionaries including Vinoj P Selvam and Amar Prasad Reddy were detained.

Annamalai said there have been "irregularities of Rs 1000 crore," in the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) and asserted the party will continue to protest on the matter.

Lashing out at CM Stalin, Annamalai said it was his 'guess' that the DMK leader was 'afraid' of something and therefore was 'strangulating' BJP's voice.

EAM meets his counterparts from Sweden, Ireland

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday met here his counterparts from various countries including Sweden, Ireland and Ghana and discussed ways to strengthen ties.

The interactions took place on a day when the three-day Raisina Dialogue -- India's premier conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics -- began in the national capital.

Jaishankar shared the updates on his meetings in a series of posts on X.

"Started the #Raisina2025 engagements, meeting DPM & FM @tfajon of Slovenia. Appreciated her assessment, as a current UN Security Council member, of global challenges," the EAM said after meeting Slovenian foreign minister Tanja Fajon earlier in the day.

He also met several other leaders during the course of the day, including his Swedish counterpart Maria M Stenergard and Simon Harris, Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland), Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence. "Pleased to meet FM @MariaStenergard of Sweden this morning. Discussed deepening our engagement with the EU," the external affairs minister posted on X.

"Warm greetings to Tánaiste & FM @SimonHarrisTD, the Government and People of Ireland on their National Day. My recent visit provided an opportunity to renew our bonds and strengthen our ties," he wrote in another post and also shared a photograph.

Cong, BJP in spar over four per cent quota for Muslims

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The ruling Congress and the BJP in Karnataka on Monday once again sparred over the budgetary provision of four per cent reservation for Muslims in government contracts.

The Congress rejected the BJP's allegation that religion-based reservation was "against constitutional provisions."

Defending the reservation, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said that Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhists are citizens of this country.

"We have concerns for minorities and backward communities. When the BJP says it wants to take everyone along, let it appoint Christian and Muslim ministers. Only then does BJP state president B Y Vijayendra have the right to speak about equality. Let him read the state anthem written by Kuvempu—then he will understand what makes Karnataka a peaceful garden," Shivakumar told reporters.

Hitting back at Shivakumar, Vijayendra said that it was the BJP government, not the Congress, that had appointed Dr A P J Abdul Kalam as the President of India.

"We appointed Najma Heptulla, Justice Abdul Nazeer, and Arif Mohammed Khan as governors. Musician Ustad Bismillah Khan was bestowed with the Bharat Ratna by the BJP government," Vijayendra told reporters.

According to him, Congress's appeasement politics is not new.

He questioned the Congress party's concern for Dalits, asking where it was when its MLA Akhanda Srinivasa Murthy's house was "torched by Muslim hooligans".

The Leader of the Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly, R Ashoka, claimed that several Supreme Court judgments have stated that there is no provision in the Constitution for religion-based reservations.

"Yet, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wore a 'topi' (skull cap), organised Tipu Jayanti, and introduced Shaadi Bhagya (launched in 2013, it provides financial assistance to economically backward minority women). He gave grants to Muslims beyond what they had asked for. Now, by offering four per cent reservation in contracts to Muslims, the Congress government has made an assault on Hindus," he alleged.

Govt launches mobile app for PM Internship Scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday launched a dedicated mobile application for the Prime Minister Internship Scheme and urged more companies to join the programme.

Also, the minister said she has appealed to MPs to encourage youth to join the scheme.

The pilot project of the scheme targeted at providing 1.25 lakh internship opportunities to the youth during 2024-25 was launched on October 3, 2024. After launching the app in the national capital on Monday, Sitharaman, who is in charge of the Finance and Corporate Affairs ministries, said the scheme is aimed at getting youth from Tier II and III cities and help them to understand the skills that are required by the industry as well as the job availability.

There is a shortage of people in terms of industry expectations and requirements and the scheme is aimed at bridging that gap, the minister said.

Regarding the scheme, she emphasised that there is no compulsion on industry and no interference.

The scheme is for a national cause, Sitharaman said and urged more companies to be part of it. Indian industry should participate in the larger interest. "You need to open the window... for people to have a peek," the minister said.

Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Harsh Malhotra said the scheme provides on the ground experience for youth and will help in contributing towards Viksit Bharat.

In the first round of the scheme's pilot project, more than 1.27 lakh internship opportunities were provided by the companies and the second round of the project started in January this year under which over 1.18 lakh internship opportunities have been posted by around 327 companies. The deadline for applications in the second round is March 31.

The pilot project of the scheme targeted at providing 1.25 lakh internship opportunities to the youth during 2024-25 was launched on October 3, 2024

According to Sitharaman, the scheme's website and app are being made more accessible. It is available in various languages. "Every language should have its prominence," she noted.

Interns will be provided monthly financial assistance of Rs 5,000 for 12 months and a one-time grant of Rs 6,000 under the scheme.

The scheme, announced in the 2024-25 Union Budget, aims to provide internship opportunities to one crore youth in the top 500 companies in five years.

The top 500 companies have been identified by the Corporate Affairs Ministry, which is implementing the scheme, on the basis of their average CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) expenditure over the last three years.

Corporate Affairs Secretary Deepti Gaur Mukherjee said more companies beyond the top 500 ones are expected to join the scheme.

The ministry has also introduced a framework for assessment of the implementation of the pilot project.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | MARCH 18, 2025

Editor's TAKE

Narendra Modi unfiltered

The Prime Minister's recent podcast speaks volumes about his governance and worldview

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is known for his articulation and engaging oratory. Often he speaks on various issues of national importance and to motivate the people especially the young minds. His radio program, 'Mann Ki Baat,' is one of the most popular and widely listened to broadcasts. Recently, he appeared on a podcast, where his articulation was at its finest. Recently he appeared on a podcast show and his articulation was at its best. In a episode of the Lex Fridman Podcast, the Prime Minister engaged in a profound three-hour conversation, offering insights into his personal journey, leadership philosophy, and India's evolving stature on the global stage.

Central to Modi's leadership is an unwavering commitment to India's welfare. He emphasised, "My country first. I always question if what I'm doing harms my nation in any way." Drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, he added, "Gandhiji advised that if you're ever unsure, think of the poorest person's face and ask yourself, 'Will this help them?' That always guides me."

Modi's tenure has been marked by decisive actions during challenging times. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he faced diverse economic recommendations but chose a path tailored to India's unique context. Prioritising the welfare of the underprivileged. He told the interviewer that the poor must not sleep hungry, and social tensions over basic needs must not arise. This approach contributed to India's resilience and rapid post-pandemic economic growth. Modi rejected calls to print excessive money or flood the economy with funds, ensuring that India's post-pandemic recovery remained stable. His confidence in India's unique strengths allowed the country to emerge stronger while others struggled with inflation and financial instability.

Modi's leadership is characterised by a readiness to take risks and accept responsibility. He stated he would it if it was right for his country. And that he would take full ownership—if something went wrong. This transparency has fostered public trust, with citizens recognising his genuine intentions. He acknowledged that while mistakes are inevitable, his priority remains clear: to work for India's progress with honesty and dedication. Under Modi's leadership, India's global standing has risen significantly. He attributed this to consistent and clear diplomacy, asserting that the world trusts India because there is no duplicity in us. This credibility has positioned India as a key player in international peace efforts and technological advancements. He also stressed the importance of emerging technologies, including AI and 5G, and India's role in shaping the future of these innovations. Throughout the conversation, Modi revealed his belief in lifelong learning and adaptability. "If I don't understand something, I ask like a student— 'Can you clarify this? What happens next?' I also play devil's advocate to challenge ideas."

His decision-making process, he said, is rapid but well-informed, driven by insights from diverse sources. This intellectual curiosity and strategic foresight have helped shape India's modern governance model, balancing tradition with progress. The podcast not only shed light on Modi's personal and political philosophies but also highlighted India's strategic direction in the contemporary world. His blend of traditional values with modern governance underscores a vision of progress deeply rooted in cultural ethos, solidifying India's place as a global powerhouse in the 21st century. No wonder he happens to be one of the most articulate prime ministers India has ever had.

Stalin plays the language card

Stalin doubles down on language politics ahead of the Tamil Nadu assembly elections, replacing the rupee symbol with a Tamil version in the budget document—sparking a debate on language dominance and Centre-State relations



On Thursday, Tamil Nadu underwent a significant cultural transformation by replacing the official rupee symbol (₹) with a Tamil letter in its budget document. Pronounced 'roo,' this letter represents the Indian currency in the Tamil language and embodies the region's rich cultural heritage. Chief Minister MK Stalin's decision to change the symbol could have broader implications for global influence. The rupee is one of India's most important symbols of sovereignty. The Tamil Nadu Assembly elections are scheduled for next year, and some believe that the DMK wants to make this an election issue.In a bold and decisive move against the National Education Policy (NEP), the Tamil Nadu government replaced the official rupee symbol with a Tamil character in the state's 2025 Budget. Chief Minister Stalin's announcement that this Tamil symbol will be used in the State's Budget logo for 2025-26 highlights the significance of this decision.

The ruling DMK has been in conflict with the central government on various issues, including language policies.In a recent post on X, Stalin shared a teaser video of the new logo. The post stated, "To ensure the widespread development of Tamil Nadu and benefit all sections of society," along with the hashtags #DravidianModel and #TNBudget2025. The logo also included the phrase "Everything for all," reflecting the DMK's commitment to inclusive governance. The government released a logo featuring 'roo,' the first letter of the Tamil word 'Rubaai,' meaning currency. The logo carries the caption "Everything for All," symbolising the government's commitment to inclusivity and fostering a sense of unity among its diverse population. The disagreement over the three-language formula under the NEP has further escalated tensions.

This new controversy adds fuel to the ongoing political friction between Tamil Nadu and the central government, particularly over language policies. Tamil Nadu has consistently opposed the Centre's three-language formula, insisting on continuing its two-language policy. The DMK has stated that Tamil Nadu will not accept "Hindi colonialism" as a substitute for British colonial rule.

Meanwhile, the Union government accuses the state government of being "dishonest" and jeopardising students' futures for political gain.By replacing the rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its budget document, the Tamil Nadu government has reaffirmed its commitment to preserving Tamil culture. In contrast, the BJP-led central government promotes the use of Hindi as a third language across India. Tamil Nadu, however, advocates for linguistic diversity and encourages pride in its cultural identity. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman strongly criticized the DMK, arguing that the party should have protested when the UPA government adopted the rupee symbol in 2010. At the time, the DMK was part of the ruling UPA alliance at the Centre.Tamil Nadu has now become the first state to reject the national currency symbol after 14 years, reinforcing its ongoing resistance to the NEP. The rupee symbol (₹) was designed by Udaya Kumar, the son of a former DMK MLA, who currently serves as a professor at IIT. Before 2010, the Indian Rupee was represented internationally using abbreviations like "Rs" or "INR," sometimes leading to confusion with the Pakistani and Sri Lankan rupees.

In 2009, the Ministry of Finance organized a contest to create a new rupee symbol, inviting designers, artists, and the public to submit ideas. The objective was to develop a symbol that showcased India's economic strength and cultural heritage.



KALYANI SHANKAR

The final rupee symbol (₹), designed by Udaya Kumar Dharmalingam, merges the Devanagari letter with the Roman letter 'R,' giving it a unique Indian identity while ensuring global recognition. However, the Tamil Nadu government does not endorse this symbol, as it values its language and opposes a design based on the Devanagari script. When the proposal was introduced in the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Thursday, BJP and AIADMK members protested against the symbol change.

This highlights the ongoing political tensions between the BJP-led central government and the DMK-led Tamil Nadu government. The historical conflict between Aryan and Dravidian identities remains a significant issue in Tamil Nadu. The state strongly defends the Tamil language and is the only one to reject the national rupee symbol. This decision could have significant implications for its economy and relations with the central government and other states. Chief Minister Stalin aims to maintain a strong stance on the language issue. Meanwhile, the Indian Rupee continues to grow in importance in the global economy.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recognizes it as a potential international currency, alongside China's Renminbi (RMB). Many countries now accept the rupee for payments, and India has established trade agreements using the rupee for transactions. At the core of the dispute is whether Tamil Nadu should adopt a two- or three-language formula. The primary concern is that requiring students to learn a third language may be an additional burden and could lead to the dominance of Hindi across India.

The Centre and the State should engage in discussions to find a mutually acceptable solution.

(The writer is a popular columnist. Views expressed are personal)

Will AI make Lamarckian theory a reality?

SECOND Opinion



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionised learning, knowledge acquisition, and even cognitive processes. As education becomes increasingly fragmented, the very nature of how we acquire skills and knowledge is shifting rapidly. This transformation raises an intriguing question: Could AI-driven learning bring the long-disputed Lamarckian theory to life?

The traditional model of structured learning-where knowledge is acquired in a linear and sequential manner-has largely diminished. Unlike earlier generations that learned through methodical study, today's learners rely heavily on technological tools that deliver information in fragmented, bite-sized pieces. Social media platforms, microlearning modules, and digital content consumption patterns have conditioned students to absorb knowledge in a fast-paced, non-linear manner. This fragmented learning model has reduced the emphasis on precision and mastery. Instead of spending hours deeply studying a subject, students often resort to extracting key points and memorizing surface-level information. While this approach saves time, it diminishes depth of understanding and critical thinking-vital aspects of structured learning.

In the early 21st century, academics expressed grave concerns about the impact of the internet, particularly Google, on student learning. The culture of referencing books in libraries gradually faded as students gravitated toward instant Google searches. While Google became a powerful knowledge resource, it also promoted a superficial engagement with information, providing quick answers without requiring deeper cognitive effort.

Today, AI has exacerbated this shift in learning dynamics. AI-driven tools offer instant writing support, reducing the need for students to develop language skills or enhance cognitive abilities. Moreover, handwriting-once considered essential for cognitive development-has become increasingly obsolete. Research has shown that handwriting improves memory retention, conceptual clarity, and motor skills. However, modern learners rely heavily on keyboards, voice recognition tools, and screen-based communication, sidelining this valuable skill. AI-driven transcription tools have further distanced students from traditional note-taking methods, diminishing the cognitive benefits associated with writing by hand.

Lamarck's theory of evolution proposed that acquired traits could be passed on to subsequent generations. Although largely discredited in favor of Darwin's natural selection, modern developments in epigenetics have revived discussions about the potential inheritance of acquired characteristics. Interestingly, AI's influence on cognitive development bears similarities to Lamarck's hypothesis.

The rapid integration of AI in education suggests that students are actively "acquiring" new cognitive patterns-ones that prioritise fragmented learning, surface-level understanding, and reduced memory reliance. While these changes are not genetic, they are rapidly shaping the intellectual habits of entire generations. Children now grow up in an environment where cognitive shortcuts are normalised, potentially passing down a diminished emphasis on analytical thinking and deep learning. In this sense, AI's environmental influence is mimicking Lamarckian evolution in an intellectual context. Skills once deemed critical for human development-such as deep reading, critical reasoning, and handwriting-are fading from mainstream education. Future generations may inherit not only digital dependency but also a reduced capacity for sustained intellectual engagement.

While AI undoubtedly enhances learning through instant access to information and automated support tools, its potential to reshape cognitive skills cannot be ignored. By promoting fragmented learning and diminishing the value of structured education, AI appears to be creating an intellectual environment reminiscent of Lamarck's theory-where acquired traits, such as shortcut thinking and reduced cognitive rigor, risk becoming entrenched in future generations.

To mitigate the risk of AI-induced cognitive decline, educational systems must balance AI integration with structured learning approaches. Encouraging students to engage in sustained reading and critical writing exercises can help counterbalance the fragmented learning model.

(The writer is the Dean of Academic Affairs, Garden City University, Bangalore. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak



"Covid-19 has exposed the limitations of all of us. No matter how much we consider ourselves a great nation, very progressive, very scientifically advanced, whatever it may be, everyone in their own way, but in the times of Covid-19, we all came down to earth, every country of the world. And then it seemed that the world would learn something from it, and we would move towards a new world order. But unfortunately, the situation was such that instead of moving towards peace, the world disintegrated.

NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

Letters to the Editor

River of promises

Madam —In the recent Tamil Nadu budget, the government has allocated a fund of ₹1500 Crore for the third consecutive time to beautify the Adyar river in the last three years, surprising the onlookers. This reminds us of the incident of the past in the state Assembly when a communist member raised the issue of progress made by the then government on cleaning the Cooum River and the progress made.

The former Chief Minister late M Karunanidhi pushed time to reply while the media in TN started screaming about a crocodile sighted in the Cooum river. The very next day the late CM announced in the Assembly that none are coming forward to work in the Cooum River because of the Crocodile threat. When the communist MLA sought details for ₹3 Crore initial allocation, the late CM said that money was already spent on the project for initial feasibility study. Going by the shifting of blame by the government the animal outside would end up in tears by the shocking statement of the state. There is budget allocation in the name of new projects which has an alternative name for the Centre's existing projects. Though the State allocates ₹2000 Crore for free laptop scheme as a beneficiary for 20 Lakh students in the next two years which was formerly the pet project of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalitha, but was discontinued when DMK came to power in 2021.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

Pakistan needs course correction

Madam—Religious supremacism in Pakistan (March 17) should sensitise all those who are frantically and frantically trying to establish supremacy over other sects of the same religion or over other religions. Such activities misplaced the priorities and left the people to live a miserable life. Religion is a guide to set the way of life on the correct track. To promote hate against any other group in the name of God cannot be a religious activity. Because religion preaches only to love thy neighbours. Promoting hatred and annihilating activities over other group in the name of God is purely an attempt to seek identity for the individual or the group. History has a lot of examples to explain the ephemeral relief drawn from victory over the other. Besides seeking identity such promotion of hatred over others is a tactical measure to cover up their misdeeds and mistakes.

Religion is an innate affair. Religion influencing politics or otherwise cannot be called a religious activity. In countries where religion dominates the government a visible fact seen is people's suffering. Pakistan has a long way to go in saving the country from virtual collapse in terms of economy and people's livelihood. The country has already wasted a considerable time on promoting terrorists and their activities against Afghan, India, Balochis and so on. Now it is paying for all its sins.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Unlawful arrest of Congress leader in Assam

Madam —A major characteristic of nationalism is that for it every opponent, every opposition, every critic is like an enemy. Nationalists very cleverly link any finger raised against them and criticism of their policies with 'anti-nationalism' and get it declared anti-national through the media captured by them. If this were not so, then why would the youth Congress leader of Assam not have been arrested for his social media post. The Assam Congress spokesperson was arrested only because he had questioned on X about the status of cases registered against three senior BJP leaders.

Ritam Singh had posted on 'X' on March 13, in which there was a mention of the court convicting three people in a rape case in Dhemaji district in the year 2021. The Congress spokesperson was arrested without giving him any warrant or notice. Congress Deputy Leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi reached Ritam Singh's house and alleged that his colleague was dragged and beaten up by the police. This incident happened on a day when the country's Home Minister Amit Shah was present in the state. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has not only called this arrest appropriate and right but also predicted in one sentence that "Just wait, the big revelation is yet to happen. Your senior leader's collusion with ISI and Pakistan will be exposed by September."

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

CORPORATE LIFESTYLE LEADS TO VITAMIN B12 DEFICIENCY IN INDIA

A recent study by MediBuddy has shown that more than 57 per cent of male corporate professionals suffer from vitamin B12 deficiency which is a serious concerns and this alarming statistic points to a larger issue within urban India where lifestyle choices, dietary habits and work pressures are negatively impacting health and the study analysed data from around 4,400 individuals (3,338 men and 1,059 women), all urban corporate employees. And even among women nearly 50 per cent exhibit deficient levels. It is due to the fact that work has gained prevalence over everything else, and it is generally seen that with demanding schedules, erratic eating habits and high stress levels, corporate professionals often overlook essential nutrition-until the symptoms start.

The primary cause of vitamin B12 deficiency in Indian corporate males is dietary and it is well known that B12 is predominantly found in animal-based foods such as meat eggs and diary. But Indians are generally vegetarians and due to this reason also there is deficiency of B12. Additionally, even those who consume dairy may not get sufficient amounts due to declining nutritional quality and excessive food processing.

Another major factor is the fast-paced corporate lifestyle. Professionals often rely on quick meals, processed foods, and restaurant takeout, which lack essential nutrients and due to these factors there exist B12 deficiency and there is need to change such lifestyle. It is generally seen that increased alcohol consumption and smoking and high caffeine intake are common prevalent among corporate employees which further reduce the body's ability to absorb B12 and an individual becomes ignorant about the deficiency of B12. Moreover chronic stress and long working hours contribute to this deficiency and recently a few deaths were also repeated due this stress.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

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

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | MARCH 18, 2025

Reclaiming education: The missing Gandhian link

India's post-independence education system was built with urgency but lacked the necessary foundation of values. By reconnecting with India's intellectual traditions and fostering inclusivity, the nation can reshape its its education system to build a future rooted in both wisdom and progress

FIRST Column



Educational endeavors in India immediately after independence were initiated hastily in an attempt to achieve too much in too little time, and that too under a severe paucity of human and material resources. This has proven to be too costly for the nation in the long run, as it now suffers from non-functional schools, absentee teachers, and proxy teachers.

My interpretation is that our teacher preparation institutions have either ignored, forgotten, or failed to appreciate the importance of the values that once brought the entire nation together. It was the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that fostered commitment, dedication, sacrifice, care for others, and a lifelong devotion to the nation. These are commonly referred to as Gandhian values in public discourse. Unfortunately, Gandhian values were neglected in practically every sector as successive generations took over the management of the nation.

The expectations from teachers and the education system have always been very high. They are supposed to set standards, norms, practices, morals, ethics, and values. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of eroding values has not spared the education system and its teachers. Eminent educationist DD Kothari aptly puts it: "The basic task of education-education at all levels-is to promote powers of the mind, the acquisition of special skills, and the advancement of knowledge. Above all, it should generate in the younger generation a sense of purposefulness and mission, dedication, confidence in themselves, and faith in the country's future. To underscore the significance of moral education and the promotion of an abiding sense of ethical values and social responsibility as integral elements of education in any society, secular or otherwise."



JS RAJPUT

This statement deserves to be read multiple times, and more importantly, it should inspire an intensive process of continuous reflection ('Manan') and interactive discussions ('Chintan'). A serious reassessment is required, beginning with schools and extending to institutions of higher learning. To contextualise this issue within the 21st century, let me briefly digress before returning to the focal point.

One outstanding individual who envisioned post-independence education in India with a deep understanding of both its past and present, while simultaneously foreseeing its future, was Dr DS Kothari. A great physicist, researcher, and legendary educator, his profound insight into spirituality and the Indian tradition of generating, transferring, and utilising knowledge-with the fundamental objective of serving the people-made him exceptionally suited for his role as Chairperson of the National Commission on Education (1964-66). This author had the privilege of attending some of his lectures at NCERT and other institutions. It was impossible not to be impressed by his articulation, pragmatism, and vision.

For India, his prescription for the future was succinctly captured in four letters: "STPG." Yes, India and Indian education need to focus on 'Science, Technology, Production, and Gandhi.' It was more than five decades ago that this approach profoundly influenced my thought process, sparking a keen desire to comprehend it in the modern era-a time dominated by Western education, thought, and culture. Kothari's prescription demanded a deep familiarity with Indian traditions and culture, a recognition of their historical challenges, and an incisive, unbiased analysis of Western knowledge systems-without either undue prejudice or blind admiration.

On a personal note, listening to Professor Kothari transformed my reading interests and my entire approach to educational reform. Several committee and commission reports have followed the Kothari Commission Report. These were necessary, as the pace of change, technology, and pedagogy demanded constant evolution. Terminology may change with time, but for India, it has always been the 'in-built dynamism and effective corrective procedures' within its eternal way of life that sustain it. This inner strength of the Indian education system has allowed it to withstand onslaughts from various directions.

> OUR TEACHER PREPARATION INSTITUTIONS HAVE EITHER IGNORED, FORGOTTEN, OR FAILED TO APPRECIATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VALUES THAT ONCE BROUGHT THE ENTIRE NATION TOGETHER. IT WAS THE LEADERSHIP OF MAHATMA GANDHI THAT FOSTERED COMMITMENT, DEDICATION, SACRIFICE, CARE FOR OTHERS, AND A LIFELONG DEVOTION TO THE NATION

Unfortunately, the "Gandhi" component of the STPG quartet proposed by Dr Kothari never received the attention it truly deserved. The neglect of Gandhian values is visible from schools to universities, with few exceptions. When one broadens their perspective, it becomes evident that this oversight has had far-reaching consequences. In simpler terms, one may ask: Has India ignored the fundamental purpose of education?

Within the education system, if one examines the implications closely, the focus will always return to teachers. Every teacher must constantly ask themselves: Are all Indian students, from their early schooling years-including home schooling-being taught in the same idiom (not language) that all religions are equal? That for me, mine is the best, and for my neighbor, his is the best for him? That our ultimate goal, regardless of our religion, is the same?

It bears repeating that nearly every Indian teacher in a government school teaches a multi-religious classroom. Therefore, they must be well-equipped-and personally convinced-of the beauty of diversity in all its forms, including religious diversity. A teacher who acknowledges their responsibility as a creator of a united, integrated, and cohesive future for India must be aware of the vast treasure of great Indian scriptures, many of which are not necessarily religious but serve as guides for a 'contented, contributing, and creative' life. A teacher must be free from preconceived prejudices and biases. Those who are committed to this cause can seek guidance from an address Mahatma Gandhi delivered to students and teachers at Banaras Hindu University: "Early in my childhood, I felt the need for a scripture that would serve as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. Today, the Gita is not only my Bible or my Quran, it is more than that-it is my mother." A large number of institutions are now engaged in in-depth research and serious studies on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). One hopes that, despite misinterpretations of secularism, these studies will not ignore the importance of ancient Indian scriptures and their contemporary relevance.

Conclusion

India's post-independence education system, while ambitious, struggled with limited resources and a rushed implementation, leading to long-term consequences such as dysfunctional schools and a decline in values-based education.

The erosion of Gandhian values—commitment, sacrifice, and national devotion—has been particularly detrimental. Teachers, as moral and intellectual leaders, must be equipped to foster ethical awareness and social responsibility. Dr DS Kothari's vision of "STPG"—Science, Technology, Production, and Gandhi—offered a blueprint for India's educational growth. While science and technology have advanced, the Gandhian component has been largely neglected. This omission has impacted not only the education system but also India's moral and social fabric.

A reassessment is necessary, emphasising value-based education and religious harmony, ensuring that teachers instill the beauty of diversity and shared human purpose. Institutions now researching the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) offer hope for reintegrating ethical wisdom into modern education. Only by balancing modern advancements with time-tested values can India cultivate an education system that nurtures both knowledge and character, securing a prosperous and harmonious future.

(The writer is a retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of forest force, Karnataka. Views expressed are personal)

Regulatory challenges and opportunities in the assisted banking space

The assisted banking sector, which bridges traditional financial services with innovative technology, is at the forefront of expanding banking services to the last mile. However, it is also grappling with a rapidly evolving regulatory landscape. This dual role-driving financial inclusion while ensuring compliance with stringent regulations-has become a defining feature of the sector.

As of today, nearly 80 per cent of India's population has access to bank accounts, a remarkable improvement from 2021, when almost one-third of the country's adult population remained unbanked. Assisted banking has played a pivotal role in this transformation by bridging the digital divide and integrating millions of underserved individuals into the formal financial system.

Yet, this growth has also led to the introduction of a complex and ever-evolving regulatory framework aimed at ensuring data security, consumer protection, and financial stability. For the assisted banking sector, navigating this dynamic regulatory environment is critical to sustaining growth and fostering innovation.

Compliance with regulations

Assisted banking operates in a highly regulated environment. Among the complex set of regulations and guidelines that are to be adhered to include anti-money laundering (AML), know-your-customer (KYC), and data protection norms.

The impact of assisted banking is evident in the dramatic increase in bank account penetration across India. From being a country with a significant unbanked population just a few years ago, India has made tremendous strides in ensuring that the majority of its citizens have access to basic financial services.

This progress has been driven in large part by government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), which aimed to provide every household with a bank account, and the rapid adoption of digital payment systems like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). Assisted banking has complemented these efforts by providing the necessary support to individuals who may lack the confidence or capability to navigate digital platforms independently.

However, the constantly shifting regulatory landscape poses challenges for service providers, as they invest a significant amount of their time and resources in continuously upgrading their compliance processes. Having said that, such regulatory challenges are not insurmountable. From my experience in operating a Pan-India network of more than one lakh touchpoints providing financial services across the spectrum of Rural, Semi-Urban, Urban and Metro landscape of India, the regulatory maze is navigable — if not easily — but with a bit of innovation and a firm commitment to comply.

Tackling the KYC challenge

Financial fraud and identity theft are the primary concerns for every regulator. In a recent report, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already indicated a sharp rise in bank fraud cases in the first half of the current financial year.

In reality, a large number of these frauds can be avoided with a diligent approach towards KYC and re-KYC of customers availing banking services. The fact is almost one-third of all banking fraud cases take place only because of the lackadaisical attitude towards KYC and re-KYC.

Assisted banking service providers must step up by adopting stricter KYC rules, streamlining customer onboarding and implementing stringent processes for verification and periodic re-validation of customers.



SHIKHAR AGGARWAL

For instance, KYC and re-KYC is a process where we work with several leading banks, and periodically update the customer information they have on record. This process helps ensure that the information provided at the time of account opening or opting for a service is not outdated. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) mandates that banks conduct Re-KYC regularly, based on a risk approach. The procedure is smooth, accurate, and impenetrable thanks to sophisticated digital tools, AI-driven monitoring, and rigorous documentation checks by companies like us.

Such rigorous KYC and re-KYC practices would not just mitigate risks but also enhance customer confidence in assisted banking platforms.

Cybersecurity and data protection

The increasing dependence on digital platforms is making assisted banking more vulnerable to cybersecurity threats. Around the globe, regulatory agencies are tightening rules on data protection and privacy.

The RBI has also introduced several fraud mitigation initiatives while encouraging banks and service providers to make their customer onboarding and transaction monitoring processes fool-proof. Acknowledging the sharp rise in digital fraud, particularly the use of mule bank accounts to scam customers, the RBI recently rolled out an Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning solution called MuleHunter.ai. This tool is, designed to spot and prevent fraudulent transactions linked to mule accounts, and will help in tackling digital fraud head-on. Mule accounts, which are often used by fraudsters to launder money, have become a significant concern for regulators and financial institutions alike. Tools like MuleHunter.ai represent a proactive approach to tackling this issue, leveraging advanced technology to detect and prevent fraud in real time.

Even though putting in place such tech-driven and sophisticated solutions requires a hefty investment, they also present an opportunity for assisted banking providers to strengthen their security systems. Adopting such measures will not just help assisted banking providers meet regulatory demands but also set themselves apart as safe and reliable platforms.

Building customer trust

Regulatory compliance is not just about meeting legal requirements-it is also a critical factor in building and maintaining customer trust. In the assisted banking sector, where many customers are new to the formal financial system, trust is especially important. When customers feel secure and see transparency in the services provided, they are much more likely to engage with the platform and explore additional financial products and services.

By adhering to regulatory guidelines, assisted banking service providers can boost confidence among their users and financial partners. Moreover, a commitment to compliance reflects a broader goal of empowering customers financially. Organisations that prioritise ethical practices and transparency are more likely to build strong brand reputations and foster customer loyalty, which are essential for long-term success in a competitive market.

Conclusion

The regulatory landscape in assisted banking is undergoing rapid transformation, bringing both substantial challenges and exciting opportunities. To thrive in this ever-changing environment, service providers such as ourselves must proactively address compliance requirements, prioritise investments in cybersecurity and AI, and maintain an unwavering dedication to the core principle of "Customer Service".

As the industry expands, embracing a forward-looking and flexible strategy to navigate regulatory shifts will be crucial for driving sustainable growth and ensuring that financial services remain inclusive and accessible to everyone. Throughout this journey, we must keep our mission- "Delighting the citizen. Strengthening the Nation" at the heart of everything we do.

(The writer is the Chairman of BLS E-Services Ltd. Views expressed are personal)

How one-sided venting can drain relationships

Have you ever had a conversation where someone overwhelmed you with their problems, leaving you emotionally drained? Or perhaps you've found yourself venting to a friend, only to realise later that it felt more like a one-sided emotional outpouring. In today's dynamic and demanding world, emotions frequently run high. Whether it's work-related stress, personal challenges, or unresolved trauma, individuals often seek comfort by sharing their feelings with friends, family, colleagues, or anyone they trust. While expressing emotions is a healthy practice, it can become problematic when it turns into excessive, one-sided communication.

This phenomenon, known as emotional dumping, is a widely misunderstood behavior that can strain relationships and negatively affect mental well-being. Unlike healthy venting, emotional dumping negatively impacts both the person sharing and the listener. It is widely regarded as an unhealthy form of expression because the individual unloading their emotions is often unaware of both their own emotional state and that of the listener. A key sign of emotional dumping is leaving a conversation feeling drained, exhausted, or overwhelmed. Unlike healthy discussions, it disregards the listener's consent and lacks structure in terms of time, topic, and purpose. Emotional dumping can have far-reaching consequences for both the sharer and the listener. Since emotional dumping typically focuses on venting rather than resolution, it can prevent the sharer from developing critical problem-solving skills.

By continuously rehashing the same issues without seeking solutions, they miss opportunities to learn how to manage their emotions constructively. Over time, this can hinder personal and emotional development, leaving them stuck in their problems.

They may not even realise how their behavior affects their relationships. If this pattern continues, it can lead to social isolation, as people begin to distance themselves to protect their emotional well-being. On the other hand, receiving an unfiltered emotional outpouring can be overwhelming for the listener, leading to emotional exhaustion, stress, and even resentment.

Since emotional dumping does not involve seeking solutions, listeners may feel powerless or burdened, which ultimately affects their mental well-being. When this pattern continues, it can damage relationships, as the listener may begin to distance themselves to safeguard their emotional health. Several studies suggest that emotional dumping can become addictive. The temporary relief that the sharer experiences after unloading their emotions creates a cycle of dependency, where they continuously seek external validation without addressing the root cause of their distress. This cyclical behavior reinforces negative emotional patterns and makes it difficult for individuals to develop resilience or effective coping mechanisms.

However, rather than getting caught up in someone else's negativity, listeners must set healthy boundaries to protect their emotional well-being. When someone repeatedly unloads their problems onto friends, family, or colleagues without seeking solutions or being open to suggestions, it can lead to emotional fatigue and indifference. Over time, this pattern discourages meaningful support and resolution.

If someone recognises that they tend to engage in emotional dumping, they should try shifting towards mindful communication. Instead of venting without purpose, they should focus on expressing emotions in a way that allows for constructive feedback and solutions. Developing self-awareness can help individuals recognise when they are about to engage in emotional dumping. Before reaching out to someone, it helps to ask: "Am I seeking support, or am I simply offloading negativity?" Encouraging the sharer to explore different ways of processing their emotions—such as journaling, meditation, and self-reflection—can help them manage their emotions independently. Sometimes, people just need guidance on healthier coping mechanisms.



SAKSHI SETHI

If the situation becomes unmanageable, seeking help from a therapist or counselor can provide a more effective outlet. Since emotional dumping can strain relationships and mental health, it is crucial to develop strategies to manage it effectively. Emotional dumping is a natural but often unhealthy way of handling emotions. While sharing emotions is important for connection and support, excessive and one-sided emotional unloading can harm both the sharer and the listener. Recognising the difference between healthy venting and emotional dumping is key to maintaining strong relationships and emotional well-being.

By setting boundaries, practicing self-regulation, and fostering mindful communication, individuals can create a more supportive and emotionally balanced environment. Learning healthier ways to express and process emotions not only strengthens relationships but also promotes personal growth and resilience. Emotional well-being is a shared responsibility, and by making small changes, we can support each other without feeling emotionally overwhelmed.

(The writer is an educator. Views expressed are personal)

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VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | MARCH 18, 2025

IN BRIEF



Rupee jumps 24 paise to close at 86.81 against US dollar

The rupee appreciated 24 paise to close at 86.81(provisional) against the US dollar on Monday on positive domestic equities and weakness of the American currency in the overseas market. Forex traders said the rupee traded with a slight positive bias on weakness in the US dollar and positive global markets. However, surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains for the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.90 then touched an intraday high of 86.76 and a low of 86.90 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 86.81 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 24 paise from its previous closing level.
On Thursday, the rupee surged 17 paise to settle at 87.05 against the US dollar. Forex, stock markets were closed on Friday on the occasion of Holi festival. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on weakness in the US dollar and positive global markets.



Exports contract to $36.91 bn

India's exports declined for the fourth month in a row in February to USD 36.91 billion due to volatility in petroleum prices and global uncertainties. The country's exports stood at USD 41.41 billion in the same month a year ago. However, trade deficit in February narrowed to USD 14.05 billion as the country's imports reduced to USD 50.96 billion in February, according to commerce ministry data. Cumulatively, during the April-February period this fiscal year, merchandise and services exports rose 6.24 per cent to USD 750.53 billion as against USD 706.43 billion in the year-ago period.
India's merchandise shipments witnessed a decline in value terms in the four months between November and February. Merchandise exports were at USD 36.43 billion in January compared to USD 37.32 billion a year ago. In December, it stood at USD 38.01 billion against USD 38.39 billion in December 2023, while such outward shipments declined to USD 32.11 billion in November 2024 from USD 33.75 billion in the year-ago month.



HC discharges Gautam Adani, Rajesh Adani

The Bombay High Court on Monday discharged Adani Enterprises Ltd, group Chairman Gautam Adani and MD Rajesh Adani from a case of alleged violations of market regulations involving Rs 388 crore, saying no case of cheating or criminal conspiracy was made out. The Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) in 2012 initiated the case against the Adani Enterprises Limited (AEL) and its promoters Gautam Adani and Rajesh Adani, and filed a chargesheet, accusing them of criminal conspiracy and cheating. In 2019, the company and the two industrialists filed a petition in the HC, seeking to quash a sessions court order of the same year refusing to discharge them from the case. The HC's single bench of Justice R N Laddha on Monday quashed the sessions court order and discharged the duo and the company from the case. The court in its order said a careful evaluation of the submissions and records makes it "evident that the complaint fails to satisfy the essential ingredients of the offence of cheating".

IBC significantly benefited India, says Union min

Reveals insolvency applications involving Rs 10 lakh cr resolved

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



As many as 40,943 applications were filed under the the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), of which 28,818 applications involving Rs 10 lakh crore were resolved even before admission, Union Minister of State for Corporate Affairs Harsh Malhotra said in Lok Sabha on Monday.

He also said that the introduction of the IBC in 2016 significantly benefited India, improving its global rank by 56 places to reach 52 in 2019 from 108 in 2018.

"Under IBC, 40,943 applications were filed of which 28,818 applications were resolved even before admission. This itself is a big achievement. Of those resolved, the total amount involved was around Rs 10 lakh crore. Among those which are pending or under trial, 1,119 have gone for resolution and resolved," he said.

The minister said many reforms have been brought with regards to home buyers.

"If any big builder or a consumer goes to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which is a quasi-judicial body, we have ensured resolution tower-to-tower basis. We have ensured possession of home buyers even during proceedings," he said.

Malhotra said as per information provided by NCLT, the number of cases pending under the Companies Act were 8,133 and under the IBC were 12,351 as on December 31,2024.

He said there were several reasons for the pendency of cases in NCLT, which depends on circumstances and complexity of each case, nature of evidence, number of Interlocutory Applications (IA), stay by the higher courts in many cases, cooperation of stake holders and adjournments.

"To facilitate expeditious disposal, the government is taking necessary steps on an ongoing basis, which include implementation of e-court and hybrid court project, regular colloquiums for capacity building of members, provisions of infrastructure, filling up of vacancies, etc," he said.

The minister said the government has taken a number of initiatives under Ease of Doing Business (EoDB), which are aimed at creating a conducive business environment.

"As a part of the above, Doing Business Report (DBR) 2019 was published by the World Bank. India's rank in resolving insolvency in the above report was 52," he said.

The World Bank discontinued publishing its Doing Business Report (DBR) in September 2021, with the last report released in October 2019.

Malhotra said the B-Ready (Business Ready) project is a new initiative by the World Bank to replace the earlier Doing Business rankings.

"The B-Ready assessment focuses on various stages of a business lifecycle, including starting a business, dealing with construction permits and resolving insolvency. The first B-Ready report was launched on October 3rd, 2024, and India is covered in the third phase of the project.

Indian Railways in sound financial health, says minister Vaishnaw

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Railways' financials are in good condition with continuous improvement efforts underway, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed the Rajya Sabha on Monday.



During a debate on the working of the Railways Ministry, Vaishnaw noted that the national transporter has successfully overcome pandemic-related challenges, with passengers returning to train travel and both passenger and cargo traffic showing growth.

During 2023-24, Indian Railways reported a revenue of approximately Rs 2,78,000 crore against expenses of Rs 2,75,000 crore. Major expenditure components include staff costs (Rs 1,16,000 crore), pension payments (Rs 66,000 crore), energy expenses (Rs 32,000 crore), and financing costs (Rs 25,000 crore).

"Railways is fulfilling its expenses from its own income because of good performance. ...Overall, the financial condition is good and we are trying to improve it on constant basis," Vaishnaw stated.

The minister highlighted that Railways subsidises passenger fares while generating revenue from cargo and freight operations.

While the actual cost per kilometer stands at Rs 1.38, passengers are charged only 72 paise, resulting in a total passenger subsidy of approximately Rs 57,000 crore for 2023-24.

Vaishnaw emphasised that Indian train fares remain the lowest compared to neighbouring countries.

"If you look at a journey of 350 km, Rs 121 is the fare of general class in India, Rs 400 in Pakistan, Rs 413 in Sri Lanka. This is the same in almost all categories," he noted, adding that fares have remained unchanged since 2020.

Energy costs have "stabilized" at Rs 30,000-32,000 crore, with the railways financially benefiting from electrification initiatives implemented after 2019.

Banks write off bad loans worth Rs 16.35 lakh cr in last 10 years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Banks have written off non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans worth about Rs 16.35 lakh crore in last 10 financial years, Parliament was informed on Monday.

Highest amount of Rs 2,36,265 crore was written off during financial year 2018-19 while NPAs worth Rs 58,786 crore were written off in 2014-15, the lowest in the last 10 years.

During 2023-24, banks wrote off bad loans of Rs 1,70,270 crore, lower than Rs 2,16,324 crore done in the previous financial year.

Banks write off non-performing assets (NPAs), including those in respect of which full provisioning has been made on completion of four years, as per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines and policy approved by banks' boards, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in a reply in the Lok Sabha.

Such write-offs do not result in waiver of liabilities of borrowers and therefore, it does not benefit the borrower, she said. Banks continue pursuing their recovery actions initiated against borrowers under the various recovery mechanism available to them.

Sensex bounces back 341 pts on gains in banking shares

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex rebounded by 341 points on Monday, snapping its five-day losing streak following buying in banking stocks and a sharp rally in global shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 341.04 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 74,169.95 as 19 of its constituents ended in the green and 11 in the red. In intra-day trade, the benchmark jumped 547.44 points or 0.74 per cent to 74,376.35.

The NSE Nifty rose by 111.55 points or 0.50 per cent to 22,508.75.



From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Adani Ports, ICICI Bank, Zomato and UltraTech Cement were among the biggest gainers.

However, ITC, Nestle, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Asian Paints and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards.

Shares of IndusInd Bank jumped 5.30 per cent in intra-day trade after the Reserve Bank on Saturday assured customers that the firm remains 'well-capitalised', even as it directed the bank's board to complete remedial action relating to an estimated Rs 2,100 crore accounting discrepancy within this month. The stock finally ended at Rs 676.95, up 0.72 per cent.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.77 per cent, while smallcap index dipped 0.02 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, healthcare surged 1.12 per cent, commodities (0.92 per cent), metal (0.91 per cent), financial services (0.83 per cent), auto (0.80 per cent) and bankex (0.71 per cent).

Telecommunication, realty and FMCG were the laggards.

Gold, silver rally Rs 1,300 to hit record levels amid strong global cues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices hit fresh record levels on Monday, rallying Rs 1,300 each, tracking strong trends in the global markets amid uncertainty over US tariffs, trade tensions and growing expectations of monetary policy easing by the Federal Reserve.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity, extending gains for the fourth day in a row, rallying Rs 1,300 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 90,750 per 10 grams.

It had closed at Rs 89,450 per 10 grams on Thursday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity zoomed Rs 1,300 to establish an lifetime high of Rs 90,350 per 10 grams from Thursday's closing level of Rs 89,050 per 10 grams.

According to HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst, Commodities, Saumil Gandhi, several factors have contributed to the record-breaking rally in precious metals, including buying by central banks and global economic instability.

Further, the demand for safe haven assets increased due to the trade and economic policies of US President Donald Trump, which in turn increased economic uncertainty worldwide, Gandhi said.



So far this year, the yellow metal prices had climbed Rs 11,360, or 14.31 per cent, to Rs 90,750 from Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on January 1.

On Friday, the bullion markets were closed on the occasion of Holi festival.

Net direct tax kitty rises 13 pc to Rs 21.26 lakh cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Net direct tax collection grew 13.13 per cent to over Rs 21.26 lakh crore so far this fiscal aided by by higher advance tax mop up, government data showed on Monday.

During the year, the government collected Rs 10.44 lakh crore from four instalments of advance tax as against Rs 9.11 lakh crore in the previous fiscal, registering a growth of 14.62 per cent.

The last instalment of the advance tax payment was due on March 15, 2025, for the current financial year.

Advance tax collection under the corporate tax category rose by 12.54 per cent to Rs 7.57 lakh crore while non-corporates witnessed a growth rate of 20.47 per cent to Rs 2.87 lakh crore during the financial year.

An individual whose estimated tax liability is likely to be over Rs 10,000 (after considering tax deducted and collected at source — TDS and TCS) is required to pay advance tax that year, as per Section 208 of the Income-Tax Act. This includes salaried taxpayers. Advance tax is to be paid before the end of the financial year on the income that one would have earned that year.

Haryana presents 2.05 lakh crore tax-free Budget

Proposes Rs 5,000 cr for Lado Lakshmi Yojana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Monday presented a tax-free Rs 2.05 lakh crore budget for 2025-26, making various announcements including earmarking Rs 5,000 crore for 'Lado Lakshmi Yojana' and setting up an authority to tackle drug abuse.

Presenting the budget in the state Assembly, Saini said he received around 11,000 suggestions from various sections regarding the state budget.

Saini did not impose any fresh tax in the budget.

Sharing details of the proposals in his maiden budget address, Saini said a new department named "Department of Future" will be created to make Haryana "future capable".

Saini, who holds the finance portfolio, said the budget envisages an outlay of Rs 2,05,017.29 crore for 2025-26, up 13.70 per cent from revised estimates of 2024-25.



He said that in the last 10 years, the Haryana government laid great emphasis on e-governance and that his government has fulfilled 19 out of 217 promises of the poll manifesto.

"In this direction, my proposal is to establish the Haryana AI (Artificial Intelligence) Mission, in which the World Bank has assured to provide assistance of Rs 474 crore," he said. This AI mission will establish hubs in Gurugram and Panchkula.

To promote startups, the Haryana government will encourage private investors to create a 'fund of funds' of Rs 2,000 crore.

'EPFO settles 2.16 cr claims within 3-day deadline'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO settled a record number of 2.16 crore claims through the autonomous process in the current financial year till March 6, which was more than double the figure of last fiscal, Parliament was informed on Monday.

In the previous financial year, the EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) had settled 89.52 lakh claims.



Now, 60 per cent of advance (withdrawal) claims are processed through auto mode, said Minister of State for Labour & Employment Shobha Karandlaje in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

The minister said the limit for processing of advance (part withdrawal) claims through auto mode has also been enhanced to Rs 1 lakh.

In addition to illness/hospitalisation related claims, partial withdrawals for housing, education and marriage have also been enabled under auto mode, the minister told the House, adding that claims under the auto mode are processed within three days.

EPFO achieved a historic high of 2.16 crore claim settlement as on March 6, 2025 during the current financial year, up from 89.52 lakh in FY 2023-24, the minister said.

Besides, the process of correction in member details has been simplified, and members having Aadhaar-verified UANs can make corrections themselves, without any EPFO interventions, she told the House.

At present, 96 per cent corrections are being done without any EPF office intervention, and over 99 per cent claims are received through online mode.

As on March 6, 2025, 7.14 crore claims have been filed through online mode.

In transfer claim submission requests, the need for employer's attestation of Aadhaar-verified UANs has been done away with.

Now only 10 per cent transfer claims require member's and employer's attestation. The requirement for submitting a cheque leaf with the claim form has also been relaxed for KYC-compliant UANs meeting prescribed criteria.

Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors to hike vehicle prices

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India and Tata Motors on Monday announced plans to increase vehicle prices from April in order to partially offset the impact of rising input costs.

Maruti Suzuki said it plans to hike prices of its entire model range by up to 4 per cent from next month.

Tata Motors said it will increase the price of its commercial vehicle range by up to 2 per cent from next month.

In light of rising input costs and operational expenses, the company has planned to increase the prices of its cars from April, Maruti Suzuki India said in a regulatory filing. The price increase is expected to be up to 4 per cent and will vary depending on the model, it added.

While the company continuously strives to optimise costs and minimise the impact on its customers, some portion of the increased cost may need to be passed on to the market, the country's largest carmaker stated.

Maruti Suzuki currently sells various models ranging from the entry-level Alto K-10 to multiple-purpose vehicle Invicto in the domestic market, with price ranging from Rs 4.23 lakh and Rs 29.22 lakh respectively (ex-showroom Delhi).



In January this year, the company announced to hike prices by up to Rs 32,500 across various models from February 1. Maruti Suzuki India shares ended 0.24 per cent up at Rs 11,536.10 apiece on BSE.

A Honda Cars India spokesperson said that the automaker is also looking to increase vehicle prices from next month.

Tata Motors said it will increase prices of its commercial vehicle range by up to 2 per cent from April in order to partially offset the impact of rising input costs.

The prices of the company's commercial vehicle range will increase by up to 2 per cent from April 1, 2025, the Mumbai-based auto major said in a regulatory filing.

The price increase is to offset the rise in input costs, and will vary as per individual model and variant, it added.

Shares of Tata Motors on Monday ended 0.84 per cent up at Rs 660.90 apiece on BSE.

The Pioneer
Vijayawada | Tuesday March 18, 2025

what's brewing?

Ishwak & team wraps up the shooting of *Gandhari*

The talented actor Ishwak Singh has officially wrapped up his much-anticipated project, *Gandhari*, marking the conclusion of a remarkable journey. The actor took to social media to reflect on this incredible experience with a heartfelt caption that captures the essence of his journey.

"And just like that, this incredible journey comes to an end. What a ride it has been—full of passion, hard work and unforgettable memories. Can't wait for you all to experience the magical world of *Gandhari*!" Ishwak shared on Instagram, signaling the completion of an exciting chapter in his career.

He also shared pictures with his co-stars Taapsee Pannu, Kanika Dhillon,and others from the set, offering fans a glimpse into the camaraderie and behind-the-scenes moments that made the film special.

Directed by Devashish Makhija and written by Kanika Dhillon, *Gandhari* promises to be a groundbreaking cinematic experience that blends myth and reality. The film will feature an impressive star cast, including Ishwak Singh, Taapsee Pannu, Sayani Gupta, Zakir Hussain and Hussain Dalal, each bringing their unique talent to the screen. Together, they weave a compelling narrative that explores themes of resilience, faith and sacrifice.





Paan Parda Zarda enters post-production

The much-anticipated gangster drama *Paan Parda Zarda* has officially completed its shoot. Starring Mona Singh, Tanya Maniktala and Priyanshu Painyuli in key roles, the web series delves into the dark and gritty world of illegal opium smuggling in central India.

Backed by Jio Studios and Reliance Entertainment, the show also boasts a stellar ensemble cast, including Tanvi Azmi, Sushant Singh, Rajesh Tailang and Manu Rishi.

Helming the project are accomplished directors Gurmmeet Singh (*Mirzapur, Inside Edge*) and Shilpi Dasgupta, alongside creative visionaries like Mrighdeep Singh Lamba (*Fukrey* franchise) and Suparn S Varma *(Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai, Family Man, Rana Naidu*). The series is further strengthened by the writing prowess of Hussain Dalal and Abbas Dalal (*Bambai Meri Jaan, Farzi, Brahmastra*), as well as Radhika Anand and Vibha Singh.

Producers Jyoti Deshpande and Namit Sharma have been instrumental in bringing this ambitious project to life.

Reflecting on the project, Mona Singh had earlier shared her excitement about being part of *Paan Parda Zarda*, calling it a "brand-new journey" in collaboration with Jio Studios.

"The series has a unique color and texture; it's a page-turner with elements of a love story, action and family drama, all set against the backdrop of illegal opium smuggling. The interwoven relationships are the key to this series, beautifully nuanced by an incredible writing team," she said.



Writer-director Mrighdeep Singh Lamba described the project as a labor of love, emphasizing the extensive research and preparation that went into crafting the narrative.

"We have worked on this story for years, ensuring every detail is authentic and engaging. The audience will enjoy watching the story unfold in a setting rarely explored on screen. This is a special moment for Gurmmeet, Shilpi and me—we've long dreamed of bringing this story to life."

Orry caught in controversy over alcohol near Holy shrine

Socialite and Bollywood insider Orhan Awatramani, popularly known as Orry, has landed in legal trouble after being accused of consuming alcohol near the Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra, Jammu and Kashmir. Along with seven others, including a Russian national, Orry has been charged by the local police for violating restrictions in the sacred area.

According to news agency ANI, the Jammu and Kashmir Police have registered an FIR (No. 72/25) at Katra Police Station against all eight individuals, citing violations of the District Magistrate's order and alleged offense to religious sentiments.

The alleged incident took place in the Cottage Suite area of Katra, which has stringent regulations prohibiting non-vegetarian food and intoxicants due to its proximity to the revered Vaishno Devi temple. The accused reportedly consumed alcohol at a hotel in this restricted zone.

As per Times Now, the individuals named in the FIR include Darshan Singh, Parth Raina, Ritick Singh, Rashi Dutta, Rakshita Bhogal, Shagun Kohli and Russian national Anastasila Arzamaskina.

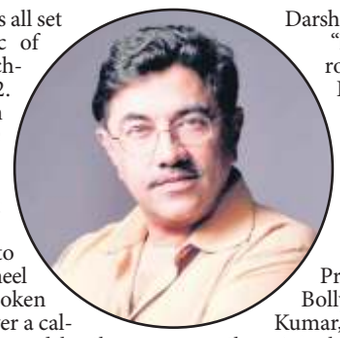
Following the complaint, a special investigative team was formed under the supervision of SP Katra, Dy SP Katra and SHO Katra. Authorities have confirmed that notices will be issued to all accused, directing them to cooperate with the investigation.

Reasi SSP has warned that strict action will be taken against anyone found violating the law, particularly in cases related to alcohol or drug consumption near religious sites.



Suneel Darshan reveals why he chose to make *Andaaz 2* after 22 years

Filmmaker Suneel Darshan is all set to bring back the magic of *Andaaz* (2003) with its much-anticipated sequel, Andaaz 2. With the teaser unveiled on January 31 and songs like *Tere Bin Kahin Dil Na Lagey, You're Beautiful* and *Ishq Junooni Hai* releasing in intervals, excitement is building among fans.



But what led to the decision to revisit *Andaaz* after 22 years? Suneel Darshan, in an interview has spoken about the sequel, which was never a calculated move, nor was it influenced by the blockbuster success of *Gadar 2* (2023).

"I didn't plan *Andaaz 2* because of any trend or comparison. When I wrote the script, I realized it naturally fit the title. While it's not the same story, the storytelling falls within the same zone—there's music, romance and a love triangle, just like *Andaaz*, but with much more to offer," he shared.

Casting the lead actor for *Andaaz 2* was an unexpected turn of events. While searching for supporting characters, Darshan stumbled upon Aayush Kumar.

"He was brought in for a different role entirely. But as I spoke to him, I saw something in him. That's when I decided—this guy should play the lead. I signed him on the spot! I don't think it even registered with him for some time that he had landed the lead role," Darshan laughed.

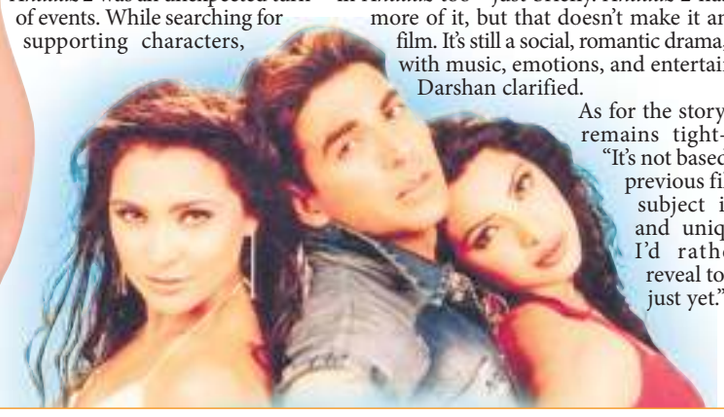
Given that *Andaaz* marked Priyanka Chopra and Lara Dutta's Bollywood debut alongside Akshay Kumar, many fans are curious whether the original star has been involved in *Andaaz 2* in any way. However, Darshan admitted that he hasn't been in touch with Akshay since their last collaboration on *Dosti* (2005).

"I haven't met him in years. We haven't crossed paths, except for a couple of times when he wished me on my birthday," he revealed.

While *Andaaz* was primarily a romantic drama, the teaser of *Andaaz 2* suggests a mix of emotions and action.

"Yes, there's some action, but there was action in *Andaaz* too—just briefly. *Andaaz 2* has a little more of it, but that doesn't make it an action film. It's still a social, romantic drama, packed with music, emotions, and entertainment," Darshan clarified.

As for the storyline, he remains tight-lipped. "It's not based on any previous film. The subject is fresh and unique and I'd rather not reveal too much just yet."



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

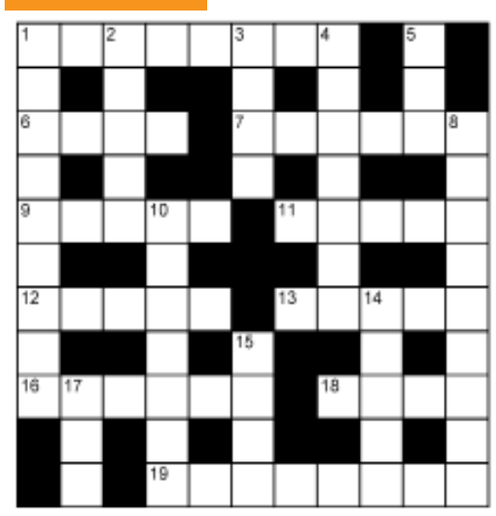
Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 The punishment announced to a criminal in court
6 Strong affection
7 To make or become larger
9 Bend
11 Salary
12 From Ireland
13 Go in
16 A stinging plant
18 A month
19 Recall

DOWN

1 Choice
2 Not ever
3 Requirement
4 Say why
5 Come first in a race
8 A type of warship
10 Someone who calls in to see you
14 You have one on each hand
15 Group of players in a game
17 Pixie

SOLUTION 843

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The Pioneer
Vijayawada

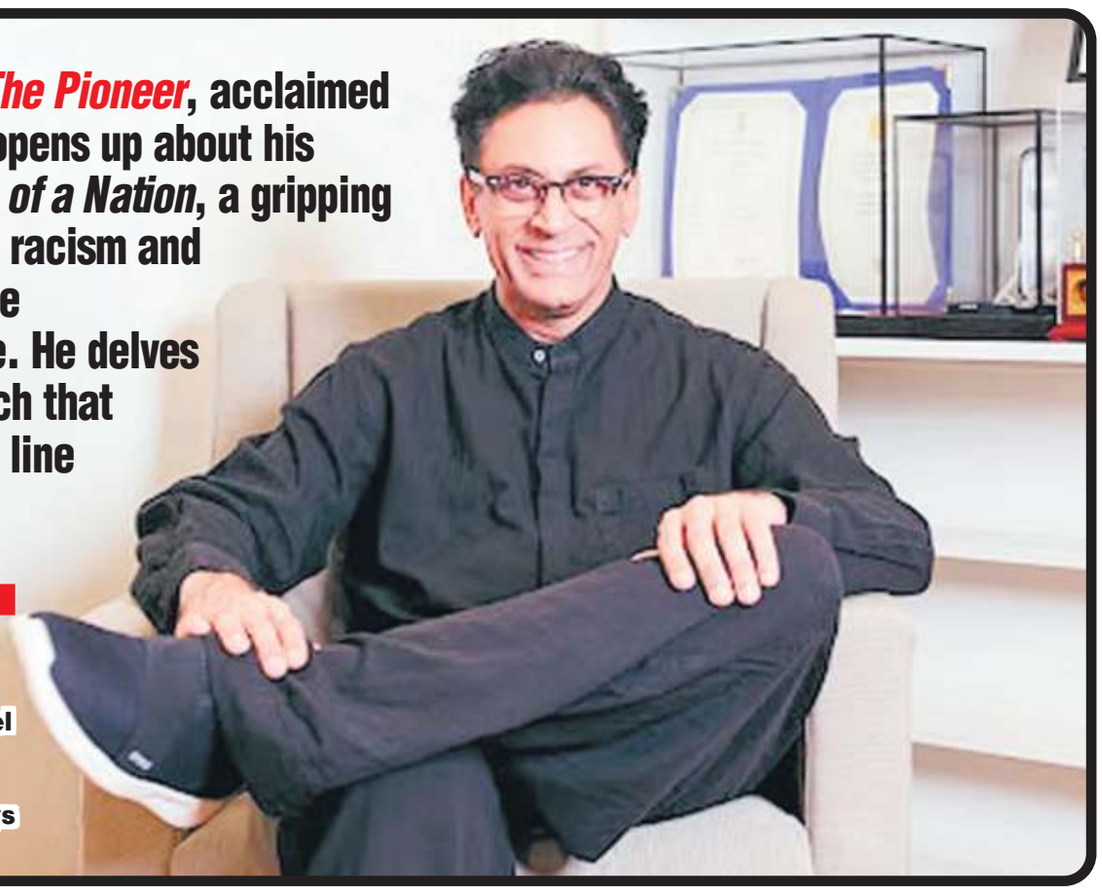
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Tuesday
March 18, 2025

Ram Madhvani: After years of intense stories, I want to make a full-blown masala film

TEJAL SINHA
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In an exclusive chat with *The Pioneer*, acclaimed filmmaker Ram Madhvani opens up about his latest project, *The Waking of a Nation*, a gripping exploration of colonialism, racism and the events leading up to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. He delves into the meticulous research that shaped the series, the fine line between fact and fiction



I don't sit down and think, 'Let me craft a strong female character.' I think about the person first—do I feel for their struggle? Do I care about their journey? Their gender then shapes their experience, but I always start with their internal conflict.

Ram Madhvani is no stranger to powerful storytelling. The director behind *Neerja, Aarya* and *Dhamaka* has always chosen stories that are more than just narratives—they are statements, questions and reflections on the world we live in. Storytelling, for him, has never been just about entertainment—it has always been about making a statement.

With his latest project, *The Waking of a Nation*, he delves into one of India's most painful historical moments—the Jallianwala Bagh massacre—but through a lens that goes beyond just the incident itself.

"This story isn't just about the massacre. It's about the colour of our skin, white superiority and the burden the British felt they had to 'civilize' us. It is about racism, prejudice, and colonialism. That's what really drew me to bringing this to the screen."

While many are familiar with the brutality of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, Madhvani was particularly interested in what led up to it and what followed. The series explores the Hunter Commission (then called the Punjab Disorders Committee), which was formed to investigate the events and the larger conspiracy surrounding British rule in India.

Writing *The Waking of a Nation* was a deeply research-intensive process. It took Madhvani and his co-writers, Shantanu Shrivastava and Chadhujjit Nath, three years to develop the script. "Everything we referenced is in the public domain," he says, adding that while the series is inspired by true events, it is ultimately historical fiction. "We've made it clear upfront that this is inspired by true events, unlike *Neerja*, which was based on a real-life person. Many elements in the show—like the diaries, the characters, the broader incidents—are based on reality, but a lot of it is fictional."

He describes the storytelling approach as faction—a term borrowed from the New Journalism movement of the 1970s, where fiction meets fact to create compelling narratives. The series follows a fictional protagonist, Kantilal, played by Taaruk Raina, whose personal transformation mirrors the larger awakening of a colonised nation.

"Kantilal starts as someone who is deeply influenced by British ideals, wearing suits, speaking English and believing in the empire. His journey is about shedding that blindfold—which is why, in our poster, we have a blindfold made of the Union Jack. That's what the show is about: realizing the truth about colonial rule."

A consistent element in Madhvani's work is the presence of strong, well-rounded female characters. From Sonam Kapoor in *Neerja* to Sushmita Sen in *Aarya* and Mrunal Thakur in *Dhamaka*, his films and series have frequently featured women who defy stereotypes.

"I don't sit down and think, 'Let me craft a strong female character,'" he clarifies. "I think about the person first—do I feel for their struggle? Do I care about their journey? Their gender then shapes their experience, but I always start with their internal conflict."

In *The Waking of a Nation*, Nikita Dutta plays Poonam, a woman who, much like other female characters in Madhvani's films, isn't defined by stereotypes but by her resilience. He credits the strong women in his own life—his mother, wife (and co-producer) Amita Madhvani, and many of his female colleagues—for shaping the way he writes female characters.

His admiration for Sonam Kapoor in Neerja is evident. "She gave herself completely to that role. She went through workshops, met Neerja Bhanot's family and trained as an air hostess to truly understand the character. Meeting Neerja's mother, Rama Bhanot, was a moment I'll never forget. That family's strength in overcoming their loss was incredibly moving."

Unlike *Aarya*, which was commissioned by Hotstar, *The Waking of a Nation* wasn't initially backed by a platform. It was developed independently by Ram Madhvani Films and only after the script was completed did the team approach Sony LIV.

"Saugata Mukherjee and the team at Sony LIV were incredibly supportive. They didn't just commission the project blindly—they read it, understood the vision and greenlit it after seeing the depth of the story. I'm grateful for the creative freedom they gave us, from casting to production."

Now that the series is gaining much appreciation, Madhvani is looking forward to a creative shift.

"I want to make a full-blown masala commercial Hindi film next," he laughs. "Something completely different. I've spent years working on these emotionally and narratively intense projects and I'm excited about the idea of doing something fun, over-the-top and purely entertaining."

But even as he considers the mainstream, he is also deeply intrigued by the future of cinema. Having just completed a short film in Virtual Reality (VR), Madhvani is exploring how AI and emerging technologies could reshape storytelling in the coming years.

"At the core, storytelling doesn't change. But the way we experience it will. Whether it's VR, AI, or other innovations, we're going to see a new cinematic language emerge and I want to be part of that evolution."

As always, Madhvani's focus remains on telling stories that matter. With *The Waking of a Nation*, he hopes audiences walk away with a deeper understanding of history—not just of colonialism, but of how narratives are shaped and controlled.

"Colonialism wasn't just about taking our land," he says. "It was about controlling our minds. And that's what we need to wake up to."

Rethinking home!

PNS|HYDERABAD

The traditional concept of 'home' is changing dramatically as the world grows more linked. Presenting Housr, a co-living revolution where like-minded people from various backgrounds come together to build thriving, cooperative communities that reinvent the art of cohabitation. It's a cultural revolution that honours the value of interdependence and group development rather than merely shared places!

Housr's co-founder and CEO, Deepak Anand, asks us to picture waking up surrounded by other innovators, entrepreneurs and creatives who are all driven by the same desire to live in a community. A contagious spirit that ignites deep connections, encourages creativity and motivates personal development permeates coliving places! Co-living communities are redesigning the urban landscape one shared kitchen, co-working lounge and communal garden at a time as the boundaries between work, play and life become increasingly hazy.

The co-living trend encourages you to become a part of a vibrant, constantly changing community of people who are reinventing what it means to live, work and flourish together, regardless of your background—whether you're a digital nomad, startup entrepreneur, or just an inquisitive person looking for connection.



What changes do you think the demand for co-living will undergo in 2025 as urbanisation picks up speed and remote employment changes residential preferences?

Co-living companies are expected to lead the way in 2025 by customising their services to each city's unique culture while maintaining the same high standards for comfort, connectivity and flexibility everywhere. As a result, it becomes important for companies to recognise and respond to the demand for experiences in various cities. We are preparing to update our products for 2025 in accordance with city-specific preferences and inclinations.

How do you strike a balance between luxury and accessibility, given that millennials and Gen Z are choosing real estate based on affordability concerns?

All of the homes are in the best locations around cities, giving residents excellent value for their money. We have created a cozy environment for them with convenient access to city activity. The subscription plans and clever pricing structure give today's kids the freedom to choose what best fits their budget. By implementing zero security deposit move-ins through platforms like CirclePe, we have done away with customary deposits and given residents access to the best-in-class living spaces at reasonable pricing. We are transforming shared living by staying sensitive to individual needs and offering flexible pricing.

Living spaces are becoming more and more personalised thanks to technology. What advancements in co-living do you think will become unavoidable over the next five years?

In order to make life more comfortable and convenient, co-living will rely more and more on AI-based technologies over the course of the next five years. While on-demand services will make it simple to meet individualised demands, AI-based space optimisation will allow people to make the most of their available space. To enable personalised living spaces, in-app hyper-personalization will become essential; the app will control everything from lighting to room adjustments. The residents' daily lives will be considerably made easier by these technology. These clever, practical solutions will be a top focus as co-living develops further, making them essential to modern living.

In what ways do you think this hybrid model will challenge the dominance of serviced apartments and hotels in urban markets?

By competing with conventional hotels and serviced apartments and providing a model that incorporates the finest aspects of each by enabling more flexible and communal stays, the co-living hybrid model has upended the hospitality sector. Co-living bridges the gap by combining the advantages of both models, whereas hotels focus on short-term visits and serviced apartments on long-term rentals. Business travellers can take advantage of first-rate accommodations with a dash of community and experiential perks when they book. In response to the growing need for adaptable living spaces that provide immersive experiences rather than just accommodation, this paradigm reimagines city life.

Experience is more important to post-pandemic travellers than lodging alone. How can it set itself apart in the hospitality industry by fusing upscale hotel-like amenities with intimate residential settings?

In order to give our residents an immersive experience, we have distinguished ourselves in the hospitality sector by fusing the coziness of home with the upscale amenities of a luxury hotel. We provide round-the-clock resident assistance through competent cleaning personnel, qualified hospitality workers and planned community events to strengthen ties amongst residents. Travellers looking for authentic, long-term experiences after the pandemic will find this balance appealing. Traditional hotel chains can learn from co-living and emphasise connection over short-term stays and personalised experiences, providing value beyond short-term accommodation.

How does it make sure that, rather than focusing on shared convenience, its common areas promote meaningful interactions?

We actively create micro-communities in addition to providing common areas. We ensure that residents participate in meaningful connections that go beyond convenience through carefully planned events and networking opportunities. We frequently host stand-up comedy, movie evenings, gaming and jam sessions, evening soirees, and more. These gatherings, which are based on common interests, provide a wonderful opportunity for residents to bond and foster a feeling of community. By placing a high value on purposeful community development, we hope to foster an environment where deep connections can grow.

How can co-living areas in build-to-suit houses be future-proofed so they can adjust to changing customer needs without requiring regular structural changes?

Above all, build-to-suit (BTS) homes provide flexibility. Their build-to-suit buildings' modular construction and creative, flexible layouts make it simple for co-living participants to modify the spaces to accommodate tenants' evolving lives. These buildings use smart technology that ensures lifespan and enhances operation, ensuring sustainability without requiring constant redesigns or significant overhauls. Flexible housing options are becoming more and more important as urban densities rise.

The concept of "home' is changing. Do you believe that build-to-suit co-living spaces might supplant traditional homeownership as the desired living model for the next generation in a society where people are looking for stability and mobility?

The idea of a home has changed as a result of the younger generation, especially Gen Z, being more interested in experiences than in ownership. Because they provide transportable, lifestyle-focused housing with community, convenience and flexibility as the main considerations, build-to-suit co-living spaces have become the perfect fit for their demands. Because of the dynamic and personalised environment these facilities provide, homeownership is no longer a requirement but rather an option. A few years from now, co-living may replace traditional ownership more than it will be a luxury option as a desired living model for future generations, as the attractiveness of stability increases along with mobility.



Healthy at every stage

In today's world, women have more control than ever over their health and well-being. With advances in medicine, nutrition, and fitness, age is truly just a number. Women in their 40s, 50s, and beyond are staying active, feeling vibrant, and living healthier lives. The key lies in adopting the right habits and maintaining a positive mindset.



PRIORITISE REGULAR EXERCISE

Staying active is one of the best ways to maintain health and vitality. Exercise improves heart health, strengthens bones and keeps muscles toned. Women should focus on a mix of:

- Cardio workouts like walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming to keep the heart strong.
- Strength training to maintain muscle mass and bone density, reducing the risk of osteoporosis.
- Flexibility and balance exercises such as yoga or Pilates to enhance mobility and prevent falls.
- Just 30 minutes of movement daily can make a significant difference in long-term health.

FOLLOW A NUTRITIOUS DIET

What women eat plays a crucial role in how they feel as they age. A balanced diet should include:

- Lean proteins (chicken, fish, beans, tofu) to maintain muscle strength.
- Healthy fats (avocados, nuts, olive oil) for brain function and heart health.
- Plenty of fiber from fruits, vegetables and whole grains to aid digestion.
- Calcium and vitamin D to support strong bones and prevent osteoporosis.
- Limiting processed foods, refined sugars and excessive alcohol can also help maintain energy levels and prevent chronic illnesses.

TAKE CARE OF HORMONAL HEALTH

Hormonal balance is essential for overall well-being. As women age, estrogen levels decline, which can affect mood, metabolism and bone health. Consulting a gynecologist or fertility specialist can help manage hormonal changes through:

- Lifestyle adjustments
- Natural supplements
- Hormone replacement therapy (if necessary)

PRIORITISE MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Staying healthy is not just about physical fitness—it's also about mental and emotional balance. Stress, anxiety and lack of sleep can accelerate aging. To maintain well-being:

- Practice mindfulness and meditation to reduce stress.
- Engage in hobbies and activities that bring joy.
- Build strong social connections to stay emotionally fulfilled.
- Ensure quality sleep (7-9 hours per night) for proper body recovery.

STAY ON TOP OF HEALTH SCREENINGS

Preventive care is crucial for long-term health. Regular check-ups and screenings help detect potential health issues early. Women should prioritize:

- Annual gynaecological exams with PAP smear and USG scan.
- Mammograms (as per age and risk factors)
- Bone density tests
- Heart health check-ups (cholesterol, blood pressure, diabetes screening)

Aging is a natural process, but how women age is in their control. By staying active, eating well, managing stress, and prioritizing health check-ups, women can feel younger, stronger and more vibrant at any age. It's never too late to invest in self-care—because age truly is just a number!

(The author, Dr. Smrithi D Nayak, is a Consultant - Obstetrics & Gynaecology, at Aster RV Hospital.)

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | MARCH 18, 2025

Inter Milan retain Serie A crown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Milan



Inter Milan took a significant step to keeping its Serie A crown with a 2-0 win at title rival Atalanta. Carlos Augusto and Lautaro Martinez scored in the second half to lift the league leader three points above second-placed Napoli and six points above third-placed Atalanta.

Napoli had earlier been held 0-0 at relegation-threatened Venezia.

The fight for the final Champions League spot is also tight, with just six points separating six teams in the race for fourth place after more misery for Juventus, which lost 3-0 at Fiorentina.

TOP SPOT

It was a head-to-head clash for top spot in Bergamo, with Atalanta knowing that victory would move it level on points with Inter and Napoli.

Both sides had great chances in an entertaining first half, with Inter going closest with less than seven minutes on the clock. Marcus Thuram was on the verge of wheeling away in celebration as he swept a finish past Atalanta goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi and toward the far corner, following good play with Lautaro Martinez. But his effort bounced off the base of the right post. At the other end, Inter goalkeeper Yann Sommer pulled off a fantastic save to fingertip Mario Pasalic's header over the bar. Inter broke the deadlock in the 54th minute, immediately after play resumed following a delay of several minutes as a fan got medical treatment in the stands.

A corner was whipped in from the right and Carlos Augusto rose relatively unmarked to head into the bottom left corner. It was only his third goal for Inter in two seasons at the club.

Lautaro thought he had doubled Inter's lead in the 71st but the whistle had already been blown for a foul by him on Berat Djimsiti.

Atalanta's chances of getting back into the match diminished nine minutes from time. Éderson was booked for dissent and then sarcastically applauded the referee, who showed the Atalanta midfielder a second yellow card and then a red.

Lautaro sealed the match six minutes later. Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini was still protesting the Ederson decision and he was also sent off.

Inter defender Alessandro Bastoni was also sent off following a second yellow card.

NAPOLI HELD AGAIN

It was another draw for Napoli its fifth in its last seven matches.

Napoli almost got off to the perfect start in Venice but Giacomo Raspadori's effort came off the left post in the fourth minute. Venezia also had plenty of chances, with the best opportunity coming three minutes from the break. Alex Meret did well to parry from Kike Pérez and Daniel Fila's follow-up was cleared off the line by Napoli defender Amir Rrahmani.

Napoli went even closer on the stroke of halftime but Ionut Radu pulled off a superb save to grasp Romelu Lukaku's header on the goalline.

It was a fourth straight draw for Venezia with two of those coming against Atalanta and Lazio but it remained in penultimate position in the standings, five points from safety.

MOTTA UNDER PRESSURE

Juventus coach Thiago Motta is under even more pressure after his team slipped out of the top four, shipping seven goals in two matches and scoring none.

Robin Gosens and Rolando Mandragora scored within two minutes of each other in the first half and Albert Guðmundsson added another after the break as Fiorentina moved to within five points of the top four.

Juve's season was already in tatters after a dismal 4-0 loss at home to Atalanta last weekend. The Bianconeri had also been eliminated from the Champions League and Italian Cup.

Motta's former team, Bologna, replaced Juventus in fourth after an impressive 5-0 drubbing of sixth-placed Lazio.

IPL: Omarzai's arrival at Punjab Kings delayed

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Afghanistan all-rounder Azamatullah Omarzai's arrival at Punjab Kings has been delayed due to personal reasons ahead of the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL).

The foreign players of Punjab Kings are arriving from Monday onwards but Omarzai, the ICC ODI Player of the Year, would be able to join the squad only on March 20.

Punjab Kings play their season opener against Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad on March 25.

The season also marks the start of captain Shreyas Iyer and head coach Ricky Ponting's journey at Punjab Kings. Ponting linked up with the team in Dharamsala.

The Indian players of the squad, including new recruit Yuzvendra Chahal, reached Chandigarh on Sunday night after a training camp in Dharamsala where they will play three home games this season.

Lead pacer Arshdeep Singh and captain Iyer, who were part of India's Champions Trophy squad, have also joined the team in Chandigarh. The Indian players were given a week off post the Champions Trophy triumph.

"Omarzai has some issue at home. He will be in India by March 20. The rest of the foreign players start trickling in from today," said an IPL source.

After guiding KKR to the title last season, Iyer will be expected to pull Punjab Kings out of doldrums after more than a decade of under-performance.

The squad is packed with all-rounders including Marco Jansen, Omarzai, Marcus Stoinis and Glenn Maxwell, who returns to the franchise.

Nathan Ellis yet to join CSK

Chennai Super Kings CEO Kasi Viswanathan said on Monday that Australian pacer Nathan Ellis is the only foreign recruit yet to join the team.

"All others including Rachin Ravindra and Devon Conway are here. Nathan will join soon," he said.

Among star Indian players, Ravindra Jadeja has already joined the team as well as recently retired R Ashwin, who returns to the franchise after a decade.

At Gujarat Titans, captain Shubman Gill joined the squad on Sunday night while the arrival of New Zealand batter Glenn Phillips is awaited.

"Glenn will be here by tomorrow," said a source.

BFI elections: Ajay Singh faces challenge from Kalita, Bhandari for President post

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Incumbent Boxing Federation of India (BFI) chief Ajay Singh, who is eyeing a third consecutive term as president, will be up against Secretary General Hemanta Kalita and Vice President Rajesh Bhandari when the BFI holds its long-awaited elections on March 28.

Singh is also the chairman of SpiceJet Airlines and his name was proposed by the Uttarakhand state body.

He will be challenged by Assam Amateur Boxing Association secretary Kalita, Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association president Bhandari.

Bhandari has also applied for the North Zone vice president's post, which he currently holds. Kerala State Amateur Boxing Association secretary D Chandralal is the fourth contender for the President's post.

The election will take place during BFI's Annual General Meeting in Gurugram. The last date for filing nominations was March 16.

Former Sports Minister Anurag Thakur was also expected to contest for the president's post, with the Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association sending his name as its representative.

His name, however, did not figure in the Electoral College finalised by Singh even though Kalita included him in a separate list. However, the Returning Officer R K Gauba, following established norms, approved the list given by the BFI head.

Singh had said Thakur was "ineligible" to represent Himachal Pradesh.

Thakur's faction has not ruled out taking legal action against that decision.

For the secretary's post, multiple candidates have entered the fray, including Uttar Pradesh's Pramod Kumar, Karnataka's Satish N, Odisha's Anil Kumar Bohidar, and incumbent treasurer Digvijay Singh (Madhya Pradesh). Digvijay has also filed a nomination for the treasurer's post.

Eight zonal vice presidents and an equal number of zonal joint secretaries are also to be elected.

The scrutiny of nominations will take place on Tuesday, while the publication of the list of valid nominations and withdrawals are scheduled for March 19. The BFI elections have been significantly delayed. The body was supposed to conduct them before February 2 and federation sources said it was due to the ongoing turmoil in international boxing administration. A new world body is expected to take charge this week after the International Boxing Association was suspended for corruption and governance related issues.

Last month, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) formed a five-member ad hoc committee to oversee boxing affairs in the country. The move was promptly stayed by the Delhi High Court after the federation challenged it, calling it "arbitrary and illegal."

Men's national hockey camp begins at SAI Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

> During this camp, our focus will be more on fitness and conditioning apart from introspecting on recent performances
>
> — CRAIG FULTON, CHIEF COACH

The men's national hockey camp, featuring a 36-member core probable group, began at the SAI Centre here on Monday, with chief coach Craig Fulton saying the focus will be on "introspecting" on recent performances.

The camp will conclude on March 28. "It has been a busy season for the players with back-to-back events and high-quality matches. During this camp, our focus will be more on fitness and conditioning apart from introspecting on the recent performances and where we stand in terms of key focus areas," Fulton was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

"Our efforts now will be towards building up for the matches in the next phase of Pro League in Europe and I will also be interested in seeing how some of the fresh talents live up to the billing," he added.

Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Pawan, Suraj Karkera and Mohith Honnenahalli Shashikumar are the goalkeepers who have been named in the core group, while Jarmanpreet Singh, Amit Rohidas, Sumit, Sanjay, Jugraj Singh, Amandeep Lakra, Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Varun Kumar and Yashdeep Siwach are the defenders.

Rajkumar Pal, Shamsher Singh, Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Mohd Raheel Mouseen, Vishnukant Singh, Rajinder Singh and Poovanna CB are the midfielders named in the core probable group.

Faf du Plessis appointed vice-captain of Delhi Capitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

South African batting stalwart Faf du Plessis was on Monday appointed vice-captain of Delhi Capitals team for the upcoming Indian Premier League season beginning on March 22.

The former South Africa captain will be Axar Patel's deputy in the Delhi-based franchise. Axar was named DC captain on Friday."I am very excited. Delhi has been great and the boys have been fantastic. Definitely, I feel happy and ready," the right-handed batter said in a video uploaded by the franchise.

The 40-year-old du Plessis led Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the last three seasons of the IPL. However, he was not retained by RCB ahead of the mega auction last year.



Cricket would always be my greatest ally: Hardik

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

From incessant boos to frenzied adulation star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya has seen it all in the last few months, during which his life underwent a "360 degree turnaround" and keeping him afloat in the turmoil was his determination to "never leave the battlefield".

As he gears up for his second IPL season as Mumbai Indians captain, Pandya can expect a markedly warmer reception at the Wankhede after playing crucial roles in India's T20 World Cup and the ICC Champions Trophy triumphs.

The backlash he faced in IPL 2024 was triggered by the team's decision to hand him the leadership role, replacing Mumbai's very own Rohit Sharma, who led the franchise to five trophies.

"For me, it has always been about never leaving the battlefield. There have been phases in my career where my focus wasn't necessarily on winning but on surviving and holding my ground," Pandya told 'JioHotstar' ahead of the IPL starting March 22.

"I realised that no matter what was happening around me, cricket would always be my greatest ally...I kept pushing through, and when all the hard work finally paid off, it was beyond anything I could have scripted.

"The six-month phase where we won the World Cup, and then the kind of love and support I received upon returning -- it was a complete 360-degree turnaround for me," he added.

The 31-year-old said he never wavered from the belief that if he remained persistent, he would come out stronger.

"I didn't know exactly when that would happen, but as they say, destiny had its plan, and in my case, everything changed within two and a half months," he said.

Pandya played a pivotal role with the new ball along side Mohammed Shami in India's victorious Champions Trophy campaign recently in the absence of Jasprit Bumrah. He was also a part of India's T20 World Cup-winning squad in the Americas last year.

The 2024 IPL season was challenging for him as MI finished at the bottom of the points table. But Pandya said MI have put together a well-balanced squad and is optimistic about the team's chances this year.

"Having played in the IPL for almost 11 years now, each season brings new energy and fresh positivity. The 2024 season was undoubtedly challenging for us as a group, but it also provided invaluable lessons," Pandya said.

"We analysed those learnings and applied them while building our team for 2025. This time, we have assembled an experienced squad players who have played a lot of cricket at the highest level. That in itself is exciting.

Pandya said the side has been focussed on building a strong bowling attack, considering that Wankhede is a "challenging venue". "Playing in the IPL in Mumbai, particularly at Wankhede, can be intimidating due to the high-scoring nature of the pitch. We wanted bowlers with experience, pace, and the ability to generate swing and bounce.

"I believe we have put together a well-balanced team, one that meets all our requirements from top to bottom. Now it's about turning up and delivering on the field." To all the youngsters who would new to the glitzy league, Pandya has just one message.

Inzamam expresses concern over Pakistan cricket's decline

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lahore

> I would think that the cricket board now needs to learn from its mistakes and not repeat the same mistakes we have made in the last two years.
>
> — INZAMAM-UL-HAQ, EX-PAKISTAN CRICKETER

Former national team captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has expressed his concern over the constant decline in Pakistan cricket and attributed it to the mistakes made by those running the game in the country.

Inzamam told the media in Lahore that there had been a rapid decline in the performance of the national team in the last two years.

"We are not working in the right direction and making the wrong calls in many areas," he said.

The former chief selector warned that the team would continue to spiral downwards if there is no planning and execution. He blamed frequent changes in the team's management, coaches, and players for the chaotic situation.

"I would think that the cricket board now needs to learn from its mistakes and not repeat the same mistakes we have made in the last two years.

"In the past two years, the performance of the Pakistan team has been on a decline. If we don't work in the right direction, we will continue to fall further," said Inzamam.

The former captain himself has been a victim of the chaos in the PCB as he was forced to step down as chief selector in 2023 after the board mishandled a matter relating to conflict of interest.

He made it clear that constant changes in team management is not a solution to the problem.

"We need to sit down and think about where the mistakes are being made."

Inzamam said that being a former captain and player he knew that when constant changes are made, it only undermines the players.

"Instead of making too many changes, we need to think carefully about where things are going wrong. If there are constant changes, players won't gain the confidence they need, and the situation will remain the same," he further said.

The former captain also said he remained a big supporter of Babar Azam whom he described as a top player.

"Babar Azam is a top player. Everyone goes through a rough patch, but the national team hasn't been playing good cricket for the past few months," he added. "Trust the management and the players, and work together to identify where the mistakes are," he said.

To a question about the role of the stars from the 1990s and the impact they had, Inzamam made it clear that the players from that era will hold special place in Pakistan cricket.

"If we look at the players from the 90s generation, Pakistan cricket would lose its strength without them," he concluded.

Rory McIlroy, JJ Spaun tie in The Players Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ponte Vedra Beach (US)



Rory McIlroy had every reason to think he would be leaving The Players Championship with the gold trophy and a big payoff.

He was three shots ahead of JJ Spaun after a four-hour rain delay and had a rain-softened course ahead of him.

Spaun refused to give in easily. He caught McIlroy with two great shots, held his nerve down one of the most daunting closing stretches and it ended in a draw when it was too dark for a three-hole aggregate playoff.

This David-and-Goliath battle won't be decided until Monday morning at the TPC Sawgrass. McIlroy, keeping an eye on Spaun while playing in the group ahead of him, needed two putts from 75 feet on the par-4 18th for a 4-under 68. Then he had to wait until Spaun (72) came within inches of making a 30-foot birdie putt for the win.

"Everyone expects him to win," said Spaun, who has one PGA Tour title and has never reached the Tour Championship. "I don't think a lot of people expect me to win. I expect myself to win. That's all I care about." McIlroy made birdie before and after the delay to build his lead to three shots. He played the final six holes in 1 over, and his 4-foot par putt on the 18th nearly slid out of hole.

"I'm standing here feeling like I should be going home with the trophy today," McIlroy said. "But it's all right. I'll reset and try to go home with the trophy tomorrow."

They finished at 12-under 276.

They did well to finish in regulation before sunset. The Players has a three-hole aggregate playoff on the most memorable holes on the TPC Sawgrass — the par-5 16th, the island green on the par-3 17th and the 18th hole that requires the boldest of tee shots with water all the way down the right and trees to the right.

It will be the first Monday finish at The Players Championship since Cameron Smith won in 2022, and the first playoff since Rickie Fowler won 10 years ago.

"You've got to make five good swings. That's all it is," said McIlroy, a four-time major champion with 38 titles worldwide. "So try to get up there, make five good swings tomorrow morning and get this thing done."

Tom Hoge had to wait out the four-hole delay before facing a 15-foot birdie putt on the 18th. He missed, posting a 66 and wound up two shots behind. Lucas Glover rallied from a rough front nine for a 71 and joined Hoge and Akshay Bhatia (70). They each earned $1,325,000 for the tie for third from the $25 million purse, the richest in golf. Bud Cauley, who thought his career was over from crushing injuries in a 2018 car crash in Ohio, fell back early and steadied himself for a 74. He tied for sixth, giving him more than enough points to fulfill his medical exemption for the rest of the year.

McIlroy faced a four-shot deficit going into the final round and roared into contention with an 8-foot birdie putt and beautiful long iron to 10 feet for eagle on the par-5 second. He took the lead for the first time when Spaun made bogey on the seventh hole. Spaun caught a big break on the ninth hole when his second shot was in the collar of deep rough. He got relief from standing on a sprinkler head, then more relief when his drop was in the sprinkler head, leading to a clean lie. He chipped to 6 feet for birdie.

Still, McIlroy appeared to start pulling away right before and after the four-hour delay from a band of thunderstorms moving across north Florida.

He holed a 12-foot birdie putt on the par-5 11th to reach 12 under. Spaun, playing in the group behind him, was in trouble in a bunker well short of the green. Four hours later, McIlroy made a 15-foot birdie on the 12th, while Spaun barely got the bunker shot on the green and made bogey with a three-putt from some 70 feet.

"Once that bogey kind of hit me, I just tried to just fight back," Spaun said. "I kind of went with the odds. I had nothing to lose. Now I'm trying to catch Rory, and I can't really control what he does, but I can control what I do, and I just started committing to my shots and my swing and trusting it more.

"When I'm hunting, it's easier to let it go. Whereas, starting the round I was a little tentative, a little scared and stuff," he said. "I think it put me in a pretty comfortable spot to finish off the round."

McIlroy fanned a drive well right on the 14th, couldn't reach the green, leading to bogey. Even so, the one-quarter inch of rain softened the green. The 15 mph wind all but vanished. The Stadium course was vulnerable. McIlroy, however, missed a birdie chance from just inside 6 feet on the 15th and didn't judge the speed of the green on the par-5 16th on his chip, leaving it 12 feet short. Another miss.

Behind him, Spaun threw a dart to a foot on the 14th for birdie, and chipped tight at the 16th for a birdie that tied him for the lead. Both found land on the island at the 17th McIlroy against the collar for an awkward stab at his 15-foot birdie attempt, Spaun lagging beautifully from 45 feet on a putt that is slow up the slope and races to the pin.

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WHAT IF A VEHICLE HAD A LIFE? *TUK TUK* DIRECTOR SHARES HIS VISION



Directed by Supreet Krishna, *Tuk Tuk* is all set to hit the cinemas on March 21. Ahead of the release, he shares some interesting ideas

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March 21 will witness several small-budget films releasing on the big screens and *Tuk Tuk* is one of them. Directed by Supreet Krishna, the film stars Saanvi Megghana and Nihal Kodhati in lead roles, with Harsha Roshan (*Court* fame), Karthikeya Dev, and Steven Madhu playing key characters.

"We selected all the actors through auditions," said Supreet Krishna. He further mentioned that some of the young actors have already gained popularity, which could benefit the film's success.

Speaking about the film's inspiration, Supreet revealed that the idea stemmed from a vehicle he saw in a cricket advertisement. "What if a vehicle had a life of its own?" he wondered. This thought sparked a concept that blends humour, fantasy and emotions, all wrapped in a commercial package.

Addressing comparisons with past Telugu films where vehicles played pivotal roles, such as *Bamma Mata Bangaru Bata, Mechanic Mavayya* and *Karu Diddina Kaapuram*, Supreet clarified, "*Tuk Tuk* is an entirely original film. It is neither copied from nor inspired by any other movie." Interestingly, while the story is set in Chittoor, the film was entirely shot near Amalapuram. "We wanted to capture the monsoon season, so we chose Amalapuram for the shoot," said the director.

The story follows three teenage boys, played by Harsha, Karthikeya and Madhu, who were cast after rigorous auditions and workshops. The film's central character is the vehicle Tuk Tuk, which is not just a mode of transport but an entity that knows the past, present, and future. It humorously responds to questions while carrying a deep emotional core.

Harsha Roshan, who gained attention with *Court*, plays a major role in *Tuk Tuk*. "Yes, he has a significant part in our film as well," the director confirmed. He added that the film incorporates elements of fantasy, mystery, and a well-structured screenplay while maintaining a strong commercial appeal. A native of a village near Chittoor, Supreet Krishna previously worked as a writer for Puri Jagannadh. He also directed Alanaati Sitralu, which was released directly on OTT. *Tuk Tuk* marks his official directorial debut in feature films.

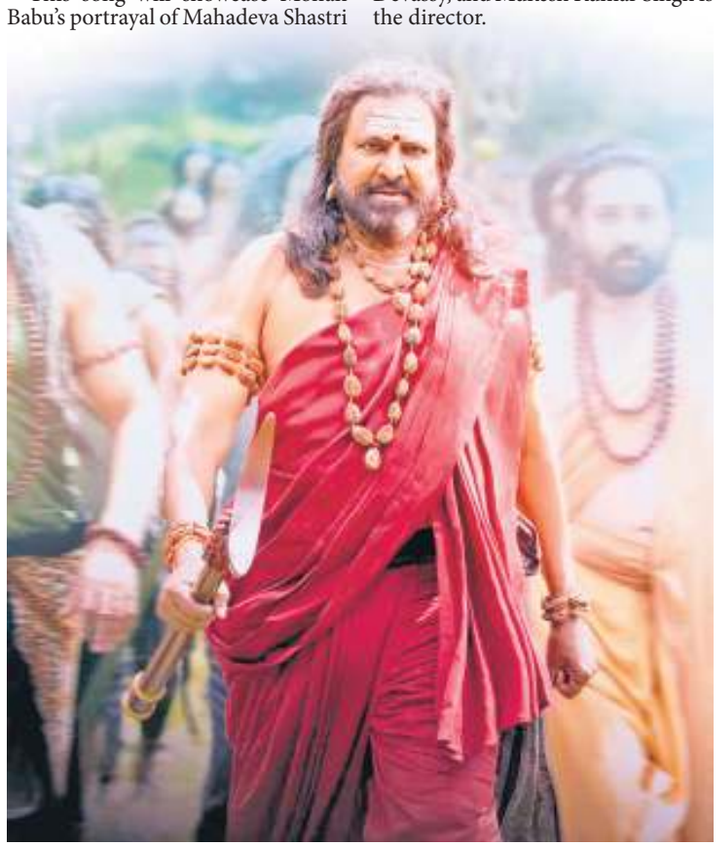
Interestingly, he hinted at plans to develop a franchise, with each film centered around a different vehicle with a unique backstory. "I want to explore fresh and innovative subjects, just like *Tuk Tuk*," he said when asked about his future plans.

Glimpse of Mohan Babu from *Kannappa* on March 19

Manchu Vishnu's dream project, *Kannappa*, is all set to hit the screens on April 25. Vishnu's father and producer, Mohan Babu, plays a crucial role as Mahadeva Shastri in the film. Vishnu, who began promotions for the movie several weeks ago, is set to release a song on March 19 to celebrate Mohan Babu's birthday.

This song will showcase Mohan Babu's portrayal of Mahadeva Shastri in the film. As both the producer and the powerhouse behind the character, Mohan Babu's birthday provides the perfect occasion to launch this high-energy, impactful track.

The film boasts an impressive star cast, including Prabhas, Mohan Lal, Akshay Kumar and Kajal Agarwal. Music for the film has been composed by renowned music director Stephen Devassy, and Mukesh Kumar Singh is the director.





SUKUMAR'S NEXT WITH SHAH RUKH KHAN?

It is not new for South Indian directors to helm Hindi films. In earlier times, filmmakers like K. Raghavendra Rao, Bapayya, Tatineni Rama Rao, Dasari Narayana Rao, Mani Ratnam, Priyadarshan and Ram Gopal Varma made significant contributions to Bollywood.

More recently, directors like A.R. Murugadoss, Atlee Kumar, Sandeep Reddy Vanga and Gowtam Tinnanuri have made their mark in the Hindi film industry.

Now, the latest buzz is that Pushpa director Sukumar is all set to make his Bollywood debut. Reports suggest that he will be directing none other than the 'Badshah of Bollywood,' Shah Rukh Khan. Shah Rukh Khan previously worked with South Indian director Atlee for *Jawan*, which was a massive success. Now, reports indicate that he is gearing up for another collaboration with a South director—this time, Sukumar, who has delivered back-to-back blockbusters, including the recently released *Pushpa 2*. According to reports, the film is expected to be a rural political action drama that will present SRK in a never-before-seen avatar. Sukumar, known for his perfectionism, taking on a project with Shah Rukh Khan has already generated immense excitement in the film industry. Additionally, reports suggest that SRK will play an anti-hero in this film.

However, one concern remains—Sukumar's filmmaking process is known to take time. Throughout his career, he has taken over a year to complete each of his projects. Even with *Pushpa* and its sequel, the process took nearly four and a half years. This raises the question: Will Sukumar be able to complete his film with SRK within a stipulated timeline?

Moreover, Sukumar is currently committed to *RC 17* with Ram Charan, followed by *Pushpa 3: The Rampage*. Meanwhile, Shah Rukh Khan is occupied with multiple projects, including *King*, an action drama set to begin filming in May 2025, followed by *Pathaan 2*, the sequel to his 2023 box-office juggernaut. Given their packed schedules, it appears that Sukumar and Shah Rukh Khan might only be able to collaborate post-2027.



Tamannah to romance Chiranjeevi?

Director Anil Ravipudi is all set to begin his next project with Megastar Chiranjeevi. The film is expected to start shooting this summer, with a planned release date during the Sankranthi festival in 2026. The director has already made plans to complete the film in a single schedule and has roped in Tamannaah Bhatia as the female lead.

Interestingly, Tamannaah has worked with Anil Ravipudi in two successful films, *F2 and F3* and she also starred opposite Chiranjeevi in *Bhola Shankar* and *Sye Raa Narasimha Reddy*.

Despite some reports of a misunderstanding between Tamannaah and Anil Ravipudi after *F3*, both have since clarified that it was a minor issue. Tamannaah also expressed her respect for the director and mentioned that she was upset by the rumors.

Now, Anil Ravipudi has approached Tamannaah to play the female lead in Chiranjeevi's upcoming film, and according to sources, she has already given her nod to the project. On the other hand, Tamannaah is currently playing the female lead in *Odela 2*, which is still under production. She's also been a talk-of-the-town with rumours of her breakup with Vijay Varma.

Nani's *Court* emerges as a blockbuster; Kiran Abbavaram's *Dilruba* faces box office woes



Last week saw the release of two notable Telugu films—*Court*, a courtroom drama produced by Nani and *Dilruba*, starring Kiran Abbavaram.

Prior to Court's release, *Nani* made a bold statement, challenging audiences that if they didn't like the film, they could skip his upcoming project *Hit 3*. His confidence paid off—*Court* has turned into a massive blockbuster.

In just three days, the film recovered its production costs and started generating profits. The OTT rights have already been sold for a lucrative amount. The movie has grossed approximately Rs 24 crore within its opening weekend.

Directed by debutant Ram Jagadeesh, the film has also performed well in overseas markets. Veteran actor Sivaji, who plays a crucial role as Mangapathi, has made a strong comeback with this film. Priyadarshi also plays a significant role, while Sridevi and Harsha Roshan star as the young lead pair.

On the other hand, Kiran Abbavaram's *Dilruba* has failed to make an impact. Directed by debutant Vishnu Karun, the film received negative reviews right from its premiere screenings. Poor word-of-mouth further diminished its chances at the box office.

After delivering a hit with *KA*, Kiran Abbavaram had high expectations for *Dilruba*, but unfortunately, it has backfired completely.



SIVAJI'S STRONG SECOND INNINGS

Actor Sivaji, known primarily for his roles in entertainment, has recently grabbed the attention of audiences with his performances in serious roles. After a long break, he made a significant comeback with the web series *90s A Middle-Class Biopic* on ETV Win, which became an instant hit. This success led to a spike in the channel's subscriptions. Sivaji played the roles of a father and a teacher, earning widespread appreciation for his performance. Following this, Sivaji appeared as Mangapathi in the recently released *Court*, where his performance was highly praised. At the success meet of the film, Sivaji shared, "I have been waiting for this role for the last fifteen years, and now I got my chance with this role."

Sivaji, who had previously starred as the lead actor in several films before taking a break, also participated in *Bigg Boss* to introduce himself to the new generation of viewers. He later landed the role in the web series *90s*. His portrayal of Mangapathi in *Court*, produced by Nani and directed by debutant Ram Jagadish, has been hailed as one of his finest. His intense performance and powerful dialogue delivery have received significant praise from audiences.



Sivaji added, "After *90s A Middle-Class Biopic*, I got many offers to play father or brother roles, but I didn't want to repeat the same thing. I waited for the right opportunity, and finally, I got my chance with *Court*."

Although Priyadarshi played the lead role with a young cast, and other actors like Sai Kumar and Harshavardhan were also part of the film, it was Sivaji's role and his strong performance that became the film's backbone. While many actors attempt comebacks, few succeed with such a compelling role.

PIC TALK





Namrata Shirodkar, representing the Mahesh Babu Foundation, inaugurated Andhra Pradesh's first-ever Mother's Milk Bank at Andhra Hospitals, marking a significant step in neonatal healthcare. The facility will provide vital support to newborns whose mothers are unable to produce milk, ensuring their health and nutrition through carefully screened donations.