VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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Modi govt uplifted India's health infrastructure: **Shah** 5

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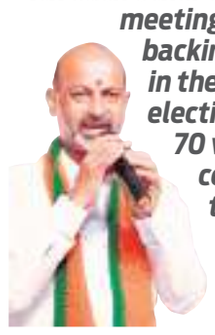


Kalyan Shankar on *Mad Square* success: 'Didn't expect such huge **COLLECTIONS'** P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

The Congress and the BRS are trying to ensure the AIMIM candidate's victory. These two joined hands at the southern states meeting held in the name of delimitation, and are now coordinating with each other to organise a public meeting in Hyderabad. They are backing the AIMIM candidate in the GHMC Local Body MLC elections. The BRS has around 70 votes, but it is not contesting. The Congress, too, has not fielded a candidate. Isn't this clear evidence of their collusion?



— Bandi Sanjay Kumar, MoS Home P4

DON'T MISS...

Help build Swarna AP, students told

Minister for Medical and Health, Satya Kumar Yadav, urged students to actively participate in the realisation of Vikisit Bharat and a prosperous Swarna Andhra Pradesh, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. He made this appeal during the inauguration of the new building for Saraswati Vidya Mandir in Chatragadda village, Repalle rural mandal. Addressing the gathering, Minister Satya Kumar Yadav emphasised the importance of pursuing education in one's mother tongue...

-PAGE: 4

NDRF retrieves seven bodies

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) on Monday recovered seven bodies from the earthquake flattened buildings in Mandalay region of Myanmar after the Indian rescuers were tasked with launching relief and rescue operations in about a dozen buildings, official sources said. The Myanmarese authorities have assigned various sectors to different foreign rescue agencies which have come to help the country that was shaken by a devastating 7.7-magnitude quake on Friday claiming...

-PAGE: 5

external debt rises to US$ 717.9 bn

India's external debt increased by 10.7 per cent to US$ 717.9 billion at the end of December 2024 from US$ 648.7 billion in December 2023, as per the data released by the finance ministry. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, there is a 0.7 per cent increase in external debt from the level of US$ 712.7 billion at the end of September 2024, according to India's Quarterly External Debt Report. The external debt to GDP ratio stood at 19.1 per cent at the end of December 2024, against 19 per cent in September 2024, it said...

-PAGE: 8

LSG eye win against Punjab Kings

New skipper Rishabh Pant will be eager to make his mark as Lucknow Super Giants look to win their first home game of the season when they host an in-form Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Tuesday. Pant, who became IPL's most expensive player in the auction last year, will be determined to justify his hefty `27 crore price tag after low returns as a batter in the first two games. His captaincy at LSG started with an unfortunate loss, as they fell short by just one wicket against his former team...

-SPORTS

CM sets 'P4' policy in motion

CALLS IT A GAME-CHANGING MISSION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has expressed confidence that the P4 initiative will be a game-changer in the State, particularly for the underprivileged. Speaking at the launch event of P4 in Amaravati on Sunday, the Chief Minister described P4 as a mission dedicated to poverty alleviation and pledged that it would have a transformative impact on society.

Chandrababu Naidu, along with Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, unveiled the logo for the P4 initiative, marking the commencement of the programme on the auspicious occasion of Ugadi, the Telugu New Year.

The Chief Minister emphasised that any programme launched on Ugadi has historically been successful, and he hopes the P4 initiative will follow this tradition.

"P4 is an extraordinary scheme designed to lift the poor out of poverty," Naidu said. "We are working together with Pawan Kalyan, who is always thinking about the future of the state, and with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose vision is to position India at the top globally."

Continued on Page 2

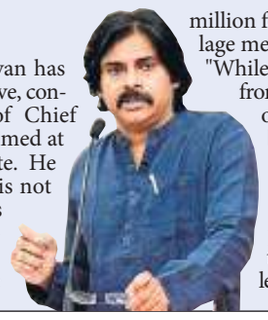




- **Political collaboration:** Naidu highlights his partnership with Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to drive State development.
- **Naidu's legacy:** He reflects on his 47-year political journey, crediting his mentor NT Rama Rao and reiterating his dedication to public service.
- **Economic growth targets:** Naidu projects an increase in per capita income from Rs 2.98 lakh to Rs 5.42 lakh by 2028-29, aiming for Rs 55 lakh by 2047.
- **Good governance:** CM reassures the public of his integrity, defends his family's business involvement, and promises the P4 initiative's success.

Fight against poverty has begun: Pawan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan has announced the launch of the P-4 initiative, conceptualised under the leadership of Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu, aimed at achieving "Zero Poverty" in the State. He emphasised that the P-4 programme is not merely about financial aid but focuses on development through public-private-people partnerships.

Dy CM Pawan revealed that three million families would be identified through village meetings for participation in the initiative. "While the previous government sought stakes from businesses looking to invest in the state, our coalition government is asking these businesses to support the growth of the people at the grassroots level," he stated.

Pawan Kalyan recalled, "Exactly a year ago, both the Chief Minister and I participated in a programme with the aspiration that the Telugu people should thrive, regardless of where they are."

Continued on Page 2



I & PR Minister Kolusu Parthasarathy inspecting the arrangements for CM's visit to Kotha Gollapalem village in Bapatla district on Tuesday.

'CM working to create 20L jobs for youth'

All set for distribution of NTR Bharosa pensions today

PNS ■ BAPATLA

State Information and Public Relations and Housing Minister and district in-charge, Kolusu Parthasarathi, stated that Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu is taking necessary steps to create 20 lakh job opportunities for the youth. On Monday, the Minister visited Kotha Gollapalem village in Chinnaganjam Mandal, Bapatla district, to inspect arrangements for the CM's visit on April 1. He was accompanied by Revenue Minister Anagani Sathya Prasad and Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar.

Minister Kolusu Parthasarathi said that the state government distributes NTR Bharosa pensions to 64 lakh beneficiaries every month on the 1st. The pensions were increased from Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 in the very month the government assumed office, fulfilling the Chief Minister's election promise. "In contrast, the previous government took five years to raise pensions by just Rs 1,000," he added.

Continued on Page 2

Vizag will overtake Hyd in growth: Lokesh

Outlines plans for IT expansion and infrastructure development

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam is on the fast track to becoming a major economic powerhouse, with Minister for IT & HRD, Nara Lokesh, expressing confidence that the city will soon outpace Hyderabad in development. Speaking at the foundation stone-laying ceremony for a hotel to be constructed by Varun Group at RK Beach, Lokesh underscored the city's growing industrial and IT potential.

Reaffirming the government's dedication to progress, Lokesh highlighted several transformative initiatives undertaken in Visakhapatnam over the past ten months. He



announced an ambitious plan to create five lakh IT jobs over the next five years, positioning the city as Andhra Pradesh's iconic capital. Additionally, he emphasised efforts to establish Visakhapatnam as India's fifth economic capital, ensuring balanced growth across various sectors.

Acknowledging the overwhelming electoral support, Lokesh noted that the city delivered the highest-majority seats in the state, reaffirming public trust in the administration's vision. Highlighting the significance of the Varun Bay Sands Hotel, Lokesh stated that the project would elevate Andhra Pradesh's tourism sector and bring national recognition. He credited Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for spearheading the state's rapid advancement in industrial, tourism, and IT sectors.

Continued on Page 2

Reliance to launch first CBG plant in Kanigiri tomorrow

- Nara Lokesh and Anant Ambani to attend inauguration
- Plans for 500 CBG plants across AP: Minister Gottipati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The much-anticipated inauguration of Reliance's first Compressed Bio Gas (CBG) plant in Kanigiri is scheduled for April 2. The event will be attended by State Minister Nara Lokesh and Reliance's Anant Ambani. Energy Minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar, who reviewed preparations for the ceremony on Monday, confirmed that both the state minister and Anant Ambani would jointly attend the event.

During his visit, Minister Ravi Kumar emphasised that the government has been focusing on various initiatives to enhance the financial conditions of farmers and provide employment opportunities for young people. He stated that one key measure involves utilising unused land for the construction of CBG plants. These lands, which previously generated a minimal income of just Rs 4,000 to Rs 5,000 in rental yields, will now be leased for CBG production. Farmers will earn up to Rs 31,000 for leased land and up to Rs 15,000 for government-owned land, according to the minister. Furthermore, even if farmers do not lease the land but instead cultivate the required grasses for the plant, they will still benefit financially.

Continued on Page 2



4 of family die in mishap

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

In a horrific road accident, four members of a family, including a six-month-old infant, were killed and two others injured when the car they were travelling in collided with a lorry at Puligadda in Avanigadda mandal on NH 216 on Monday.

CI Yuva Kumar stated that a six-member family was travelling from Tenali to the Subramanyeswara Swamy temple in Mopidevi when their car crashed into a lorry on the highway.

The accident claimed the lives of Gidugu Ravindra Mohan Babu (55), his wife G Aruna (50), their grandson Satwik (5), and the six-month-old infant. Gidugu Sandeep and Pallavi sustained injuries and were admitted to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Avanigadda.

Ravindra Mohan Babu, Aruna, and the infant were killed on the spot, while Satwik succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at GGH.

Woman undertrial ends life in jail

PNS ■ ELURU

Two sub-jail staff members have been suspended in connection with the suicide of a woman remand prisoner.

According to the police, Gandham Santha Kumari (37) was sent to judicial remand in connection with the murder of her husband, Gandham Bose. She was accused of killing him with the help of her paramour, Songa Gopal, on March 24.

Continued on Page 2

Action plan to strengthen Vizag Steel Plant

CM holds talks with Union Steel Ministry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The central and state governments are jointly working on a comprehensive action plan to strengthen the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. In this regard, a team from the Union Ministry of Steel held discussions with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu at his residence in Undavalli on Monday. The meeting primarily focused on the post-approval measures and subsequent developments following the NDA government's approval of a special package to strengthen the plant.

During the meeting, Union Minister of State for Steel, Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma, expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister for the state government's initiative in providing security to the plant through the Special Protection Force (SPF). Discussions also covered the need for regular monitoring of the plant's progress, the re-establishment of the third blast furnace alongside the two currently operational furnaces, and other key areas for improvement.

The Chief Minister highlighted the deep emotional connection the state shares with the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (RINL) and the necessity to preserve and strengthen it.

Continued on Page 2

Govt fully prepared to table Waqf bill: Rijiju

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Minority Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju asserted on Monday that the government is fully prepared to table the amended Waqf bill in Parliament, as he accused some political parties and organisations of seeking to foment unrest in society and mislead people over its provisions.

With Parliament reconvening on Tuesday following the weekend and Eid holiday, he said the timing of the bill's introduction will be decided following consultations after Parliament meets but he wants it passed as soon as possible.

The ongoing Budget session of Parliament is scheduled to end on April 4, and the bill will have to be passed by both the Lok Sabha as well as the Rajya Sabha to become a law.

The government has indicated that it will discuss with leaders of different parties on Tuesday the timing of the Bill's introduction. It is likely to be first introduced in the Lower House, probably on Wednesday.

April-June to be hotter than usual

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is expected to experience hotter-than-usual temperatures from April to June, with more heatwave days in central and eastern India and the northwestern plains, the IMD said on Monday.

Most parts of the country will see higher-than-normal maximum temperatures, except for some areas in western and eastern India where the temperatures are expected to be normal. Minimum temperatures will also be above normal in most regions, India Meteorological Department (IMD) chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said in an online press conference.

"From April to June, most parts of north and east India, central India, and the plains of northwest India are expected to experience two to four more heatwave days than normal," he said. Usually, India records four to seven heatwave days from April to June.



More heatwave days likely in many states: IMD

The region normally experiences five to six heatwave days during the season. States likely to see above-normal heatwave days include Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and the northern parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

An IMD official had earlier said northwest India might face double the number of heatwave days during the summer.

The region normally experiences five to six heatwave days during the season. States likely to see above-normal heatwave days include Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and the northern parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

In April, most parts of India will likely witness higher-than-usual maximum temperatures. However, some areas in the extreme southern and the northwestern regions may experience normal temperatures.

Minimum temperatures will be higher than usual across most of the country, except for a few places in the northwest and the northeast where temperatures may be normal or slightly below normal, Mohapatra said.

Experts have warned that India should prepare for a peak electricity demand growth of 9 to 10 per cent this summer season, with the country expected to experience a higher number of heatwave days.

Last year, the all-India peak electricity demand crossed 250 gigawatts (GW) on May 30 -- 6.3 per cent higher than projections. Climate change-induced heat stress is one of the key factors driving electricity demand.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | APRIL 1, 2025

Min Lokesh assures swift action on public grievances

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Education and IT Minister Nara Lokesh chaired the 60th day of Praja Darbar at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) office in Visakhapatnam on Monday morning, marking the second day of his visit to the city. Engaging with citizens, the minister attentively listened to their grievances and assured them of the coalition government's commitment to resolving issues effectively.

An appeal was made by representatives of the Andhra Pradesh Unemployed Special Teachers Federation. Citing a Supreme Court directive, they urged Minister Lokesh to ensure that special teacher recruitments in the State be conducted through a direct recruitment process (DSC notification) rather than regularisation. They emphasised that this approach aligns with recruitment policies followed in other states.

Among the petitioners was K Ramadevi, a Visakhapatnam resident and former contract employee at the APSRTC Narsipatnam depot during the Samaikya Andhra Movement. She expressed concern over the government's failure to implement the 2013 agreement with the workers' union and called for the enforcement of the breadwinner scheme for families of contract workers. She appealed to the minister for intervention to ensure justice.

Reparthi Raju, a resident of Visakhapatnam, voiced concerns about alleged land encroachment behind the ZPH School in Vepagunta, Pendurthi constituency. He claimed that the encroachment had the backing of the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government and urged authorities to take immediate action to reclaim government-owned land. Despite multiple complaints, he alleged that no remedial measures had been taken.

Similarly, N Srinivasa Rao, a retired Special Deputy Collector and former Revenue DT from Paderu filed an appeal seeking the removal of two officials, T. Appa Rao and Eshwar Rao, from the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) in ASR District. Accusing them of political bias in favor of the YSRCP, he called for their replacement with impartial and competent officers.

Another petitioner, R. Lakshmi, a carpenter, narrated his struggle regarding a 150-yard plot he had purchased in Sujatha Nagar Teachers Layout, Pendurthi. He alleged that Abit Raju had encroached upon his property and that, despite multiple complaints, authorities had failed to take action. He sought urgent intervention to reclaim his land. K. Soujanya, an engineering graduate from Visakhapatnam, approached the minister seeking assistance in securing employment. Minister Lokesh assured her, along with all other petitioners, that their concerns would be thoroughly examined and necessary steps would be taken promptly.

YSRCP activist murdered in SSS dist

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

A YSRCP activist was brutally murdered by miscreants at Papireddypalle village in Ramagiri mandal of Sri Satya Sai district, on Sunday night.

According to police, the attackers assaulted YSRCP activist Kuruba Lingamayya (55) with iron rods and sticks. He was taken to a private hospital in Anantapur, where he succumbed to his injuries on Monday while undergoing treatment.

The deceased Lingamayya's son, Srinivaslu, also sustained facial injuries while attempting to rescue his father. YSRCP sources alleged that followers of MLA Paritala Sunita had pelted stones at the house of YSRCP leader Jayachandra Reddy in Papireddypalle village two days earlier when he was not at home.

Lingamayya had intervened and told Sunita's followers that it was improper to attack Jayachandra Reddy's house in his absence. Additionally, he had mobilised some YSRCP activists in the village.

Meanwhile, YSRCP chief and former Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy condemned the murder, expressing deep anguish over the deteriorating law and order situation in the Sri Satya Sai district. He alleged that the ruling party leaders had orchestrated the killing of the YSRCP activists for opposing their actions, describing it as an example of oppressive tactics.

Jagan Reddy claimed that attacks on YSRCP workers and leaders had become routine, accusing the police of colluding with ruling party figures instead of ensuring public safety. He criticised the police for their failure during the recent by-elections in Ramagiri mandal, stating that their inaction had allowed ruling party leaders to commit atrocities unchecked, endangering democracy.

The former CM also condemned the alleged targeting of marginalised and weaker sections for political vendetta, calling it deplorable. He assured that those responsible for the crime would be brought to justice and warned of strict legal action. Expressing condolences to Kuruba Lingamayya's family, he reaffirmed the party's support for them in this difficult time.

YSRCP leader and former MLA Topudurthi Prakash Reddy also condemned the murder, alleging that it was orchestrated by TDP MLA Paritala Sunitha with the support of SI Sudhakar. He accused the police of shielding the six perpetrators, allowing lawlessness to prevail under what he termed "Lokesh's Red Book Constitution." Prakash Reddy linked the murder to the Ramagiri mandal MPP by-election, where YSRCP had secured eight MPTC seats against TDP's one.

Minister promises better connectivity for remote villages

PNS ■ PARVATIPURAM



Tribal Welfare Minister Gummadi Sandhya Rani reaffirmed her commitment to improving connectivity in tribal regions by pledging to construct roads in all inaccessible villages. She made this announcement while inaugurating a newly built road in Saluru mandal on Monday. The minister allocated Rs 30 crore for additional road projects to further enhance connectivity in remote areas.

The newly inaugurated road, constructed at a cost of Rs 1.25 crore, aims to provide better access to tribal communities. "During my tenure, I will ensure that all inaccessible tribal villages have proper roads and addresses," Minister Sandhya Rani assured the public.

She revealed that Rs 30 crore had been sanctioned for three more road projects in Saluru mandal, with further developments in the pipeline awaiting financial clearance. The approved projects include a 14-km stretch from Kurukutti to Sampangipadu at Rs 17.20 crore, a 6-km road from Kodana to Chinthamala costing Rs 7.30 crore, and another project worth Rs 6 crore.

The minister highlighted the Chief Minister's commitment to eradicating the "doli" system, a practice where patients are carried in makeshift stretchers due to the absence of proper roads. She stated that the government was taking concrete steps to ensure road connectivity for all tribal villages to eliminate such hardships.

Responding to requests from Simidivalasa residents, Minister Sandhya Rani assured them that a school and an Anganwadi centre would be established if the requirements were met. Stressing the importance of ethical education, she urged parents to instill strong values in their children. "Every boy has a mother, sister, and female relatives. Cruelty against girls and women should not happen," she emphasized, calling on parents to educate their children on proper conduct and respect toward women. The minister's announcements and assurances were met with appreciation from tribal communities, who have long sought better infrastructure and facilities in their villages.

'CM working...

Continued from Page 1

He further stated that CM Chandrababu Naidu is taking steps to increase the per capita income of every individual in the state. "The Chief Minister is also working towards transforming every household into an entrepreneurial unit," he noted.

Speaking on the government's development initiatives, the Minister highlighted that despite the enormous debts inherited from the previous government, the current administration is consistently implementing welfare and development schemes without any hindrance. "We are successfully running the Super Six schemes," he added. He also expressed confidence in the success of the Chief Minister's tour, underscoring its significance for the development of the region.

Parchur MLA Eluru Sambasivarao, Chirala MLA MM Kondayya, Bapatla MLA V Narendra Varma, District Collector J Venkata Murali, District SP Tushar Dudi, Joint Collector Prakhar Jain, and other officials were present.

Fight against...

Continued from Page 1

Marking the significance of the event, Pawan Kalyan expressed his joy that such a pivotal programme coincided with Ugadi, the Telugu New Year. He declared,

"This Ugadi will be remembered as historic. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our nation is progressing towards the goal of a developed India by 2047, and in our state, we are shaping a Swarna (Golden) Andhra Pradesh under Chandrababu Naidu's guidance." As the P-4 programme gears up to combat poverty, the Deputy Chief Minister concluded, "If we effectively carry forward this initiative, we will create numerous wonders."DCM Kalyan urged unity and support for families facing hardships, emphasising, "If we offer a little encouragement, it provides mountains of strength to those in need. Many of us come from small villages, and a small word of support can make a difference."

Vizag police bust illegal online betting ring, 4 held

Masterminds operating from Dubai; special teams deployed to track key suspects

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



In a significant crackdown on illegal online betting, the City Police have arrested four individuals involved in promoting fraudulent betting websites. G. Praveen Kumar, Madinavalli, Razia Begum, and Dharani were apprehended following reliable intelligence, revealing their participation in a deceptive betting operation.

Investigations disclosed that the accused employed manipulative tactics to lure unsuspecting individuals. They charged registration fees, provided demo logins, and falsely promised substantial returns on minimal investments. These deceptive strategies ensnared victims in a cycle of addictive betting, resulting in severe financial losses.

The illicit operation was masterminded by Zia and Saurabh, who managed the network from Dubai. They leveraged local connections to recruit telecallers through interviews, tasking them with aggressively promoting the betting websites. These telecallers were enticed with attractive salaries, contingent on the number of new users they successfully enrolled.

Despite being aware of the illegal nature of online betting, the telecallers actively participated in the fraudulent scheme. Operating remotely from Dubai, they made persuasive calls to potential victims, promising high profits for minimal investments. Upon expressing interest, individuals were instructed to register and received a QR code via WhatsApp for deposits. Subsequently, login credentials were provided, granting them access to participate in online betting games.

Authorities have identified Zia and Saurabh as the masterminds behind this organized fraud and have deployed special teams to track and apprehend them, along with other telecallers complicit in promoting illegal betting websites in Visakhapatnam.

Law enforcement officials have emphasized the significant financial losses suffered by numerous individuals due to such fraudulent schemes. The public is strongly advised to refrain from engaging in any form of online or offline betting. The police have issued a stern warning that stringent legal action will be taken against anyone found organizing, promoting, aiding, or engaging in such illicit activities, including telecallers involved in these fraudulent operations.

Action plan to...

Continued from Page 1

He also thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Government for considering the state's request and providing financial assistance for the plant's revitalisation.

He further underscored the importance of coordinated efforts between the central and state governments to restore the plant to its former glory. He assured that the state government would continue to provide all necessary support for its revival. Additionally, the Chief Minister pointed out that unless the plant reduces operational costs and enhances efficiency, it may not achieve the desired results. Steel Ministry Secretary Sandeep Poundrik, Joint Secretary Abhijit Narendra, NMD CMD Amitav Mukherjee, RINL CMD Ajit Kumar Saxena, MECON CMD SK Varma, and MSTC Limited CMD Manojendra Ghosal were present at the meeting.

Reliance to launch first...

Continued from Page 1

The construction of CBG plants is part of the government's broader plan to establish 500 such plants across the state. Ravi Kumar explained that each plant, with a capacity of 20 tonnes, would directly and indirectly provide employment for between 250 and 500 people. This initiative is expected to reduce migration caused by unemployment in rural areas, as thousands of job opportunities will be created through the construction and operation of these plants.

The state government has earmarked approximately 5,000 acres for the establishment of these plants. At present, a 100-tonne capacity plant is being constructed in Kanigiri. Additional plants are planned for locations including Giddalur, Markapur, Darsi and Kondepi. The development of 500 plants is expected to significantly boost local employment and improve the economic conditions of farmers.

Minister Ravi Kumar also highlighted that, as part of the state government's commitment to generating 20 lakh jobs in the next five years, the construction of CBG plants in rural areas will be actively promoted.

The inauguration event on 2 April will be attended by several officials, MLAs Ugranarasimha Reddy, Ashok Reddy, and various other coalition leaders.

Woman undertrial...

Continued from Page 1

Santha Kumari was arrested and produced before the court, which remanded her in judicial custody. However, on March 30, she ended her life by hanging herself with her chunni in the toilet.

Eluru sub-jail superintendent Ch R U Swamy informed the One Town police about the incident, and a case was registered. Eluru RDO M. Achut Ambarish and DSP D. Sravan Kumar conducted an inquiry into the suicide. Based on the inquiry report, sub-jail head warder Varalakshmi and warder Nagamani were suspended for dereliction of duty, officials said.

CM sets 'P4' policy...

Continued from Page 1

Reflecting on his political journey, the Chief Minister shared that he had been dedicated to the people of Andhra Pradesh for nearly five decades. "I became an MLA in 1978, and in three years, I will have completed 50 years in public service. My life is dedicated to serving the people who have supported me all these years. I have been elected nine times, including four terms as Chief Minister and 15 years as Leader of the Opposition," Naidu noted with pride.

He went on to praise his political mentor, the late NT Rama Rao, founder of the Telugu Desam Party, who instilled discipline and perseverance in him. "I have been in public life for 47 years, and my sole aim has always been to bring progress to the state and improve the lifestyle of the people," he said.

Chandrababu Naidu reiterated his commitment to good governance and clean politics, mentioning several transformative programmes he had introduced in the past, such as Prajala Vaddaku Palana, Janma Bhoomi and the IT revolution. "I think about how to transform people's lives as soon as I wake up every day," he added.

On the issue of personal integrity, Naidu clarified that he had never committed any mistakes and would continue to uphold his values. He also addressed concerns about his family's involvement in business, stating that the Heritage business was handed over to family members so they would not rely on politics for their livelihood.

Chandrababu Naidu assured the public that the primary goal of the P4 initiative is poverty eradication.

He highlighted the state's economic progress, with per capita income increasing from Rs 2,66,995 last fiscal year to Rs 2,98,065 this year, and projected to rise to Rs 5,42,985 by 2028-29. He set a target for per capita income to reach Rs 55 lakh by 2047.

He stressed that the growth of the state's economy would lead to increased revenue, which should be distributed among the people for development. "Every plan I have introduced has been successful, and I am confident that P4 will be no different," he concluded. The progress report for P4 is expected to be presented to the public by the next Ugadi.

Vizag will overtake...

Continued from Page 1

Criticising the previous government, Lokesh recalled instances where obstacles were allegedly created to prevent Naidu's visit to Visakhapatnam, including the use of heavy machinery to block access to Vizianagaram's Ramateertham temple. Providing a further boost to Visakhapatnam's economic prospects, Lokesh announced the imminent entry of Lulu Group into the city. Over the past ten months, the administration has actively attracted major investments, securing commitments from companies like TCS, a metal plant, and a hydrogen plant.

Stressing the transition from "ease of doing business" to "speed of doing business," he voiced confidence in achieving a trillion-dollar economy in North Andhra Pradesh. He expressed regret that Visakhapatnam, once among India's top nine economic cities, had fallen to the tenth position due to past governance failures. Lokesh also highlighted the pivotal role of MP Sribharat and Visakhapatnam's MLAs in transforming the city into the country's fifth-largest economic hub and a premier IT destination. He reiterated the goal of generating five lakh IT jobs within five years and confirmed that a structured roadmap was in place to achieve this vision.

Applauding the city's vibrant environment, he emphasized its potential for tourism, concerts, and sporting events. Additionally, he assured that Amaravati's infrastructure projects would be completed within three years and confirmed that the Bhogapuram International Airport would be operational within a year, ahead of the Vijayawada Airport.

Several prominent dignitaries attended the event, including Home Minister Vangalapudi Anita, Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar, Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, and former minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju.

CM's constant call for population growth is 'ridiculous': Congress

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Andhra Pradesh Congress leader N Tulasi Reddy on Monday criticised Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu for repeatedly urging people to have more children despite rising unemployment and a livelihood crisis, calling it "ridiculous".

Addressing a press conference at Andhra Ratna Bhavan in Vijayawada, Reddy alleged that a lack of livelihood opportunities is driving youth towards drug addiction.

"Naidu repeatedly advocating for having more children to increase the population is ridiculous... at a time when there is no livelihood or employment for people in the state and the country, especially the youth," Reddy claimed.

According to the Congress leader, the sentiment to provide employment and livelihood to locals is rising globally, while circumstances have also arisen where Indians are returning from the USA and other countries, leaving their jobs.

Highlighting high unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty in Andhra Pradesh and India, he remarked that the country ranks poorly on both the happiness and hunger indices.

He observed that comparing India to developed countries such as Japan is "foolish", as those nations face an ageing crisis along with a declining population and shrinking youth demographic.

It makes no sense to fear a situation like Japan's. It is a developed country with a population of just 12 crore, while India leads the world with 144 crore people, Reddy claimed.

He further contended that Japan has a population density of only 340 people per square kilometre, whereas India stands at 488. In contrast, China has a density of 151, the US 38, and Russia just nine, he added.

Noting that India accounts for 18 per cent of the global population but occupies only 2.4 per cent of the world's landmass, Reddy urged Naidu to "reconsider his stance on population growth".

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Sukla Paksha
Tithi:	
Chavithi:	Apr 01 05:42 AM to Apr 02 02:32 AM
Panchami:	Apr 02 02:32 AM to Apr 02 11:50 PM
Nakshatram:	
Bharani:	Mar 31 01:45 PM to Apr 01 11:06 AM
Krithika:	Apr 01 11:06 AM to Apr 02 08:49 AM
Rahukalam:	3:22 PM to 4:54 PM
Yamagandam:	9:17 AM to 10:48 AM
Varjyam:	09:58 PM to 11:25 PM
Gulika:	12:20 PM to 1:51 PM
Amritakalam:	06:50 AM to 08:15 AM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:55 AM to 12:44 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 36°c
Humidity: 67%
Sunrise: 6:02 AM
Sunset: 6:20 PM

Updated: March 31 2025 5:00 PM

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Protest for Muslim rights marks Ramadan prayers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A large crowd gathered at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium in Vijayawada for prayers on the occasion of Ramadan. The event was organised in response to a call from the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, with Muslims voluntarily participating in the prayers while wearing black ribbons as a symbol of protest. They had donned the ribbons before leaving their homes for the stadium.

Among those who attended the event were former Chairman of the Police Housing Board Nagul Meera, NTR District YSR Congress Party president Devineni Avinash, Muslim JAC Convenor Munir Ahmad, president of Muslim Hakkula Porata Samithi Farooq Shubli, and several other prominent figures from the city, including the President of the Eidgah, Dr Kalasha Wali.

Maulana Mohamed Aijaz Uddin Siddiqui delivered the sermon, addressing the massive gathering before leading the prayers. During his address, Maulana Aijaz Uddin Siddiqui expressed concern over the government's disregard for Muslim rights. He prayed that God would open the eyes of government officials who oppress the community and guide them towards justice. He also stated that participating in this peaceful protest, with Muslims wearing black ribbons, was a message against the Waqf Amendment Bill. He regarded it as an act of divine guidance.

As he spoke about the government's failure to uphold Muslim rights, emotions ran high, and several worshippers in the Eidgah area began chanting "Allahu Akbar" with tears in their eyes. The prayers became a powerful moment of collective expression against the oppression faced by the community.

The event also saw significant participation from leaders and activists of various political parties. NTR District YSRCP Booth Convenor Syed Aleem, YSRCP leader Naheed, Vijayawada East Minority SC/BC President Subhanilu, and several other city leaders and representatives from different political factions attended in large numbers.

New Livestock Insurance Scheme takes effect today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Animal Husbandry Department Director Dr T Damodar Naidu has revealed that to protect livestock farmers from financial losses caused by the death of cattle, buffalo, goats, sheep, and pigs, the state government is launching a new Livestock Insurance Scheme under the National Livestock Mission, which enhances support for livestock rearers. Priorising the welfare of livestock farmers, the TDP-led NDA government had reduced Insurance Premiums to just 15%, ensuring affordability for all eligible livestock, he said. In a press statement here, the Animal Husbandry Director, Dr Damodar Naidu, said that the new scheme would come into force with effect from April 1 onwards. He said that the state government issued orders in this regard recently, mandating a 15% premium subsidy for all categories of rearers, encouraging wider adoption of the scheme. Additionally, he said the remaining 85% share would be borne by the Central and State governments as 60% and 40% respectively. Further, he said the earlier limit of insuring up to five cattle, buffalo has now been increased to 10.
Similarly, the insurance coverage for sheep, goats and pigs, which was previously limited to 50, has now been extended to 100 sheep and goats, he said.

Nara Lokesh lays foundation for four-lane road from Atchutapuram to Anakapalli

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI



HRD and IT Minister Nara Lokesh emphasized the importance of public cooperation in development projects and assured that those affected by road expansion would receive fair compensation. He made these remarks while laying the foundation stone for the four-lane road from Atchutapuram to Anakapalli during a program held at Atchutapuram Junction.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Lokesh reaffirmed the coalition government's commitment to public welfare and infrastructure development. He noted that upon taking office, the government swiftly implemented a Rs 1,000 pension increase, bringing the total amount to Rs 4,000. Highlighting social welfare initiatives, he mentioned ongoing programs like Anna Canteens and free gas distribution while announcing new schemes such as Talliki Vandanam and Annadata Sukhibhava.

The minister pointed out that insufficient funding under the previous administration had led to deteriorating road conditions. However, the present government has promptly undertaken road repair and expansion projects.

He emphasized that the Atchutapuram-Anakapalli road, now set for widening, was a promise made during the Yuvagalam Padayatra. He reassured that those financially impacted by the expansion would be fairly compensated and explained that the road project aligns with the region's long-term industrial and economic growth.

He also highlighted the establishment of NTPC Green Energy Limited, supported by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Additionally, he urged coalition party workers to actively engage in pension distribution programs, address local concerns, and uphold discipline in governance.

Member of Parliament CM Ramesh underscored the Atchutapuram-Anakapalli road's industrial and strategic relevance, attributing past accidents to the lack of expansion. He pointed to upcoming projects such as RC Mittal, a hydrogen plant, and bulk drug industries, stressing the need for improved infrastructure. He noted that while industries in the region currently employ around two lakh individuals, new investments worth ?5 lakh crore are expected to generate an additional four lakh jobs.

MLA Sundarapu Vijay Kumar announced a 14-km road upgrade to a four-lane highway at Rs 243 crore. He thanked PM Modi, CM Chandrababu Naidu, Dy CM Pawan Kalyan, and other officials for their support, highlighting the project's impact on local transport. He urged public cooperation for timely completion.

Christian leaders seek clarity on pastor's death

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Several Christian leaders from Krishna and NTR districts have urged the state government and police department to disclose the truth regarding the suspicious death of Pastor Praveen Pagadala. Representing various Christian organisations, the leaders gathered under the banner of the All India Dalit Christian Peace Forum in Vijayawada on Monday. They called for a comprehensive investigation into the death and expressed their willingness to take legal action if necessary.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Lanka Karunakar, president of the All India Dalit Christian Peace Forum, described Pastor Praveen Pagadala's death as a tragic incident. He highlighted the conflicting opinions and suspicions surrounding the cause of death. While some believe it was an accident, the majority suspect foul play. Karunakar further explained that discrepancies exist in the reports, particularly in images provided by the police, where the victim's face is not visible. He emphasised that the circumstances of the death remain suspicious.

The leaders also criticised the police and government for failing to conduct a thorough investigation. They demanded a complete and transparent inquiry into the case, pointing out several inconsistencies in the police's explanation. They questioned the claim that the incident was an accident, arguing that many people do not accept this narrative. The delay in receiving the post-mortem report has further fuelled doubts, they said. The Panchanama report, which should have been conclusive, was also deemed inadequate, and there was a lack of clear information from doctors, they added.

Christian leaders expressed concerns that, given these developments, they might need to take steps to protect their community. They met to discuss future actions and strategies for safeguarding the rights of Christians in the state. They urged Christians to file complaints at the nearest police stations in the event of any attacks, emphasising that the Indian Constitution guarantees their rights.

The meeting was attended by prominent Christian leaders, including Bishop P Spurgeon Raju of Manna Ministries, Pastor Veshapogu John Bhaskararao, gospel leader and singer AR Stephenson, Pastor Chatla Luther Prashanth of Suvarta Channel, Pastor YM Ravi Kumar, Pastor M Matthews, and several other pastors and religious leaders.

Parents Assn seeks fee structure regulation in private junior colleges

As admissions start today, they ask for detailed fee structure and rules of reservations on the BIE website

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Parents Association of Andhra Pradesh, under the leadership of honorary president and Advocate Marlireddy Kota Reddy, president Narahari Sikharam, and general secretary G Eswaraiah, has urged the State government to strictly implement the Andhra Pradesh Education Regulatory and Monitoring Act for the forthcoming 2025-26 academic year. They have also called for measures to support parents by regulating the fee structures of private intermediate colleges.

In a press release issued on Monday, they emphasised that if the Board of Intermediate Education (BIE) cannot effectively manage the fee structures of these private institutions, the government should contemplate dissolving the board and assuming its responsibilities. They noted that, according to the new schedule, intermediate admissions will commence on April 1 across all 3,305 junior colleges in the State, which include government and high school-plus institutions. Among these, 2,648 are private junior colleges, while 447 are government colleges and 210 are high school-plus colleges.

Besides, they mentioned that the Intermediate Board, along with government and high school-plus colleges, operates in four streams: MPC, BiPC, MEC, CEC, and vocational groups. They anticipate that over 2,00,000 students will enrol in these colleges, with another 8,00,000 expected to seek admission in private colleges to pursue their intermediate education. However, they criticised the Board of Intermediate Education for its failure to deliver quality education to economically disadvantaged and middle-class students since the establishment of government junior colleges.

They highlighted the breaches of BIE regulations by private colleges, noting that these institutions exclusively offer MPC and BiPC programmes. They expressed concern that Board officials have granted permissions to these colleges for these specific groups, which they deemed a clear violation of board policies. Furthermore, these private colleges are charging students fees of Rs.1 lakh, prompting the State government should investigate the matter, they said.

They later informed the government that prominent corporate junior colleges, including Narayana, Sri Chaitanya, Bhashyam, NRI, VIVA, and Viswa Bharathi, are imposing fees of Rs.4.50 lakh on students. They criticised this practice as exploitation of parents. IN addition, they pointed out that these colleges are operating as hostels without the necessary approvals from the board and requested an inquiry into this issue.

Further, they urged the government to enforce the AP Education Regulatory and Monitoring Act rigorously, regulate fees in private colleges, and ensure adherence to reservation policies during admissions.

They insisted that the fee structure, reservation rules, and other relevant information be made available on the BIE website for each college.

VMC collects Rs 30 cr in property tax dues in a week

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) has successfully collected Rs.30 crore in property tax dues within a week, following the State government's interest waiver announcement. On the last day alone, around Rs.6 crore was collected.

The 50-per cent rebate on house tax and vacant land tax dues, announced on March 25, received a positive response from property owners. In-charge Municipal Commissioner Dr D Chandrasekhar stated that citizens took advantage of the scheme, helping VMC boost its revenue.

GVMC collects a record Rs 510 cr property tax

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has set a new benchmark in municipal revenue generation, collecting an unprecedented Rs 510 crore in property tax for the financial year 2024-25—surpassing the government's target.

This achievement is attributed to strategic planning and diligent supervision by the GVMC Commissioner, who issued directives to Zonal Commissioners, Revenue Officers, and field staff to streamline tax collection. Regular assessments by the Additional Commissioner (Revenue) and Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) further optimized the process, ensuring efficient execution at all levels.

Recognizing the collective effort behind this success, the in-charge Commissioner M N Harendhira Prasad extended gratitude to Visakhapatnam's residents, property taxpayers, and public representatives for their contributions. Special appreciation was given to the revenue teams and media representatives for their role in fostering transparency and awareness. GVMC's record-breaking tax collection strengthens the city's financial foundation, paving the way for enhanced urban development and improved civic amenities for its residents.

AP's international skater Jessy Raj achieves another milestone

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



International Skater and Ball Puraskar awardee M Jessy Raj from Andhra Pradesh has achieved an impressive international milestone by winning two gold medals, one silver medal, and one bronze medal at the Taiwan Artistic Skating Championship 2025. The event took place in Taiwan from March 26 to 31.

Jessy, a class 9 student of NSM Public School in Vijayawada, earned gold medals in both Solo Dance and Couple Dance. Additionally, she secured second place in Pair Skating, winning a silver medal, while also bagging a bronze medal in Inline Free Style.

As many as 8 countries: India, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Italy, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan participated in this tournament. Jessy Raj represented the Indian team and performed her outstanding talent. As a result, she achieved four medals in the international championship.



Minister urges students to help build Swarna Andhra

PNS ■ BAPATLA



The Saraswati Vidya Mandir organisation, under the Vidya Bharati network, manages over 24,128 schools across the country. A recent impact study conducted by an American organisation, which revealed the positive influence these schools have had on millions of families.

Minister for Medical and Health, Satya Kumar Yadav, urged students to actively participate in the realisation of Vikisit Bharat and a prosperous Swarna Andhra Pradesh, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. He made this appeal during the inauguration of the new building for Saraswati Vidya Mandir in Chatragadda village, Repalle rural mandal.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Satya Kumar Yadav emphasised the importance of pursuing education in one's mother tongue. He urged the audience to dispel the misconception that development is possible only through the English language. He stated that English is merely a medium of communication and that proficiency in it does not automatically guarantee success.

He added that those who study in their mother tongue develop stronger creativity and cognitive skills, citing the examples of former President Dr Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who succeeded despite learning in their native languages.

The Minister highlighted the success stories of countries such as Japan and China, which have thrived by providing quality education in their native languages. He also praised philanthropists like Veeramachineni Veeranjaneya Shastri and others who donated large tracts of land to educational institutions and dedicated themselves to the cause of education. He noted that the culture of philanthropy has diminished over time and expressed his desire to see it revived. He also condemned the growing trend of land grabs involving educational institutions over the past five years and called for a return to a culture where philanthropists support education and healthcare.

The Minister congratulated the management of Saraswati Vidya Mandir for reviving the school in 2023 and transforming it into a model institution. The Saraswati Vidya Mandir organisation, under the Vidya Bharati network, manages over 24,128 schools across the country. Minister Yadav praised a recent impact study conducted by an American organisation, which revealed the positive influence these schools have had on millions of families.

The Minister also assured Revenue Minister Anagani Sathya Prasad that he would focus on improving healthcare facilities in the Repalle region.

25% of vacant super specialty doctor posts filled

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a bid to tackle the shortage of super specialty doctors, 41 Assistant Professors with super specialty qualifications have been recruited through a walk-in interview under a special recruitment drive. This initiative, conducted by the Directorate of Medical Education (DME), aimed to fill vacancies in 20 Government General and Super Speciality Hospitals. The newly recruited doctors hold advanced qualifications, including DM and MCh in various specialities, alongside postgraduate degrees in their respective fields.

The recruitment of these 41 specialists has helped reduce the vacancies in the Super Speciality Assistant Professor category by 25%. Before the special drive, 166 out of 365 sanctioned posts (45%) were vacant. This recruitment follows a review conducted by Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav, which revealed that half of the total 682 sanctioned posts for Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors in super speciality disciplines were unfilled.

As part of efforts to address these gaps, the Health Minister has directed further recruitment drives. Next week, DME will hold additional walk-in interviews for the recruitment of Associate Professors and Professors.

BJP State meet focuses on political strategies



State BJP president addressing a press conference in Vijayawada on Monday. Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held a significant state-level meeting in Vijayawada, led by party president Daggubati Purandeswari. The meeting saw the participation of newly appointed district presidents, district in-charges, and other invited members, focusing on organisational matters and political strategies.

Key topics discussed included the celebration of the party's foundation day on April 6 and Dr BR Ambedkar's birth anniversary on April 14. Leaders were also briefed on conducting six major activities at the polling booth level.

Purandeswari opened her speech by emphasising the party's substantial growth, noting that the BJP has registered over 2.5 million members in the state, with 21,000 active members. She highlighted the presence of 218,000 party workers at the booth level, asserting that the BJP's popularity in the state is on the rise. She further remarked that there is strong support for Prime Minister Modi and the party's initiatives. The "Double Engine" government model, she claimed, is helping the state recover from five years of mismanagement.

She criticised the YSR Congress Party (YSCP) government for its failure to foster development in the state, instead driving it further into debt. Purandeswari accused the previous state government of mismanaging roads and infrastructure and creating divisions in society. She pointed out that the YSCP government had failed to attract any new investments to the state, while its leaders were profiting immensely through the liquor mafia and corrupt practices in the distribution of sand and soil.

Purandeswari also underscored various development projects funded by the central government, including Rs 15,000 crore for the stalled Polavaram project, Rs 12,500 crore from the ADB, and Rs 11,000 crore from HUDCO for the Amaravati capital city project. Additional financial assistance has been allocated for road repairs and infrastructure improvements across the state, including R$s 4,800 crore for Panchayat Raj and Rs 7,200 crore released as tax devolution funds.

She further noted that the central government, under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, is dedicated to eradicating poverty and creating employment opportunities. The Centre is also providing substantial support to the MSME sector and encouraging the top 500 companies to generate one million jobs nationwide.

Roads leading to farm fields under construction: Nimmala

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM



Minister for Water Resources Management Nimmala Ramanaidu has announced that roads leading to agricultural fields are being constructed for the benefit of farmers.

The Minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of four gravel roads in Yelamanchili mandal on Monday.

The roads are being built at a cost of Rs 1.15 crore. One of them is being constructed at Adavipalem village, from the Ambedkar statue to the Kontheru channel, while another is being laid at Medapadu village up to the Medapadu branch canal.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister Ramanaidu said that farmers face difficulties in transporting their harvested produce due to the lack of proper roads. The government has initiated the construction of gravel roads to help them bring their produce home.

"The Chandrababu Naidu-led government has taken all necessary steps to streamline the irrigation system for the benefit of farmers. Under the 'Annadata Sukhibhava' scheme, Rs 20,000 will be provided to farmers," he added.

He also highlighted the government's 'P4' programme aimed at eradicating poverty. He pointed out that the previous YSRCP regime had failed to clear Rs 1,674 crore in arrears owed to farmers for their paddy produce, which was settled once Chandrababu Naidu came to power.

Criticising the YSRCP government, he said that silt was not removed from irrigation canals, and even essential maintenance, such as applying grease to the shutters, gates, and ropes of irrigation projects, was neglected. The irrigation system was completely ignored during Jagan Reddy's tenure, he alleged.

MLC Angara Rammohan, Irrigation EE P Subramanyeswar Rao, and leaders from the TDP, BJP, and JSP were present.

New online module for professional tax registration

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has transferred the responsibility for professional tax collection in the Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada Municipal Corporations to the Commercial Taxes Department. According to Government Order GO Ms No 63, this change will take effect from 1 April 2025, as stated by Babu A, Chief Commissioner of State Tax, Commercial Taxes Department, GoAP.

To streamline the process, the Commercial Taxes Department is launching a new online module for professional tax registration and filing, which will also become operational from the same date. This initiative aims to simplify compliance, enhance transparency, and improve the overall efficiency of the tax administration system.

To ensure smooth compliance, the department has introduced an easy-to-use online platform called the My Profession Tax Portal. Taxpayers can conveniently register and file returns through the portal, available at https://apct.gov.in/GSTPortal/Ap_index.aspx.

Govt committed to welfare of minorities, says Dola

PNS ■ ONGOLE



Minister for Social Welfare, Dola Bala Veeranjaneya Swamy, has reaffirmed the Coalition Government's commitment to the welfare of Muslim minorities and expressed his delight at participating in Ramadan prayers.

The minister took part in Ramadan prayers at the Eidgah in Kondapi on Monday, marking the occasion of the Ramadan festival. He exchanged greetings with members of the Muslim community and wished that the blessings of Allah remain with the people of the state.

Speaking on the occasion, he described Ramadan as a symbol of sacrifice and sanctity.

He noted that the holy month embodies discipline, brotherhood, charity, and spiritual reflection, strengthened through fasting.

He highlighted that all Muslim brothers, regardless of their financial status, pray in mosques, adding that the Quran calls for doing good to one's fellow human beings.

"The TDP government supported the construction of an Eidgah in Kondapi. The government's objective is the development and welfare of Muslim minorities. We have allocated Rs 5,434 crore for their welfare in the budget," the minister stated.

He further revealed that the government is disbursing honorariums to Imams and Mauzams every month and making special arrangements for those undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage. Since the coalition government came to power, it has initiated steps to repair mosques and shadi khanas, he noted.

Thunderstorms, gusty winds likely in AP

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds reaching 30-40 kmph are expected in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next five days, the Meteorological Center said on Monday.

Similar weather conditions are likely in South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema from April 1 to 4. Maximum temperatures may drop by 2-3 degrees Celsius across Andhra Pradesh during this period.

Light to moderate rain is forecast for North Coastal Andhra Pradesh over the next seven days, while South Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Rayalaseema may experience rainfall from April 1 to 6. However, dry weather is expected in these regions over the next 24 hours.

A trough from south Chhattisgarh to south Tamil Nadu now extends to Madhya Maharashtra across Vidarbha, linked to a cyclonic circulation over Marathwada at 0.9 km above mean sea level. Another north-south trough runs from the cyclonic circulation over Marathwada to north Tamil Nadu between 0.9 and 1.5 km above mean sea level.

Why are you selling HCU lands, Sanjay asks CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar addressing the media on Monday at State BJP office

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, asked the Telangana Government, "Why is there a need to sell HCU lands? Who gave you the right to sell them? Why should governance depend on selling public assets? If that is the case, even KA Paul can run the government. Why didn't you announce that you would sell lands and other public assets before the elections? If you had, you wouldn't have got even a single vote. Therefore, the decision to auction HCU lands must be withdrawn immediately. The BJP fully supports the students demanding this."

Sanjay lashed out at the police lathi-charge on students trying to protect Hyderabad Central University (HCU) lands.

"Does the Chief Minister have no humaneness? Students are protesting to safeguard HCU lands, and you are beating them like criminals. Why are you dragging lady students by their hair and beating them cruelly? Is this your governance? Is your job only to sell public lands worth billions?" Sanjay said.

"No one who saw the lathi-charge on students at Hyderabad Central University on Sunday can control themselves. Everyone's eyes welled up with tears. But Congress leaders think they have done something great," he said.

Lashing out at the police, Sanjay said, "When ABVP students were protesting, you stormed into their rooms and assaulted them. Do you think you can unleash tyranny at will? Action must be taken against the police officers responsible for the lathi-charge. An inquiry into the incident must be conducted immediately. And what is the Education Commission doing?"

On GHMC local body MLC elections, he said that the Congress, the BRS and the AIMIM are conspiring together.

The Congress and the BRS are trying to ensure the AIMIM candidate's victory. These two joined hands at the southern states meeting held in the name of delimitation, and are now coordinating with each other to organise a public meeting in Hyderabad. They are backing the AIMIM candidate in the GHMC Local Body MLC elections. The BRS has around 70 votes, but it is not contesting. The Congress, too, has not fielded a candidate. Isn't this clear evidence of their collusion?

I & PR Minister assures 3-phase power for mosque

PNS ■ ELURU



Minister for Housing and I&PR K Parthasarathy assured that a three-phase power supply will be provided to the mosque in Nuzvid town.

The Minister participated in Ramadan prayers at an Eidgah in Nuzvid on Monday, exchanging greetings with the Muslim community and extending his wishes on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, he said Muslims across the world celebrate Ramadan with devotion, sanctity, and fervor.

"The compound wall is being constructed around the Eidgah in Nuzvid. Electricity officials have been directed to provide a three-phase power supply to the Eidgah. Efforts will also be made to ensure honorariums are disbursed to imams every month," he said.

Reiterating the government's commitment to Muslim welfare, he assured support for the development of the Wakf Board.

He highlighted various welfare schemes introduced for the upliftment of Muslims and urged minorities to make use of them.

Recalling the TDP regime's efforts in preventing communal violence, he noted that the party also extended support for reservations. Emphasizing the importance of communal harmony, he said everyone should live happily with mutual respect.

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

EXPLORING THE HERITAGE OF JAIPUR & AGRA

An enlightening educational tour for 43 AU students

It was an unforgettable adventure for 43 students from Andhra University, guided by Dr. Ch Madhusudhan Rao, Head of the Department, on an enlightening educational tour to Jaipur and Agra from March 20 to 28.

The carefully curated itinerary provided a perfect blend of learning and exploration, taking the students through majestic palaces, historic forts, and captivating museums. Here's a closer look at the key highlights of their remarkable journey:

JAIPUR

The tour began at the splendid City Palace, a striking fusion of Rajput, Mughal, and European architectural styles. Home to courtyards, gardens, and a wealth of museums, the palace offered a fascinating glimpse into Jaipur's royal past, immersing the students in the opulence and traditions of the city.

A visit to Jaipur wouldn't be complete without experiencing the grandeur of Amer Fort. The students were enchanted by the intricate carvings, the breathtaking mirror work, and the expansive courtyards. Of particular note was the Sheesh Mahal (Mirror Palace), where the shimmering reflections left the group in awe.

Next, the students ventured into the Albert Hall Museum, Rajasthan's oldest museum, which houses an extensive collection of artefacts. From paintings and sculptures to decorative arts, the museum showcased the diverse cultural heritage of India, offering the students a deeper appreciation of the country's artistic history.

The group was captivated by Jantar Mantar, India's largest astronomical observatory,



where they marvelled at the scientific achievements of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II.

The iconic Hawa Mahal, with its elaborate lattice windows designed to allow cool air to flow through, stood as a testament to Rajput architectural ingenuity.

En route, the group took a moment to admire the serene beauty of the Jal Mahal, a palace floating on Man Sagar Lake. The picturesque view, combined with the architectural marvel, left a lasting impression on the students.

The students also visited Panna Meena Ka Kund, a geometrically stunning stepwell famous for its symmetrical stairs. A highlight of the Jaipur leg of the journey was the visit to the Elephant Village. Students had the rare opportunity to interact with these majestic creatures, learning about their care, feeding, and the deep bond they share with humans.

AGRA

Undoubtedly the crowning moment of the Agra tour was the Taj Mahal. The students stood in awe of its unparalleled beauty and the timeless love story behind its construction, mesmerised by the intricate craftsmanship and the emotional depth it symbolises.

The final stop was the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Agra Fort.

Dr. Ch Madhusudhan Rao has previously organised similar educational tours, including visits to sites like Salihundam, Ramatheertham, Arassavalli, Thotlakonda, and several other historic and cultural landmarks.

He also led an interstate tour to Hampi and Hospet, where students explored temples such as Achyutraya, Virupaksha, Badavilinga, Vithala, and Hazara Rama, further enriching their learning experiences.

ACROSS THE STATES



Dalai Lama receives Gold Mercury Award for Peace

Tibetan spiritual leader The Dalai Lama was awarded the prestigious Gold Mercury Award for Peace and Sustainability at a special ceremony held at his residence in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh on Monday. The award was presented by Gold Mercury International, a globally recognised think tank and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) dedicated to promoting peace, governance and sustainable development. Nicolas De Santis, president and secretary general of Gold Mercury International, who presented the award to the Dalai Lama at his residence in Dharamshala said, "Dalai Lama is a leader whose wisdom, compassion and unwavering dedication to peace have inspired the world. As we celebrate His Holiness' 90th birthday, we reflect on your extraordinary legacy. "For decades, he has championed non-violence, human dignity, interfaith dialogue and environmental stewardship, always reminding us that true peace begins within. Your message of universal responsibility teaches us that we are all connected -- not just as nations but as one human family, sharing one fragile planet" he said.



Delhi breathes cleanest air during Jan-March in 5 yrs

Delhi recorded an average air quality index of 231 during the January-March period, the lowest for the quarter in five years, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said on Monday. The CAQM, which formulates air pollution control plans for Delhi-NCR, said the January-March period of 2025 saw the best air quality in the last five years. The average AQI for this quarter was 231, compared to 250 in 2024; 240 in 2023; 241 in 2022 and 278 in 2021, it said. In 2025, there was not a single day when the AQI crossed 400. There were six such days in 2021, one in 2022, three in 2023 and three in 2024, it said. During the first quarter of 2025, Delhi had 36 days with an AQI below 200, compared to 13 such days in 2021, 27 in 2022, 35 in 2023 and 41 in 2024. Favourable weather conditions, along with efforts from various agencies, have helped improve Delhi's air quality, the panel said.



Police rescue 600 people from clutches of fraudsters

Nearly 600 people, including 79 minors, were rescued from the clutches of fraudsters in Bihar's East Champaran district, the police said on Monday. The police also arrested three persons associated with a firm that allegedly used to lure youths and minors with fake job offers, only to hold them captive and extort money from their families. "Acting on a tip-off, police raided the premises of the private firm in the Raxaul area of East Champaran district and rescued 495 youths and 79 minor boys from its premises," the East Champaran Police said in a statement. The police arrested three persons and launched a manhunt to nab 17 absconding accused who have been named in the FIR, it said. Preliminary investigations revealed that the firm used to detain people even for months after promising them jobs. "Persons associated with the firm also extorted Rs 15,000 to Rs 20,000 from the parents of the victims. Investigations also revealed that victims were subjected to physical and psychological abuse by the accused," the statement said. All 79 rescued minor boys were handed over to the Child Welfare Committee of Motihari, the district headquarters of East Champaran.

Vaishnaw to address CBI's 62nd Foundation Day ceremony today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw will deliver the 21st DP Kohli Memorial Lecture on the 62nd Foundation Day of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) here on Tuesday, officials said.

Vaishnaw, who also holds charge of the ministries of Information and Broadcasting, and Electronics and Information Technology, will address the personnel of the premier agency on 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047 - a Road Map for the CBI'.

He will also confer the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and the Police Medal for Meritorious Service upon CBI personnel.

The lecture is organised by the CBI to honour its founder director Dharmnath Prasad Kohli, an illustrious police officer who was the first chief of the agency from its inception on April 1, 1963, to his retirement on May 31, 1968.

"The lecture series has been honoured to feature highly distinguished speakers and luminaries from various fields who share their insights and experience on pertinent topics," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

Modi govt uplifted India's health infrastructure: Shah

PNS ■ HISAR



"In 2013-14, the Government of India's budget for the health sector was Rs 37,000 cr, and in 2025-26, it will be Rs 1.37L cr."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said that the Narendra Modi government, over the past decade, has uplifted India's health infrastructure by taking a holistic approach to improve the health sector across the entire country.

Shah stated that the health infrastructure has been improved from the primary to tertiary level.

He was addressing a gathering after unveiling a statue of Maharaja Agrasen at the Maharaja Agrasen Medical College campus in Agroha here. On the occasion, he also inaugurated the newly built ICU and laid the foundation stone for the postgraduate hostel. Shah highlighted several initiatives of the Narendra Modi government taken in various fields.

He mentioned that 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty during the Modi government's tenure. Four crore houses have been built for the poor, providing shelter to 20 crore people, Shah said.

He also discussed the Central government's provision of free food grains to over 81 crore beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and the provision of toilets to every household under the Swachh Bharat Mission."Until 2014, 12 crore families in this country did not have toilets. Imagine the plight of girls in families without toilets," Shah said.

He emphasised that much work has been done by the Modi government to uplift medical infrastructure.

"In 2013-14, the Government of India's budget for the health sector was Rs 37,000 crore, and in 2025-26, it will be Rs 1.37 lakh crore," he said.

When Narendra Modi became PM, there were seven AIIMS in the country, six of which were established during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government. Now, there are 23 AIIMS. The number of medical colleges has increased from 387 to 766. The number of MBBS seats has grown from 51,000 to 1.15 lakh, with an additional 85,000 seats set to be added in the next five years, he added.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, state BJP Chief Mohan Lal Badoli, state health minister Arti Singh Rao, minister Ranbir Singh Gangwa, BJP MP from Kurukshetra Naveen Jindal, Chairperson Emeritus of the Jindal Group, Independent MLA from Hisar Savitri Jindal, former Rajya Sabha MP D P Vats and others were present on the occasion.

MYANMAR QUAKE



NDRF retrieves seven bodies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) on Monday recovered seven bodies from the earthquake flattened buildings in Mandalay region of Myanmar after the Indian rescuers were tasked with launching relief and rescue operations in about a dozen buildings, official sources said.

The Myanmarese authorities have assigned various sectors to different foreign rescue agencies which have come to help the country that was shaken by a devastating 7.7-magnitude quake on Friday claiming 1,700 lives till now.

The NDRF has been asked to work in 13 buildings in Sector D of Mandalay city, the second largest urban area of the country, about 65 kms from the airport in capital Naypitaw. At least seven bodies have been retrieved by NDRF personnel till now who landed in the country on Saturday as part of the humanitarian 'Operation Brahma' launched by India to help its neighbour with which it shares a 1,643-km-long international boundary. The 80 Indian federal rescuers are also working at the U hla thein monastery where 170 monks are stated to be stuck. Three bodies (out of the seven) were recovered by the NDRF from this location, the sources said.

The squad, armed with plasma cutters, hammers and other equipment used to search beneath collapsed structures, has also deployed four canines to search for signs of life which look to be "very bleak".

Narmada river key for MP and Gujarat progress: Yadav

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said on Monday that the Narmada river has played a major role in making MP and Gujarat prosperous states.

He also hailed the entrepreneurial spirit of the Gujarati community for building business in India and globally. "A large number of Gujarati brothers reside in many cities of Madhya Pradesh. Narmada Mayya (river) has played a major role in making the two states prosperous.

"Entrepreneurs and professionals of the Gujarati community have made a place for themselves by working hard in Gujarat, other states, and countries," Yadav said while welcoming Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel and the State Home Minister Harsh Sanghvi at the airport here. The Narmada River flows through Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Patel and Sanghvi arrived in Bhopal to attend the "Sadakal Gujarat-Bhopal" programme.

The Gujarat chief minister said a strong tradition of cooperation exists between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. "A new dimension is being added to these relations through the programme," he added.



Kerala Minister urges ASHA workers to send their cut hair to Centre

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Labour Minister V Sivankutty on Monday vehemently criticised ASHA workers for cutting their hair and shaving their heads -- in protest against alleged government apathy-- suggesting that they should instead send their hair strands to the central government via union ministers from the state.

The minister stated that Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) should have staged their protest and haircutting demonstration before the Centre in New Delhi. In a statement, Sivankutty, who also serves as the state's General Education Minister, further alleged that local BJP representatives had infiltrated the protest. Taking a dig at Suresh Gopi, he remarked that ASHA workers would not receive the demanded wage hikes even if the union minister distributed coats and umbrellas to them.

"It has been days since I sent a letter to the Union Labour Minister, requesting that scheme workers, including ASHAs, be granted worker status and made eligible for benefits under the Central Labour Act. However, I have not received any response so far," he said. Sivankutty also urged the union ministers from the state, Suresh Gopi and George Kurian, to pressure the Centre into approving the demands raised by ASHA workers.

He further countered claims that ASHA workers receive only Rs 7,000 as wages in Kerala, stating that the campaign was "baseless". According to him, ASHA workers, under stipulated conditions, are entitled to wages of up to Rs 13,200, including a telephone allowance, with Rs 10,000 being the state's contribution.

Pollution biggest challenge; transport sector significant contributor: Gadkari

PNS ■ THANE



Pollution is India's biggest challenge and the transport sector is a major contributor, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said on Monday, stressing the urgent need to transition from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources.

He said India's dependence on fossil fuels is both an economic burden as Rs 22 lakh crore is spent annually on fuel imports and an environmental hazard, making clean energy adoption crucial for the nation's progress.

Speaking at the launch of an eco-friendly electric cycle in Thane, the Road Transport & Highways Minister said cycling needs to be promoted as a sustainable urban transport option in view of increasing urbanisation.

Gadkari said the rapid growth of India's automobile sector has surpassed Japan to become the third-largest globally since 2014.

He said by 2030, India will be the world leader in electric vehicle (EV) production, significantly impacting the global auto market. He credited the sharp decline in lithium-ion battery prices (now at USD 100 per kWh) for making EVs more affordable and bringing them closer to price parity with traditional fuel-powered vehicles.

"Pollution is our country's biggest challenge, and a major part of it comes from the transport sector," Gadkari said, adding that the shift to electric and alternative fuels is not just an environmental necessity but also an economic imperative.

The minister said India's young engineering talent is the driving force behind innovations in EV technology and alternative fuels. He noted that startups are making significant breakthroughs, propelling India to the forefront of the green energy revolution. He also stressed the growing international demand for Indian-made electric two-wheelers which is a strong export opportunity that could boost the economy and improve India's trade balance.

"Another key area of focus is biofuels," Gadkari said.

'UCC will prevent crimes like Shraddha Walkar murder'

PNS ■ BAREILLY (UP)

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Monday said implementation of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would prevent crimes like the Shraddha Walkar murder case in Delhi.

He said a provision of the law mandates disclosure of live-in relationships to families. In May 2022, 25-year-old Shraddha Walkar was allegedly murdered by her live-in partner Aftab, who sawed her body into pieces and stored it in a refrigerator for almost three weeks, before disposing of them over several days.

Speaking at an event at Invertis University in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, where he was felicitated for implementing the UCC in Uttarakhand, Dhami dedicated the honour to the people of the state.

'In 2029, we will see Modi as PM again'

PNS ■ NAGPUR/MUMBAI



Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday dismissed speculation about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's successor, asserting the PM would continue to lead the country beyond 2029, when the next Lok Sabha polls are due.

Responding to Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut's claim that Modi went to the RSS headquarters on Sunday to convey the message that he is "retiring", Fadnavis told reporters in Nagpur, "In 2029, we will see Modi as the prime minister again."

Speaking to reporters separately in Nagpur, which houses the headquarters of the BJP's ideological mentor, senior RSS leader Suresh Bhaiyyaji' Joshi said he was not aware of any talk of (PM's) replacement.

"There is no need to search for his successor. He (Modi) is our leader and will continue (to lead)," Fadnavis insisted.

Discussing succession while the leader is active is inappropriate in Indian culture, the CM added.

"In our culture, when the father is alive, it is inappropriate to talk about succession. That is Mughal culture. The time has not come to discuss it," he said, referring to Raut's claim that Modi's successor would come from Maharashtra.

They don't know how to run govt: Atishi

Blames BJP for power cuts in Delhi; BJP hits back

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



AAP leader Atishi on Monday accused the city BJP government of failing to manage power supply, alleging outages have increased since the party took office last month.

In response, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva claimed that uninterrupted power supply is a fundamental duty of any government and accused the AAP of corruption in managing the power sector during its tenure.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi said, "Before the AAP government came to power, long power cuts were normal in the national capital."

She added, "Every household used to have inverters. But after Arvind Kejriwal became the chief minister of Delhi in February 2015, power cuts became history."

The former Delhi chief minister cited data presented by the BJP-led central government in Rajya Sabha to say that Delhi received a round-the-clock power supply under the AAP government.

"The people of Delhi do not need data because they know that for the past 10 years, their inverters were unused, and they didn't have to change batteries. But now, after the BJP formed the government in the city, power cuts are on the rise," she said.

Screen use could up insomnia risk by up to 60%: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



An hour of screen use before sleep could increase risk of insomnia by nearly 60 per cent and cut down sleep time by about half an hour, a study has found.

Over 45,000 students in Norway, aged 18-28, were asked about their sleep times and habits, including how long they used screens after going to bed. Purpose of screen use, such as watching movies or social media, was also reported by the participants.

"The type of screen activity does not appear to matter as much as the overall time spent using screens in bed," said Gunnhild Johnsen Hjetland of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and lead author of the study published in the journal Frontiers in Psychiatry.

"We found no significant differences between social media and other screen activities, suggesting that screen use itself is the key factor in sleep disruption -- likely due to time displacement, where screen use delays sleep by taking up time that would otherwise be spent resting," Hjetland said.

Insomnia is defined as taking more than 30 minutes to fall asleep and can include disturbances, such as waking up from sleep often during the night. Quality of sleep suffers and therefore, one could feel sleepy during the day, interfering with activities.

The researchers explained that screen use can affect sleep in four ways -- notifications disturb sleep, screen time replaces sleeping time, screen activities keep you wakeful so you take longer to fall asleep, or light exposure delays circadian rhythms.

Hjetland said sleep problems are highly prevalent among students and have significant implications for mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being.

"A one-hour increase of screen time after going to bed was associated with 59 per cent higher odds of having symptoms of insomnia and a reduction in sleep duration of 24 minutes," the authors wrote.

They also found no significant link between time spent using a screen and the choice of activity -- social media or movies -- suggesting that the activity itself did not affect time spent staying awake.

The result indicated that screens reduce sleep time by displacing rest, not because they increase wakefulness -- different activities would be expected to affect wakefulness differently, the researchers said.

"If you struggle with sleep and suspect that screen time may be a factor, try to reduce screen use in bed, ideally stopping at least 30-60 minutes before sleep," Hjetland said.

"If you do use screens, consider disabling notifications to minimise disruptions during the night," the author said.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | APRIL 1, 2025

Editor's TAKE

PM's historic visit to Nagpur

Narendra Modi visits RSS headquarters, strengthening ties amid political shifts

There were many firsts in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nagpur, the headquarters of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) known for its cultural voluntarism. It was a first by any Indian Prime Minister and also first visit of Narendra Modi as prime minister. The visit underscores the enduring significance of voluntary action in India's socio-political life. During his visit, Prime Minister Modi paid homage to Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS. This act signifies a recognition of Hedgewar's dedication to national service and the role of voluntary organisations in shaping India's societal fabric.

Modi visited Deekshabhoomi to honour Dr BR Ambedkar, acknowledging his monumental contributions to social reform and justice. Prime Minister's meeting with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat was also loaded with symbolism and signalled realigning of the BJP and RSS after a lean patch in the relations.

Such interactions are also pivotal in aligning national policies with grassroots movements, ensuring that developmental initiatives resonate with the voluntary organisations.

Beyond ceremonial engagements, Modi's visit encompassed the inauguration of significant projects aimed at bolstering infrastructure and healthcare. He laid the foundation stone for the expansion of the Madhav Netralaya Premium Center, a super-specialty eye care facility established in 2014 in memory of Dr Golwalkar. This initiative underscores the government's focus on enhancing healthcare accessibility through collaborative efforts. Furthermore, Modi inaugurated a 1,250-meter-long airstrip at Solar Defence and Aerospace Limited, facilitating the testing of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and advancing India's defence capabilities. The Prime Minister's engagements in Nagpur reflect the ethos of transformative leadership exemplified by figures like Mahatma Gandhi during India's freedom struggle. Gandhi's emphasis on voluntary action as a catalyst for societal change finds resonance in contemporary initiatives that seek to address social and environmental challenges.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) headquarters in Nagpur is historically significant as he becomes the first Indian Prime Minister to do so. The visit, coinciding with RSS's 100th anniversary, is seen as a strategic move to reaffirm ties between the BJP and its ideological parent after reports of friction last year. Modi paid homage to RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar and engaged in a conversation with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat reaffirming that the BJP and the Government were aligned with the ideals of RSS. While, BJP insist the visit is routine, it is politically significant. The BJP is in the process of selecting a new national president, a decision historically influenced by the RSS. Modi himself has deep roots in the organisation, having been an RSS pracharak since 1972.

Tensions between the BJP and RSS had surfaced before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, particularly after BJP Chief JP Nadda suggested that the party could function independently of RSS. However, following the BJP's reduced majority in the elections, the RSS played a crucial role in its subsequent assembly election victories in Haryana and Maharashtra.

This visit, therefore, signals a renewed alignment between the two. Indeed, apart from the political messaging and reaffirming the bond, Modi's visit serves as a reminder that the spirit of volunteerism remains integral to India's developmental journey.

Power of volunteerism

From Mahatma Gandhi's transformative leadership during the freedom struggle to modern global movements tackling social and environmental crises, voluntary action has remained a cornerstone of change



For centuries, India's socio-cultural tapestry has been interwoven with volunteerism, a practice deeply rooted in the ancient ideal of seva, or selfless service. This act, driven by empathy and a profound sense of collective responsibility, transcends personal gain, embodying human solidarity and a desire to uplift society.

At its heart lies 'servant leadership', a philosophy championed by figures like Mahatma Gandhi and coined by Robert K Greenleaf in 1977, which prioritises the needs of others, fostering sustainable social change through humble, compassionate action. Volunteerism acts as a cornerstone of civic engagement, building vibrant communities and promoting social cohesion. As recognised by the United Nations, it addresses critical humanitarian and economic challenges, cultivating leadership qualities grounded in humility and service (UNV, 2021).

True volunteers, motivated by a genuine commitment to making a difference, embody Greenleaf's vision of a "servant first," seeking no recognition or material reward, but rather finding fulfilment in contributing to the greater good. It is through voluntary service that individuals cultivate leadership qualities grounded in humility, compassion, and a commitment to others — key traits that define a servant leader.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of history's greatest proponents of servant leadership, believed in the transformative power of volunteerism.

His life exemplified the principle of *Sarvodaya* — the welfare of all — through selfless service. "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others", was Gandhi's mantra. Gandhi further emphasised that "Service can have no meaning unless one takes pleasure in it. When it is done for show or for public opinion, it stunts the man and crushes his spirit. Service, which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. But all other pleasures and possessions pale into nothingness before service which is rendered in a spirit of joy."

Mahatma Gandhi's commitment to voluntary service was evident in his efforts to eradicate untouchability, improve rural education, and uplift marginalised communities.

His approach to leadership was not one of command and control but of serving the needs of the people first, ensuring that the weakest in society were uplifted. The Dandi March of 1930, spanning from March 12 to April 6, stands as a powerful testament to the spirit of collective voluntary action. Mahatma Gandhi, leading 78 followers, embarked on this 385-kilometer journey from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, protesting the oppressive British salt tax. Along the way, thousands of people, including women, voluntarily joined this fight for freedom. Despite facing extreme British brutality, the marchers maintained unwavering nonviolence, a defining characteristic of this 24-day padayatra. Upon reaching Dandi on April 6, Gandhi's act of picking up a handful of salt resonated across India, igniting widespread civil disobedience. This historic march not only challenged colonial rule but also demonstrated the enduring power of volunteerism. Even 95 years later, this spirit continues to thrive, significantly contributing to social progress both in India and beyond, proving the lasting impact of unified action.

Historian Judith M Brown notes, "The salt march was a brilliant tactical move which galvanised the Indian population and caught the British government off guard." This act of volunteerism transcended social and economic barriers, uniting millions in the fight for independence. It demonstrated how individuals, driven by a shared vision of freedom, could volunteer their time and resources, and even risk their lives to achieve collective goals. It further exemplified, how volunteerism can catalyse social and political change. Brown further writes that "The salt *satyagraha* was designed to dramatise the way in which the whole system of British rule was based on exploitation and control, and to demonstrate that Indians could take independent action." The success of such movements hinged on the willingness of individuals to act selflessly for the greater good, reinforcing the idea that volunteerism is a powerful tool for societal transformation. Gandhi himself emphasised the importance of self-reliance and voluntary service in achieving Swaraj (self-rule). In his writings, he stressed the importance of seva (service) as a means of personal and societal transformation: "True Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused." Participants, from seasoned freedom fighters to ordinary villagers, provided food, shelter, medical assistance, and logistical support, ensuring the movement's success.



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Mark Engler and Paul Engler in their article *"How did Gandhi Win? Lessons from the Salt March"* in *Dissent Magazine* (2014) write that "Gandhi's act defied a law of the British Raj mandating that Indians buy salt from the Government and prohibiting them from collecting their own.

His disobedience set off a mass campaign of non-compliance that swept the country, leading to as many as 100,000 arrests. In a famous quote published in the *Manchester Guardian*, revered poet Rabindranath Tagore described the campaign's transformative impact: "Those who live in England, far away from the East, have now got to realise that Europe has completely lost her former prestige in Asia."

For the absentee rulers in London, it was "a great moral defeat." Dennis Dalton in his book, *"Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action,"* highlights the march's role in mobilising mass participation and fostering a sense of shared purpose. He states that the march was a perfect example of Gandhi's ability to use nonviolent action as a method of political and social change. The very fact that on May 5, 1930 — when incidents of nonviolent protests continued in several parts of British-dominated India — Gandhi was arrested with 60,000 of his supporters, shows the power of voluntary spirit in action.

The Dandi march, more than a simple act of defiance, was a living embodiment of Gandhi's philosophy of Swaraj (self-rule) and Seva (service). He transformed the mundane act of salt-making into a potent symbol of self-reliance, empowering millions to reclaim their agency against oppressive British rule. Through the selfless dedication of countless volunteers, he demonstrated the transformative power of service, uniting a nation in a collective act of resistance.

In the contemporary world, the intersection of volunteerism is more relevant than ever. Global challenges such as climate change, poverty, biodiversity conservation and social inequality demand leaders who serve with a vision beyond personal ambition. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan once noted that "Volunteerism is an essential element of any strategy to foster social inclusion, build social capital, and promote active citizenship." The spirit of volunteerism that fuelled the independence movement continues to thrive in the modern-day world. These selfless acts underscore the power of unity, demonstrating resilience and solidifying volunteerism as a force for positive change.

The writer is programme executive at Gandhi Smriti Sansthan. Views expressed are personal)

Tribute of a *'swayamsevak'*

SECOND Opinion



RAHUL KAUSHIK

On the 136th birth anniversary of Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Smruti Mandir at Reshimbagh in Nagpur, a place deeply revered by Swayamsevaks across the country, to pay tributes to the RSS founder Dr Hedgewar and Shri MS Golwalkar, fondly remembered as Shri Guruji.

For many who do not know the Sangh and its swayamsewaks, it can be a political visit, but for those who know, this was more than just a symbolic gesture, it was a reaffirmation of the shared ideological and emotional roots that continue to shape the Prime Minister's vision and leadership.

The RSS premises in Reshimbagh, which houses Smruti Mandir, where both Dr Hedgewar and the second Sarsanghchalak MS Golwalkar (popularly known as Shri Guruji) were cremated, is a sacred site for swayamsevaks.

Every year, hundreds of RSS swayamsewaks come and stay there for almost a month during the Tritiya Varsh training camp of the RSS to strengthen their spirit of Desh Bhakti and awaken within themselves the call of selfless service to our motherland.

For a swayamsevak, a visit to Smruti Mandir is not just an act of remembrance, it is a personal journey, almost a pilgrimage. It serves as a space that evokes deep reflection, stirs emotion, and reinforces the values of Desh Bhakti and selfless service.

The land is seen as sanctified, having borne the footsteps of countless dedicated volunteers who have committed their lives to the idea of a strong and united Hindu society and a self-reliant nation.The PM's visit comes at a time when the Sangh is marking 100 years since its founding in 1925.

What began as a modest initiative to organise and awaken national consciousness in the youth, has grown into one of the world's largest socio-cultural organisations.

Through its network of shakhas and affiliated institutions, the RSS has focused on character-building, social service, and cultural pride, mostly working quietly behind the scenes during times of crisis and social need. Dr Hedgewar once said, "The real strength of the nation lies in its people, not just in numbers, but in unity and character."

This philosophy has underpinned the Sangh's work for a century, aiming not at short-term political gain, but at long-term national transformation. It has dedicated itself to one goal — creating men of character who will then shape the present and future of Bharat, and the world.

In the words of Shri Guruji, "Our ultimate goal is not power, but a strong and harmonious society where every individual lives with dignity and devotion to the nation."

This approach has allowed the Sangh to influence diverse aspects of Indian life, from education and rural development to disaster relief and social harmony, without being dependent on political power or influence.

While there has often been speculation about ideological or strategic differences between the RSS and the BJP, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Smruti Mandir reflects a continuing alignment with the foundational values of the Sangh.

His political journey, from a humble swayamsevak to the highest office in the land, has remained informed by the discipline, nationalism, and ethos instilled in him through the Sangh.

As Bharat looks toward the future, the centenary of the RSS serves not only as a moment of reflection but also as a renewed commitment.

In the century ahead, the Sangh's guiding principles of unity, service, and cultural rootedness are set to remain as relevant as ever. We look forward with confidence to seeing Bharat advance as a strong, self-reliant, and harmonious nation, driven by the enduring ideals the Sangh has championed for a hundred years, shaping a future worthy of its civilisational greatness and global leadership.

(The author is a commentator on socio-political issues. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak



People try to create division in society for their politics. There are big issues today which should be discussed. At least, political parties should not comment on other people's religion. This is a matter of personal faith. Who will offer Namaz and where, whether shops will remain open or closed during Navratri — all these are worthless talks. There is no need for discussion over this.

CHIRAG PASWAN, UNION MINISTER

Letters to the Editor

Spinning a new yarn

Madam — Apropos of the thought provoking article 'Modi highlights issue of textile waste' (March 31) inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann ki Baat', it should be fundamentally recognised that waste is national wealth. Particularly the waste textile is much cheaper and easily available raw material for medium and low grade fabric used in households for multi purposes and for common usage by masses. Among all wastes, only metal waste have been widely utilised on a mass scale.

In malls, certain brands have launched schemes of accepting waste fabric at nominal cost or discounting the sales of fresh dress material. The biggest challenges, so far not addressed, are handling of the chemical waste of such recycling and processing units vitiating the ground water and the environment, and branding of recycled products for public acceptability.

Besides Panipat and Tirupur, Meerut, Kanpur, Gorakhpur (UP), Ludhiana (Punjab), Yevla (Maharashtra) have huge potential, skilled labour and infrastructure for this industry. The textile chemical waste causing huge ground water pollution has taken ominous political proportions in Panipat and Sonipat. Before embarking on recycling textile waste on a mass industrial scale, the problem of chemical waste should be solved technologically.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

Privatisation of education

Madam — Sonia Gandhi, MP and chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party, targeted the Narendra Modi-led Government at the Centre of following an agenda "leading to damaging consequences in the domain of education." She said there are '3Cs' that haunt Indian education today — centralisation, commercialisation and communalisation.

She said the Government was coercing the State Governments to implement the PM-SHRI scheme of model schools by withholding the grants due to them under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan as leverage. Criticising the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, she says in the article, "The introduction of the high-profile National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has hidden the reality of a Government that is profoundly indifferent to the education of India's children and youth. The Union Government's track record over the last decade has convincingly demonstrated that in education, it is concerned only with the successful implementation of three core agenda items the centralisation of power with the Union Government, the commercialisation and outsourcing of investments in education to the private sector, and the miscommunication of textbooks, curriculum, and institutions." Since 2014, we have seen the closure and consolidation of 89,441 public schools across the country and the establishment of 42,944 additional private schools.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Every drop holds life

Madam — Water conservation is no longer just a chapter in books, it is a declaration of war — a commitment that places a torch in our hands, challenges us, and reminds us at every step of the value of life. The water crisis is not mere imagination but a fire that has reached our doorstep. This is the moment when water conservation is not just a play of words but our last chance to sustain life.

"Every drop holds life" — this is not an old saying but the very heartbeat of our existence. Water is a priceless gem gifted by nature, yet we are wasting it carelessly as if we do not realise its worth. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on water conservation in 'Mann Ki Baat' is not just a decorative speech but a warning bell -an alarm that if we do not wake up now, there will be nothing left to regret tomorrow.

True, the Government is fulfilling its responsibility — reservoirs are being built, policies are being formulated, and plans are being structured. But is that enough? No! These efforts will bear fruit only when we — every home, every heart — actively participate in this noble cause. Water conservation is not just a government agenda but a duty for every living being on this planet.

It is time to move beyond daily habits and turn this into a passionate movement-one that revives our rivers, rejuvenates the earth, and gifts life to future generations.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

GHIBLI ILLUSTRATIONS: VIRAL TREND THAT HIDES DEEPER THREAT

The social media platforms, these days are bombarded with the studio Ghibli art illustrations, created by the people using ChatGPT and other AI tools.

The trending artificial intelligence driven art form which is created by AI chatbots are going viral with even the popular world leaders like Uniter States President Donald Trump, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others too making their portrayal from it.

Although, the viral trend of Ghibli illustrations is welcoming as it gives a rejoice to us to revive our cute memories, by curating them in water-coloured cartoonist art from, which is traditionally a Japanese art style technique.

But at the same time, it is also a point of concern because if AI will continue eating the art space, then what will happened to the concept of originality. Art is the wonderful gift given by God to the artist.

It is this art which allow him to earn praise and living in the society. If AI will steal the artistic magic from the original art form, one can expect the decline of art and its various forms soon from the society.

The original art will vanish in the future as AI is replacing the job of artistic persons. AI is offering us every such creative art work free of cost.

It is good for the short-run. But in the long run, if the trend continues for Ghibli illustration today, may be some other forms of art tomorrow, the day will come soon, when man will lose this magical blessing of making art on his own. AI is a potential threat for the future of art.

We must restore the original art by encouraging artist and the new generation to learn drawing these Ghibli's on their own instead letting AI to recreate your memories into art style in just few minutes.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

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

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | APRIL 1, 2025

Delhi budget: Big push for capital spending

In her first budget as Chief Minister and Finance Minister of Delhi, Rekha Gupta has taken bold steps to increase capital expenditure, signaling a shift towards infrastructure-led growth

FIRST Column



In the Budget for the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi for the financial year (FY) 2025-26 presented on March 24, 2025, Rekha Gupta the Chief Minister (she also holds the finance portfolio) has done 'heavy lifting' by substantially boosting capital expenditure even while making some smart moves to lower the burden of its poll pledges. At the outset, let us take a look at FY 2024-25.

For the FY 2024-25, Atishi the then finance minister under the AAP Government had budgeted for total expenditure (TE) of ₹76,000 crore including revenue expenditure (RE) of ₹61,000 crore and capital expenditure (CE) of ₹15,000 crore. Against this, the revised estimate of TE has turned out to be ₹6,500 crore less at ₹69,500 crore. While the RE at ₹55,500 crore is lower by ₹5,500 crore, the capital expenditure too is down by ₹1000 crore to ₹14,000 crore.

The shortfall in actual expenditure over the budgeted level is a clear manifestation of poor economic management by the erstwhile AAP dispensation. On the capital side, the inability to spend even the budgeted amount shows the slow pace of project execution. Besides, the umpteen instances of irregularities and misappropriation of funds as brought out in the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) raises doubts about whether the amount spent went for the intended purpose.

The significant shortfall in spending on the revenue side also points towards serious lapses in governance.

For FY 2025-26, the incumbent Rekha Government has proposed TE of ₹100,000 crore which is a massive ₹30,500 crore higher than the revised estimate of ₹69,500 crore for FY 2024-25. Out of this, the capital expenditure for FY 2025-26 at ₹28,000 crore is double the actual for FY 2024-25 at ₹14,000 crore. Even the RE for FY 2025-26 at ₹72,000 crore is ₹16,500 crore higher than the actual for FY 2024-25 at ₹55,500 crore — an increase of around 30 per cent.



UTTAM GUPTA

An important criterion for testing whether a Budget is good is the proportion of the total spend it provides for capital expenditure on building assets like roads, bridges, flyovers, expressways, drainage systems, pipelines etc as this assures a regular income stream in the long-term besides providing jobs on a sustainable basis.

The capital expenditure for FY 2025-26 at ₹28,000 crore works out to 28 per cent of the TE as against only 20 per cent for FY 2024-25. Correspondingly, the RE is down to 72 per cent during FY 2025-26 from 80 per cent during FY 2024-25.

Setting an ambitious target by itself won't be of any use unless this is accompanied by garnering the required resources to support the desired spending level. The Government has projected a total revenue of ₹69,950 crore for the FY 2025-26. This includes tax revenue of ₹68,700 crore (GST and VAT: ₹49,000 crore, excise duty: ₹7000 crore, stamp duty or registration fee: ₹9000 crore and levies on motor vehicles: ₹3700 crore), non-tax revenue of ₹750 crore and other capital receipts of around ₹500 crore.

The tax revenue for FY 2024-25 is ₹59,200 crore (as per revised estimate), aiming at tax revenue of ₹68,700 crore for FY 2025-26 which works out to 17 per cent more seems a bit unrealistic. Assuming this will materialise, still the estimated total revenue of ₹69,950 crore for FY 2025-26 will fall short of even the RE resulting in a revenue deficit (RD) of ₹2050 crore. Add to this the capital expenditure of ₹28,000 crore, the Government could end up with a fiscal deficit (FD) of ₹30,050 crore. But, the picture projected by Rekha Gupta is much less bleak than what these numbers would suggest.

> AN IMPORTANT CRITERION FOR TESTING WHETHER A BUDGET IS GOOD IS THE PROPORTION OF THE TOTAL SPEND IT PROVIDES FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURE ON BUILDING ASSETS LIKE ROADS, BRIDGES, ETC AS THIS ASSURES A REGULAR INCOME STREAM IN THE LONG-TERM

This has been made possible by what she has termed as 'Union government's aid for capital projects'. A substantial provision of ₹12,096 crore has been made under this head and included under 'non-tax receipts' of the Delhi budget.

This boosts the total revenue for FY 2025-26 to ₹82,046 crore (69,950+12,096). Minus RE of ₹72,000 crore, we get a 'revenue surplus' of ₹10,046 crore (instead of RD of ₹2050 crore). One wonders whether an amount received by the Delhi Government from the Centre could be justified as a 'legitimate' source of revenue earned by the former.

On the basis that this is tenable and the Delhi Government gets to a total revenue of ₹82,046 crore, the TE being ₹100,000 crore, it would still be left with a gap of ₹17,954 crore.

Taking into account an 'opening balance' of ₹2,965 crore at the start of FY 2025-26, the gap is reduced to ₹14,989 crore or say ₹15,000 crore. So, Delhi will still be saddled with an FD of ₹15,000 crore for which it intends to take a loan from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF).

During the elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had given several guarantees, the prominent ones being ₹2,500 a month to women under Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY), ₹ 21,000 to pregnant women, LPG cylinders at subsidised price of ₹500 and free cylinder on Holi and Diwali, implementation of Ayushman Bharat scheme and additional cover of ₹500,000 for senior citizens and so on. Redeeming these promises 'in toto' would have led to a mind-boggling increase in the RE. But, a deft handling of this issue by Team Rekha has salvaged the situation.

For instance, implementing MSY as promised ie giving cash assistance of ₹2500 per month to 'every' woman above the age of 18 years in Delhi (their number is 6700,000) would have cost the exchequer ₹20,100 crore per annum. However, by restricting the assistance only to BPL families, it has reined in the outgo at just about one-fourth or ₹5100 crore.

Besides having to deal with the political ramifications of not implementing its promises in toto, the Government will have a tough time managing its finances. To get a jump of around ₹10,000 crore in Delhi's tax revenue over a high of ₹59,000 crore achieved during FY 2024-25 will be daunting. Then, you have the highest ever fiscal deficit of ₹15,000 crore and the cost it will entail by way of additional interest payments.

The Government can't also be oblivious of its other liabilities currently not reflected on its books. For instance, its department the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) has a debt of over ₹70,000 crore. Likewise, according to the CAG, Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) had incurred a cumulative loss of ₹60,000 crore at the end of FY 2021-22.

These would have ballooned further during the following three FYs till the end of March 2025. The liability for servicing those debts of ₹130,000 crore plus is vested entirely in the NCT Government.

The government will also have to reckon with regulatory assets (RAs) of power distribution companies or discoms worth ₹27,000 crore.

RAs are created when the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commissions (DERC) accept that the tariffs don't cover discoms' purchase costs but don't raise rates. The resulting gap is booked by discoms as RA. Even as the government has vowed to protect consumers from tariff hikes, it will have to find money to pay for this massive liability. Team Rekha faces a "tough terrain" ahead.

(The author is a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Crucial role of staffi- g i- dustry i- drivi- g formal job creatio-

The staffing industry plays a crucial role in formal job creation for the vast workforce in India that currently operates outside of the social security ambit. With over 400 million individuals seeking stable employment opportunities, the need for formalisation is evident. As more industries recognise the advantages of utilizing staffing services for formal job creation, the potential to uplift millions of workers into secure and regulated positions continues to grow exponentially.

The staffing industry plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between the skills possessed by job seekers and the demands of employers. By understanding the specific requirements of businesses, staffing companies can effectively match candidates with the right skill sets for job opportunities. This not only benefits employers by providing them with qualified personnel but also helps job seekers find suitable employment that aligns with their expertise.

Moreover, through their extensive networks and industry knowledge, staffing companies can identify emerging trends in various sectors and connect skilled workers to relevant job openings. This proactive approach ensures employers and employees are well-positioned to meet evolving market demands.

By facilitating this matchmaking process, staffing firms contribute significantly to formal job creation in India. They enable individuals to secure stable employment within established companies while assisting businesses in efficiently sourcing talent for their operations. This synergy ultimately fosters economic growth and enhances overall productivity across different industries.

The staffing industry in India plays a crucial role in formal job creation across various sectors, benefiting both employers and job seekers. The sectors that can greatly benefit from this arrangement are the construction, goods and transport sectors. With its high demand for workforce on a short term and project-to-project basis, these industries need to have a formal approach that can take the employer-worker arrangement through the formal staffing industry that can provide better opportunities to the workers and protect the industry from malpractices.

The new age sectors that are poised for growth through formal job creation via the staffing industry are renewable energy, EV, and Agritech. As the new age sectors expand with technological advancements, there is a rising need for qualified workforce which are not readily available but need to be trained or skilled and brought gradually grown through short-term employment.

Continuing trends from industries like retail, logistics, IT, e-commerce etc, they are increasingly turning to staffing companies to meet seasonal demands and scale their workforce up or down as needed. By utilising staffing services, these sectors can ensure flexibility in their workforce while providing more formal employment opportunities to individuals including keeping them under social security ambit.

By leveraging the expertise of formal staffing companies, various sectors in India have the potential to drive formal job creation while meeting their specific recruitment needs effectively.

The Indian Government recognises the significant role of the staffing industry in formal job creation and has introduced various initiatives. Through the major policy reforms that are yet to be implemented through labour codes, the Staffing industry will be better regulated which will directly help to bring ease of business for corporates, access to better social security for job seekers and remittances through proper channels for the government. The need to regulate the staffing companies has been an active approach taken by the Indian Staffing Federation for over a decade to transition CLRA into National or State licences, which will make staffing companies further regulated and responsible. The labour codes are now a necessity to be implemented that were passed by parliament in 2020.



SUCHITA DUTTA

EPFO has recognised that expert services (which are mostly catered by Staffing Companies) have increased new employment generation by 12-15 per cent YoY. Formal job creation is considered by contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) for new employees.

Additionally, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has been actively engaging with stakeholders in the staffing industry to address challenges and streamline processes. By fostering a conducive environment for flexible employment arrangements, these policies aim to boost overall economic growth and workforce participation rates. With continued support from government initiatives, the staffing industry in India is poised for sustained expansion, driving formal job creation across various sectors.

The future outlook for the staffing industry in India appears promising, with a growing demand for flexible workforce solutions by at least 15-16 per cent YoY. As businesses continue to adapt to dynamic market conditions, the need for skilled temporary and contract workers is expected to rise.

With technological advancements shaping the way we work, staffing companies have an opportunity to leverage digital platforms for efficient talent acquisition and management. This shift towards automation and data analytics can help match job seekers with suitable roles more effectively.

Moreover, as more sectors recognise the benefits of formal employment through staffing services, there is potential for significant growth in job creation across industries such as IT, healthcare, manufacturing, and retail. By providing access to a diverse pool of talent, staffing agencies can play a vital role in bridging skill gaps within organisations.

Government initiatives aimed at supporting the staffing industry further indicate a positive trajectory for its expansion. Through policies that promote formal employment and protect workers' rights, there is room for continued collaboration between public authorities and private sector stakeholders.

The evolving landscape presents ample opportunities for the staffing industry to thrive in India's ever-changing job market. By staying agile and adaptable to emerging trends, this industry can position itself as a key driver of economic growth and employment opportunities nationwide. The staffing industry will continue to be a key player in driving formal job creation in India, thus paving the way for a more structured and sustainable employment landscape in the country.

The staffing industry in India remains a cornerstone of formal job creation, bridging the gap between workforce demand and supply across various sectors. By facilitating structured employment opportunities, staffing companies play a crucial role in enhancing job security and social benefits for millions.

Industries such as construction, logistics, renewable energy, and agritech stand to gain significantly from this shift toward formalised staffing solutions. Additionally, Government initiatives and labor code reforms aim to further regulate and strengthen the industry.

As businesses continue to embrace flexible workforce solutions, staffing firms are poised for sustained growth, leveraging digital advancements for talent acquisition and workforce management. With a projected annual growth of 15-16 per cent, the sector will play an instrumental role in shaping India's evolving employment landscape.

By driving formalisation and bridging skill gaps, the staffing industry is set to contribute significantly to economic growth, ensuring a more stable and sustainable future for India's workforce.

(The author is Executive Director, Indian Staffing Federation (ISF). Views expressed are personal)

Staving off depressing thoughts and emotions

His teammates and opponents jumped and hopped as Uday (name changed), a strapping youngster, generated pace and bounce off the wicket. Soon he fancied representing his school and maybe one day India too. The youngster was passionate about cricket and modelled himself on Imran Khan. He sported a similar flowing mane and dressed like the talismanic and outstanding Pakistan speed merchant. He spent considerable time at the nets honing his bowling skills and was fast emerging as the leading bowler of the school team and had by now developed a reasonable fan following.

He was also obsessed with Bollywood productions and was enamoured by the superstar Amitabh Bachchan, so much so that his swagger and gait were similar to those of his idol. At that young and innocent age, the minds of whippersnappers are influenced by the purported acts of valour of their superstars and iconic characters by whom they are inspired. And they dream of being like their paladins. Humans are social animals and interactions, whether in person or through the media, weave their way and etch impressions on the mind. Uday too was a dreamer.



RAVI VALLURI

However, his doctor-father did not approve of the fantasy and make-believe world his son inhabited. Much to his chagrin, the aspiring cricketer was forced to forsake the red cherry, the nets and white flannels and opt for the medical stream at school. Unfortunately, the youngster went into depression.

He could barely figure out the complexities of human anatomy as his mind meandered perpetually to the cricket playfield. Intriguingly the father could never appreciate the mind and passions of his only son. The stripling youth lost the possible opportunity to represent India and went astray, losing his peace of mind at an innocent age was administered Prozac and had to undergo psychiatric treatment as he withdrew into a shell of anonymity and was beginning to exhibit violent tendencies.

A depressed mind manifests antipathetic emotions such as melancholy, feelings of despondency and rejection. It is more than traits of sadness and grief. Soon the mind faces hardship such as symptoms of anxiety, sleep disorders, and debilitating agitation accompanied by acute restlessness and disorientation in the thought process. At the physical plane, a mentally distraught person is afflicted with fatigue, exhaustion, attacks of migraine, chest pain, arthritis, spondylitis, problems in the gut, reduction or increase in appetite, a sudden spurt, degeneration in the limbs, and drop in immunity levels.

Depressed individuals are plagued and agonised by a double whammy. They lose interest in life and suffer from physical and mental disabilities. A depressed individual hosts negativity within his persona, resulting in the depletion of his aura. Consequently, he becomes friendless and is cocooned in the vicious cycle of miserable thoughts.

This infelicitous state can become treacherous as the afflicted may contemplate snuffing out his life, suffer from schizophrenia or even suffer from addictions. Demons of gloom-ridden thoughts always create their nests in the minds that are not robust and efficacious in their approach to life.The great Buddhist scholar Nagarjuna had written some prescient words: If there is a remedy when trouble strikes, what reason is there for despondency?

And if there is help for it, what is the use of being sad? So, come what may, I will never harm My cheery, happiness of mind. Depression never brings me what I want, my virtue will be warped and marred by it.It is important for despondent and desperate people to appreciate that time acts as a pre-eminent healer and that depression and suffering can be staved off through surrender to the Divine, through the practice of meditation and mindful living. It is essential to ensure that the mind of an individual does not get gripped by disconsolate thoughts.

The family, friends and associates need to play an active role in boosting the morale of the patient by uplifting his spirits and ensuring that he is not mired and enmeshed in the cesspool of negative emotions. Fortuitously, medical science has made rapid advancements and helplines are available today 24 x 7 wherein prompt assistance can be rendered to those suffering from bouts of acute depression. A mind that is cannonaded with negative thoughts should unflinchingly take to physical activities as they release positive endorphins, which help to stave off negativity and depression. Apart from medical treatment, such people should go for long walks; if they have a pet, it would be a worthwhile effort to take the pet for a stroll and observe its pranks. At their workplace, they ought to take the flight of steps rather than the lift, attempt an early morning jog and sweat it out instead of consuming a cup of coffee, which will in any case add toxins to the body through its content of caffeine. The body and mind will benefit by partaking in lime water laced with honey to combat early morning blues. The able-bodied, mentally brawny, as well as those unfortunate individuals suffering from depression shouldn't remain seated for more than 20 minutes. To divert their attention from mental maladies, it is an effectual habit to attempt gardening or pursuing a hobby. What happened to the main protagonist Uday? He was treated medically for the psychological problem but was also guided by his friend to attempt alternative methods to stave off depression. After a few sessions with a psychiatrist Uday found his mojo once again by sporting white flannels and went on to write a biography of a celebrated cricketer.

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

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IN BRIEF



Videotex aims Rs 1,000 cr revenue

Videotex, a home-grown original design manufacturer (ODM) for TV is aiming to be a Rs 1,000-crore company, doubling its topline in next four years, led by capacity enhancement and diversification into the growing appliances segment, a company official said. The company, which does contract manufacturing for over 20 Indian and global brands for the domestic market, has plans to expand its capacity to 3.2 million units per annum, Videotex Director Arjun Bajaj said. "Over the next four years, we aim to achieve Rs 1,000 crore in revenue by expanding our capabilities, diversifying our product portfolio in the appliances segment, and driving innovation through R&D," Bajaj said. The company, which operates two manufacturing units at Greater Noida, UP, had a revenue of Rs 409 crore for the financial year that ended on March 31, 2024 and expects to end the current fiscal year around Rs 470 crore. "As part of a phased expansion, we have already reached an annual manufacturing capacity of 2.2 million units in Phase I.



CTI urges Delhi CM to reduce VAT on ATF

The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) on Monday wrote a letter to Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, urging a reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT)on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) to prevent a shift of air passengers to Noida's Jewar Airport. CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal said the high VAT on ATF in Delhi is making flight operations costlier, which could lead airlines to prefer Jewar Airport in Uttar Pradesh. He said, "While Delhi levies a 25 per cent VAT on ATF, Uttar Pradesh reduced its tax from 21 per cent to just 1 per cent in December 2024." CTI General Secretary Gurmeet Arora emphasised that the lower tax in UP will significantly reduce operational costs for airlines, potentially leading to lower airfares at Jewar Airport compared to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport.



Croma appoints Shibashish Roy as new CEO & MD

Tata Group retail chain Croma on Monday announced the appointment of Shibashish Roy as its new Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, effective April 1. Roy was named CEO in November 2024 and worked alongside outgoing Managing Director Avijit Mitra during a transition period that concluded in March 2025, Croma said in a statement.
He has over 20 years of experience in Tata Group companies and has been instrumental in expanding Croma's market presence and improving its customer service approach across different sales channels, it added. "Shibashish has been transitioning into the role of CEO & MD over the past five months, following the succession plan announced late last year... I am certain Shibashish's digital-first approach and passion for customer engagement will drive Croma to great heights and look forward to working with him," Infiniti Retail Ltd Chairman Naveen Tahilyani said.

SITHARAMAN TO VISIT LONDON FROM APRIL 8 TO10

FTA may figure in talks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Issues pertaining to the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) and bilateral investment treaty between India and the UK are expected to figure during the three-day visit of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to London from April 8-10, official sources said.

The minister would be attending a host of meetings, including India-United Kingdom Economic and Financial Dialogue, in London.

Sitharaman is likely to hold a bilateral meeting with UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves and other British ministers.

"Issues pertaining to the trade agreement and bilateral investment treaty (BIT) may also come up for discussions between the two," the official said.

On February 24, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds announced resumption of negotiations for the proposed FTA between the two countries.

The India-UK negotiations are resuming after a gap of over eight months.

The talks were launched on January 13, 2022. So far 14 rounds of talks have been completed.

The two countries are actively negotiating on three different fronts - FTA, a bilateral investment treaty (BIT), and a Double Contribution Convention Agreement.

In the BIT, the sticking point between the two nations is with regard to the resolution of disputes.

In the trade agreement, India is looking for greater access for its students and professionals in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

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

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

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23. Britain is the sixth-largest investor in India. The country received USD 35.3 billion in FDI between April 2000 and September 2024.

The talks may get a boost as India has announced to raise the foreign direct investment cap in the insurance sector to 100 per cent from the existing 74 per cent.

FM to launch 'NITI NCAER States Economic Forum' portal today

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will launch the "NITI NCAER States Economic Forum" portal on Tuesday providing access to a comprehensive repository of data on social, economic, and fiscal parameters of states spanning over three decades till financial year 2022-23. The portal, developed by NITI Aayog, in collaboration with the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), offers direct access to the complete database categorised across five verticals -- Demography; Economic Structure; Fiscal; Health and Education of states. Besides, the portal will provide macro and fiscal landscape of 28 Indian states, structured around indicators on demography, economic structure, socio-economic and fiscal indicators, NITI Aayog said in a statement. The portal will facilitate an understanding of macro, fiscal, demographic, and socio-economic trends; easily accessible data and user-friendly format.

India's external debt rises to USD 717.9 bn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's external debt increased by 10.7 per cent to USD 717.9 billion at the end of December 2024 from USD 648.7 billion in December 2023, as per the data released by the finance ministry.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, there is a 0.7 per cent increase in external debt from the level of USD 712.7 billion at the end of September 2024, according to India's Quarterly External Debt Report.

The external debt to GDP ratio stood at 19.1 per cent at the end of December 2024, against 19 per cent in September 2024, it said.

The valuation effect is due to the appreciation of the US dollar vis-a-vis the rupee and other major currencies, such as the yen, the euro and Special Drawing Rights (SDR), amounting to USD 12.7 billion during the quarter ended December 2024, the report said.

Excluding the valuation effect, the increase in external debt would have been USD 17.9 billion quarter-on-quarter against USD 5.2 billion at the end of December 2024 over September 2024, it added.

"US dollar-denominated debt remained the largest component of India's external debt, with a share of 54.8 per cent in end-December 2024, followed by Indian Rupee (30.6 per cent), Japanese Yen (6.1 per cent), SDR (4.7 per cent) and Euro (3 per cent)," it said.

The outstanding external debt of the central government declined while that of the non-government sector increased at December-end 2024 over its level at September-end 2024, it noted.



The share of outstanding debt of non-financial corporations in the total external debt was 36.5 per cent, followed by deposit-taking corporations (except the central bank) (27.8 per cent), central government (22.1 per cent) and other financial corporations (8.7 per cent), according to the report.

Loans were the largest component of external debt, with a share of 33.6 per cent, followed by currency and deposits (23.1 per cent), trade credit and advances (18.8 per cent) and debt securities (16.8 per cent), it added.

Deepak Fertilisers arm gets demand notice of Rs 226 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Deepak Fertilisers And Petrochemicals Corporation Ltd on Monday said its subsidiary has received a demand notice of Rs 226.32 crore from the Income Tax Department for assessment years 2017-18 and 2018-19.

In a regulatory filing, the company informed that the order imposing penalty has been passed against its wholly owned subsidiary Mahadhan AgriTech Ltd.

The demand notice dated March 30, 2025, has been issued by Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax- Central Circle, Mumbai.

The total penalty demands under various sections of the Income Tax Act 1961 amount to Rs 226.32 crore for assessment years 2017-18 and 2018-19, it added. Deepak Fertilisers said the company is in the process of filing an appeal against the present penalty orders. The company is of the opinion that it has a strong case on merits and confident of succeeding in getting these demands quashed in the appellate proceedings.

BSE smallcap index jumps 8 pc ,optimism in equity mkts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The BSE smallcap and midcap indices ended the 2024-25 fiscal on a positive note amid a strong rebound this month, driven by a largely optimistic trend in the stock market, impressive retail investors' participation and better valuations.

In the 2024-25 fiscal, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3,471.79 points or 8 per cent while the midcap index climbed 2,209 points or 5.61 per cent.

In comparison, the BSE benchmark Sensex rallied 3,763.57 points or 5.10 per cent in the entire 2024-25 financial year.

Rebound in March was driven by improving domestic optimism and return of foreign flows with bargain hunting at lower levels as valuations are now more aligned to historic averages, he added.

Stock markets came under bear attack from October onwards amid concerns over foreign investors fleeing the domestic market and rich valuations of the equities.

But, heavy retail investors' participation played a crucial role in the overall market's positive trend this fiscal.

Also, return of foreign investors after a prolonged period of selling, bargain hunting at lower levels, better valuations and the US Fed signalling two rate cuts in 2025 boosted investor sentiment, experts said.

In the month of March, the BSE benchmark index surged 4,216.82 points or 5.76 per cent.

The BSE smallcap gauge zoomed 3,555.23 points or 8.25 per cent and the midcap index surged 2,939.1 points or 7.61 per cent this month alone.

"The Indian equity markets experienced a strong performance in FY25, maintaining equilibrium in the face of global challenges. The strong electoral mandates have shored-up market confidence, ensuring continuity of policies.

Haldiram sells stake to IHC and Alpha Wave Global

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Haldiram Snacks Food, the country's leading snack and food brand, on Monday confirmed selling its stake to two new investors -- IHC (International Holding Company) and Alpha Wave Global -- according to a release. However, the statement did not disclose the details of the deal. The announcement comes a day after Haldiram confirmed acquisition of a minority stake by Singapore-based global investment firm Temasek. The details of this deal were also not disclosed. "Haldirams, India's leading snack and food brand, is pleased to announce the addition of two new investors, IHC (International Holding Company) and Alpha Wave Global, to its ongoing equity round, following Temasek's recent participation," the statement said.

This strategic move further strengthens Haldirams financial position as it accelerates its global expansion plans, particularly in the US and the Middle East. "The investment reflects Alpha Wave Global's and IHC's commitment to backing dominant companies with strong consumer brands," it said. According to industry sources, IHC and Alpha Wave are collectively acquiring a minority stake of about 6 per cent stake in Haldiram Snacks Food at a valuation of USD 10 billion (around Rs 85,000 crore), which is considered to be the largest for the Indian packaged food industry.

Gujarat Kidney Super Speciality files IPO papers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Healthcare company Gujarat Kidney And Super Speciality has filed its preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to mobilise funds through an initial public offering. The initial public offering (IPO) is entirely a fresh issue of equity shares of up to 2.2 crore equity shares with a face value of Rs 2 each, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Friday.

The proceeds from the fresh issue to the tune of Rs 77 crore will be used for proposed acquisition of Parekhs Hospital at Ahmedabad and Rs 12.4 crore for part-payment of purchase consideration for the already acquired "Ashwini Medical Centre".

Funds worth Rs 30.2 crore will be used by the company for funding capital expenditure requirements towards setting up a new hospital in Vadodara, and Rs 7.3 crore for buying robotics equipment for the hospital at Vadodara. Additionally, proceeds worth Rs 1.5 crore for debt repayment and the remaining funds will be used for funding inorganic growth through unidentified acquisitions & general corporate purposes.

BirlaNu plans to invest up to Rs 1,300 cr, eyes acquisitions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



CK Birla Group home and building material solutions firm BirlaNu Ltd plans to invest up to Rs 1,300 crore in the next three years as part of its strategy to double sales in 3-4 years time, according to top company officials.

The company, which had recently renamed itself as BirlaNu Ltd from erstwhile HIL Ltd and undertaken a rebranding exercise, is also scouting for acquisition opportunities to fuel its growth, BirlaNu Ltd President Avanti Birla said.

"We are widening our positioning and going further, in a two-fold manner -- in our own products and we're also looking externally at diversifying, other products (and) potential acquisitions," she said when asked about the future roadmap.

Asked if any acquisitions are being considered at the moment and how much war chest has been prepared, she said, "It is just part of our expansion...when it comes to the external market, there is no particular number as such right now but we are always looking for opportunities that come to us at the right price."

Elaborating further, BirlaNu Ltd Managing Director & CEO Akshat Seth said the company has set on a journey to doubling sales in the next three to four years and do it profitably, identifying pipes and construction chemicals to be the real growth engines, besides expecting its global interiors brand Parador to also double during the time period.

"In order to do this, organic growth is one big lever, but we are evaluating inorganic opportunities...we continue to look for good assets overall to fuel this growth," Seth added.

Renault to buy out Nissan's stake in Indian joint venture

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

French auto major Renault on Monday said it will buy out its Japanese partner Nissan's stake in their Indian joint venture -- Renault Nissan Automotive India Private Ltd.

Renault Group would own 100 per cent of Renault Nissan Automotive India Private Ltd (RNAIPL), by acquiring the 51 per cent shareholding currently held by Nissan, the company said in a statement.

The company, however, did not disclose the financial details of the transaction.

Renault Group and Nissan have entered into a share purchase agreement to this effect.

Upon the completion of this transaction, Renault Group would own 100 per cent of RNAIPL, it added.

The agreement also includes an operational agreement to continue the current projects between Renault Group and Nissan, and to define the future relationship of Renault Group and Nissan in India.

Nissan will continue to use RNAIPL for sourcing vehicles for India and for exports in the coming years, the statement said.

Meanwhile, Renault Group and Nissan will continue to operate jointly, Renault Nissan Technology & Business Center India (RNTBCI) in which Nissan will retain its 49 per cent stake and Renault Group will hold its 51 per cent stake.

RNAIPL would continue to produce Nissan models, including the New Nissan Magnite, and will serve as a crucial pillar for the company's future expansion plans, the company said.

Under the agreement, Renault Group, through Ampere, the first European intelligent EV pure player, would develop and produce a derivative of Twingo, a A-segment vehicle, for Nissan from 2026.



Investment, turnover criteria to help MSMEs scale up: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The revised investment and turnover criteria for micro, small and medium enterprises, effective from Tuesday this week, is expected to offer greater opportunities for growth and expansion, resulting in increased job creation, according to experts.

The government has notified significant revisions to the turnover and investment criteria for classifying MSMEs, which will come into effect from April 1.

Under the revised criteria, the investment and turnover limits for classification of all MSMEs will be enhanced to 2.5 and 2 times, respectively.

"The revised and increased eligibility should enable those MSMEs who have had good growth to grow further by giving them increased headroom to continue to grow. It should be especially beneficial for new micro enterprises as they can scale up with the various fiscal incentives available, especially with regard to access to finance," Ashok Saigal, Co-Chairman of CII National MSME Council, said.

He further said the growth of MSMEs is expected to boost employment creation.



Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) with investments up to Rs 2.5 crore will now be classified as micro enterprises, from the previous threshold of Rs 1 crore. The turnover limit has been revised from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore.

Units with investments up to Rs 25 crore will be classified as small enterprises, from the earlier Rs 10 crore. The turnover limit for such enterprises has been doubled from Rs 50 crore to Rs 100 crore.

MSMEs with investments up to Rs 125 crore will now be classified as medium enterprises, from the earlier limit of Rs 50 crore. For medium enterprises, the turnover limit has been doubled to Rs 500 crore.

During her budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced new classification criteria for MSMEs.

"To help them (MSMEs) achieve higher efficiencies of scale, technological upgradation and better access to capital, the investment and turnover limits for classification of all MSMEs will be enhanced to 2.5 and 2 times, respectively.

This will give them the confidence to grow and generate employment for our youth," the Finance Minister said in her Budget speech on February 1.

Battleground brings high-stakes competition with four powerhouse leaders

The battle lines have been drawn and the competition is about to explode with high-octane energy! Amazon MX Player's newest reality show, *Battleground*, is set to push contestants to their absolute limits in a gripping test of strength, endurance and strategy. With cricketing superstar Shikhar Dhawan stepping in as the Supermentor, the show just got an extra layer of intensity.

But that's not all—*Battleground* has now unveiled its four electrifying team leaders: Asim Riaz, Rajat Dalal, Rubina Dilaik and Abhishek Malhan. These powerhouse personalities will be leading the charge, mentoring 16 contestants as they fight their way through grueling challenges for the title of *India's Biggest Fitness Star* (Male & Female).

The anticipation surrounding Battleground skyrocketed after a clip of Asim Riaz and Rajat Dalal's heated confrontation went viral, sending fans into a frenzy. The speculation is now over—the rivalry is real, and the newly released promo makes it clear that this face-off is just the beginning!

The competition kicks off on April 5, running for an intense 28 days, where strength will collide with strategy and only the toughest will survive. Each leader will spearhead a regional team—Mumbai Strikers, Haryana Bulls, Delhi Dominators and UP Dabangs—guiding them



through relentless physical challenges, unexpected twists and drama-filled eliminations.

Known for his unwavering determination, Asim is all set to bring his A-game to the Battleground house.

Speaking about the competition, he shared, "I've always believed that real strength comes from pushing your limits, and that's exactly what I'm bringing to *Battleground*. My team and I are ready to face every challenge head-on and prove we're the fiercest competitors in the game."

With his no-nonsense approach and hunger to dominate, Rajat isn't here to play nice. "For me, it's not just about being strong, it's about being unstoppable. My team will fight with everything we've got and I'm here to make sure no one underestimates us. The promo is just a glimpse of the fire we're bringing to *Battleground* and this is just the start," he declared. A force of resilience, Rubina is ready to go all out to ensure her team outshines the rest. "I know what it takes to stay resilient in the toughest conditions, and my team will reflect that same grit. Strength isn't just physical, it's mental too and we're here to prove that," she emphasied.

Bringing his effortless swag and sharp strategy to the competition, Abhishek is here to make a statement. "I've always believed that if you're going to compete, you might as well dominate. My team will push limits and make a mark with every challenge. We're not here to blend in but to take over," he stated.

Urvashi Rautela calls working with Sunny Deol again 'destiny'

Bollywood actress Urvashi Rautela is set to share the screen once again with action star Sunny Deol after 12 years in the song *Touch Kiya* from the upcoming film *Jaat*. The duo, who first worked together in the 2013 film *Singh Saab The Great*, is back, promising fans an electrifying reunion.

Talking about this special collaboration, Urvashi expressed her excitement, calling it destiny. "Working with Sunny Deol Sir after 12 years feels like destiny. He's the ultimate action hero, and I'm thrilled to match his energy in *Jaat*. This is going to be iconic," she said.

Urvashi reminisced about her first leading role, which Sunny Deol gave her in Singh Saab The Great when she was just 19. Reflecting on her journey, she shared, "That film was just the beginning. Now, with Jaat, we're taking it to the next level—bigger, bolder and unstoppable!"

The actress couldn't hide her admiration for Sunny Deol's signature style, humorously adding, "Sunny Sir's 'dhai kilo ka haath' is unreal. April 1 is going to be massive! I can't wait for fans to see what we've created."

For Urvashi, this reunion is more than just a professional milestone—it's deeply sentimental. She believes it bridges the fanbase that first supported her with the one she has built over the past decade.

With *Jaat* and *Touch Kiya*, this dynamic duo is set to reignite their on-screen magic. As excitement builds, all eyes are on April 1, when fans will finally witness Urvashi and Sunny's much-anticipated comeback.





KAPIL SHARMA RETURNS TO BOLLYWOOD WITH *KKPK 2*

Kapil Sharma, the king of comedy, is set to make a grand comeback to Bollywood with *Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2*. A decade after his successful debut in *Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon* (2015), the beloved comedian-actor is returning for the much-anticipated sequel. And what better way to announce it than with an intriguing first look?

On the joyous occasion of Eid 2025, Kapil surprised his fans with an exciting glimpse of the film. Taking to Instagram on March 31, he dropped a poster that has left everyone guessing.

In the first look of *KKPK2*, Kapil is dressed as a groom in an elegant ivory sherwani and a traditional sehra, but his expression tells a different story—one of shock, confusion and pure Kapil-style hilarity. Standing beside him is a bride, draped in a gorgeous blue outfit, her face completely hidden behind a veil. The two are seen with their arms intertwined, while the sound of shehnai plays in the background, adding to the mystery.

The biggest question now is—who is the bride? Fans have flooded the comment section with speculation, with many wondering if the sequel will follow the same chaotic, comedic storyline of multiple marriages and mistaken identities.

Sharing the poster on Instagram, Kapil extended warm festive wishes, writing, "Eid Mubarak" along with folded hands, party face and clapperboard emojis, followed by the hashtag #*KKPK2*.

With Kapil's signature humor, a veiled mystery, and the promise of double the fun, *Kis Kisko Pyaar Karoon 2* is already building massive excitement. Will Kapil's character once again find himself in a whirlwind of accidental marriages? Who is the secret bride? Fans will have to wait and watch as the comedy unfolds!

RICHA CHADHA SLAMS BOLLYWOOD'S FEAR OF EXPERIMENTATION



Bollywood has long been accused of playing it safe, relying on star power rather than innovation. Filmmaker Hansal Mehta recently voiced a strong opinion on this, stating that the Hindi film industry needs to take risks and cast new faces. Actor-turned-producer Richa Chadha, who has experienced the industry from both sides, agrees but also highlights a deeper issue—the industry's tendency to stereotype actors, making experimentation even harder. Speaking about the struggles of new actors, Richa acknowledges that the landscape has changed since she started her career. "When I started, it was also very difficult. In fact, today, youngsters have social media. Back in 2012-13, social media existed, but it wasn't as prevalent. Now, there are added benefits that younger people do have for sure." Despite these advantages, she believes that opportunities for newcomers remain limited. "We should give more chances to newcomers, but it's very sad that even established filmmakers in Bollywood tend to stereotype actors. I can say that from my personal experience. Somewhere, the math of the business doesn't allow us to take chances. And it's not only limited to the actors but filmmakers as well."

The issue of typecasting doesn't just affect aspiring actors—it limits even the most established stars. Richa insists that many well-known actors are eager to take on challenging roles but often don't get the opportunity. "A lot of established actors are also down to take risks and dying to do films where their performances will shine, not just their action or dance sequences." Many industry insiders, including directors like Anurag Kashyap and Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, have repeatedly stated that Bollywood is in desperate need of reinvention. Richa agrees, pointing out how failure often pushes filmmakers to take fewer risks rather than more. "When a big film with a big star flops, everyone wants to become safer and safer. They want to have an item song and a certain number of action sequences. But over time, you realise that innovation is the heart of any industry."

According to Richa, Bollywood has plenty of successful models to look up to, yet it refuses to learn. "I feel quite bad about the fact that in front of us, there are many good examples that already exist, but we don't take inspiration from them. The South Indian film industry has managed to crack how their films work and how to keep things consistent."

She points out that South Indian filmmakers take calculated risks, ensuring their films cater to their core audience while also being commercially viable. "They make sure that they make films for their own fans, they make sure the ticket prices are low, and they keep things affordable. *Yahaan pe kuch ulta hota hai*. When a film is big and there is anticipation for it, people increase the ticket prices."

Taking a direct dig at the industry's decision-makers, she adds, "Why am I, a new producer with only one film and who is basically an actor, having to say this to the media? The big stakeholders should be looking at this."

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



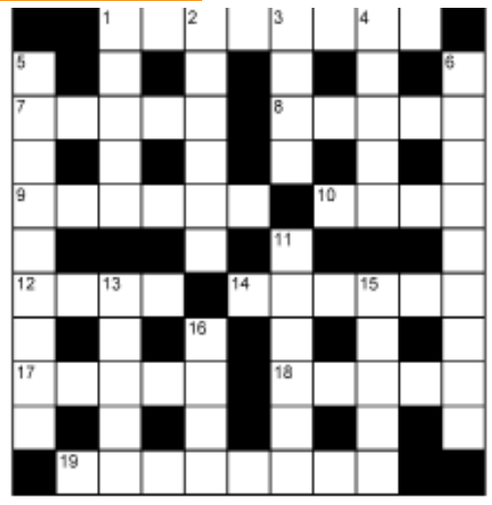
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 A three-sided figure
7 Shoplifter
8 A compass direction
9 Coming to a finish
10 Something worn on a foot
12 Shove
14 A skateboard has these
17 Precise
18 Water vapour
19 A blown musical instrument

DOWN

1 Bronze medal place in a race
2 Toddler
3 Smell with this
4 Titter
5 Tried
6 Trio
11 Picked
13 Wee
15 Vote into power
16 Famous celebrity

SOLUTION



NANCY



SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

GINGER MEGGS



The Pioneer
Vijayawada

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TUESDAY APRIL 1, 2025

Spice, tang & whole lot of love on banana leaf



Kaadhale's Ugadi special lunch was more than just a meal—it was a journey through the vibrant flavours of Telugu cuisine, a nostalgic embrace of tradition and a heartfelt celebration of the festival. Every dish was prepared with authenticity, capturing the essence of a home-cooked festive meal

TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Ugadi, the Telugu New Year, is a time of renewal, joy and most importantly, a feast that reflects the six essential flavours of life—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. At Kaadhale, a pure vegetarian restaurant near the Clock Tower in Secunderabad, this spirit was brought to life with an elaborate three-day Vindu Bhojanam, a meal that honored the rich culinary traditions of South India. Served on a fresh banana leaf, the feast was an experience in itself, where every dish told a story of culture, tradition, and exquisite flavors.

The meal began with being served the banana along with a marigold flower, followed by the Ugadi Pachadi, a dish that perfectly embodies the philosophy of the festival. Made with jaggery, raw mango, neem flowers, tamarind, chili and salt, this unique preparation mirrored the different emotions that life brings—joy, challenges, bitterness and surprises. The balance in Kaadhale's version was flawless, with the tartness of the raw mango complementing the subtle bitterness of the neem flowers, while the jaggery softened the sharp edges with its natural sweetness. It was a refreshing and symbolic start to the meal, preparing the palate for the rich flavors to come.

Following this traditional opening, the feast introduced a selection of appetizers and condiments that celebrated the diverse textures and tastes of South Indian cuisine. The Kosambari Salad was a refreshing delight, made with soaked moong dal, grated carrots, fresh coconut and tempered mustard seeds. Light, crunchy, and subtly sweet, it acted as a cooling contrast to the spice-forward dishes that followed. Accompanying it was Sorakaya Roti Pachadi, a bottle gourd chutney that had a creamy, earthy flavor enhanced by a gentle tempering of mustard seeds, green chilies and curry leaves.

The bold flavours of Andhra Pradesh were evident in the Avakaya, the region's iconic mango pickle. Aged to perfection, this fiery condiment packed a punch with its mustard-laden spice mix, making every bite an explosion of heat and tang. The Podi, a dry spice powder made from roasted lentils and chilies, was another classic addition, lending a smoky, nutty depth to steaming hot rice when mixed with a dollop of ghee.

No South Indian feast is complete without deep-fried indulgences, and Kaadhale delivered beautifully with its Garelu and Cut Mirchi. The Garelu, crisp on the outside and soft within, were made from urad dal batter, delicately seasoned with black pepper and curry leaves. Their golden-brown crust gave way to a pillowy interior, making them the perfect companion to coconut chutney and sambar. The Cut Mirchi, on the other hand, was a treat for spice lovers—large green chilies, dipped in gram flour batter, deep-fried until crisp, then slit open and sprinkled with a hint of chaat masala for that extra zing.

As the feast moved toward the main courses, the sheer variety of flavors on the banana leaf was a testament to the diversity of Telugu cuisine. The Chikkudukaya Tomato Kura, a broad bean and tomato curry, stood out with its delicate yet robust flavour profile. The beans were tender, absorbing the tangy tomato gravy infused with garlic and green chilies. In contrast, the Gutti Vankaya Kura, a dish revered across Andhra households, brought a rich, nutty depth to the meal. Baby brinjals were stuffed with a decadent masala of roasted peanuts, sesame seeds, coconut, and tamarind, then slow-cooked until they were infused with smoky, velvety flavours.

For rice lovers, the feast presented an array of beautifully prepared options. The Mamidikaya Pulihora, or raw mango rice, was a perfect balance of tartness and spice, where the sharp citrusy notes of grated mango were complemented by the warmth of tempered mustard seeds, dried red chilies, and crunchy peanuts. The Veg Pulao offered a more aromatic touch, its long-grained basmati rice cooked with seasonal vegetables and subtly perfumed with whole spices like bay leaves and cardamom. A simple serving of steamed rice was also available, the ideal base for the comforting dals and stews that followed.

One of the most beloved elements of a traditional Andhra meal is its hearty lentil dishes and Kaadhale did not disappoint. The Gongura Pappu, made from sorrel leaves and toor dal, was a rustic, tangy preparation that highlighted the deep, sour notes of the greens, balanced with the richness of tempered ghee. The Gummadikaya Pulusu, a pumpkin stew cooked in tamarind gravy, brought an element of sweetness to the meal, with the soft, caramelised pumpkin soaking up the flavorful, slightly spicy broth. The classic Sambar, with its thick, tangy lentil base enriched by vegetables, was a warm and comforting addition, while the Rasam, with its peppery, tamarind-infused broth, acted as a digestive elixir.

Adding a crunchy accompaniment to this spread were the Appadam & Chilli, where crispy papads were served with fried green chilies, an irresistible combination that provided a bold, spicy crunch with every bite. The Poori, puffed up and golden, was soft yet flaky, pairing beautifully with the rich gravies and curries.

To conclude this extravagant meal, the desserts were a true indulgence. The Bellam Parannam, or jaggery-infused sweet rice, was a decadent affair, with its velvety texture and deep caramel-like sweetness offering the perfect end to the feast. The Poornam Boorelu, a traditional Andhra sweet, were little dumplings of heaven—crisp on the outside, yet soft and filled with a luscious mixture of jaggery and lentils within. Served warm, they were a nostalgic reminder of festive home-cooked meals.

To cleanse the palate and aid digestion, a generous helping of curd was served alongside a banana, which is customary in South Indian meals, offering a naturally sweet and refreshing end. And finally, no grand meal is complete without Killi (Pan), a fragrant betel leaf preparation that left a lingering freshness in the mouth.

This Ugadi special lunch was more than just a meal—it was a journey through the vibrant flavours of Telugu cuisine, a nostalgic embrace of tradition, and a heartfelt celebration of the festival. Every dish was prepared with authenticity, capturing the essence of a home-cooked festive meal.

For those who appreciate the depth and complexity of South Indian cuisine, this was an experience to cherish, a feast that not only filled the stomach but also warmed the soul.

Pioneering new era in offshoring for financial consultancy!

PNS|HYDERABAD

So, you know how offshoring is changing the game for financial consulting? BINDZ is becoming a popular partner for American companies wishing to enter the Indian market. What is their secret? The standard for tax support and outsourced accounting is being raised via a novel Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) approach.

What distinguishes it is their capacity to facilitate global companies' entry into India's thriving talent pool. In contrast to conventional outsourcing approaches, it's strategy makes use of their specific knowledge to reduce risk and increase efficiency.

Building a solid and knowledgeable basis for their clientele is the main goal of its creative business concept. By doing this, they're opening the door for American businesses to enter the Indian market without experiencing the typical growing pains.
It is at the forefront of this daring new strategy, which is having positive results!

Given the growing need for Global Capability Centers (GCCs) in India, it joins the market at a perfect moment. In order to access specialised, high-quality consulting solutions, foreign businesses, such as US CPA companies, advisory firms and other financial institutions, are increasingly turning to boutique suppliers in addition to more conventional major consulting and outsourcing organisations. This makes its offering particularly alluring. India's increasing importance in the financial services sector is further shown by the recent spike in private equity investment and small businesses entering this market. India stands out for its depth of talent, high educational standards and decades of corporate investment—especially in complex domains like tax consulting and auditing—even though nations like South Africa, the Philippines and emerging markets in Latin America also provide cost advantages to U.S. firms. With a youthful and diverse leadership team committed to training the next generation of financial consultants, it is ready to take the lead. Read this exclusive interview with Sirish Korada - Managing Director & CEO of BINDZ to find out how !



Which major developments are currently influencing the financial consulting and outsourcing sectors?

Globalisation, digitalisation and changing expectations are all driving changes in the financial consulting and outsourcing sectors. Financial services are changing as a result of digital transformation, with automation, artificial intelligence and data analytics improving accuracy and efficiency. The scope of offshore financial consultancy is expanding beyond conventional markets like the U.S. and the U.K. to include emerging economies like Japan and Germany. With companies providing specialised solutions in investment banking, accounting, corporate activities and HR services, India remains a top choice for financial services outsourcing.

What distinguishes them from the conventional GCC models?

In contrast to conventional Global Capability Center (GCC) concepts, they have adopted a novel approach. In the traditional GCC model, the foreign company must assume and undertake all the risk and significantly higher investment in the initial years to set up their GCC at the offshore location themselves. By using a highly specialised Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) approach and it is under SAPRO LLC offering GGC as a service (GCCaaS), we can avoid this. Foreign enterprises can use it's capabilities to set up, operate and streamline all processes and businesses for their clients thanks to the BOT model, which provides a fully customisable and client-centric framework. Including essential business deliveries at a reduced cost and with a risk-sharing approach.

What turning points has it made recently in its expansion process?

It has made significant strides in its growth, enhancing its standing in the Indian financial consulting market. Its ability to effectively scale its staff to meet CBIZ's expanding operational needs is one of its major achievements. With complete solutions in tax, audit, advising, insurance, technology and corporate functions, the organisation is also growing its service portfolio. The announcement of it's second facility in India less than a year after its founding is another noteworthy accomplishment. It will soon have a fully functional center in Hyderabad in addition to Bengaluru, where it now has its headquarters!

In what ways is it tackling the skill gap and lack of talent in the financial consulting industry?

It is actively addressing the skill gap and talent deficit by utilising India's sizable and highly qualified workforce. To guarantee a consistent supply of personnel with training in international financial standards, the organisation funds collaborations with leading educational institutions and continuous learning initiatives. Additionally, it prioritises upskilling programs by incorporating advanced technologies like automation and artificial intelligence into its training curricula. In addition to attracting top talent, it makes sure staff members are prepared to handle the changing needs of financial consulting by promoting a culture of continuous development and offering a dynamic work environment.

What plans for growth or future projects does it have planned for 2025?

It has a bold plan for 2025 that emphasises growth, innovation and service improvement. In order to increase service resiliency and broaden its talent pool, the company intends to expand outside of Bangalore by opening offices in several other locations. Furthermore, it wants to advance its AI-powered automation projects by creating in-house solutions for risk assessment, accounting and tax processing. Extending its corporate finance and advisory services to meet a wider range of financial consulting demands is another important area of concentration. In order to strengthen its standing as a reliable financial consulting partner, it's parent firm, SAPRO LLC, is also looking into strategic alliances to duplicate its profitable BOT model with other clients throughout the world.



Glaucoma: Beyond just an eye problem!

Have you regarded your eyes as tiny extensions to your health? Not just an eye disease, glaucoma is also associated with other bodily conditions. So, managing your entire body—mindful of both health and disease—can help your vision. Many aspects affect your eyesight such as your general health, lifestyle and even genealogy. We are able to prevent dire eye problems because these connections are understood. And just like exercising and eating healthy keeps your body fit, good regular maintenance of the eyes leads to good vision. Glaucoma doesn't happen by itself; it nearly always comes with other conditions that make looking after your health more vital.

What is glaucoma?

An eye disease that can slowly take away one's sight is glaucoma. A good analogy is a balloon that is overfilled with air; everything inside is gradually expanding and in due time, it will explode. There is a liquid called the aqueous humorwhich is found in the eye and must constantly be flowing in and out. Its primary purpose is to both nourish the eye and remove the waste. If gets retained and fails to drain as it should, then just like the balloon, pressure is built. This high pressure can harm the optic nerve, which acts as a wire carrying images from your eye to your brain. A damaged optic nerve can lead to a loss of vision. Destruction of the optic nerve results in vision loss. The tricky part? Glaucoma can develop without any warning signs!

Glaucoma and other health problems

Many people don't realize that glaucoma is connected to other health conditions. Let's take a look at a few:

DIABETES: WAY TOO MUCH SUGAR CAN DULL YOUR VISION

When the insulin in your body and the sugar in your blood isout of balance, diabetes is a result. It is a complication of this condition. If sugar levels become too high then the blood vessels in your eyes can suffer and risk glaucoma. A diabetic person has a much greater probability of developing glaucoma than a non-diabetic person. Consequently, eye exams performed by an ophthalmologist on a regular basis are an absolute necessity for those whose condition could predispose them to this dangerous eye disease.

BLOOD PRESSURE: TOO HIGH FOR COMFORT, TOO LOW FOR COMFORT

Blood pressure is like the voltage in the current. If it is too elevated (hypertension) then your eyes are at risk of having glaucoma because other parts of your eye can be impacted by the excess force. If it is too low (hypotension) your eye muscles won't receive enough oxygen and nutrition. Balance the blood pressure in your system and you will preserve the health of your eyes.

HEART DISEASE: EYES AND THE HEART WORK IN SYNERGY

Your heart supplies oxygenated blood to all the organs of your body including your eyes. Hearts that are weak or injured may not allow the eyes to receive enough oxygen, which can easily lead to glaucoma. It could be said that the eyes are attempting to thrive without the water that is necessary for their survival. This implies a very intimate connection between the heart and eyes. Persons with heart conditions will need to be more regular in their eye check-ups as they are at a higher risk of this condition.

What else can put you at risk for glaucoma?

Age and family history: Our eyes will naturally change as we age, your risk of glaucoma increases if you have a blood relative with the condition.

Medications: Certain medications, such as steroids taken for asthma or allergies, can increase eye pressure. Consult your doctor about the state of your eyes if you have been on these meds for a while.

Eye injuries: You have a higher risk of developing glaucoma if you've injured your eye by for instance while playing sportsor just a freak accident. Just as a scar on your skin may never totally heal, an injury to the eye can result in future problems. Make sure to wear protective eye gear when engaging in physical activities (especially sports or dangerous work).

You can help maintain eye health by:

- **Have routine eye exams:** Glaucoma can develop without your knowledge, so even when you are feeling healthy and free of symptoms make sure to have a comprehensive eye exam every 2 years.
- **Limit health issues:** Manage your diabetes, blood pressure and heart disease in control to reduce the risk.
- **Extra precaution with medicines:** If you are taking steroids or similar medication, be sure to ask your doctor if they conduct an eye checkup.
- **Save your eyes:** Put on safety goggles while playing sports or using tools.

Treat your eyes like you would treat your body

Your eyes are a window to your health. Remember to see an eye doctor regularly because glaucoma can be prevented or controlled if detected early. Ultimately, you have one set of eyes be sure to take good care of it.

(The author, Dr. Pradeep Balam, is a Consultant – Glaucoma, at Sankara Eye Hospital, Hyderabad.)

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | TUESDAY | APRIL 1, 2025

LSG eye win against Punjab Kings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow



New skipper Rishabh Pant will be eager to make his mark as Lucknow Super Giants look to win their first home game of the season when they host an in-form Punjab Kings in the IPL here on Tuesday.

Pant, who became IPL's most expensive player in the auction last year, will be determined to justify his hefty ₹27 crore price tag after low returns as a batter in the first two games.

His captaincy at LSG started with an unfortunate loss, as they fell short by just one wicket against his former team, Delhi Capitals. However, LSG made a strong comeback with an impressive five-wicket victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad at home, thanks to some sensational hitting by Nicholas Pooran (70 off 23) and Mitchell Marsh (52 off 31) and Shardul Thakur's (4/34) twin strikes in the third over which halted the marauding SRH batting unit.

Despite the team's success, Pant suffered a second consecutive failure with the bat, managing only scores of 0 and 15 in the opening two matches.

The Indian dasher will be keen to silence his critics and let his bat do the talking.

For the first time, Pant will face his former Delhi Capitals coach Ricky Ponting, who has joined Punjab Kings this season.

It will a clash between the most expensive and second-most expensive players in IPL history, with Shreyas Iyer leading Punjab Kings.

In contrast to Pant's struggles, Iyer, who was roped in for ₹26.75 crore, led from the front with a match-winning 97 not out off 42 deliveries against Gujarat Titans.

The IPL-winning captain is relishing playing at number 3 and will look to continue in the same vein.

Shashank Singh started from where he had left in the previous season, smashing boundaries at will, while Priyansh Arya made an electrifying IPL debut with a 23-ball 47 at the top for Punjab.

Their batting efforts were complemented by India quick Arshdeep Singh and a disciplined bowling at the death by medium pacer Vijaykumar Vyshak, who was brought in as an impact sub.

The Ekana Stadium tends to favour bowlers, particularly spinners and slower bowlers. However, the wicket produced varied results during the IPL last season and in the four WPL played last month.

Spinners from both side could play a crucial role in the outcome of the match.

If LSG's formidable batting line up can put the runs on the board, the onus will be on Ravi Bishnoi, who hasn't been in the best of form, to provide breakthrough with his effective leg spin. He will have fellow leg-spinner Digvesh Rathi, who made heads turn with his stellar show at the inaugural Delhi Premier League last year, for company.

The hosts also have the option to play left-arm spinner Shahbaz Ahmed, while Aiden Markram is also handy with off spin.

Seasoned Indian leg spinner Yuzvendra Chahal will be the leader of the spin attack for Punjab with Glenn Maxwell also expected to roll his arm over.

They have plenty of pace bowling options as well with Iyer using as many as seven bowlers in the match against GT.

Zeeshan Ansari gets IPL stage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

At 16, Zeeshan Ansari was the youngest member of the Indian U-19 World Cup team in 2016 that had a posse of future India internationals in its ranks.

While Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan, Washington Sundar, Sarfaraz Khan, Avesh Khan and Khaleel Ahmed were striving to graduate to the next level, Ansari sank into oblivion.

Since then he has played just five Ranji Trophy matches and one Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy contest for Uttar Pradesh.

The wiry leg-spinner from Lucknow's famous shopping hub Hazratganj, wasn't the centre of attention in that illustrious batch that had six players, who later went on to play for the senior Indian team across formats with varying degree of success.

On Sunday afternoon, after years of wilderness, the now 25-year-old and better-built Ansari walked into the collective consciousness with wickets of Faf du Plessis, Jake Fraser-McGurk and KL Rahul albeit in a losing cause for Sunrisers Hyderabad on his IPL debut.

Not afraid to flight the ball, Ansari showed a big heart, something that former U-19 India selector and UP stalwart Gyanendra Pandey was impressed with back then. He was picked for the junior national squad.

"Usko Eid se pahle hi Eidi mil gayi (He got Eid's gift before the festivities began). He is a very hardworking bowler," Pandey, who had played a couple of ODIs for India back in 1999, told PTI.

"Obviously, I don't want to get into why he didn't play more for Uttar Pradesh in domestic cricket all these years. But he was UP T20 league's highest wicket-taker for Meerut Mavericks and that's how SRH scouts picked him."

What Pandey likes about Ansari is his courage whenever he is being challenged by the best in business.

"I was coach of Kanpur Superstars and he played for Meerut Mavericks. Sameer Rizvi (who is with DC) is a big name in UP T20 circuit and he dismissed him effortlessly. Those who watched UP T20 league saw his talent and yesterday a bigger audience got to watch him play."

Along with Delhi, UP is another BCCI affiliated state association which produces battle-hardened players, who rise not because of the system but despite it.

He had 17 wickets in five Ranji games, decent if not outstanding but even then not getting a chance across any format since 2020 does defy logic.

Son of a tailor in Hazratganj, the senior Ansari never had the means to raise questions about why his son was repeatedly ignored.

Another former UP first-class cricketer, who didn't wish to be named said: "Look, Kuldeep was most of the time busy with international cricket but somehow our coach Sunil Joshi (former India spinner) didn't find anything special in the boy." "Well, hope that he finds something now. I believe both Vippy (Vipraj Nigam of DC) and Zeeshan can play for UP together."

His childhood coach Gopal Singh, who taught him the first lessons in wrist spin at the Lucknow Development Authority when he was around 12, explained how it became a very bizarre situation for Ansari.

"After he came back from U-19 World Cup in 2016, he played Ranji Trophy and performed decently. Next season, he didn't play a single game -- not even U-19 or U-23. Since he had played Ranji Trophy, people thought why should he go back to U-19s but then he wasn't even picked for senior team."

Singh also said that Ansari as such didn't go through any financial hardships.

"Yes, they are a middle-class family but there are no sob stories. Yes, his father is a tailor but they have a shop and it was he who brought his son to me but I don't think there were any financial struggles as such."

Singh thanked Meerut Mavericks skipper and KKR star Rinku Singh for using his ward well during the UP T20 League.

"Rinku supported Zeeshan a lot during UP T20 league. A leg-spinner needs a lot of confidence from his captain. He was brought into bowl at crucial junctures and that helped him catch attention of scouts."

PCB to i- quire age- t for breachi- g ECB's a- ti-corruptio- code

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is set to inquire a case where a UK-based Pakistani agent, who represented 18-20 centrally contracted players, has been suspended by the England and Wales Cricket Board for breaching its anti-corruption code.

Mughiz Ahmad Shearachiikh and his company International Cricketers Association (ICA) had last year signed centrally contracted players from Pakistan.

Aamer Jamal, Mohammad Wasim Jr, Abdullah Shafique, Arafat Minhas, Haseebullah, Jahandad Khan, Kamran Ghulam, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Hasnain, Mohammad Hurraira, Irfan Niazi, Naseem Shah, Nauman Ali, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Sajid Khan, Shadab Khan, Sufiyan Maqeem, Tayyab Tahir while Imam ul Haq, Mohammad Haris, Sarfaraz Ahmed and Usama Mir were being represented by his company on short term basis.

Sheikh, who is also registered as a player agent with the ECB, had his registration suspended after investigations by cricket regulators.

Following a hearing, an independent anti-corruption tribunal has found him guilty of four violations of the ECB's anti-corruption code.

Sheikh apparently tried to bribe an English coach of a team to play his players and the coach reported his approach to the ECB.

A reliable source in the PCB said that soon after the case came to light, the players were advised to reconsider their association with Sheikh and his company and some have already disassociated with him.

The PCB is also looking into tightening its requirements and approval procedure for allowing agents and their companies to represent Pakistani players.

"Cricket has changed and with so many T20 and T10 leagues and endorsement opportunities available all players have their agents to look after their best business interests. The PCB will now change and tighten its procedure before approving registration of any agent," the source said.

Back in 2010, a UK based Pakistani agent, Mazhar Majeed became the centre of the spot-fixing scandal involving former captain Salman Butt and pacers Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir when Pakistan was touring England.

Later, when the scandal broke out it was revealed that Majeeed, who served jail time also, had close ties with other senior Pakistani players and got them contracts in the UK.

Senior players including Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan and Shaheen Shah Afridi are represented by another company, Saya Corporation whose ties with former captain Inzamam ul Haq led to his resignation as chief selector in 2023.

Williamson praises Nitish Rana's knock

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi



New Zealand batting great Kane Williamson lavished praise on Nitish Rana, calling his 36-ball 81 an "incredible knock of the highest standard" and also credited Rajasthan Royals' fielding for their six-run win over Chennai Super Kings.

Nitish, coming to bat at number 3, produced a match-winning performance as RR posted 182 for nine and then restricted CSK to 176-6 to open their account this season.

Wanindu Hasaranga's four wickets and some sensational fielding, including stand-in skipper Riyan Parag's incredible one-handed catch to dismiss Shivam Dube, were key moments of the match.

"Nitish is an excellent player of spin, but he got his innings started against the seam, using the pace well," Williamson, who has played for Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans in the past, said on JioHotstar.

"He accessed the areas behind square nicely and perhaps came in at No. 3 due to the left-hand, right-hand combination. It was an incredible knock of the highest standard, and I think that's key for him moving forward in this tournament.

"Rajasthan Royals have several other talented batters, but today, Nitish was the match-winner. That said, in a game like this—on a surface where the margins are so fine — I believe Rajasthan Royals' fielding is what truly got them across the line."

With CSK needing 39 off 12 balls, MS Dhoni (16), cheered by the crowd, hit a boundary over short third and a towering six over long-on off a profligate Tushar Deshpande, but he couldn't finish the job.

Highlighting on the aura surrounding Dhoni, Williamson said: "The fact that Chennai Super Kings were playing an away match, yet the entire crowd was dressed in yellow, was just incredible. We've seen this so many times before.

"I felt like it was written in the stars for MS to come in and smash 20 runs in an over to finish things off—he's done it so often. But it was a tough ask, needing 40 off the last two overs.

"Still, it was special to see him walk out. I can only imagine how intimidating it must be for any opposition trying to defend a total when he's at the crease."

Former India batter Ambati Rayudu also believes fielding made all the difference in the match, saying it was painful to watch some of the mistakes being made by the five-time champions CSK. "When you're playing a close game, these one-percenters really matter. We saw quite a few incredible catches in this match — it's rare to see that! On the other hand, Chennai Super Kings didn't field well at all, except for maybe one or two stops in the infield," said the former CSK player.

Dhoni can't bat 10 overs running full stick: Fleming

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

Mahendra Singh Dhoni can't bat ten overs running full stick as his knee remains dodgy and the former captain decides on his batting position based on the match situation, revealed Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming. The 43-year-old Dhoni had faced criticism for batting at number 9 during CSK's 50-run loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru at Chepauk last week.

On Sunday, the CSK talisman walked out at number 7 with the team needing 54 off 25 balls but could manage just 16 runs off 11 balls as they suffered a six-run loss to Rajasthan Royals.

"It's a time thing. MS judges it. His body, his knees aren't what they used to be. He's moving okay but there's still a nutrition aspect to it. He can't bat 10 overs running full stick. So he will gauge on the day what he can give us," Fleming said at the post-match press conference.

"If the game's in the balance like today, he will go a little bit earlier and he backs other players when other opportunities are up. So he's balancing that. I said it last year, he's too valuable to us, (with his) leadership and wicket keeping, to throw him in at 9- 10 overs.

"He's actually never done that. So look, from around 13, 14 overs he's looking to go, depending on who's in."

RR racked up 79 for 1 in the powerplay compared to CSK's 42-1 and Fleming admitted they lost the match in the powerplays.

"If you analyse the game it's probably the two power plays. Our power play with the ball went for the best part of 80 runs and we were only able to manage early 40s," he said.

"So that's on the scoreboard the big difference and we were also sloppy in the field compared to Rajasthan who were outstanding. So that would be the two immediate takeaways."

> **It's a time thing. MS judges it. His body, his knees aren't what they used to be. He's moving okay but there's still a nutrition aspect to it**
>
> — STEPHEN FLEMING, CSK COACH

Reflecting on the key moments, Fleming said: "I think (Riyan) Parag's catch was the turning point in the match. The Dube match-up was going our way but he (Wanindu Hasaranga) had courage. You can't deny that and he certainly gave the ball air.

"Sometimes you give the ball air and in this competition you can go the distance but he had the courage to do that and Gaikwad's wicket as well was very clever. So he held his nerve and had a good day.

"Nitish Rana played really well. I thought he combated a bit of bounce and a bit of seam early to get them off to a great start ... So that catch was big and then classy bowling from Hasaranga to Ruturaj. So probably three pretty good moments."

I tried to use pace in this wicket: Nitish

Promoted to number 3, Nitish Rana's belligerent 36-ball 81 saw RR post 182 for 9 and then restrict CSK to 176 for 6 to register its first win of the season.

"I got to know yesterday (Saturday) when Rahul sir called me before going to practice. Riyan also told me that I could bat at number 3. I guess, that decision was very good.

"In the first two matches, I was trying to hit hard. So, my learning from the last two matches was that if I try to use pace in this wicket, how much pace I can use on the new ball, if I try to do that, then my success rate can increase in making runs. And today, I did the same thing..."

It was Riyan Parag's first win as a captain and Nitish credited his calm demeanour and the atmosphere of the dressing room for the win.

"I think, captaincy is very result-oriented. If your result is in your favor, then everyone says that you are a very good captain. I don't believe that. I think, there are small battles in a T20 game. How you win those battles, that is important," he said.

"A player knows that and Riyan is very calm as a captain. And this dressing room is also very calm. This starts with the coaches, the kind of atmosphere that Sanju and even Rahul sir has created in the dressing room... There was no panic. And we just tried to focus on the process."

Ahlawat eyes comeback after disappointing India Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Gurugram

Indian golfer Veer Ahlawat has expressed his disappointment over his performance at the Hero India Open 2025, admitting that he needs to rectify his mistakes quickly to stay competitive in upcoming tournaments.

Ahlawat, who was one of the best-performing Indians in the tournament, ended tied 17th alongside Gaganjeet Bhullar and Om Prakash Chouhan.

"My game was pretty average, and I didn't play my best game. My ball striking was a bit off, but still, I managed to finish in the top-20, that's a good part. But I need to work on my game to be up there competing for the title," Ahlawat said in an exclusive interview on Sunday. "My main focus is to play my best game without thinking much about the result. I am not worried about getting a lot of top-five finishes, I just want to showcase my best potential," he added.

Indian Golf Union (IGU) President Brijender Singh praised Ahlawat's performance.

"I don't think it was hard luck for him, I am proud of his performance. It is a matter of the ball rolling for you, and you can have some bad breaks, but overall, I am satisfied with the way he played this week," Singh told PTI Videos on the sidelines of the tournament.

Establishing a professional golf league in India has been a topic of discussion in the recent months.

Ahlawat believes that introducing such a format would significantly help the sport grow in India, providing professional golfers with more opportunities and financial incentives.

"I think such a league will be great for Indian golf. It will be fun, and it will be a completely different format. There will be more prize money for the pros to grab, so it will be nice," Ahlawat said.

The IGU president said that this league will allow young players learn from professionals, while also increasing the sport's popularity and financial viability. "When the young kids and less professional kids get a chance to play with the pros, they will learn about shot-making, they will learn about golf, they will also understand the exhilaration you get by winning because for some, winning is a real high," Singh said.

Singh is also optimistic about the future of golf in India as the country shares cordial relations with the international bodies governing the sport.

"The future of golf is bright, I think we are more organised. The countries that manage the golfing spectrum have seen us, have more faith in us. We have been organising such huge tournaments successfully, which gives them courage to bring new tournaments to India," he said.

"We had the LIV series, we have Hero (India Open), we will have another one in October at the Delhi Golf Club hopefully. So, the confidence really grows for the overseas partners. We will get to see a lot of golf, they will come and participate on more serious terms," he added.

I wa- t to improve my strike rate i- T20: Azmatullah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi



Afghanistan and Punjab Kings all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai wants to replicate his remarkable ODI success in the T20 format and for that, he is working on his batting strike rate besides improving his pace as a fast bowler.

The last 12 months have been rather memorable for the 25-year-old who was named ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year in January, the first one from his country to get that honour. He is also the top-ranked all-rounder in the ICC ODI rankings.

Omarzai had a dream game against England in the Champions Trophy as he led his team to another famous win over their fancied opponents with an all-round performance including a 31-ball 41 and a five-wicket haul.

For someone who considers himself as a batting all-rounder, bouncing out the likes of Jos Buttler was a big deal for Omarzai.

Considering his special feats in the 50-over game, the desire to excel in the shortest format comes across as natural. In the middle of his second IPL season, Omarzai wants to use the upcoming two months to become a better T20 player ahead of the World Cup in India and Sri Lanka next year. "Yes, you are right when you say that ODI has been my best format thus far. In ODIs, you get more time to settle and you can play longer and take extra time in the middle.

"In T20s, you don't. So here (in the IPL), I have to improve my strike rate and work on long innings to do the best for my team," Omarzai, who played for Gujarat Titans last season, told PTI.

On the fast bowling front, he wants to consistently bowl in excess of 140kmph.

"International cricket is fast now. If you have 1-2 skills, others will read you. So, you have to learn and improve every time. I will also try to improve my line and length. I will work on my pace to reach 140 kmph. I want to play as a proper fast bowler with my team.

"The team should feel that they are playing as a proper fast bowler. I don't want to play as an all-rounder or a medium pacer. I want to work on my pace and especially on death bowling as that is an area Afghanistan have faced issues of late (following the retirement of Naveen-Ul-Haq).

"I want to be at the top not just in one format but across formats and become the best player for Afghanistan," said Omarzai, who has featured in one Test, 39 ODIs and 47 T20s.

His returns in the shortest format are modest as he averages close to 57 with the bat in ODIs and has taken 38 wickets at an average of 30.16.

Looking to learn from Ponting and Shreyas

With Punjab Kings being on the road for their first two games, Omarzai has not got much to talk about batting with head coach Ricky Ponting. He has spent a bit of time with skipper Shreyas Iyer though, discussing batting against world class fast bowling. "Last season, I talked about the game with Shubman Gill (at Titans). This season, conversations with Shreyas have been good. He is a calm and cool person. I enjoy spending time with him.

"I asked him about how to play fast bowlers in the T20 format. He said 'we should use their pace'. 'The ball travels fast here, you will get runs. Don't try to play forcefully'.

"He has played a lot at international level. He has a good idea of how to play pace," said Omarzai.

On his maiden season with the franchise, he added: "The atmosphere is good, the coaches are great, the players have been welcoming. As the World Cup is here next year, it is crucial to get the IPL experience."

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Kalyan Shankar on *Mad Square* success: 'Didn't expect such huge collections'

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Post the success of *Mad Square*, director Kalyan Shankar shares his feelings and excitement about it



The film *Mad* became a super success and now its sequel, *Mad Square*, has turned out to be an even bigger hit. Director Kalyan Shankar, overwhelmed by the response, said, "After seeing the first-day collections, I never expected the film to collect such huge numbers."

He noted that while the first part primarily appealed to the youth due to its college backdrop, *Mad Square* has managed to attract a broader audience. "In *Mad Square*, families, women and kids are enjoying it a lot. The first one was limited to youth, but I'm happy that the sequel is being watched by everyone," he shared.

When asked which film he prefers, he said, "The first one is special because it was my debut, but as a writer, I love the second one more."

The director also received praise for balancing all the characters effectively. "Many people complimented me, saying I managed to give equal importance to all the characters within the stipulated two-hour runtime," he said.

He credited the camaraderie among lead actors Narne Nithin, Sangeeth Sobhan and Ram Nithin for adding to the film's success. "These three became thick friends, which worked really well for my film. In the first part, Narne Nithin took some time to blend in, but by the second one, their bond was natural, which was a huge plus," he explained.

Kalyan Shankar acknowledged that Satyam Rajesh's comedy scenes were inspired by *Hello Brother*, starring Nagarjuna. He also admitted that Mad Square shares similarities with films like *DJ Tillu* and *Jaathi Ratnalu*. "The genres might be similar, but the stories are completely different," he clarified.

He further stated that while *Mad 2* is fictional, some comedic moments are inspired by real-life people around him.

The film features music by two composers, Bheems Ceciroleo and S. Thaman. "The *Sankranthiki Vasthunnam* songs were a hit and *Daaku Maharaj* had an excellent background score. So, we requested Thaman to compose the background score for the Goa episode to create a distinct feel," he revealed.

On whether he wants to cash in on the success of *Mad,* he said, "We'd love to continue the franchise, but a strong story is essential. If we don't have a compelling narrative, people won't watch it. The first part had realistic characters, but for the sequel, I wrote a crime comedy and took cinematic liberties. Without those, it would have turned into a serious thriller instead of a comedy."

He emphasised that if another sequel is made, it must include the same lead trio. "We can't replace them with others; it may not work out," he said.

Kalyan Shankar previously worked with director Sriram Aditya on Hero and also collaborated with Vijayendra Prasad, the father of SS Rajamouli. "I've made short films and a web series," he shared.

Initially, he struggled to find producers for a serious film he had written. "For three years, I ran around with a serious film called *Dream*, but no one was interested. I realized that comedy works best, so I decided to pursue that," he explained.

Kalyan Shankar has now landed a big project with Ravi Teja. "The film will begin in August. It's a superhero backdrop story that requires extensive preproduction. It's not a sci-fi film but a completely fictional story," he said.

Discussing his strength as a filmmaker, he said, "Whether it's comedy or emotion, it should come unexpectedly—that's what makes it click. That's my strong point and it should always feel convincing."

On his personal preferences, Kalyan Shankar said he enjoys comedy the most. "I want to work with all actors and be successful. My personal favourite actor is Pawan Kalyan and my dream is to direct a film with him. But he is very busy with politics," he shared.

Vaishnavi Chaitanya's dual role in *Jack*: 'My role will entertain everyone'



Vaishnavi Chaitanya has become the latest crush for many after the teaser of *Jack* was released a few days ago. She plays the female lead opposite Siddhu Jonnalagadda in this film, directed by Bommarillu Bhaskar.

Vaishnavi shot to fame with *Baby*, where she played a bubbly role and received widespread appreciation for her performance. She even won several awards for the film.

Despite her rising popularity, she remains selective about her projects. "I don't want to sign just any film. My role should have a strong impact on the story," she stated. At a latest song release event for *Jack*, she revealed an exciting detail: she is playing a dual role in the film.

Vaishnavi is also very active on social media, especially Instagram, where she regularly shares stunning photoshoots. In her latest shoot, she captivated fans with a regal and powerful appearance.

While there is tough competition from non-Telugu actresses, Vaishnavi is winning hearts as a homegrown talent. Many believe Telugu actresses rarely get major opportunities, but some, like Vaishnavi, have broken the trend through hard work. She started her career with minor roles and first gained attention as Allu Arjun's sister in *Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo.* That role eventually led to her big break as the female lead in *Baby*.

Now, she is set to showcase her versatility in *Jack*, which is releasing on April 10. She is also starring opposite Anand Deverakonda in the sequel to *90's A Middle-Class Biopic.*

Talking about her role in *Jack*, she said, "I played a bubbly role in *Baby* and then a serious one in *Love Me*. But in *Jack*, my role will definitely entertain everyone. I've tried comedy and I believe this film will help me connect more with family audiences."

EMPURAAN' CONTROVERSY

Film censored again, changes made

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal's latest release, *Empuraan*, has been embroiled in controversy since its release on March 27. The film, a sequel to the blockbuster *Lucifer*, is directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, who also plays a pivotal role in both films.

Following its release, *Empuraan* faced backlash over certain scenes that some groups found objectionable. One of the major points of contention was a sequence depicting riots in Gujarat, where a character named Balraj Bajrangi (played by Abhimanyu Singh) was shown abusing women, including a pregnant woman. Right-wing political groups criticised the portrayal of Hindu leaders, prompting the filmmakers to make changes. The character's name was altered from Balraj Bajrangi to Baba Bajrangi.

Additionally, the film underwent re-censorship, resulting in the removal of a few minutes from the controversial sequence. The scene depicting abuse against women was cut by two minutes, while the sequence involving the pregnant woman was entirely removed. Initially, the film had a runtime of approximately 180 minutes, but following these edits, it now stands at 177 minutes and 44 seconds.

Lead actor Mohanlal addressed the controversy and issued an apology, stating, "As an artist, it is my duty to ensure that none of my films promote hatred towards any political movement, ideology, or religious group." His statement, written in Malayalam, assured that he and his team took necessary steps to resolve the issue.

Director-actor Prithviraj Sukumaran's mother also defended him on social media, asserting that all key stakeholders, including Mohanlal, were aware of the film's script from the beginning. "It is unfair to put the entire blame on Prithviraj," she stated in her post.

Despite the controversy, *Empuraan* has shattered box office records, becoming the highest-opening Malayalam film and surpassing the Rs 100 crore mark within just a few days of its release.





Salman Khan's *Sikandar* faces box office disaster, Rashmika's 'lucky mascot' fails

Salman Khan's latest film *Sikandar*, which hit theatres on March 30, has opened to a disappointing response. Despite a star-studded cast featuring Salman, Kajal Aggarwal and Rashmika Mandanna, the film failed to generate buzz or attract audiences. Directed by AR Murugadoss, the film struggled to make an impact at the box office. Given Salman Khan's massive fan base, expectations were high, but *Sikandar* turned out to be a major letdown. The film saw minimal footfall even on its opening Sunday, a public holiday and the situation remained the same on Monday despite the Ramzan festival holiday. Critics slammed the movie for its weak storyline and lackluster direction, which further dented its prospects.

The film's promotional campaign also failed to create excitement. As a result, *Sikandar* has only managed to collect around Rs 25 crore, on its opening day, a figure considered disastrous for a Salman Khan starrer. Meanwhile, Rashmika Mandanna, who had been on a streak of back-to-back hits, couldn't continue her success with this film. Dubbed a 'lucky mascot' for her previous projects, her presence failed to make a difference this time. Alongside Rashmika, South Indian stars Kajal Aggarwal, Sathyaraj and Kishore also played key roles in the film.

60 years of superstar Krishna's debut film *Tene Manasulu*



March 31, 2025, marked the 60th anniversary of *Tene Manasulu*, the film that launched Telugu cinema legend Superstar Krishna. Directed by Adurthi Subba Rao, the film was released on March 31, 1965 and became a massive hit, setting the stage for Krishna's illustrious career.

Interestingly, the film was initially conceived as a black-and-white production. However, after shooting a few reels, Adurthi Subba Rao decided to convert it into a color film, making it one of the earliest color films in Telugu cinema with a social drama theme.

The casting process for *Tene Manasulu* was unique, as the director sought fresh faces through a newspaper advertisement. Krishna, keen on entering the film industry, sent his portfolio. Other notable actors, including Jayalalitha, Krishnam Raju and Hema Malini, also applied for roles. Eventually, Krishna and Ram Mohan were selected as the leads.

Music played a crucial role in the film's success. The legendary singer Ghantasala lent his voice for Krishna's songs, which became musical chartbusters. Additionally, renowned writer Mullapudi Venkata Ramana served as the screenwriter, while K. Viswanath, who later became a celebrated filmmaker, worked as an assistant director.

One lesser-known anecdote from the film's production involved Krishna learning to ride a scooter. Since the script required him to drive one, he trained for four days under the guidance of Ravi Kondala Rao before confidently riding from Sarathi Studios to Sanath Nagar.

Following *Tene Manasulu*, Krishna became a sensation and went on to become one of the biggest superstars of Telugu cinema. He later turned producer, director, and even established a film studio in Hyderabad. His legacy continues through his son, Mahesh Babu, who is one of the leading actors in South Indian cinema today.

