VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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# The Pioneer

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India, Thailand upgrade ties to strategic **partnership** 5

**'BSNL ON PATH OF PROFITABILITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION'** 8



'I had accepted that 280C might never release, but now it's **HAPPENING'** P12



**QUOTE OF THE DAY**

The Pioneer

*In the next three years, the BRS will come back to power in Telangana. Whoever buys pieces of the 400 acres in Kancha Gachibowli must understand that it will be taken back. No force can stop us. This is the word of our Chief KCR. We will convert the 400-acre plot into an eco-park*



*— KT Rama Rao, BRS MLA* P4

**DON'T MISS...**

## Rs 39 cr to close 3 Budameru breaches

Minister for Water Resources, Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu, held a review meeting with department officials on Thursday at the Sachivalayam in Velagapudi to discuss the modernisation of the Budameru Rivulet. During the meeting, the minister announced that the state cabinet had allocated Rs 39.05 crore to address three breaches in the Budameru. He instructed officials to initiate the tender process for these projects and ensure their timely completion. Dr Ramanaidu noted that around 80% of the Budameru modernisation work...

-PAGE: 3

## SC: Entire selection process tainted

In a major blow to the West Bengal government, the Supreme Court on Thursday invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in the state-run and aided schools, calling the entire selection process "vitiated and tainted". A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar upheld a Calcutta High Court verdict of April 22, 2024, annulling the appointments and said the tainted candidates should refund their "salaries/payments received". "This is a case...

-PAGE: 5

## EPFO eases claim process

Retirement fund body EPFO on Thursday said applicants seeking withdrawal from provident funds online do not have to upload the image of a cancelled cheque and their bank accounts need not be verified by employers. The move is expected to fast-track claim settlement process for nearly eight crore members and ensure ease of doing business for employers. At present, members of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), while applying for withdrawal of funds from PF accounts online, need...

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## 'Exposure to difficult conditions helped me'

Opener B Sai Sudharsan felt exposure to "difficult conditions" during his current stint with IPL side Gujarat Titans (GT) has contributed immensely to him evolving as a T20 batter. Sudharsan played a fine innings of 49 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in GT's eight-wicket win here on Wednesday night to showcase the benefits of his hard yards at nets. "It's my fourth year (in the IPL), so I feel it has given me a lot of experience. I got exposed to a few difficult conditions...

-SPORTS




# Trump hits India with steep 27 pc tariffs

## Triggers trade turmoil in 60 countries

**PNS** ■ WASHINGTON/ NEW DELHI

President Donald Trump slapped universal duties on all countries exporting goods to the US and additional steep levies on countries like India, potentially impacting sales of products from shrimp to steel in the world's biggest economy.

The US imposed a steep 27 per cent tariff on all goods, barring pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, energy and certain minerals not available in the United States, that are imported from India, calling the country the "worst offenders" of unfair trade practices.

Export of products such as shrimp, carpet, medical devices and gold jewellery to the US will be impacted. On the other hand, exports of electronics, textiles, and pharma will get an edge over its competitor countries.

Exemption of energy from the tariffs would also mean that India can continue to export fuels like gasoil and gasoline to the US.

The goods that were exempted from the tariffs made up for just over 25 per cent of the total exports from India to the US.

The Indian government reacted cautiously, saying it is "carefully examining the implications" of the announcements and will also study opportunities that may arise due to this new development in the US trade policy. Trump announced the imposition of additional ad valorem duties ranging from 10 per cent to 50 per cent on imports from all trading partners. The baseline duty of 10 per cent will be effective on India from April 5 and an additional 27 per cent from April 9.The 27 per cent duty would be over and above any existing levy that Indian products entering the US may currently attract.

Though the move is expected to impact India's exports of certain goods to the US, experts say that India is better-placed than its competitors, including Bangladesh (37 per cent), China (54 per cent), Vietnam (46 per cent) and Thailand (36 per cent) who face increased levies.

# Cabinet clears major industrial projects to boost employment

## GOVT ENSURES VSP REMAINS UNDER PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, has approved several large-scale industrial projects aimed at generating significant employment opportunities. Among the key decisions, the Cabinet has granted approval to ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India Limited to establish a major steel plant in two phases, with a total investment of Rs 35,000 crore. The plant is expected to produce 17.8 million tonnes of steel upon completion.

The project will be set up in Anakapalle district, where the company will develop a captive port at DL Puram with a 2.9 km waterfront to support the steel plant's operations. As part of this initiative, the Cabinet also approved an amendment to Clause 30.1.1 of the Port Concession Agreement for Kakinada Gateway Port Limited (KGPL), facilitating the project's development.

Minister for Housing, Information and Public Relations Kolusu Parthasarathi stated that the first phase of the project would involve an investment of Rs 55,964 crore to establish a steel plant with a capacity of 7.3 million metric tonnes. Production is expected to commence by January 2029, generating an estimated 20,000 jobs. The second phase, projected to be completed by 2033, will expand production to 10.5 million metric tonnes, with an additional investment of Rs 80,000 crore, creating 33,000 more jobs.

Continued on Page 2




- ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India Limited to set up a Rs 35,000 crore steel plant in Anakapalle.
- Steel plant to produce 17.8 million tonnes upon completion, creating over 50,000 jobs.
- Captive port at DL Puram with a 2.9 km waterfront to support steel plant operations.
- 50,000 hotel rooms to be built this year to boost tourism and employment.
- Licence fee for three-star and above hotels reduced from Rs 66 lakh to Rs 25 lakh.
- 'Jalaharathi Corporation' created to oversee the Rs 80,000 crore Polavaram-Banakacherla Link Project.
- Project to utilise Godavari floodwaters for Rayalaseema region's benefit.
- IAS officers to be assigned to rural areas to develop a roadmap for rural welfare.

## Undertake village visits for 4 days a month: CM to MLAs

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed ministers and legislators to participate in the 'Palle Nidra' (village night stay) initiative for four days every month to strengthen their engagement with rural communities.

Following the Cabinet meeting on Thursday, the Chief Minister held an extended discussion with ministers, emphasising the need to actively communicate the government's welfare programmes and their impact. He pointed out that while Andhra Pradesh was implementing various welfare schemes, nearly a quarter of these were not being implemented in neighbouring states. CM Naidu urged the ministers to ensure greater awareness of government schemes, particularly in rural areas where they could have the most significant effect.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister also discussed the Rishikonda Palace issue, focusing on how to address buildings constructed during the tenure of Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. Initially, ministers suggested visiting the palace, but CM Naidu later asked them to share their views on the next course of action.

Expressing displeasure over the YSR Congress Party's (YSRCP) handling of Pastor Praveen's death, CM Naidu accused the opposition of attempting to tarnish the government's image. He criticised the alleged misrepresentation of the case, particularly regarding CCTV footage. "CC cameras are playing a crucial role in solving the case of Praveen's death. If we are not vigilant, the opposition will try to put all the blame on us, just like they did with previous incidents. While we are struggling to present our good deeds, false accusations are being plotted against us," CM stated.

# Lokesh clarifies 'Red Book' policy

## Slams opposition for spreading false propaganda

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Education, IT and Electronics Nara Lokesh has clarified the government's stance on the 'Red Book' and defended its actions against opposition leaders accused of spreading false propaganda. The term 'Red Book' has sparked discussions in political circles, with some opposition leaders reportedly experiencing health concerns upon hearing it. Lokesh asserted that the 'Red Book' would apply only to those violating the law and not to political leaders merely for being in opposition.

Addressing the media after distributing permanent land pattas to a poor family in Mangalagiri, Lokesh emphasised that, unlike previous governments that followed the 'Rajareddy Constitution,' the current administration adheres to the 'Ambedkar Constitution' and prioritises transparency and fairness. He added that the government had neither locked the gates of opposition leaders' homes nor fabricated false cases against them, as alleged.



Lokesh further highlighted that the state has provided Z-plus security to former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, exceeding the security given to Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan, ensuring his freedom of movement and public interactions. He stated that, unlike the previous government, the present administration is committed to countering false propaganda. "The 'Red Book' is a direct response to misinformation being spread by certain quarters," he remarked.

Discussing development initiatives, Lokesh pointed to the successful establishment of the first Reliance CBG plant in the Kanigiri constituency, providing employment opportunities in drought-prone areas. He accused the opposition of spreading a false narrative about such projects and attempting to derail development efforts.

On the issue of personal responsibility, Lokesh criticised Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleging that he failed to ensure justice for his own mother and sister, and asserted that such leaders should not lecture the government. He reiterated the administration's commitment to public welfare, including addressing farmers' issues, providing compensation, and ensuring fair prices for agricultural produce.

Lokesh also praised Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for his visionary policies, which transformed Hyderabad into a global IT hub, creating opportunities for millions of young people. He assured that the government would continue to focus on sustainable development and welfare for all sections of society.



## AP urges Railway Min to launch new train services

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Minister for Industries, Commerce and Food Processing, TG Bharat, met Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in Delhi on Wednesday night to discuss various railway projects. During the meeting, Bharat requested the introduction of new train services from Kurnool to Mumbai and Kurnool to Vijayawada.

Recalling that Kurnool was the capital of Andhra Pradesh when the state was formed, Bharat urged the central government to prioritise the development of the region's railway infrastructure.

Continued on Page 2

# AP CS updates PMO on mining block auctions

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Pramod Kumar Mishra, held a video conference with the Chief Secretaries of ten states under Category A to review the auction and operationalisation of mining blocks. The conference, held on Thursday from New Delhi, assessed the progress made by the states in mineral block auctions, operationalisation, and related environmental matters.

States have been classified into three categories—A, B, and C—based on their mineral reserves. Category A includes Odisha, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh. During the meeting, Mishra reviewed the steps taken by these states concerning mining auctions and operationalisation while emphasising environmental compliance.



The discussions focused on expediting the auction and operationalisation process. Mishra directed the Chief Secretaries to take necessary measures to ensure the timely completion of these procedures while adhering to environmental norms.

Andhra Pradesh's Chief Secretary, K Vijayanand, participated in the conference and briefed on the State's progress in auctioning and operationalising mineral blocks.

Continued on Page 2

## POLAVARAM PROJECT



# Work begins on Gap 1 Rockfill Dam

**PNS** ■ POLAVARAM

The construction of the crucial Gap 1 Rockfill Dam at the Polavaram Project commenced on Thursday. Officials from the Department of Water Resources, Polavaram Project Authority (PPA), and Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Limited (MEIL) performed a ceremonial 'puja' at the project site to mark the beginning of the works.

The Gap 1 Rockfill Dam will have a height of approximately 25 metres and a length of 540 metres.

Continued on Page 2

## Heavy rains, gusty winds likely in AP

**PNS** ■ VIJAYAWADA

The India Meteorological Department on Thursday forecast thunderstorms accompanied by lightning in parts of Andhra Pradesh for three days, from April 3 to 5.

It predicted thunderstorms at isolated places in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh (NCAP), Yanam, South Coastal Andhra Pradesh (SCAP), and Rayalaseema.

"Gusty winds with speeds of up to 40-50 km per hour are likely at isolated places over NCAP, Yanam, SCAP, and Rayalaseema. Maximum temperatures are expected to drop by two to three degrees Celsius in Rayalaseema," the Met Department said in a press release, forecasting weather conditions for Thursday and Friday.

Continued on Page 2

# *Fight in Parl on BC quota: Rahul Gandhi*

**PNS** ■ HYDERABAD

The Leader of the Opposition (LOP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, told Congress leaders from Telangana, including Ministers, MLAs, MLCs, and others, that they must fight the Modi Government strongly in Parliament on the 42 per cent quota for BCs. He asked Telangana Congress leaders to take the Centre's attitude to the people.

On Thursday, Telangana Congress leaders met Rahul, Sonia and AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge on Parliament premises and described the latest developments in Telangana.

TPCC Chief B. Mahesh Kumar Goud, Ministers Ponnam Prabhakar and Konda Surekha, and Government Whips Adi Srinivas and Beerla Ilaiah explained about the maha dharna conducted by BC unions at the Jantar Mantar on Wednesday to Sonia Gandhi.

She directed Telangana Congress leaders to work for the welfare of TG people and added that the people of Telangana have always been with the Congress. She added that the people of Telangana would not forget the good things done by the Congress.

She emphasised that reservations for BCs would bring 'changes' in the lives of the poor and weaker sec-



Telangana Congress leaders met Rahul, Sonia and AICC president Mallikarjuna Kharge on Parliament premises and described the latest developments in Telangana

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# Govt cancels allotment of land to Ramanaidu Studios in Vizag

## Show cause notices issued over land-use violation

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



**Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu had filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court, challenging the proposed change in land use. The Supreme Court, in its interim orders issued on February 9, 2024, ruled that the land should not be used for any purpose other than the one for which it was initially allocated.**

The Andhra Pradesh government has issued a show-cause notice to M/s Suresh Production Private Limited for attempting to secure permission for a residential layout on 15.17 acres of land. This land is part of the 34.44 acres originally allotted to the company for the construction of Rama Naidu Studios in Visakhapatnam.

Visakhapatnam East MLA Velagapudi Ramakrishna Babu had filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court, challenging the proposed change in land use. The Supreme Court, in its interim orders issued on February 9, 2024, ruled that the land should not be used for any purpose other than the one for which it was initially allocated.

Following this, Special Chief Secretary (Revenue) R.P. Sisodia issued directives on April 3, instructing the Visakhapatnam District Collector to serve a show-cause notice to the alienee regarding the 15.17 acres of land in question. The Collector has been directed to provide a reasonable opportunity for the company to present its case.

Additionally, the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region Development Authority (VMRDA) Commissioner and the Commissioner of Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) have been instructed not to entertain any applications from M/s Suresh Production Pvt. Ltd. seeking changes in land use, as it violates the existing regulations. The government's decision underscores its commitment to ensuring adherence to land use policies and maintaining the integrity of land allotments for designated purposes.

# Lokesh hands over land titles to slum dwellers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Minister for Education, IT and Electronics Nara Lokesh has fulfilled his commitment to providing free permanent land titles to people living on government land in Mangalagiri. Speaking at a ceremony in Undavalli, the Minister handed over the first set of pattas to the family of R Govindu, who has been residing in the Kondavala region of Mangalagiri for over 15 years.

Lokesh stated that this initiative was a key promise made during his padayatra in the constituency, aimed at addressing the hardships faced by local residents. Over the years, many people had built homes on government land, primarily on forest, railway, and irrigation properties. The Minister said, "Relocating these families to other areas and rebuilding their homes would be financially burdensome. After understanding their struggles, I promised to grant them permanent titles, and today, I am pleased to fulfil that promise." As part of the first phase, 3,000 land pattas were distributed.

Reflecting on his political journey, Lokesh spoke about his narrow defeat in the 2019 elections by a margin of 5,300 votes. Despite the setback, he said he had gained the trust of the people through sustained efforts and welfare initiatives. "Over the last five years, I have implemented 26 welfare schemes in Mangalagiri using my own funds, including free drinking water tankers, gravel road construction, oxygen and telemedicine services during the COVID-19 crisis, and health ambulances," he said. Lokesh also introduced sports kits for young people, established the Mangalagiri Premier League, and developed playgrounds for local communities.

Highlighting further development plans, the Minister said that Mangalagiri is undergoing extensive infrastructure improvements, including parks, sports grounds, underground drainage, and modernised public markets. Notable future projects include a 100-bed hospital, the renovation of the Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple, and the development of a jewellery park to create employment opportunities for local youth.

Lokesh reiterated his commitment to making Mangalagiri a stronghold for the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), citing the overwhelming mandate he received in the 2024 elections. "We aim to make Mangalagiri the number one constituency in the state and a TDP fortress," he added.

The Minister further stated that the distribution of land pattas marks the fulfilment of a crucial promise made to the people of Mangalagiri. "I will continue working to resolve all remaining issues, and the development of Mangalagiri will remain a priority," he assured.

# Transport employees' leaders meet ATC Ramyasree

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The leaders of the Transport Employees' Association of Zone 2 paid a courtesy visit to the newly appointed Additional Transport Commissioner (ATC), LSM Ramyashree, on Thursday. They congratulated her on assuming office in the Transport Department.

During the meeting, she emphasised the importance of each employee taking responsibility for delivering the services expected by the public. She encouraged officers and staff to process applications promptly and work towards enhancing the department's reputation. She also urged employees to bring any welfare-related concerns to her attention, assuring them that she would strive to address their issues.

Zone 2 Transport Employees' Association President, M Rajubabu, expressed his delight in meeting the ATC, stating that her appointment was historic. He noted that she is the first woman to start her career as a Regional Transport Officer (RTO) and later rise to the position of Additional Transport Commissioner, setting a new record for the department. He appreciated her proactive approach and responsiveness to employee-related issues.

Rajubabu added that employees in the department continue to work diligently, providing services to the public while adhering to the directives of senior authorities.

Association Vice-President D Rammurthy, Joint Secretary V Nagasankar, Treasurer K Ramachandra Raju, Executive Secretary B Madhusudhan Rao, and Joint Secretaries P Durgaprasad and K Sathyanarayana were also present.

# YSRCP MP strongly opposes Waqf Bill in RS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) MP YV Subba Reddy strongly opposed the Waqf Amendment Bill 2025 in the Rajya Sabha, stating that it threatens the constitutional rights and religious freedoms of the Muslim community in India.

During the debate, Subba Reddy warned that the bill could seriously undermine the faith of Muslim citizens in the Constitution and Parliament.

He pointed out that several respected Muslim organisations, including the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, had raised valid concerns about the bill, but their voices were ignored.

He argued that the bill contravenes Articles 13, 14, 25, and 26 of the Indian Constitution, which safeguard the rights to equality, religious freedom, and the management of religious institutions.

# Waqf Bill unconstitutional: Ex-Dy CM

PNS ■ KADAPA



Former Deputy Chief Minister Amzath Basha has strongly condemned the Waqf Amendment Bill 2025, calling it unconstitutional and a violation of Muslim rights. Addressing the media, Basha criticised the Bill, which was passed in the Lok Sabha on 2 April with the NDA's majority, as being in contradiction to Articles 14, 15, 25, 26, and 300 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equality, non-discrimination, religious freedom, and property rights.

He accused the NDA of betraying its promise of equal rights and undermining Dr B.R. Ambedkar's Constitution.

Basha described the Bill as a conspiracy to seize Waqf properties, which he termed as sacred Muslim assets dedicated to Allah. He dismissed as baseless Union Minister Kiren Rijiju's claim that such properties belong to the government. He emphasised that Waqf laws prohibit even donors from reclaiming these properties and questioned the government's legal justification for its move.

Basha also criticised the TDP and Janasena for supporting the Bill in Delhi despite opposing it in Andhra Pradesh, accusing their leaders, Chandrababu Naidu and Pawan Kalyan, of aligning with the "anti-Muslim" NDA for political gain.

He pointed out that the Bill removes the "Waqf by User" provision, which previously recognised religious sites such as mosques even without documentation. He warned that the new six-month proof requirement poses a threat to centuries-old properties.

Basha praised the YSRCP for opposing the Bill and urged the TDP and Janasena to reconsider their stance, claiming their support facilitated its passage. He accused the NDA of targeting 8.75 lakh acres of Waqf land nationwide and treating minorities as second-class citizens while reaffirming the YSRCP's commitment to protecting Muslim rights.

# Heavy rains...

*Continued from Page 1*

It predicted similar weather for Saturday but said the maximum temperatures could rise by two to three degrees Celsius over NCAP, Yanam, and SCAP.

According to IMD, a trough in the easterlies extends from South Interior Karnataka to Southwest Madhya Pradesh across the cyclonic circulation over Marathwada at 0.9 km above mean sea level. Additionally, an upper air cyclonic circulation lies over North Coastal Andhra Pradesh and adjoining South Odisha at 0.9 km above mean sea level.

Earlier, the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) forecast scattered thunderstorms and light rainfall in parts of the state on Thursday.

# AP urges Railway...

*Continued from Page 1*

He also briefed Minister Vaishnaw on the upcoming industrial developments in the Orvakal Industrial Park in Andhra Pradesh. He emphasised that Orvakal is poised to become a major industrial hub and highlighted the need for better rail connectivity to key cities across India to support the region's growth.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw responded positively to the proposals and assured that the railway services would be thoroughly reviewed. He acknowledged the importance of improving rail connectivity to bolster the region's economic development and assured that the necessary steps would be taken.

# AP ranks 7th in AIDS control performance

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Andhra Pradesh has significantly improved its performance in AIDS control, securing the 7th position in the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) Performance Index for States and Union Territories. The state climbed 10 places from its previous 17th rank, reflecting its enhanced efforts between April and December 2024.

Key achievements include a perfect score of 100% in the Targeted Intervention (TI) and Link Workers Scheme (LWS), demonstrating the state's strong commitment to combating HIV/AIDS. Under TI, Andhra Pradesh reached high-risk groups, including female sex workers (FSWs), through 96 NGOs operating across the state, focusing on identifying affected individuals and their contacts. The LWS initiative identified 100 high-risk villages per district to raise awareness and track AIDS cases, with 96% of high-risk individuals screened for the disease.

Additionally, 88% of individuals in high-risk groups were screened for syphilis, while 75% of pregnant women underwent testing. The Andhra Pradesh State AIDS Control Society (APSACS) also utilised 90% of the allocated funds, further enhancing its performance. The state's social media campaign against AIDS was recognised by NACO for its effective outreach.

Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav praised APSACS for its focused approach, commending Project Director Dr Siri and her team for their dedication. Since 2004, the state has identified around 2.25 lakh AIDS-affected individuals. NACO has allocated Rs 127 crore to APSACS for 2024-25 to continue its efforts.

# AP CS updates...

*Continued from Page 1*

The meeting underscored the need for swift implementation of the auction process while maintaining environmental safeguards and enhancing overall efficiency.

Special Chief Secretary (Revenue Department) R P Sisodia, Secretary (Mines Department) Praveen Kumar, PCCF Ajay Kumar Nayak, Additional PCCF Rahul Pandey, and Secretary of APPCB Sreesharavanan, along with other state officials, were present in the meeting.

# TRI funds for AP in 2024-25 yet to be released: Union Min

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Durga Das Uikey informed Parliament that the funds allocated for the Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) in Andhra Pradesh for the financial year 2024-25 have not yet been released. This disclosure was made in response to a question raised by MP Kesineni Sivanath (Chinni) on Thursday.

The TRIs receive support under the central government's Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) scheme, aimed at promoting education in tribal languages and preserving cultural heritage. The initiative funds activities such as the preparation of educational materials and the publication of tribal primers, alphabets, stories, and poems under the Multilingual Education (MLE) programme.

**Breakdown of funds released to AP**

2020-21: Rs 54.2 crore allocated, Rs 45.5 crore released
2021-22: Rs 24.5 crore allocated, Rs 43.2 crore released
2022-23: Rs 56.16 crore allocated, Rs 21.91 crore released
2023-24: Rs 108 crore allocated, Rs 12.5 crore released
2024-25: Rs 13.4 crore allocated, but no funds released yet

These funds support a range of activities, including infrastructure development, research documentation, training programmes, cultural festivals, and tourism promotion to safeguard tribal traditions, languages, and customs.

The new National Education Policy (NEP) also emphasises teaching young children in their native languages, aligning with the objectives of the TRI scheme.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, has been actively promoting multilingual education policies as part of a broader initiative to protect endangered languages. The Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) in Mysuru launched a programme in 2013 to preserve languages at risk of extinction.

# Cabinet clears major industrial...

*Continued from Page 1*

To support steel production logistics, two captive ports will be developed. The first port, with a capacity of 20.5 million metric tonnes per annum, is scheduled for completion by January 2029 at an investment of Rs 5,816 crore, generating 1,000 jobs. The second port, to be developed at a cost of Rs 5,380 crore, will support the second phase of the steel plant and create 5,000 jobs.

The Cabinet has also taken steps to support the Vizag Steel Plant, ensuring it remains under public ownership. The government has agreed to convert Rs 2,400 crore in power dues into equity, aiding the plant's return to profitability. Additionally, the state government will assume security responsibilities at the plant, replacing central forces with state police personnel.

In the tourism sector, Minister Parthasarathi highlighted the government's focus on expanding infrastructure to drive employment and revenue. The state plans to construct 50,000 hotel rooms this year to accommodate the increasing number of tourists. The Cabinet also approved a proposal to reduce the licence fee for three-star and above category hotels from Rs 66 lakh to Rs 25 lakh, fostering growth in the hospitality sector.

On the infrastructure front, the Cabinet approved the creation of 'Jalaharathi Corporation,' a special purpose vehicle under the Water Resources Department, to oversee the Polavaram-Banakacherla Link Project. Aimed at utilising Godavari floodwaters and other resources, the project is estimated to cost Rs 80,000 crore and is expected to benefit the Rayalaseema region significantly.

Additionally, the Cabinet ratified a government guarantee for a Rs 710 crore loan to the AP Power Finance Corporation and approved compensation for Rs 1,735 crore in losses incurred by M/s NECL and APGENCO due to previous government policies related to the Polavaram Hydro Electric Project.

As part of its rural development initiatives, the Chief Minister announced that IAS officers would soon be assigned to spend time in rural areas to develop a comprehensive roadmap for rural welfare. The Cabinet's decisions mark a significant step towards accelerating industrial growth, creating jobs, and advancing key sectors such as tourism, infrastructure, and energy in Andhra Pradesh.

# Work begins on...

*Continued from Page 1*

During the event, officials from the Department of Water Resources, PPA, and MEIL representatives emphasised that they are working systematically to complete the project within the stipulated deadline.

They assured that all departments are coordinating efficiently, and efforts are being made to accelerate the work to ensure timely completion.

The commencement of the Gap 1 Rockfill Dam work marks a significant step in the overall progress of the Polavaram Project, which is expected to enhance irrigation, flood control, and drinking water supply in the region upon completion.

The 'puja' ceremony was attended by key officials, including Polavaram Project Chief Engineer K. Narasimha Murthy, Superintending Engineer Reddy Ramachandra Rao, Executive Engineer K. Balakrishna, PPA Chief Engineer Ramesh Kumar, and MEIL Joint Chief Operating Officer Satish Babu Angara, along with GM Gangadhar and others.

## TODAY

**ALMANAC**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Month & Paksham:** | Sukla Paksha |
| **Tithi:** | |
| Sapthami: | Apr 03 09:41 PM to Apr 04 08:12 PM |
| Ashtami: | Apr 04 08:13 PM to Apr 05 07:26 PM |
| **Nakshatram:** | |
| Ardra: | Apr 04 05:51 AM to Apr 05 05:20 AM |
| Punarvasu: | Apr 05 05:20 AM to Apr 06 05:32 AM |
| **Rahukalam:** | 10:47 AM to 12:19 PM |
| **Yamagandam:** | 3:22 PM to 4:54 PM |
| **Varjyam:** | 02:04 PM to 03:38 PM |
| **Gulika:** | 7:43 AM to 9:15 AM |
| **Amritakalam:** | 07:32 PM to 09:06 PM |
| **Abhijit Muhurtham:** | 11:54 AM to12:43 PM |

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

**Forecast:** Mostly Cloudy
**Temp:** 34°c
**Humidity:** 73%
**Sunrise:** 6:00 AM
**Sunset:** 6:21 PM

**Updated:** April 3, 2025 5:00 PM

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# AP and Kerala partner to promote natural farming

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A high-level meeting on natural farming was held between key officials from Andhra Pradesh and Kerala to discuss sustainable agricultural practices. During the meeting, Kerala's Agriculture Minister, P. Prasad, expressed the state's interest in implementing natural farming across 64 designated plots as part of a government-backed initiative to promote eco-friendly agriculture. Andhra Pradesh's Agriculture Minister, K. Atchannaidu, emphasised the importance of certification and traceability in natural farming to ensure quality control and accountability, in line with the Chief Minister's vision. Prasad also conveyed congratulations from Kerala's Chief Minister on Andhra Pradesh's progress in natural farming initiatives. Dr Aparna B. proposed introducing a PG Diploma in Natural Farming at Vellayani Agriculture College to strengthen academic research in sustainable agriculture. T. Vijay Kumar highlighted Andhra Pradesh's commitment to climate-resilient farming, sharing insights from the recent Davos Conference.

Looking ahead, Atchannaidu announced plans to visit Kerala to inaugurate its natural farming initiatives, further strengthening collaboration between the two states for a sustainable agricultural future.



# Rs 39 crore to close 3 Budameru breaches

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Water Resources, Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu, held a review meeting with department officials on Thursday at the Sachivalayam in Velagapudi to discuss the modernisation of the Budameru Rivulet. During the meeting, the minister announced that the state cabinet had allocated Rs 39.05 crore to address three breaches in the Budameru. He instructed officials to initiate the tender process for these projects and ensure their timely completion.

Dr Ramanaidu noted that around 80% of the Budameru modernisation work had been completed under the previous TDP government, which allocated Rs 464 crore to enable the release of 37,500 cusecs of floodwater from the Budameru Channel. However, he pointed out that the remaining 20% of the work was not completed during the YSRCP government's tenure from 2019 to 2024, despite the availability of funds. He attributed this to the YSRCP government's cancellation of the channel widening project from Enikepadu UT to Kolleru Lake.

Additionally, Dr Ramanaidu urged officials to enhance the Budameru Diversion Channel's flow capacity to 37,500 cusecs and prepare an action plan to complete the outstanding work. He suggested reviewing the channel's floodwater flow capacity and discussing alternative channel proposals alongside the Budameru Channel to facilitate the release of an additional 10,000 cusecs of floodwater.

He also directed Water Resources Department officials to coordinate with the Revenue, Municipal, and Disaster Management Departments to manage Budameru floods under disaster management, with support from the central government. The matter will be discussed with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu.

The meeting was attended by Water Resources Department Special Chief Secretary G Sai Prasad, Engineer-in-Chief Mamidi Venkateswara Rao, and several senior departmental officials.

## Durga Temple earns Rs 2.18 cr from hundis

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Officials at the Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, located on Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada, conducted a donation count on Thursday, which revealed a total income of Rs. 2.18 crore. This amount was collected from offerings made by devotees through the hundis.

The counting took place on the sixth floor of the Mallikharjuna Maha Mandapam within the temple grounds. As reported by the temple's Executive Officer, K Ramachandra Mohan, the total income amounted to Rs. 2,18,00,698. Besides, the Durga temple received 355 grams of gold and 6.374 kg of silver ornaments, which were donated by devotees to Durga Devi via the hundis.

The counting process was overseen by Deputy Executive Officer M Ratna Raju, with participation from temple staff, local police, and SPF personnel.







# Untimely rain causes huge crop loss in Nunna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

An unexpected rain, accompanied by strong winds, caused widespread damage to crops in the NTR district on Thursday. The sudden downpour severely impacted standing crops of paddy, jowar, and mango. In Nunna, located in Vijayawada Rural mandal, fierce winds uprooted mango trees, leading to the loss of mangoes that were ready for harvest, and resulting in significant financial setbacks for farmers.

Mango cultivators suffered substantial losses as strong winds uprooted trees across several villages. Farmers reported that the unseasonal rain struck just as the mango crop was nearing harvest. Paddy spread on roads for drying was soaked by the unexpected rain, while jowar crops were flattened by intense winds.

The gusty winds also damaged electric poles and transformers, disrupting the power supply in areas under the APCPDCL Nunna substation. Following the rain, electricity department staff worked to restore power. Affected farmers have urged the government to provide compensation for their losses.

Mango farmers, in particular, have faced severe setbacks, as their produce was ready for market. A young farmer, M Sivarama Prasad, said he had leased a mango orchard for approximately Rs 2 lakh to sell mangoes during the summer. However, he expressed distress over the losses incurred as the mangoes fell from the trees.

Another farmer, Madu Sivaramaiah, voiced concern that the delayed opening of the Mango Market in Nunna had prevented many growers from harvesting their produce, leading to significant losses. He urged the government to implement the newly introduced mango insurance scheme to support affected farmers.

Meanwhile, jowar farmer Kolli Koti Reddy stated that he had planned to harvest his maize crop, but the unexpected rain had damaged it. He appealed to agricultural department officials to provide input subsidies to affected farmers.



## APHDC signs 2 pacts with NID to promote handicrafts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Handicrafts Development Corporation (APHDC) has signed two significant agreements with the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. The agreements were formalised on Wednesday at the state Secretariat in Amaravati in the presence of Minister Savitha and Principal Secretary of the Handlooms and Textiles Department, Yuvraj. The contracts were exchanged by Lepakshi Managing Director Vishnu, NID Ahmedabad Director Dr Ashok Mandal, and AP Director Dr Bavumik Nagar.

These agreements aim to provide two years of training to artisans in crafting items from banana fibre and water hyacinth ('Gurrapu Dekka'), which are key traditional crafts in the state. The training will also cover product packaging, branding, and strategies to enhance market visibility.

The programme will be implemented in two regions—Anantapur, where artisans will focus on banana fibre products, and Machilipatnam in Krishna district, where they will learn to craft items from water hyacinth. The training, spanning three to six months, seeks to improve artisans' skills, introduce them to advanced weaving techniques, and encourage innovative product designs.

Minister Savitha reaffirmed her commitment to promoting the state's handicrafts by providing training aligned with modern tastes. She emphasised that these agreements would not only help preserve Andhra Pradesh's cultural heritage but also boost rural employment and improve artisans' livelihoods.

"These collaborations will play a vital role in strengthening the handicrafts sector in Andhra Pradesh. They will make our crafts more competitive in the global market while providing essential training and market access for our artisans," said Minister Savitha.

## Integrated IAS coaching prog at Andhra Loyola

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The prestigious CSB IAS Academy, led by its founder Bala Latha, is taking a significant step forward in its mission to produce more Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) civil servants. In collaboration with the renowned Andhra Loyola College in Vijayawada, which has a 70-year legacy in education, the academy is set to launch an Integrated Graduation + UPSC Civil Services Coaching Programme on the college's expansive 100-acre lush green campus.

Addressing the media at Andhra Loyola College on Thursday, CSB IAS Academy Director Bala Latha highlighted that many students trained at CSB have secured IAS, IPS, and other prestigious positions. She emphasised that to further increase the number of UPSC civil servants from Andhra Pradesh, the Integrated Graduation + UPSC Civil Services Coaching Programme would commence in the third week of June at Andhra Loyola College.



CSB IAS Academy founder Bala Latha addressing a press conference in Vijayawada on Thursday. **Photo: Ch. Vijaya Bhaskar**

She also noted that the course would benefit students preparing for Group-1 exams. Additionally, she highlighted that the college has one of the largest libraries in the country, equipped with all necessary books for students. Hostel facilities would also be available. She further explained the importance of preparing for the UPSC examination alongside a degree.

Director of Andhra Loyola College, Fr Bala, expressed his pride in collaborating with CSB IAS Academy under Bala Latha's guidance to offer integrated civil services coaching at the graduation level. He affirmed that, while upholding Andhra Loyola College's legacy of discipline and excellence, they aim to establish a modern Civil Services 'Gurukul' to produce competent civil servants capable of shaping the nation's future.

He stated that students could choose from any of the 38 degree programmes offered by Andhra Loyola College. As part of the three-year programme, students would receive personalised guidance from Bala Latha to systematically prepare for the UPSC Civil Services examination. Students interested in enrolling in the Integrated Graduation + UPSC Civil Services Coaching Programme at Andhra Loyola College are encouraged to contact 9963378333 at the earliest.

## 'Priority to women's safety'



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gummidi Sandhya Rani, Minister for Women and Child Welfare and Tribal Welfare, emphasised that the protection and safety of women are the State government's highest priorities. She inaugurated the new One-Stop Centre on the Old Government Hospital premises in Vijayawada on Thursday evening. The minister stated that the centre would be staffed by 11 to 13 personnel and would be available 24/7 for women in distress.

She highlighted that the government is allocating funds for the construction of similar facilities across the state. Underscoring the importance of women's safety, Sandhya Rani recalled that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has prioritised women's protection, taking specific measures to ensure their well-being. She added that both the central and state governments are committed to safeguarding women.

The One-Stop Centre will provide legal, family, and other essential assistance to women who have been exploited or abused. Sandhya Rani noted that women can approach female officers at the centre to discuss issues they may not feel comfortable sharing at home. Unlike previous administrations, the current government will not only ensure protection but also deliver justice, healthcare, and accommodation for victims.

MLA Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao lauded the government's initiative, stating that the One-Stop Centre offers comprehensive protection and support for women facing violence or harassment. He assured that female police officers would be available round the clock to provide medical, legal, and advisory services.

Secretary A Suryakumari, Director M Venugopal Reddy, NTR District PD Dasari Srilakshmi, and DCP (Admin) Saritha were among those present.

## APSRTC staff seek higher pension option

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

President of the Andhra Pradesh Public Transport Department (APPTD) Employees' Union, P. Damodara Rao, along with general secretary G.V. Narasaiah, has urged Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director of APSRTC, to take necessary measures to provide a higher pension option for both serving and retired employees. They noted that, following the Supreme Court's directives and with Dwaraka Tirumala Rao's initiative, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has permitted 31,000 employees to access the higher pension facility.

In a press release issued on Thursday, they stated that over 70,000 employees and pensioners in the state had applied for the higher pension benefit. Among them, 31,000 have received demand letters from the EPFO, indicating their eligibility for the scheme. However, they expressed concern that many employees and pensioners had not received any such letters, while some had their requests rejected by the Commissioner.

# Congress urges Governor's intervention in Waqf Bill

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Congress party has urged Governor A Abdul Nazeer to intervene in various issues, including the Waqf Bill, and bring them to the attention of the President of India and the Central Government.

A Congress delegation led by APCC Vice-President Kolanukonda Shivaji met the Governor at Raj Bhavan on Thursday, expressed their concerns over the Waqf Bill, and submitted a memorandum in this regard.

The Congress leaders appealed to the Governor to take up the issue of the Waqf Bill with the Union Government and recommend necessary amendments. They also called for the immediate implementation of a caste census to support effective policy-making, an increase in reservations in local body elections to 42% for fair representation, the prompt issuance of the DSC notification, and strict implementation of the SC/ST Sub-Plan to ensure allocated funds are utilised as intended.

The Congress leaders apprised the Governor that the Waqf Bill has raised serious concerns among the people of Andhra Pradesh, particularly the Muslim community, as it directly affects the management and administration of Waqf properties.

"The Bill appears to centralise control over Waqf lands, reducing the role of state Waqf Boards and local stakeholders. Given that Waqf matters have traditionally been administered at the state level, any legislative changes should be made in consultation with State Governments and community representatives," they stated in the memorandum.

The Congress also stressed the need for a comprehensive caste census to accurately identify and address social inequalities. "We urge the Central Government to conduct a nationwide caste census and ensure that its findings are used to promote social justice and equality," the memorandum read.

The party further highlighted the proposal to increase reservations in local body elections to 42%, arguing that adequate political representation for marginalised communities is crucial for inclusive governance. They requested the Governor to recommend the measure to the relevant authorities to make grassroots governance more representative and inclusive.

The Congress also expressed concern over the delay in issuing the DSC notification, which has exacerbated unemployment among educated youth in Andhra Pradesh. They emphasised that timely recruitment through DSC is vital to fill vacant positions in the education sector and provide employment opportunities to qualified candidates.

The APCC urged the Governor to strengthen accountability mechanisms under the SC/ST Sub-Plan to prevent fund diversions and ensure transparent utilisation of allocations meant for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Congress leaders Korivi Vinaya Kumar, ADV Kiran, Junaid Baig, MD Pilla Jaya, Angadala Poornachandra Rao, and Nallamothu Srinivasa Rao were among those who met the Governor.



# Public urged to take part in 'Brand Image Title' contest for Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

**Collector invites title and tagline aimed at attracting both domestic and international tourists**



NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha has extended an invitation to the public to engage in a competition for the 'Brand Image Title', designed to draw tourists from both domestic and international destinations to Vijayawada city. He encouraged individuals to contribute their ideas and concepts that embody the Brand Image Title and Tagline of Vijayawada, the entry point to Amaravati, the new capital of the State. He announced that attractive prizes and certificates will be awarded to the winners.

In a recent press release, the Collector urged citizens to take part in the Vijayawada city Brand Image Title and Tagline initiative. He highlighted that Vijayawada, known for its educational, medical, industrial, cultural, and artistic significance, has gained prominence as it serves as the gateway to Amaravati. He noted that the concept of establishing a brand name for Vijayawada emerged during a period when tourists from various regions were visiting Amaravati.

He added that competitions for brand titles are being organised to realise this vision and to elevate the city's recognition through the most fitting brand title. He welcomed participation from both residents of Vijayawada and individuals from other areas. He encouraged those with innovative ideas and a passion for Vijayawada to propose their suggestions for a brand title and tagline. He cited examples such as Kerala's 'God's Own Country', Bengaluru's 'Silicon Valley of India', and Jaipur's 'Pink City', emphasising that Vijayawada deserves a distinctive title that would enhance its recognition.

Meanwhile, he made it clear that it is essential to convey the rationale and concepts behind the proposed title. He mentioned that following the title competition, there would also be a contest for logo design. Proposing a brand title presents a unique opportunity; in addition to receiving prizes, the individual who suggests the title would have their name permanently recognised, he said.

To seize this opportunity, participants should submit their brand title and tagline details to the email ID: Brandvjacomp.collectorntrdist@gmail.com, including their name, address, and mobile number, he explained.

## YSRCP slams Waqf Amendment Bill

PNS ■ KURNOOL

YSRCP former MLA Hafeez Khan has strongly criticised the Waqf Amendment Bill introduced by the NDA-led central government, calling it unconstitutional. He pointed out that all Muslim MPs opposed the bill in Parliament, citing its flaws and accusing the NDA of undermining India's constitutional values. Khan claimed that the Bill, widely rejected by Muslim organisations, aims to seize Waqf lands and incite religious tensions, alleging that the NDA is conspiring to plunder properties through schemes like Umeed.

He criticised Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu for supporting the BJP despite pre-election promises to back minorities. He questioned the decision to grant collectors authority over Waqf lands, warning that it could lead to illegal occupation by coalition leaders.

# Officials directed to expedite construction of houses

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY



East Godavari District Collector P Prasanthi has instructed officials to accelerate the construction of houses and ensure timely completion.

The Collector conducted a virtual meeting with Housing Department PD S. Bhaskar Reddy and officials at division, mandal, and constituency levels on Thursday to review the progress of the housing construction.

She emphasised that beneficiaries who have received financial assistance for house construction must complete their houses by the end of May. Expressing dissatisfaction over the slow progress at the stage conversion level, she urged officials to step up efforts.

Collector Prasanthi stated that the State government has set a target of completing 10,794 houses in East Godavari district by May 31. So far, 4,929 houses (46% of the target) have been completed, while 5,865 houses are yet to be finished. Reaffirming the government's commitment to eradicating poverty, she noted that 50% of poverty could be addressed by ensuring home ownership.

"To expedite housing construction, the State government has provided additional financial assistance to Scheduled Tribe (ST), Scheduled Caste (SC), and Backward Class (BC) beneficiaries. Awareness campaigns have been conducted at the field level regarding this," she informed officials.

The Collector warned that Secretariat Engineer Assistants, Housing DEs, AEs, and MPDOs who fail to meet the housing targets would be held accountable. So far, 5,330 beneficiaries have agreed to construct houses, and Rs 7.64 crore has been disbursed to 3,378 of them. She directed field-level engineering officers, staff, and MPDOs to take personal responsibility for the stage conversion process.

She urged officials to focus on completing the 5,865 pending houses by May 31, stressing that the salaries of housing officials should be linked to the progress in stage conversions.

She highlighted key areas where beneficiaries have received additional financial assistance, including Anaparthi, Nallajerla, Kovvur, Chagallu, Rajahmundry Urban, and Kovvur Urban.

She also called for a more practical stage conversion system and weekly performance reviews of assistant engineers and engineering assistants. She emphasised the importance of ensuring the proper utilisation of financial aid rather than its misuse. DRDA PD N.V.S. Murthy and other officials attended the meeting.



# Steps taken to enhance facilities at welfare hostels: WG Collector

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani has asserted that steps have been taken to improve amenities in social welfare hostels and urged students to excel in their studies.

The Collector inspected the BC Girls' Welfare Hostel at Mutyalapalli village in Mogaltur mandal and the SBM ZP High School on Thursday. She reviewed the completed construction works at the hostel and instructed officials to expedite the pending works. The Housing PD briefed her on the work carried out on the ground floor and first floor, as well as the cleaning of septic tanks and repairs to leaking pipelines.

Interacting with Class 9 hostel students, the Collector encouraged them to study diligently, reminding them of their parents' hard work for their future. She advised them to strive for academic success to fulfil their parents' aspirations. She also instructed teachers to focus on Class 8 students and provide proper guidance until they complete Class 10.

Members of the ZP School Committee brought to her notice the encroachment of school land and urged her to take steps to reclaim it for use as a playground. Responding to their request, the Collector directed the Tahsildar to provide details of the land.

Later, the Collector conducted a surprise inspection of the Holy Land Welfare Girls' Hostel at Valandala Revu in Narasapuram mandal. She inspected the dining hall and hostel rooms and emphasised the need for improved facilities for hostel students. She assured them that steps would be taken to address any issues they faced.

Narasapuram RDO Desiraju, Housing Department Officer G Pitcchaiah, and other officials accompanied the Collector.



# Lightning kills boy, injures three farmers

PNS ■ KURNOOL

A teenage boy was killed, and three farmers sustained serious injuries after being struck by lightning at Kandanathi village in Yemmiganur mandal on Thursday.

According to official sources, the deceased, Ravi (15), and the injured were in their agricultural field when lightning struck, killing the boy instantly. The three farmers suffered grievous injuries and were admitted to the Government General Hospital (GGH) in Yemmiganur. Officials said they had taken shelter under a tree when it was struck by lightning.

Heavy rain, accompanied by gales and lightning, lashed several parts of the district in the evening.

# Dy Speaker inaugurates paddy purchase centre

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM



Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Kanumuri Raghurama Krishna Raju inaugurated a Paddy Purchasing Centre at the Rythu Seva Kendram in I. Bhimavaram village, Aakividu mandal, on Thursday and flagged off a lorry laden with paddy.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Speaker stated that farmers were content under the coalition government, as their welfare was being prioritised. He noted that farmers could now transport their paddy to a rice mill of their choice, adding that, unlike the previous government, the present administration was crediting the money directly into farmers' accounts within a few hours of purchase.

Raghurama Krishna Raju reiterated his commitment to developing the constituency, particularly in the fields of education and healthcare.

He expressed concern over water pollution, citing medical experts who had warned that many people were suffering from cancer due to contaminated water. He assured that steps would be taken to prevent sewage from entering crop canals. He also urged village panchayats to dispose of waste properly in designated areas instead of dumping it on roadsides and canal banks.

The Deputy Speaker emphasised that education and healthcare remained key priorities. He highlighted the installation of CCTV cameras in the constituency, facilitated with the support of voluntary organisations and donors, as part of security measures.

Speaking at the event, Joint Collector T Rahul Kumar Reddy advised farmers to utilise the WhatsApp facility to sell their Rabi crop paddy through the Rythu Seva Kendras. He recommended that the MCU 1121 Puri variety be harvested at 125 days while still green and asked farmers to ensure that the moisture content was 17 per cent before bringing it to the Rythu Seva Kendras.

The Joint Collector pointed out that the government had enabled farmers to transport their paddy to rice mills of their choice. He also advised them to inspect the gunny bags provided by rice mills and return any damaged ones to the respective mill.

RDO K Pravin Kumar Reddy, Civil Supplies District Manager T Shivarama Prasad, and District Agriculture Officer Z Venkateswara Rao were among those present.



# Four-member fake police gang nabbed

PNS ■ ELURU

The police have arrested four individuals who were posing as police officers to commit crimes and seized police uniforms, badges, and caps at Dwaraka Tirumala.

DSP Srevan Kumar informed the media on Thursday that the complainant, M David, who runs a tea stall at Lakshmi Nagar, was targeted on April 1. At around 11:30 pm, Accused 1, B Prasanth Kumar, accompanied by Accused 2, P Surendra Kumar, approached the tea stall. They impersonated police officers and demanded Rs 1,000 from David for operating the stall at night. Fearing repercussions, David handed over the money.

Meanwhile, a highway patrolling team arrived at the location. On seeing them, the fake police gang fled the scene in a car. Acting on the directions of SP K Pratap Shiva Kishore and under the supervision of Additional SP N Suryachandra Rao, a police team led by CI UJ Wilson and SI T Sudhir arrested all four accused on Thursday at Bhimadole Junction. The police identified the other two accused as Golla Suresh Kumar and Korapati Rohit.

The police seized an AP 07 CL 6252 Maruti Suzuki Swift Dzire car, a police uniform shirt with an AP Police logo, a black head constable's whistle guard, police uniform trousers, a black police web belt with an 'S' buckle, and a baton from the gang. Cases have been registered under Cr No. 79/2025 U/S 319 (2), 308 (6) R/W 3(5) B.N.S at Dwaraka Tirumala police station.

# Pawan inaugurates bus service between Tirupati and Palani



PNS ■ GUNTUR

Deputy Chief Minister K Pawan Kalyan, accompanied by Transport Minister M Ramprasad Reddy, inaugurated a new bus service between Tirupati and Palani at his camp office near Mangalagiri on Thursday.

As priests recited hymns, Pawan Kalyan and Ramprasad Reddy formally launched the service connecting the two renowned pilgrimage centres. The Deputy Chief Minister also inspected the facilities available on the bus.

Speaking on the occasion, Pawan Kalyan said, "I undertook the Shashta Shanmuka Yatra in Tamil Nadu in February this year. As part of the yatra, I visited the Lord Subrahmanya Swamy temple atop Palani Hill. During my visit, I was informed about the difficulties devotees face while travelling between Palani and Tirupati."

He recalled that members of the Tamil Nadu State Kandan Charitable Trust and the Palani Town Citizen Forum, Balaji and Subramaniam, had submitted a petition regarding the issue.

"I brought this matter to the notice of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, and within half an hour, permission was granted to operate a new bus service between Tirupati and Palani," he said.

The distance between Tirupati and Palani is 505 km, and the bus fare is Rs 680.

Civil Supplies Minister Nadendla Manohar, MLC Pidugu Hariprasad, MLA Aarani Srinivasulu, APSRTC chairman Konakalla Narayana Rao, and RTC MD Dwaraka Tirumala Rao were among those present.

## TTD announces special facilities for devotees donating Rs 1 cr

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Thursday announced special facilities for devotees who donate Rs 1 crore to the Tirumala temple.

According to a release from TTD, donors can avail of these facilities on all days except during special festivals. Those contributing Rs 1 crore will be entitled to the following benefits: darshan of Srivari Suprabhata Seva for three days along with four others, Break Darshan for three days, and Supatham Darshan for four days.

Additionally, donors will receive 10 big laddus, 20 small laddus, one dupatta, one blouse, 10 Maha Prasadam packets, a one-time Vedic blessing, and accommodation in a room worth Rs 3,000 for three days.

Once in a lifetime, donors can also receive a five-gram Srivari gold dollar and a 50-gram silver dollar by presenting the relevant certificates to the office. Donations can be made towards various TTD trusts, including the Cottage Donation Scheme, SV Pranadana Trust, SV Vidyadana Trust, BIRRD Trust, Sri Venkateswara Annaprasadam Trust, Sri Venkateswara GoSamrakshana Trust, Sri Venkateswara Sarva Shreyas Trust, Sri Venkateswara Veda Parirakshana Trust, SRIVANI Trust, Sri Venkateswara Bhakti Channel Trust, and Sri Balaji Arogya Varaprasadini Scheme (SVIMS), with corresponding benefits.

# Dr. Udumala Bala installed as Archbishop of Visakhapatnam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Visakhapatnam witnessed a historic ecclesiastical event as Most Rev. Dr. Udumala Bala was officially installed as the new Archbishop. The solemn installation ceremony took place at St. Peter's Cathedral Grounds, Gnanapuram, under the leadership of His Excellency Most Rev. Leopoldo Girelli, the Papal Ambassador to India and Nepal.

The event was marked by a grand Eucharistic celebration attended by over 25 bishops and archbishops from across India, including Cardinal Anthony Poola of Hyderabad and Bishop Emeritus Gali Bali, who delivered an inspiring homily. Over 500 priests, 500 nuns, and nearly 10,000 lay faithful gathered to witness this significant occasion. Outgoing Apostolic Administrator Bishop Jaya Rao was also present.

In his inaugural address, Archbishop Bala reflected on his spiritual journey, describing Warangal as his 'Dhanya Bhoomi' (Blessed Land) and Visakhapatnam as his 'Punya Bhoomi' (Holy Land). Expressing gratitude for his divine calling, he acknowledged the missionary heritage of Warangal and the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) legacy in Visakhapatnam. He lauded the people's warmth and generosity and pledged to serve with devotion.

Archbishop Bala emphasised his commitment to unity, peace, and interfaith harmony, urging collective efforts toward a more inclusive society. He extended heartfelt thanks to the Catholic community and people of all faiths, calling for collaboration in building a better Visakhapatnam, a stronger Andhra Pradesh, and a united India.

Archbishop Girelli praised Archbishop Bala's intellectual and pastoral qualities, highlighting his expertise in Moral Theology, teaching abilities, and tenure as Chairman of the CCBI Commission for Seminarians, Clergy, and Religious (2015–2023). He also commended the Visakhapatnam Archdiocese's vibrant faith life, supported by clergy, lay members, and religious organisations like the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Youth Association.

While recognising the archdiocese's strong spiritual foundation, the Papal Nuncio also addressed socio-economic challenges, including unemployment and migration. He emphasised the Church's role as a beacon of hope, urging it to continue uplifting the marginalised and spreading Christ's message of love and service.

# Vizag sees rising demand for wellness centres

## Government pushes tourism growth with new projects

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM



Visakhapatnam is witnessing a surge in demand for wellness centres, with multiple organisations approaching the Tourism Department for suitable land allocations. District Tourism Officer (DTO) Sudhasagar, who recently assumed charge while also serving as Deputy Collector, shared these developments in a discussion with The Pioneer.

According to DTO Sudhasagar, several organisations have expressed interest in establishing wellness centres in the city. "Representatives from Patanjali Group recently visited various locations to explore potential sites," he noted, adding that other stakeholders have also come forward with similar proposals. The government itself is actively planning to set up a well-equipped wellness centre in the region.

Meanwhile, addressing concerns regarding unauthorised constructions, Sudhasagar stated that notices have been issued to certain beachside restaurants that expanded beyond their leased boundaries. "Specific warnings have been given to establishments such as Shankton in Thotlakonda and Marilyn Kay in Bheemili for unauthorised expansions," he confirmed.

In another significant development, the Oberoi Group has initiated earthwork for its new project in Annavaram. However, the May Fair project is facing hurdles due to the absence of direct access from the main road. "The government has taken note of the issue and has recently issued directives to resolve it," the DTO explained. Efforts to streamline the approval process for tourism-related projects are also progressing. "The single-window system software became operational just two days ago, enabling the tourism department to process applications more efficiently," Sudhasagar stated.

Furthermore, plans for tourism expansion in Bheemili mandal are gaining momentum. Senior officials have proposed utilising 15 acres of reclaimed land from Sharada Peetham for tourism-related projects. "This initiative aligns with the broader vision of developing Bheemili as a key tourism hub," he added. Among the highly anticipated tourism initiatives is the conversion of a Bangladesh ship into a floating restaurant. "The project has received approval from the forest department, and a recent Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) meeting in Vijayawada has further advanced the process. Additional permissions are expected soon," Sudhasagar confirmed.

With increasing interest from both the private sector and government authorities, Visakhapatnam is on the cusp of significant growth in its wellness and tourism infrastructure. These developments are expected to enhance the city's appeal as a prime destination for both wellness and leisure seekers.

# 'Will reclaim disputed land, make it eco-park'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



BRS Working President KT Rama Rao announced on Thursday that his party would reclaim the disputed 400 acres of HCU at Kancha Gachibowli and convert it into an eco-park if voted to power.

Addressing a press conference at the Telangana Bhavan, KTR warned real estate players against purchasing the land under what he called the Congress Government's "biscuit-throwing" deals, promising that BRS would retrieve every inch of that and dedicate it to the people of Hyderabad.

KTR said the eco-park would become a landmark like Manhattan's Central Park, serving as a green haven for students and Hyderabadis. He accused Chief Minister Revanth Reddy of commodifying the land and warned prospective buyers of inevitable losses if the BRS returned to power. Supporting HCU students who have been protesting for over 10 days, KTR hailed their determination and compared their protest to student movements during the Telangana statehood struggle.

He criticised the Congress for failing to hold talks with the students and warned that the BRS would lead a massive march to HCU if the government did not reverse its decision.

KTR attacked Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, calling him a "real estate broker" rather than a leader.

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## ACROSS THE STATES



### Haryana to launch 200 new 'Atal Canteens'

The Haryana government will set up 200 new Atal Shramik Kisan Canteens by August, an official statement said on Thursday. The BJP, in its manifesto for last year's Assembly polls, announced to establish 600 subsidised canteens in the state. At present, 175 such canteens are operational. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini will inaugurate the new canteens on Independence Day, taking the total number to 375, it said. In the Atal Canteens, farmers and labourers are provided fresh and hygienic food in a 'thali' for just Rs 10, the statement said. The canteens are managed by members of Women Self Help Groups (SHGs), thereby promoting women's empowerment. Saini directed officials to identify locations for the canteens. He also asked the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation to establish subsidised food canteens in all its industrial estates across the state, ensuring that labourers have access to nutritious food at affordable rates.



### Delhi records highest heat at 39 degree C

The national capital recorded the highest temperature of the season till date at 39 degrees Celsius, five notches above normal, a Met official said. The second-highest temperature of the season was recorded on March 26, when the mercury touched 38.9 degrees Celsius, according to weather department data. The minimum temperature in the capital was recorded at 15.6 degrees Celsius, three notches below normal, the MeT office said. The humidity levels fluctuated between 41 per cent and 22 per cent during the day, the IMD said. The weather office has forecast strong surface winds for Friday, with the maximum temperature expected to be around 38 degrees Celsius, and the minimum 16 degrees Celsius. The city's air quality continued in the 'poor' category with an AQI of 217 at 4 pm on Thursday, as per the Central Pollution Control Board. The Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi has forecast an improvement in the capital's air quality, which is expected to shift to the moderate category for the next two days



### K'taka govt to establish Gig Workers' Welfare Board

The Karnataka government decided to establish a Gig Workers' Welfare Board, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's office said on Thursday. The decision was made following a discussion between Siddaramaiah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi. According to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), Rahul Gandhi inquired about the timeline for formulating the Gig Workers' Welfare Act, which he had promised during his Bharat Jodo Yatra and the elections. "The Karnataka government has decided to establish a Gig Workers' Welfare Board to ensure the well-being of workers employed by companies like Amazon, Flipkart, Ola, Uber, and others," the statement said. It further stated that a five per cent cess would be collected from the concerned companies, while the state government would provide the remaining funds required to support welfare schemes for gig workers. "A comprehensive bill covering all aspects of gig workers' welfare will be prepared and presented before the state cabinet for approval," the statement added. Three gig worker representatives—Rakshitha Dev, Sheikh Salahuddin, and Nikhil Dev—were also invited to the meeting.

# India, Thailand upgrade ties to strategic partnership

## SUPPORT RULES-BASED ORDER IN INDO-PACIFIC: MODI

**PNS** ■ BANGKOK



- We have emphasized cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education between India's northeastern states and Thailand. We discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses.
- We have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue' between security agencies.
- I am grateful to the Thai government for issuing a special postage stamp based on the 18th-century 'Ramayana' mural paintings on the occasion of my visit.
- There has been an exchange of scholars from Ayutthaya to Nalanda. The tale of the Ramayana is deeply woven into Thai folk life.

India and Thailand on Thursday decided to elevate their relations to the level of a strategic partnership with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both the countries support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order in Indo-Pacific, and believe in a policy of development, not expansionism.

Modi made the remarks at a joint press event with his Thai counterpart Paetongtarn Shinawatra after holding delegation-level talks during which they held extensive discussions on various areas of bilateral cooperation.

"We have emphasized cooperation in the fields of tourism, culture, and education between India's northeastern states and Thailand. We discussed enhancing mutual trade, investment, and exchanges between businesses," Modi said about his talks with Shinawatra.

Agreements have also been made for cooperation in MSME, handloom, and handicraft, he noted.

Modi asserted that Thailand holds a special place in India's 'Act East' Policy and the Indo-Pacific vision.

"Today, we have decided to elevate our relations to the level of a Strategic Partnership. Discussions were also held on establishing a 'Strategic Dialogue' between security agencies," Modi said. He said India fully supports ASEAN unity and ASEAN Centrality.

"In the Indo-Pacific, we both support a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based order. We believe in the policy of vikaasvaad, not vistaarvaad (development-ism, not expansionism)," Modi said. "I am grateful to the Thai government for issuing a special postage stamp based on the 18th-century 'Ramayana' mural paintings on the occasion of my visit," he said.

Modi said Prime Minister Shinawatra presented him with the Tripitaka.

"On behalf of the Buddhaland India, I accepted it with folded hands," he added.

The centuries-old relationship between India and Thailand is tied to their deep cultural and spiritual threads, he said. The spread of Buddhism has connected our people at every level, Modi said.

"There has been an exchange of scholars from Ayutthaya to Nalanda. The tale of the Ramayana is deeply woven into Thai folk life," he said.

### Modi likely to meet Yunus, Nepal PM

**BANGKOK:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to hold talks with Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus here on Friday, their first meeting since the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August last year. The meeting between Modi and Yunus is likely to take place on the sidelines of the 6th BIMSTEC Summit, the first in-person deliberations of the leaders of the regional grouping since 2018. Modi is also expected to meet Nepalese Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli at a time when the Himalayan nation is witnessing pro-monarchy protests from a section of the society. Modi will also meet Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who is on a rare international visit, at a time when the country is grappling with the impact of massive earthquakes last week. India has rushed aid to Myanmar and has been helping with the relief efforts by setting up field hospitals to treat the injured under Operation Brahma. Myanmar has been in the middle of a civil war since the military coup in February 2021. Modi's meeting with Yunus assumes significance as the ties between India and Bangladesh have declined since the ouster of Hasina and the attacks on minorities in that country. Questions were also raised in certain quarters over the extent of control Yunus has over the administration in Bangladesh.

## RECORD 202 MPS SPEAK DURING ZERO HOUR IN LS

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

A record 202 MPs spoke during Zero Hour of Lok Sabha which lasted for over five hours on Thursday, according to LS Secretariat. Earlier, on July 18, 2019, 161 MPs had spoken during the extended Zero Hour. The secretariat said that on the initiative of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the Zero Hour was extended.

"Members got opportunity to speak on matters of public importance during Zero Hour which lasted for more than 5 hours today. 202 MPs spoke during the period," the Secretariat said. The Speaker had assured the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the House that he will accommodate MPs who want to raise important issues in the House. The Budget session concludes on Friday.

## 'It's time Modi's govt develop a spine'

### Oppn slams PM Modi over US tariff

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI



The Congress and other opposition parties on Thursday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over imposition of 27 per cent reciprocal tariff on India by the US and said it's time that the government "develop a spine" and start standing up for the country's interest.

Leading the charge, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said tariffs imposed by the US are going to "completely devastate" the Indian economy, particularly sectors like the auto industry, pharmaceuticals and agriculture. The government of India must give answers as to what it is doing about the imposition of reciprocal tariffs on India, he demanded while speaking in the Lok Sabha during Zero Hour.

"Somebody once asked Indira Gandhi ji -- 'In the matter of foreign policy you lean left or you lean right', and Indira Gandhi ji answered 'I don't lean left or right, I stand straight. I am Indian and I stand straight'," Gandhi said.

Speaking to reporters in Parliament complex, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also took potshots at Prime Minister Modi, saying the imposition of additional tariff on India by the US shows that US leadership is a businessman and "our customer" fell into his trap.

"Their friendship of hugging, laughing, 'once again Trump' slogan shows that America is a businessman and our customer got trapped," he said. "We will issue a detail statement on behalf of the party on this issue," Kharge, who is also the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, said. When asked, Congress MP Manish Tewari said the imposition of additional tariff is a "complete failure" of the negotiations between the government of India and the Trump administration.

"America has gone ahead and done what it wanted to do. Coupled with that you have the unfortunate situation where the visas of Indian students are being cancelled en masse."



## Actress Ranya Rao, jeweller linked to Rs 40 cr gold smuggling: DRI

**PNS** ■ BENGALURU

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) said jeweller Sahil Sakariya Jain played a key role in assisting Kannada actress Harshavardhini Ranya, also known as Ranya Rao, in disposing of 49.6 kg of smuggled gold worth Rs 40.14 crore.

According to the DRI's remand note, Jain not only helped facilitate the illegal transaction but also abetted Ranya in hawala money transfers linked to the smuggling operation.

Jain, a jeweller by profession, was arrested on March 26 for assisting Ranya in the gold smuggling case.

He has been remanded to judicial custody until April 7.

Jain not only helped Ranya in allegedly disposing of the gold but also appeared to have facilitated Hawala money transactions.

"It appears that he (Sahil Jain) assisted and abetted Accused No. 1 (Ranya) in disposing of approximately 49.6 kg of gold worth Rs 40,13,59,374. He has also admitted to aiding A1 in transferring Hawala money amounting to around Rs 38,39,97,000 to Dubai and Rs 1,73,61,787 to A1 in Bengaluru," the DRI stated.

The agency further noted that the unaccounted cash of Rs 2.67 crore seized from Ranya's residence on March 4, as per the 'Mahazar' (seizure document), was likely Hawala money she received as profit from purchasing gold in Dubai and selling it in Bengaluru.

The DRI added that Jain admitted to receiving a commission of Rs 55,000 for each transaction.

"The voluminous evidence extracted from two mobile phones and a laptop belonging to Sahil Sakariya Jain further establishes his role in the smuggling of large quantities of gold into India by A1 (Ranya)," the DRI stated.

## Showdown between J-K LG, Abdullah govt looms over transfers

### CM convenes urgent meeting

**PNS** ■ SRINAGAR



A showdown is looming between Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and the nearly six-month-old government over the transfer of bureaucrats and other issues, prompting Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to convene on Friday an urgent meeting of MLAs belonging to the ruling National Conference and supporting parties.

The agenda for the meeting to which legislators of the alliance partner Congress have also been invited, remained a subject of speculation as Abdullah and NC spokespersons remained tight lipped.

But the meeting is expected to discuss reported interference by Raj Bhavan in administrative matters which fall in the domain of the elected government.

The controversial transfer of 48 bureaucrats belonging to the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service (JKAS) by the LG two days ago led to the latest flashpoint between the Raj Bhavan and the Abdullah government which regards the transfers as violative of the legal and administrative framework under Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act.

## Govt silent on bringing again law on judges' appointment

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday maintained silence on whether it will consider bringing again the National Judicial Appointments Commission bill to overturn the present collegium system to appoint judges.

Responding to a question on the government's "view" relating to the National Judicial Appointments Committee (NJAC) and whether it would "again consider" bringing in the NJAC legislation, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal gave a detailed response on what the now struck down law sought to do.

But he was silent on whether the government will consider bringing the NJAC bill.

# SC:Entire selection process tainted

### Annuls appointment of 25,753 teachers, staffers in WB schools

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

In a major blow to the West Bengal government, the Supreme Court on Thursday invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in the state-run and aided schools, calling the entire selection process "vitiated and tainted".

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar upheld a Calcutta High Court verdict of April 22, 2024, annulling the appointments and said the tainted candidates should refund their "salaries/payments received".

"This is a case wherein the entire selection process has been vitiated and tainted beyond resolution. Manipulations and frauds on a large scale, coupled with the attempted cover-up, have dented the selection process beyond repair and partial redemption. The credibility and legitimacy of the selection are denuded," said the 41-page judgement authored by the CJI.

The verdict went on, "We find no valid ground or reason to interfere with the direction of the high court that the services of tainted candidates, where appointed, must be terminated, and they should be required to refund any salaries/payments received. Since their appointments were the result of fraud, this amounts to cheating.

### Can't accept verdict, but will abide by it: Mamata

**KOLKATA:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said she respects the judiciary but disagrees with the Supreme Court's verdict on school appointments "on humanitarian grounds" and dared the BJP that she was ready to be arrested for supporting the affected candidates. While accusing the BJP and the CPI(M) of "hatching a conspiracy and influencing the verdict", Banerjee emphasised that while her government would abide by the top court ruling, it would explore all possible legal options. "I have the utmost respect for the judiciary and judges, but from a humanitarian perspective, I cannot accept this judgment. As a citizen of this country, I have every right to express my opinion. While I respect the judge and the judiciary, I do not agree with the verdict," Banerjee said.

## Punjab Guv calls on people to uproot out drug menace

**PNS** ■ DERA BABA NANAK (PB)

Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria on Thursday gave a clarion call to all people to come forward to uproot the drug menace from the state, saying drugs have no place in the land of 'Guru Sahiban', prophets and warriors.

Kataria began his six-day 'padyatra' (foot march) against the drug menace. His 'padyatra' started from the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in Gurdaspur and it will culminate in Amritsar.

Addressing a gathering, the governor said the brave Punjabi people who always gave a befitting reply to invasions, would also achieve victory against drugs.

He said that drugs are a social evil and that support of every section of society would be solicited for its eradication.

Kataria said the land of Punjab is a symbol of protecting the religion and the culture and it has made huge sacrifices against tyranny and oppression.

## Legitimate religious practices not penalised by Black Magic Act: HC

**PNS** ■ MUMBAI

The `Black Magic Act' of Maharashtra is meant to curb harmful practices but does not prohibit "legitimate religious practices", the Bombay High Court has said while upholding the discharge of a self-styled godman from a criminal case.

Gujarat-based Ramesh Modak alias Shivkrupanand Swami, accused of promoting black magic through his sermons, was discharged by a lower court, following which the complainant challenged the decision in the high court.

Justice R N Laddha on April 2 refused to interfere with the lower court's order and said it had been passed after considering all material facts.

The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013, was meant to curb harmful practices, but it did not apply to legitimate religious teachings, said the high court.

"The Black Magic Act was enacted to curb harmful practices that posed serious risk to individuals and society, including human sacrifices, fraudulent rituals, and psychological exploitation; and explicitly excludes legitimate religious practices, the sharing of traditional knowledge, and cultural or artistic expressions," the high court said.

**Gujarat-based Ramesh Modak alias Shivkrupanand Swami, accused of promoting black magic through his sermons, was discharged by a lower court, following which the complainant challenged the decision in the high court.**

The complainant voluntarily attended the seminars where a CD, allegedly produced by the accused, was played, and it was an undisputed fact that Modak had not organised these seminars, the HC said.

Pune resident Rohan Kulkarni had in his 2014 complaint accused Modak and his associate Narendra Patil of cheating him through workshops falsely promising spiritual guidance and career success.

Modak promoted black magic and inhuman rituals through pre-recorded video seminars, he alleged.

As per Kulkarni, he attended a workshop in 2012 where Modak claimed to have supernatural abilities. Persuaded, he traveled to Navsari, Gujarat, to meet him, but was denied a personal meeting.

In 2013, he attended another Pune workshop, where Modak allegedly communicated through his "subtle body" while a CD of his discourse, sold for Rs 250, was advertised as "blessed."

Kulkarni later did a 45-day meditation course which he claimed caused him mental and physical distress.

The trial court discharged Modak from the case in 2020, ruling that the allegations did not constitute an offense under the Act.

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## Editor's TAKE

# Trump's tariffs: A blessing in disguise

### India must explore new markets, improve quality and rebuild ties with China

Nations do not have permanent friends, only permanent interests — a reality clearly reflected in Trump's tariffs. On April 2, US President Donald Trump announced the implementation of a 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on Indian imports, effective April 9. This move aims to counterbalance what the US administration perceives as unfair trade practices, specifically pointing to India's higher tariffs on American goods. The imposition of these tariffs is poised to significantly impact India's economy, particularly its export sectors. Companies such as Tata Motors, which export vehicles to the US, may experience reduced competitiveness due to increased costs. Although pharmaceuticals are exempt from the 26 per cent tariff, broader trade tensions could still affect this sector indirectly. Analysts estimate that these tariffs could cost India approximately USD seven billion annually, with significant revenue losses across industries such as chemicals, metal products, jewellery, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and food products.

Indeed, it is a challenging situation for India, as New Delhi has limited options to counter the US decision. The only way to address this issue is through negotiations and diplomacy, though there is no guarantee of success. However, given Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong rapport with Donald Trump, a resolution could be reached over time by offering some tariff concessions on US imports. The real challenge is not just India's ability to lower tariffs, but also the risk of exposing domestic industries to competition from American giants, which could prove devastating for many Indian companies and entire sectors.

India could also consider approaching the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to challenge the tariffs if they are deemed to violate international trade agreements. However, this legal avenue may be time-consuming and requires substantial evidence, though it remains a viable option.

It is also time to improve the quality of Indian products and explore untapped markets. India could invest in enhancing the quality and cost-effectiveness of its products to maintain competitiveness despite higher tariffs. This could involve adopting advanced technologies, improving supply chain efficiencies and fostering innovation. The most effective strategy at this point is to reduce dependence on the US market. By diversifying trade and strengthening relationships with other countries, India can safeguard its industries from the impact of these tariffs.

This would involve identifying alternative markets for key exports. Given that several other nations, including China, are also facing similar trade barriers under Trump's policies, forming an alliance of affected countries to boost trade among themselves could be a viable solution. Such an approach would create a mutually beneficial scenario, helping all parties mitigate the impact of US-imposed tariffs. It would be a win-win situation for all and could even jolt the US, as it would lose ground in global trade. Moreover, this situation could be a blessing in disguise for India's diplomatic relations.

By prioritising trade with the US, India may have strained its relations with China. Now, both countries are facing challenges under US trade policies. It is time for pragmatism to prevail, India should consider mending fences with China and moving forward. This century belongs to Asia, and it makes little sense to antagonise China merely to align with US interests, which primarily seek to maintain its global dominance. There is also a distinct change in China's attitude towards India, with President Xi Jinping extending a friendly hand. India should seize this opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties. While, the 26 per cent reciprocal tariff imposed by the US presents a significant challenge to India, this is the time to think outside the box and turn this '*aapda*' (crisis) into '*avsar*' (opportunity).

## Leaderspeak



We should get our land back. It has also come to my notice that the Prime Minister and the President have written to the Chinese. We are not finding this out from our own people, but it is the Chinese Ambassador who is informing us about this. Foreign policy is about managing external relations. You have given China 4000 square kilometers of land. On the other side, our ally (US) has suddenly decided to impose a 26 per cent tariff.

RAHUL GANDHI, LEADER OF OPPOSITION IN LOK SABHA

# Disasters know no borders

### The devastating earthquakes that recently struck Myanmar and Thailand have once again underscored the pressing need for a coordinated and effective disaster response mechanism in South Asia



The recent catastrophic earthquakes in Myanmar and Thailand have highlighted the urgent requirement for an effective and unified disaster response system in South Asia. Even with regional bodies like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) in place, prompt and efficient aid to impacted nations continues to be problematic because of bureaucratic holdups, logistical hurdles and differing national strategies. The number of fatalities and damage to infrastructure could be greatly minimised if an organised and cooperative framework existed to guarantee a swift and smooth response across borders.

The BIMSTEC countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand — often face natural and human-induced disasters because of their specific geological, climatic and economic conditions. This makes them well-suited to set up a Rapid Regional Disaster Response Centre (RRDRC). This centre would function as a focused platform for member states to collaborate on urgent disaster relief initiatives by exchanging information, skills and resources. This mechanism would not only improve disaster resilience but also bolster diplomatic relations and promote a sense of regional unity.

India, boasting its specialised and well-prepared National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), can take a pivotal role in this effort. The NDRF, overseen by the Ministry of Home Affairs, is an exceptionally skilled force focused on disaster response and management. It comprises several battalions skilled in search and rescue missions, medical support and engineering services. India has a strong history of helping countries affected by disasters, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan, Indonesia and Turkey. Establishing a comparable coordinated initiative within BIMSTEC would guarantee prompt and efficient support in the event of a disaster.

A significant challenge in regional disaster response is the swift and effective transportation of personnel, equipment, and relief supplies across borders. A Rapid Regional Disaster Response Agreement within BIMSTEC could facilitate the creation of a systematic method for collaboration. This pact must define explicit operational protocols, guaranteeing that every nation honours the sovereignty and rules of others while facilitating aid when necessary. Within this framework, the impacted nation would hold the main responsibility for coordinating disaster response on its land. Nonetheless, it would have the opportunity to seek help from other BIMSTEC countries, which would reply according to established protocols. An assigned agency within BIMSTEC, like the BIMSTEC Disaster Response Cell, might act as the primary coordinator for these initiatives.

For the RRDRC to thrive, BIMSTEC countries must dedicate themselves to several crucial obligations. They ought to collaborate to establish monitoring and early warning systems, enact measures for disaster risk reduction and set up contingency plans for emergency response. In the event of a disaster, impacted nations must promptly exchange information with other members, allowing for swift action to be taken. Every country should be prepared to provide human and material resources for regional disaster response efforts. Exchanging technical knowledge and optimal strategies will enhance overall disaster resilience. Moreover, national Governments ought to integrate essential legal and administrative actions to ensure seamless collaboration within the BIMSTEC framework.

For the RRDRC to be effective, it is crucial to create Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for every BIMSTEC member state. These processes must encompass regional standby plans for disaster assistance, the use of logistical resources, and coordination systems for disaster response. Creating collaborative strategies and backup plans would aid in minimising losses during future disasters. Strengthening capacity is another vital domain. Countries ought to conduct routine training sessions, simulation drills, and conferences to evaluate the readiness and response effectiveness of the RRDRC. The BIMSTEC focal point, in partnership with the RRDRC, must conduct regular assessments of these procedures to improve efficiency.



SATENDRA SINGH

Every member state must guarantee that it possesses the essential resources-both human and material-ready for prompt disaster response. Effective mobilisation of response by assisting nations could be enhanced through clear communication regarding the scope and type of support required. To ensure seamless coordination, impacted countries should offer local resources and services to aid relief initiatives. The aid supplies offered by supporting nations must adhere to the quality and safety regulations of the impacted country. Staff and resources sent for support must comply with the national regulations of the country seeking help and function within the specified disaster-impacted regions. To guarantee seamless cross-border support, member States must establish legal frameworks that enable the deployment of disaster response teams and relief supplies. This encompasses providing tax relief, simplifying customs processes, and speeding up approvals for staff and equipment. A committed national focal point ought to be set up in every member nation to collaborate with the RRDRC. This will guarantee that aid initiatives are effectively coordinated, minimising red tape and postponements. The creation of regional standby arrangements will enhance readiness, facilitating the swift deployment of response teams in the event of disasters.

The increasing occurrence and severity of disasters in South Asia necessitate a swift and unified response approach. The creation of the Rapid Regional Disaster Response Centre (RRDRC) within BIMSTEC is not merely a requirement but also a moral duty. Through promoting mutual assistance and teamwork, BIMSTEC nations can guarantee that disaster response is prompt, efficient and life-saving. The suggested framework, incorporating defined operational procedures, regional agreements and resource-sharing mechanisms, will greatly improve disaster readiness in the area. The moment to take action is now. BIMSTEC leaders should unite to formalise this framework, guaranteeing that no nation faces a disaster in isolation. By remaining united, we can create a safer, more resilient South Asia for future generations.

(The writer is a retired IFS officer, a former Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management and a former Director of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre. Views expressed are personal)

# A *Swades* mome-t revisited

## SECOND Opinion



APS MALHOTRA

It was a lazy Saturday evening — hot and humid outside, cool and comfortable in my bedroom. The air-conditioner was gasping for breath, fatigued by overwork. To beat the ennui and keep the drowsiness at bay, I started browsing through YouTube — one of my favourite pastimes in such situations. Without making much effort to choose what to watch and what to ignore, I started searching for Hindi film songs, as well as clips that I have seen umpteen times, but which, for me, have a deep-seated repeat value.

However, the clip that day, where my search ended, was a stark deviation from my usual preferences.

After having watched *Swades*, the Ashutosh Gowarikar directed, Shah Rukh Khan-starrer, on its release in 2004, I did not revisit it, till that evening, two decades later. And the clip which I watched is perhaps the highlight of the film, which captures the journey of a NASA scientist, Mohan Bhargava (Khan) to his village, located in Uttar Pradesh, after a long hiatus and how it changes the course of his life.

While Mohan is travelling in the second class compartment of a train, it makes a short halt at a non-decrepit railway station in the hinterland. There are not many passengers boarding or alighting.

Unlike most railway stations in our vast country, which are a beehive of activity — punctuated with different sounds, different flavours, different colours, different accents, different clothes, different people, and much more — this station is a small building, painted in typical Sarkari yellow, with a desolate platform, steeped in silence. There is no vendor to be seen, no sound to be heard, except the deafening roar of the engine hooter.

Till, abruptly, a high-pitched voice pierces the air. It comes from an almost malnourished, not well-clothed boy. As he rushes from one window of a compartment to the next, from one compartment to the other, he asks passengers to purchase water from him to quench their thirst.

Finally, he reaches the window where Mohan is sitting. Seeing the child — who, ideally, should have been in school- earn a livelihood by selling water, drawing it from a bucket he carries in his arms and using small killed cups, is gut-wrenching for the NASA scientist. A poignant, teary-eyed Mohan is rattled. Initially, apprehensive and wary of drinking it, Mohan finally takes a kullad from the boy's hand, which extends through the grills of the window. Sip by sip, he drinks it. And just as he drops a coin into the boy's hands, the train starts chugging out of the station. On looking back, he sees that the boy is taking stock of the coins he has collected, even as he becomes a blur, and then disappears.

Shahrukh — the actor, the artist — delves deep into his soul and embraces the character of Mohan with such conviction, such sincerity, such sensitivity, that for some time, one is forced to believe that this is not Shahrukh we are seeing on screen, but Mohan. This, for me, is very personal.

Conscious of the fact that my poverty cannot be more than your poverty and that there can be no comparison or justification for human deprivation, it bothers me to no end that Mohan's experience that day on an isolated railway station platform somehow pales in comparison to what I have experienced in Delhi over the decades. Ever since I started comprehending deep fissures and disparities bedevilling our society, I have been profoundly affected by what I have seen at perhaps every traffic junction in my city.

What was a trickle a few years ago and much less a few decades ago, has metamorphosed into a horrific deluge that threatens to submerge whatever remains of our tattered conscience.

Is there, can there be a solution to stem this rot?

Well, unlike Mohan, who managed to bring significant changes to the lives of the people of that small village, or rather, a hamlet, through his tireless efforts — as of now, I do not see myself suitably equipped to be harbinger of change, other than through what I can do best, albeit with a limited range, my writings. However, optimism is a shadow for me and I am sure, one day, my *Swades* moments will propel me to do something more tangible

But that evening, two decades down the line since *Swades* was released, I pondered as to where that boy — now a young man — would be. And what would he be doing?

(The writer works with an oil and gas PSU. Views expressed are personal)

# Letters to the Editor

## Muhammad Yunus' statements irk India

Madam — Apropos the front page news 'India unites against Yunus, China overtures' (April 2), the strongly condemned statements of Bangladesh's Chief Adviser and de-facto President Muhammad Yunus on expanding Chinese economic influence in North East, holding Bangladesh as the only guardian of ocean, landlocked North East States of India, are not only amateurish but against all diplomatic standards and offend the sovereignty of our country. Strangely, Yunus is apparently not aware of the mighty geographical, historical, economic and military strength of India and has forgotten that Bangladesh came into existence only with India's armed military battle against Pakistan. The North East is an integral part of the country and well connected with the entire country by rail, road and air. Rather 95 per cent of Bangladesh is surrounded by India.

All political parties have condemned Yunus for his anti-India tirade. Mohammad Yunus is not the Constitutional head of Bangladesh as yet. Our estranged neighbours Pakistan, Bangladesh and Maldives look up to China as their saviour for security and economy, but Yunus has gone a step ahead of asking China to intervene and intrude in India. How can Indo-China bilateral relations move even an inch if it tries to corner India through its hegemonic diplomacy in these neighbouring countries?

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

## Waqf (Amendment) Bill sparks outrage

Madam — The Lok Sabha passed the Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju who introduced the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, amidst strong Opposition. The Bill has sparked nationwide outrage for its controversial provisions that risk altering the very foundation of Waqf jurisprudence in India. Despite widespread dissent and stark warnings from the Opposition, the Government remains steadfast in pushing this legislation through.

This Bill, which proposes to rename the Waqf Act of 1995 to the 'Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development Act', aims to consolidate state control over Waqf properties under the guise of reform. It empowers the district collector with sweeping authority, transferring all responsibilities of the survey commissioner to the collector or any officer not below the rank of deputy collector.

Such a move eliminates the necessary checks and balances, leading to an unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of the executive. The most contentious provision gives the collector unilateral authority to decide if a property claimed as Waqf actually belongs to the Government. This is not a mere bureaucratic shift. It revives old wounds of historical injustice most notably the 123 Waqf properties, including mosques and graveyards, that were inadvertently acquired during the expansion of Delhi.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

## Will Trump's tariffs salvage US?

Madam — US President Donald Trump has finally announced his so called agenda of charging 'Discounted Reciprocal Tariffs' for the countries in the world. The US President in his media briefing claimed that, it is going to be a true 'Liberation Day' of the American trading system, as the announcement makes it tit for tat in the discounted tariff rates initiations which might be possibly make American industries to cherish a revamp.

The tariff will lead to the fair reborn of the American industries. The list of highest tariff chargers on the American good is really long, however, America maintain a little fairness of not crossing above 50 per cent for the highest chargers at the same time maintaining 10 per cent minimum bar. Nations who charge above 70 per cent of tariff include — Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Madagascar, Laos and Srilanka. India charges 52 per cent of tariff on US goods, as the new discounted reciprocal tariffs rate, from now onwards US will charge 26 per cent from India. The US has fixed the minimum limit of 10 per cent tariff on all the imports.

The tariff system revamp is partially welcoming from the side of American industrialist only, but time will tell how much success this renewed tariff system will achieve practically in the days to come.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

## INDIA AND CHINA: A NEW ERA OF COOPERATION AND COMPETITION

Refer to your editorial, "Can the elephant and dragon tango?" (April 3). India and China's relationship, while often fraught with tensions, has the potential to evolve beyond political and military rivalries. One of the most underutilised avenues for fostering stronger ties is people-to-people diplomacy.

Expanding cultural, educational, and business exchanges can create a foundation of mutual understanding. Increased academic collaboration, student exchange programs and tourism initiatives could help humanise the relationship beyond state-driven narratives. By fostering deeper social and economic interdependence at the grassroots level, both nations can create a more resilient diplomatic framework that is less vulnerable to political fluctuations.

Beyond bilateral trade and border disputes, India and China also share overlapping interests in regional connectivity and environmental sustainability. Joint infrastructure projects like the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) corridor could promote economic cooperation, while addressing India's concerns over China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Moreover, as two of the world's largest carbon emitters, their collaboration in renewable energy, water conservation, and climate change mitigation is not just beneficial but necessary. A structured partnership in these areas could create economic incentives while addressing pressing global challenges.

With India's growing digital economy and China's expertise in manufacturing and AI, cooperation in areas such as semiconductor production, cyber security, and digital infrastructure could be mutually beneficial.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

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

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | APRIL 4, 2025



# Breaking free from Soros agenda

**As India moves toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the need for an indigenous, people-centric economic framework has never been greater. Cooperative Economic Zones (CEZs) offer a transformative alternative for farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs**

FIRST Column



For far too long, India's economic trajectory has been influenced by external forces that prioritise profit over people. Financial networks, particularly the Soros-backed ecosystem, have sought to shape policy decisions in developing nations, undermining self-reliance and promoting economic models that serve foreign interests. These networks, supported by sovereign guarantee funds from various countries opposed to the vision of Viksit Bharat, have actively worked to fragment India's cooperative economy, ensuring that wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a select few.

In contrast, Cooperative Economic Zones (CEZs) present a homegrown, cooperative-driven economic model that prioritises Indian farmers, artisans, and small-scale entrepreneurs. By fostering local production, cooperative ownership and sustainable industrial growth, CEZs can insulate India's economy from undue foreign influence while ensuring equitable wealth distribution. This initiative aligns with the vision of Dr Syama Prasad Mukherjee, India's first Union Industry Minister, who championed self-reliant industrialisation and cooperative enterprise development as the foundation for national economic progress. Realising his vision through CEZs will not only empower rural communities but also strengthen India's economic sovereignty.

India's future must not be dictated by external agendas. The time has come to reclaim economic independence and return wealth to the hands of those who have long been marginalised. CEZs provide the answer to economic subversion, offering a framework built on local production, cooperative ownership, and sustainable industrial growth.

Establishing these zones is not just an economic necessity but a strategic response to external forces that threaten India's self-reliance.

The soon-to-be-established Tribhuvan Sahkari University can play a transformative role in developing cutting-edge human resources for CEZs and commodity exchanges. By introducing specialised programs in Cooperative Economics, Cooperative Commodity Trading, Agri-Tech and Blockchain for Traceability, the university will integrate AI-driven forecasting and digital finance into its curriculum. Additionally, leveraging cross-border trade frameworks like India's e-NAM and SAARC-ASEAN cooperation, the university will cultivate a skilled workforce to strengthen cooperative governance, commodity exchanges, and sustainable economic growth.



BINOD ANAND

CEZs will be a key driver in realising Viksit Bharat, the vision of a developed India by 2047. By fostering inclusive growth, decentralising industrialisation and ensuring equitable economic participation, CEZs will help bridge the urban-rural divide and reduce regional inequalities. These zones will empower millions of small-scale producers, artisans and rural entrepreneurs, ensuring that economic development reaches the grassroots level.

A robust cooperative-driven industrial and agricultural ecosystem will fuel sustained economic expansion, helping India transition from a developing to a developed economy.

In the heartlands of India, where fields stretch endlessly and artisans weave centuries-old traditions into the fabric, there lies immense potential-untapped and waiting to be harnessed.

CEZs provide the blueprint for this transformation, integrating agriculture, technology, and financial services into a resilient, community-driven economic framework. A Cooperative Economic Zone is a designated area where cooperatives and producer organisations operate with special economic benefits such as tax incentives, subsidised infrastructure and streamlined governance.

These zones encourage collective ownership, ensuring wealth generation remains with local communities rather than being concentrated in corporate entities. The CEZ model can be broadly categorised into three key sectors: agriculture and agro-processing CEZs, with 100 zones across 15 agro-climatic regions, each housing at least 30-grain silos and commodity-specific cooperatives, technology hubs, with 30 zones in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities to decentralise innovation and support cooperative-led tech enterprises, as data centres in Tier-1 cities are unsustainable and financial services CEZs, comprising 40-50 zones revolutionising the BFSI sector, countering the influence of the 'Big 4' consulting firms and the Open Society Foundation, which exploit sovereign guarantee funds to impose foreign financial dominance.

> BY FOSTERING INCLUSIVE GROWTH, DECENTRALISING INDUSTRIALISATION, AND ENSURING EQUITABLE ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION, CEZS WILL HELP BRIDGE THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE AND REDUCE REGIONAL INEQUALITIES

A key advantage of CEZs will be fortifying India's indigenous financial ecosystem, particularly RuPay. By prioritising RuPay adoption within CEZs and integrating it into financial hubs like postal banks and post offices, India can reduce reliance on foreign payment networks such as Visa and Mastercard, which are often leveraged for geopolitical influence.

Additionally, CEZs can facilitate the development of a cooperative-based payment gateway, ensuring secure, low-cost digital transactions and preventing foreign financial surveillance. CEZs will also support a farmer-centric supply chain, leveraging postal banking networks to deliver financial services directly to rural communities. This initiative will not only boost financial inclusion but also shield India's economy from external disruptions, reinforcing economic sovereignty and ensuring that financial power remains within the country.

The establishment of CEZs requires a structured and phased approach to ensure sustainability and efficiency.

Key steps include identifying potential zones by mapping regions with high agricultural productivity, strong industrial potential, or a concentration of cooperative enterprises, securing regulatory approvals through coordination with state and central Government bodies to establish necessary legal frameworks, infrastructure development, including building essential facilities such as warehouses, processing units, financial service hubs and technology incubators, integrating cooperative enterprises by strengthening 10,000 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), PACS and SHGs to form cooperative-led businesses, creating market linkages and export promotion to facilitate domestic and international trade partnerships, integrating financial services by providing cooperative banking, microfinance and digital payment systems to ensure smooth financial operations and implementing technology and skill development initiatives to train local entrepreneurs and workers in modern agricultural, industrial and digital practices to enhance productivity.

CEZs will also play a pivotal role in making India's manufacturing sector a net-zero emitter by ensuring each zone is self-sustainable in energy.

These zones will be powered by renewable energy sources, including solar, wind and biomass, significantly reducing the carbon footprint of industrial and agricultural production.

Each CEZ will be tailored to regional strengths, focusing on agro-processing industries such as food processing, dairy, fisheries and organic farming, handloom and handicrafts sectors, supporting artisans in weaving, pottery and traditional crafts, technology and innovation-driven enterprises in fintech, agritech and AI-driven rural startups, financial inclusion initiatives that strengthen cooperative banking, microfinance and digital financial services and renewable energy hubs promoting solar, wind and biomass cooperatives to support sustainable development.

The implementation of CEZs has the potential to revolutionise India's economic landscape by fostering self-reliance, sustainability and shared prosperity. By aligning CEZs with Viksit Bharat 2047, India will create a development model that is inclusive, self-sustaining and globally competitive.

CEZs are India's answer to the Soros-backed economic agenda-a blueprint for true economic independence and a sustainable, net-zero future.

(The writer is member, PM Committee on MSP and Agricultural Reforms, Government of India. Views expressed are personal)

# How viable is co-versio- of corporate dues i-to Gover-me-t equity?

The latest big news from the Indian corporate sector is quite surprising. In extending a fresh lifeline to Vodafone Idea (Vi), the central Government has decided to convert ₹36,950 crore of spectrum dues into equity, thus rendering itself the largest shareholder in the telecom sector company. The Government's equity holding will now be almost 49 per cent.

Let us examine the financial position of Vodafone Idea. The company reported a loss of ₹6,600 crore in the quarter ending December 2024. Additionally, it faces significant liabilities, including spectrum dues amounting to approximately ₹1.4 lakh crore and Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues of ₹70,000 crore. On top of that, Vodafone Idea has a bank debt of ₹2,300 crore, further adding to its financial burden. The operational data of the company is further depressing. It's average revenue per user is ₹163, much less compared to its competitors — Bharti Airtel (₹245) and Reliance Jio (₹203).

The Government buying into the equity of this loss-making and debt-ridden company does not appear to be a cool idea from the point of view of professional soundness and more importantly national interest. Instead of buying another equity chunk of the decrepit company Vodafone Idea, would not the Government have done better to use the same money to improve the operational efficiency of BSNL, its own PSU in the telecom sector?

Improving the professional services of BSNL and making them more attractive would be in the interests of its subscriber-consumers as also the larger national interest since BSNL is a central sector PSU, a national asset. It will improve the bottom line of BSNL as it is operating presently with an operational loss — a net loss during 2024 of ₹5367 crore.

It's true, at the present low rate of Vodafone Idea equity share in this beaten-down stock market, it could appear as an attractive deal but it seems to be far from any commercially viable business proposition. The idea that this will shore up the commercial top-line of Vi is also quite farfetched. This is because the Government proposes to leave the operational matters of Vi to its promoters. The professional gaps in operational efficiency of the company will remain untouched and unaddressed.

It is to be noted that the notion that this step will generate more competition in the telecom sector is also not borne out by strong logic. The duopoly of Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel can be better dented by spending more of exchequer money on BSNL in which the entire operational and managerial control is in the hands of the central Government.

It was not very long ago that the Narendra Modi Government had declared that the Government had no business to be in business. During the first two terms of this Government, much was done by way of disinvestment in many PSUs with some of them put up for outright sale. Now, to invest money by buying the equity stock of an existing private sector company which is, at the same time, saddled with losses, receivables and substantial bank loans hardly looks like a bright idea and is inconsistent with the earlier pronouncements of the Government.

Why the average revenue per subscriber of this company is far less than that of its rivals is simply explained by the fact that its schemes are unattractive and so relatively unpopular. The very fact that the company has huge dues on the spectrum side and the Average Gross Revenue (AGR) side means that the company is stuck with big-time defaulters from whom it is unable to recover its payment dues.

The central Government would do well to invest in BSNL to shore up the operations of BSNL to make it like the well-groomed, managed and professionally run PSUs like BHEL, MDNL or NTPC. Alternatively, it should auction BSNL to the private sector like VSNL was sold to the Tata group.

Accountability is the watchword.



ATUL SEHGAL

The Government is responsible and accountable toward the taxpayers whose money needs to be carefully and prudently spent with complete focus on their interest.

After all, the taxpayers are the prime nation builders whose enterprise and professional output constitute the main input for economic growth of the nation.

Finally, the disinvestment policy of the Government should be strategic and selective, not dogmatic. If it is to stay away from active business and concentrate on governance, it should not spend public money to buy equity of loss-making private companies.

## What ails Indian telecom?

The Indian telecom sector, despite its rapid expansion and critical role in digital transformation, faces several deep-rooted challenges. One of the biggest issues is the financial distress of telecom operators, primarily due to high spectrum costs and the burden of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues.

Companies like Vodafone Idea have struggled with mounting liabilities, impacting their ability to invest in network expansion and service improvements. Additionally, intense price wars, triggered by the entry of Reliance Jio, have significantly reduced tariffs, eroding profit margins across the industry.

The dominance of a duopoly — Jio and Airtel — has further weakened competition, limiting consumer choice and market dynamism. Infrastructure development remains another concern, as 5G rollout demands heavy investments, but cash-strapped telecom players find it difficult to allocate sufficient capital.

Moreover, policy uncertainties, regulatory burdens and inconsistent Government interventions have added to the sector's instability. The lack of domestic telecom equipment manufacturing also forces companies to depend on costly imports, further straining their finances. Slow rural network expansion has widened the digital divide, limiting access to quality telecom services in remote areas.

To ensure long-term sectoral health, a balanced regulatory framework, financial restructuring and strategic Government support are essential.

In conclusion, the Government's decision to convert Vodafone Idea's spectrum dues into equity raises critical questions about fiscal prudence and policy consistency.

While the move may offer temporary relief to Vi, it does little to address the company's fundamental operational inefficiencies or its struggling market position.

More importantly, it contradicts the Government's stated stance on minimising direct involvement in business. Rather than investing public funds in a private, debt-laden company, a more strategic approach would have been to strengthen BSNL, which remains a national asset under full Government control.

A well-capitalised and professionally managed BSNL could serve as a genuine competitor in the telecom sector, countering the dominance of Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel more effectively.

Furthermore, the argument that Government intervention will promote competition in the telecom space is weak, as it neither addresses Vi's structural challenges nor guarantees its financial revival.

A more logical course of action would be to either revamp BSNL's operations to improve its efficiency and market standing or privatise it strategically, as seen in the case of VSNL.

Ultimately, taxpayer money must be deployed with diligence and accountability.

Investing in a struggling private entity with no direct control over its management is not just financially questionable but also inconsistent with the broader disinvestment strategy the Government has pursued over the years.

Policymakers must weigh such decisions carefully, ensuring that public funds serve national interests rather than propping up unsustainable businesses.

(The writer is a management and business consultant based in New Delhi. Views expressed are personal)

# Mastering mind and body: Path to fitness

The gym instructor resolutely addressed a motley crowd of flabby men and women with bulging midriffs, "You need to burn six hundred plus calories everyday by footslogging on the treadmill, scorch fat on the cross-trainer or the elliptical machine, doing the sideways and straight plank for at least five to 10 minutes, enduring the pain till your abdomen shivers. Another technique is to engage your body with several reps of flutter kicks. And this needs to be done daily in an unflinching manner."

He further said, "Remember, this is not mind boggling. Undertaking cardio exercises and toning the muscles is primarily a mind game." An estimable Yoga instructor guided his clients through several sets of *Surya namaskars* and various other postures of *Hath* Yoga. Upon completion of the session, he exhorted the potential *yogis* to overreach their minds to execute 108 sets of the Sun salutations for efficacious results. "Phew! Gosh!" exclaimed the novitiates.

In the neighbourhood, a Sri Sri Yoga teacher (of the Art of Living) directed his group of tutees to complete yet another round of Padma Sadhana (a set of yogic postures accompanied by meditation, which is taught in the Advanced Meditation and the DSN courses) so that maximal benefit accrued for the body and mind. "It is all in the mind," the teacher remarked.

A middle-aged couple huffed and puffed while clambering up to the Nahargarh Fort in Jaipur. Soon they were to meet a nutritionist to regain some semblance of fitness.

"Your abs are made in the kitchen. Cut down on sugar, salt and fried stuff and go for long walks every morning and evening without fail," remarked the dietician. "But most important, parry all cravings by controlling the thoughts that arise in your mind through mindful meditation, particularly the 'Yoga Nidra', which seeps into the subconscious mind," she singularly added.

In his purple patch, Virat Kohli in all three formats of the game many a times at variance with those of his illustrious predecessors, was blessed with a formidable pedigree? The answer is a firm 'yes' when one measures in terms of physical fitness.

According to his compatriot Ravichandran Ashwin, his former captain Virat is maniacal and zealous in terms of diet and practice. The talismanic captain has without any doubt raised the bar of physical endurance and fitness for his teammates and efficacious results are noticeable in the performance of the team.

Why are we awestruck by the mere glimpse of a rainbow? The variegated colors of violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red influence the mind immediately. The mind is suffused with a measure of tranquillity, which dissipates nugatory and Sisyphean thoughts. Similarly, the mind has seven shades to it, which makes it robust and reinforce its mojo. These are vacuuming, volume, veracity, variety, value, victory and validation of the human mind.



RAVI VALLURI

It could be a plebeian, a seeker, a proficient solicitor, a prominent scientist or a high-octane performing sportsperson, all need to delve deep into the seven Vs of the mind to produce a virtuoso product. By doing so, one can separate the chaff from the grain and wade through the swathes of antipathetic cobwebs, which often mushroom in the human mind.

The process of vacuuming helps in cleansing the thought process and acquisition of humongous knowledge and wisdom. This is through regular practice and *sadhana*. It may appear coarse and tedious but in the long haul pays enormous dividends to refine the skill-sets. An archer like Arjuna through practice not only expanded his horizons to add weaponry to his arsenal but could also amplify his mind to receive the Celestial Song from Lord Krishna.

Regular application may appear repetitive on the surface, but the process improves faculties of the mind to absorb volumes of information, which provides a cutting edge over fellow competitors. The individual is soon saddled and yoked with enormous confidence to combat any disadvantageous position he may confront and develops the propensity to upend the pyramid. Over some time variety becomes the Holy Grail of the mind. This differentiates an embellished mind from a wanted one. Heterogeneity and diversification soon become the trademarks of such a qualified mind. A misadventure or a muddled situation can be viewed from the prism of variety. The halcyon mind goes for the jugular and can furnish different solutions to problems, from the elementary to the most multiplex ones, in a facile manner.

Exactness and precision are buzzwords in the lexicon of a trained mind. It is written in the epic *Mahabharata* that the chariot of Yudhishtira, which remained afloat several inches above the battlefield as he was always wedded to truth, was grounded once he lied about the purported felling of Ashwathama to his Guru Dronacharya. Therefore, a mind encompassed with the attributes and traits of veracity invariably resounds with positive attributes and results.

The mind, through interminable and unremitting training, performance and retention of prescriptive, predictive and diagnostic data adds value to its consciousness and abilities. For instance, regular practice of *Surya Namaskars*, Yoga, *pranayama* and *Sudarshan Kriya* enlarges the size of the solar plexus, which in turn enhances the intuitive ability. The mind and body become a vajra — a diamond that gleams and shimmers. Such a mind becomes truly triumphant and victorious in all situations. It scores a victory even in the most woebegone situations.

(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



## Sebi launches document number verification system

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday launched a 'document number verification system' to ensure verifiability of all documents issued by it. This has been launched keeping in mind the public interest and transparency in the functioning of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).
Under the system, any physical communication such as letters, notices, show-cause notices and summons issued by Sebi will bear an outward number, which is unique for every communication issued by the regulator, according to a statement. The process intends user verification through authentication of the one-time password (OTP) generated on the mobile number of the recipient(s) or any other person acting on their behalf who may then enter such outward number as well as other credentials like sender's name, date of the communication and the name of the recipient to verify the issuance of such communication by Sebi.



## BMW India sales up 7 pc at 3,914 units

German luxury carmaker BMW on Thursday reported a 7 per cent increase in its car sales in India at 3,914 units in the January-March period of 2025, its best ever first quarter sales, riding on its sports activity and electric vehicles. The group, which had sold 3,675 units in the first quarter of 2024, is looking at a double digit sales growth in 2025. The BMW brand clocked 3,764 units while MINI recorded 150 units in the first quarter of 2025, BMW Group India said. "If you look at the total market, there are few trends or opportunities in the market. SUVs are growing in the total market, still, even though there's a slowdown. Electrics are popular and they are also doing well in the overall market...and then everybody wants to move up. They want to buy to upgrade. We are benefiting from these three things," BMW Group India President & CEO Vikram Pawah said.



## Poonam Gupta appointed RBI Dy Governor

The government has appointed Poonam Gupta, Director General of NCAER, as Deputy Governor of RBI, the central bank said in a statement on Thursday. The appointment is for a period of three years from the date of joining the post or until further orders, whichever is earlier, it said. The post of the Deputy Governor of RBI fell vacant after M D Patra demitted office in January. He was member of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). With appointment of Gupta, now all four posts of deputy governors have been filled. The first bi-monthly MPC meeting of the current financial year is scheduled for April 7-9. Currently, Gupta is the Director General of National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India's largest economic policy think tank. She is also a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Convener of the Advisory Council to the 16th Finance Commission.

## US reciprocal tariff may erode India's GDP by up to 50 bps

The reciprocal tariff announced by the Trump administration can shave off India's GDP growth rate by up to 50 basis points to 6 per cent and the country's exports to the US could fall by 2-3 percentage points in the current fiscal, experts said on Thursday. EY Chief Policy Advisor D K Srivastava said, "the maximum adverse impact on India's GDP growth will not be higher than 50 basis points. As per our earlier projection, the GDP growth estimate for current fiscal was 6.5 per cent, which may go down to 6 per cent without retaliation". Standard Chartered Bank Head - India, Economics Research, Anubhuti Sahay said an effective 20 per cent tariff increase on Indian exports to the US ( after considering the exempted goods) in our view is likely to adversely impact India's GDP by 35-40 bps, ceteris paribus.
"However, the final impact would depend on the trade deal agreement between India and the US along with how each country negotiates/ retaliates on the proposed tariffs," Sahay said. She said while a loss in India's GDP is inevitable on higher tariff rate imposition, India is likely to be relatively less impacted amongst the Asian economies as other countries have been hit by higher tariff rates than India or run a larger trade surplus with the US especially in the non-exempted sectors. According to EY's Srivastava, the US tariff hikes could have a favourable impact on the country's exchange rate as the dollar could come under pressure in the US with a likely rise in inflation. The US has announced 27 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India saying New Delhi imposes high import duties on American goods, as the Trump administration aims to reduce the country's trade deficit and boost manufacturing.

# 'For Trump it's America first, but for Modi it's India first'

### Assessing impact of reciprocal tariff imposed by US: MoS Finance

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary on Thursday said India is assessing tariff hike imposed by the US and its impact on the country.

"For (Donald) Trump, it's America first but for Modi, it's India first. We are assessing the impact of reciprocal tariffs imposed by the US," he said on the sidelines of an event organised by PFRDA here.

Asked about its impact on India, he said assessment is being done.

The US has announced 27 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India saying New Delhi imposes high import duties on American goods, as the Donald Trump administration aims to reduce the country's trade deficit and boost manufacturing. The move is expected to impact India's exports to the US. However, experts say that India is better-placed than its competitors who also face increased levies.

President Trump, in a historic measure to counter higher duties on American products imposed globally, announced reciprocal tariffs on about 60 countries.

Meanwhile, according to an official statement on Thursday, the Department of Commerce is carefully examining the implications of the US reciprocal tariffs on India and is engaged with all stakeholders, including domestic industry and exporters to seek their feedback on the issue.

The commerce ministry said that it is also studying the opportunities that may arise due to this new development in the US trade policy.

It also said that discussions are ongoing between Indian and US trade teams for the expeditious conclusion of a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). The BTA will cover a wide range of issues of mutual interest including deepening of supply chain integration. Earlier speaking at the 1st International Research Conference on Pension organised by PFRDA here, Chaudhary said the government is taking steps to take the pension sector to the grassroots level.





## US tariffs to create market uncertainty: Experts

US President Donald Trump's announcement of 27 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India has created market uncertainty with the country's exports expected to face new challenges, India Inc and experts said on Thursday. The move is likely to cause a major realignment of global trade and manufacturing value chains. The US has announced additional 27 per cent import duties on India saying New Delhi imposes high tariffs on American goods, as the Donald Trump administration aims to reduce the trade deficit and boost manufacturing. InCred Wealth CEO Nitin Rao said the "markets will have to price this in, both in terms of sentiment and earnings. Volatility would continue but at some point it will result in sharp falls over a few days which may give good buying opportunities in a new economic order for high risk investors". Industry bodies believe the real impact of the announcements may be gauged only after a proper assessment. "Tariffs unveiled by President Trump last night would bring a major realignment in global trade and manufacturing value chains. India has been placed somewhere in the middle of the tariff rates at 27 per cent in addition to 10 per cent baseline duties, which needs to be assessed for real impact," said ASSOCHAM President Sanjay Nayar. "Net-net, it appears India's export competitiveness to the US market stands far less impacted on a relative basis. Yet our industry should make concerted efforts to increase export efficiency and value addition, to mitigate impact of these tariffs," he said. India's robust industrial competitiveness will balance the impact of US tariffs, and GDP will see only a 0.1 per cent impact in the short term, said PHDCCI President Hemant Jain. However, in the medium term, as the policy takes full effect, this shortfall will be negated, he added.

## 'US tariffs hike a self goal; impact on India will be smaller'

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan on Thursday described the reciprocal tariffs on about 60 countries by the Trump administration a "self goal" and said its impact on India will be "smaller".

US President Donald Trump has announced the imposition of additional ad-valorem duties ranging from 10 per cent to 50 per cent on imports from all trading partners.



"Let us recognise that in the short run, this will adversely affect the US economy first and foremost -- it is a self-goal as footballers would say. Coming to the effects on other countries, the direct effect of any tariff on India's exports will be to raise prices for US consumers, reducing their demand, and hence Indian growth," he told PTI.

The baseline duty of 10 per cent will be effective from April 5 and the 27 per cent from April 9. Certain sectors are exempted from these duties include pharma, semiconductors and energy products.

"Of course, to the extent that the US has applied tariffs on other countries also, and India is competing with producers from those countries, the overall effect will be smaller than if the tariffs had been applied only on India -- since US consumers will not be able to substitute away to non-tariffed producers,"the eminent economist noted.

Rajan, currently a Katherine Dusak Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance at Chicago Booth, said the long-term intent of Trump is to increase US production, but, even if feasible, that will take a long time to set up.

Responding to a question, he said the US reciprocal tariffs on India will probably be disinflationary, as India exports less and retains more goods domestically, and other countries like China try and export to India now that the US market is more closed.

## Ola Electric commences same-day registration, delivery of vehicles

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI



Ola Electric on Thursday said it has commenced an initiative for same-day registration and delivery of vehicles.

"Pilot of #HyperDelivery has started in Bangalore, and would gradually be scaled up across India during this quarter in a phased manner," the Bengaluru-based firm said in a statement.

Customers can now complete their purchase online or at an Ola Electric Store and ride home on their fully registered vehicles in just hours, it added.

"We have significantly cut the processing time of registering the vehicles through AI-led automation and by moving the registration process completely in-house.

"With this we are ensuring a much smoother purchase experience for our customers, eliminating tedious purchase processes and longer delivery timelines," an Ola Electric spokesperson said.

# BSNL on path of profitability, customer satisfaction: Scindia

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned telecom company BSNL is on the path of profitability and customer satisfaction as it has for the first time after 18 years recorded a net profit of Rs 262 crore in the October-December quarter and added 55 lakh users in the last six months, Minister of Communications Jyotiraditya Scindia informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Replying to supplementaries during question hour, the minister said, efforts are on to bring the public sector telco back to profitability and improve its customer base.

"After 18 years, BSNL for the first time has achieved a net profit of Rs 262 crore in October-December quarter, which has been achieved for the first time in 18 years under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership," Scindia told the Rajya Sabha.

In the October-December quarter of 2023-24, there was a loss of Rs 1,262 crore, he said, adding that this year in the same quarter, there is a profit of Rs 262 crore. During this period, the company recorded an operating profit of Rs 1,500 crore, he added.



The minister said that BSNL has added 55 lakh customers since June last year.

"You will be glad to know that from June 2024 till February 2025, BSNL for the first time in its history has climbed from 8.55 crore customers to 9.1 crore customers. We have added 55 lakh customers in the last six to seven months," he added.

The minister said the BSNL topline in the last October-December quarter has grown by 9 per cent and "we have squeezed on our cost" by close to 18 per cent and that has led to the EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation) multiplying three times during the period.

"BSNL is on its path of rationalisation, profitability and customer service and all the statistics that you would look at as a customer," he added.

The 5G roll-out has been the fastest in the world and has covered 99 per cent districts and 82 per cent population in the last one year, he noted.

The prime minister has made it clear that when BSNL rolls out its 5G network, it will use only swadeshi equipment.

"Across the world today, there are only four countries that have made 4G telecom network manufacturing. These are Finland, Sweden, China and South Korea.

I want to happily inform that India is the fifth country in the world, which has been manufacturing its 'swadeshi' 4G network," the minister said, adding that total swadeshi 'aatmanirbhar' network is being rolled out in the country.

On declining market share of BSNL, the minister said, "We have not yet completed our goal of one lakh towers of 4G and switching to 5G will happen after we have completed our 4G target.

## Sensex falls by 322 pts as Trump imposes reciprocal tariffs

**PNS** ■ MUMBAI

### IT shares lead losers



Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed down on Thursday due to selling in IT shares amid a global sell-off as US President Donald Trump unveiled reciprocal tariffs on about 60 countries, including India.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 322.08 points or 0.42 per cent to close at 76,295.36. During the session, it plunged 809.89 points or 1.05 per cent to hit an intraday low of 75,807.55 but recovered some of the losses as pharma shares advanced.

The broader NSE Nifty fell 82.25 points or 0.35 per cent to settle at 23,250.10. The index declined by 186.55 points or 0.79 per cent to a low of 23,145.80 in early trade but later pared some losses.

President Trump, in a historic measure to counter higher duties on American products imposed globally, announced reciprocal tariffs on about 60 countries.

The US imposed a 27 per cent tariff on Indian goods while imposing a 10 per cent baseline tax on imports from all countries.

"This is Liberation Day, a long-awaited moment. April 2, 2025, will forever be remembered as the day American industry was reborn, the day America's destiny was reclaimed, and the day that we began to make America wealthy again. We are going to make it wealthy, good, and wealthy," Trump said in his remarks from the Rose Garden at the White House on Wednesday.

IT shares led the losses with TCS falling the most by 3.98 per cent. Tech Mahindra declined by 3.79 per cent, HCL Technologies by 3.71 per cent and Infosys by 3.41 per cent.

## JSPL acquires Allied Strips for Rs 217.53 cr

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) on Thursday said it has acquired Allied Strips Limited (ASL) for over Rs 217 crore.

The acquisition has been made through JSPL's wholly owned subsidiary Jindal Steel Odisha Limited (JSO), according to a regulatory filing.

On the objectives behind the mover, JSPL said the acquisition will help JSO expand its product portfolio and provide significant synergies with the existing steel manufacturing business.

Steel produced in JSO can be used as a raw material at the ASL unit, the company said.

The acquisition is valued at Rs 217.53 crore.

Haryana-based ASL specialises in the manufacturing and supply of steel products.

The company produces a variety of steel items, including hot rolled coils, cold rolled coils, and cold rolled close annealed (CRCA) steel, serving diverse sectors, including automotive, white goods, precision tubes etc.

It currently has a capacity to process over 3,00,000 metric tonnes of HR coil per annum.

# Cancelled cheque, account verification not needed

**PNS** ■ NEW DELHI

### EPFO eases claim process




Retirement fund body EPFO on Thursday said applicants seeking withdrawal from provident funds online do not have to upload the image of a cancelled cheque and their bank accounts need not be verified by employers.

The move is expected to fast-track claim settlement process for nearly eight crore members and ensure ease of doing business for employers.

At present, members of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), while applying for withdrawal of funds from PF accounts online, need to upload image of cheque leaf or attested photo copy of the passbook of the bank account seeded with the UAN (Universal Account Number) or PF number. The employers are also required to approve the bank account details of the applicant.

The EPFO has completely dispensed with the requirement of uploading an image of a cheque leaf or attested bank passbook while filing online claims, the labour ministry said in a statement.

These two steps have been done away with to ensure 'ease of living' for EPF members and 'ease of doing business' for employers. These measures will significantly streamline the process of claim settlement and reduce grievances related to claim rejections, it stated.

These requirement were initially relaxed on a pilot basis for certain KYC-updated members. Since the pilot launch on May 28, 2024, the move has already benefited 1.7 crore EPF members. Following the successful pilot, EPFO has now extended this relaxation to all members, the ministry said.

Since the bank account is already verified along with the EPF members' details at the time of seeding of bank accounts with the UAN, this additional documentation is no longer necessary, it said, adding, this will eliminate the possibility of claim rejections due to poor-quality/unreadable uploads and reduce associated grievances.

During the financial year 2024-25, 1.3 crore members submitted requests for seeding their bank accounts and the requests after due matching with the respective bank/NPCI are to be approved by the employer through DSC/E-Sign. It is seen that around 36,000 requests for seeding of bank account are being raised by the members on a daily basis and the banks take an average of 3 days to complete the verification.



# *Kesari Chapter 2* trailer unleashes Akshay Kumar's war against British rule



The highly anticipated trailer for *Kesari Chapter 2* is finally out and it showcases Akshay Kumar in a powerful role as Sir C. Sankaran Nair.

Set against the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, the trailer depicts Nair's courageous battle against the British Empire, promising an intense and gripping narrative filled with historical significance and emotional depth. The makers took to social media to unveil the trailer and captioned it, "This is a wound. This is a roar. This… is *#KesariChapter2!* Trailer out now. In cinemas 18th April, worldwide."

The trailer begins with a compelling dialogue from Akshay Kumar as he questions General Dyer: "How did you warn the crowd at Jallianwala Bagh to disperse? Did you fire tear gas? Did you shoot in the air? Or did you just open fire on them without any warning?" General Dyer responds, "They weren't just a crowd; they were terrorists." Akshay retorts, "But they were still humans! Babies as young as eight or nine months were shot with bullets in their tiny chests. What weapons did they have?"

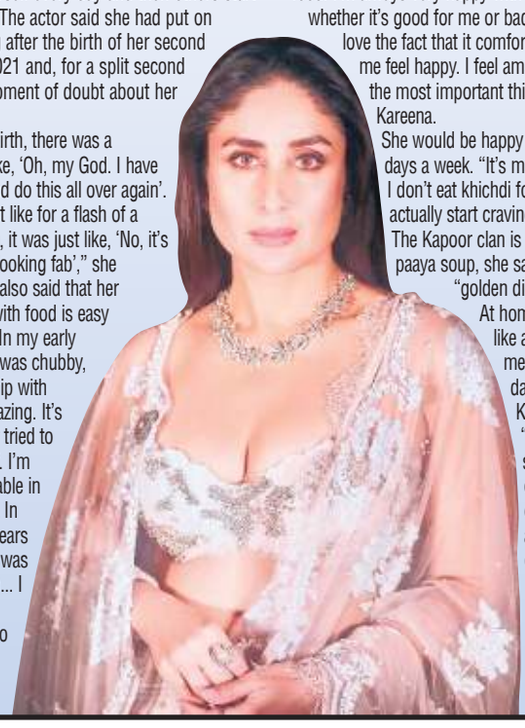
Based on true events, the film explores the aftermath of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the relentless fight for justice spearheaded by C. Sankaran Nair, a prominent lawyer and former President of the Indian National Congress.

# 'I STILL LOOK FAB'—KAREENA KAPOOR ON POST-PREGNANCY WEIGHT AND SELF-BELIEF

Bollywood superstar Kareena Kapoor Khan on Wednesday said she wants to always be fit to take on whatever comes with old age so that she's able to work and enjoy family life as long as possible. The 44-year-old actor was speaking at the launch of her nutritionist Rujuta Diwekar's book *The Commonsense Diet*. Kareena, who shares sons Taimur and Jeh with actor-husband Saif Ali Khan, said she wants to be able to go about her daily life without being dependent on "someone or a stick".

"Age is just a number. I want to always be fit to take on whatever old age brings. I want to be able to do what I have to do, whether I have to go to set also at the age of 70, 75. I want to keep working all my life. I want to be able to bend to pick up my grandchildren. So for that, I need to eat right with her (Diwekar's) guidance," she said at the event. Eating healthy, exercising and yoga are all about the way one feels, not the way they look. "That's what for me, ageing and life is. I love it, I'm embracing it, but I'm taking all these particular things (into account) like eating ghee, eating khichdi, doing a little bit of weight training for muscle strength, walking a little, my Surya Namaskars, doing my little work on my own rather than skin treatments and Botox," she added. Kareena has been synonymous with her character, the self-obsessed and vivacious Geet from *Jab We Met* who said *Main apni favourite hoon* in the 2007 film. The actor said she lives by the same rule.

"That's the only way every woman should live her life because self belief is everything. No matter how you think or feel, you have to constantly reassure yourself every day and then others start believing it." The actor said she had put on around 25 kg after the birth of her second son Jeh in 2021 and, for a split second she had a moment of doubt about her appearance.



"After Jeh's birth, there was a moment of like, 'Oh, my God. I have to go back and do this all over again'. But it was just like for a flash of a second. Then, it was just like, 'No, it's fine. I'm still looking fab'," she recalled. She also said that her relationship with food is easy and simple. "In my early years when I was chubby, my relationship with food was amazing. It's not like I ever tried to starve myself. I'm very comfortable in my own skin. In my teenage years also, I think I was (comfortable)... I was always really happy to pick up a packet of chips. But I was a confident girl.

"In the last 10-15 years, I just go back to the same food. I'm always very happy with it. Because whether it's good for me or bad for me, I just love the fact that it comforts me, it makes me feel happy. I feel amazing. And that's the most important thing for me," said Kareena.

She would be happy to eat khichdi five days a week. "It's my comfort food. If I don't eat khichdi for three days, I actually start craving it."

The Kapoor clan is obsessed with paaya soup, she said, calling it a "golden dish for us."

At home, there's nothing like a home-cooked meal after a hard day's work, added Kareena.

"Saif and I have started cooking ourselves. We enjoy it, so we also made it a way of life. Somehow it's just affecting our personality. Saif is a better cook. I can't even boil an egg."

# Vir Das debuts as author with *The Outsider*



India's biggest comedian and actor-producer Vir Das who is known for his sharp wit, boundary-pushing humour and unapologetic take on life's absurdities is all set to give a peek into his unique journey in his upcoming memoir, *The Outsider*. The memoir is set to take a deep dive into his many phases of life highlighting that the comedy world isn't the only place where he's always felt like an outsider. Whether he's stranded on a beach in Mexico, navigating cultural identity, or dealing with the highs and lows of a career that spans continents, Vir's journey has been one of constant self-discovery, heartbreak, failure and, of course, laughter.

Vir took to his social media to announce the book *The Outsider - A Memoir for Misfits* highlighting with a very deeply personal video showcasing the many chapters of his life, his identity, his career. The video announcement highlights his awkwardness, his global dominance, his lows as a comedian, his highs of being on world stage and to becoming the person he is today. In his words the book is guided from one idiot, fool, drifter, loser, dreamer and misfit to a world of such people.

In the book, amongst many incidents highlighted Vir recounts a memorable moment when, stranded on a pier in Cozumel, Mexico, with his cruise ship sailing away due to visa issues, he realised that being an outsider isn't just something he experiences—it's who he is. Born in India, Vir's early years were marked by constant moves between India and Lagos, Nigeria, where he was never quite able to settle into any one identity. As he says, he's always been the "other"—whether it was the Indian kid in Africa or the African kid in India. And it didn't stop there. From performing on stages in Illinois as the lone Indian in War and Peace, to washing dishes in Chicago and eventually conquering both Bollywood and the global stand-up comedy scene, Vir's career has been anything but conventional. His unique perspective on the world has led him to break barriers and make a name for himself from New York to Mumbai and beyond.

But being an outsider isn't all bad news—it's this very sense of not fitting in that has made Vir Das who he is today. Reflecting on his globe-trotting life, Vir says: "I've had a strange life that took me across the world more than anyone I know. I don't know how one ends up being the Indian kid in Nigeria, the African kid in boarding school, the boarding school kid in Delhi Public School, the Delhi kid in Galesburg, Illinois, the Chicago guy in Alabama, the America-return in Mumbai, the Bollywood guy in comedy, the stand-up comedy guy in Bollywood, the Bollywood guy in Indie Music, and the Indian in American comedy. All I know is, when you are blessed enough to step into all those worlds, you write a book about it. I hope to take you across the world through the eyes of a fortunate fool."

# *Panchayat season 4* arrives this July

As one of India's most beloved comedy-dramas, *Panchayat* has captured hearts with its slice-of-life storytelling, endearing characters, and a humorous yet poignant take on rural life. To mark its fifth anniversary, Prime Video has officially announced the much-awaited *Panchayat Season 4*, set to premiere on July 2, 2025.

Created by The Viral Fever (TVF), directed by Deepak Kumar Mishra and written by Chandan Kumar, *Panchayat* has been a refreshing departure from high-octane thrillers and extravagant Bollywood dramas. It thrives on its simplicity, showcasing the everyday struggles and charm of village life through the eyes of Abhishek Tripathi, played by Jitendra Kumar.

The series has been lauded for its stellar performances, featuring veterans like Neena Gupta and Raghubir Yadav, along with Faisal Malik, Chandan Roy and Sanvikaa, who have made their characters unforgettable. For three seasons, viewers have followed Abhishek's reluctant yet transformative journey from an urban engineering graduate to a dedicated secretary of the panchayat office in Phulera, a remote Uttar Pradesh village. Along the way, he has dealt with bureaucratic hurdles, quirky village dynamics, and unexpected friendships.

Season 4 is expected to delve deeper into the village's evolving political landscape, Abhishek's career dilemmas, and his growing bond with the people of Phulera. With the show's signature blend of humor and heart, fans can expect more drama, laughter, and those little moments that make *Panchayat* a true gem of Indian streaming. After winning multiple awards and establishing a dedicated fanbase, *Panchayat* continues to prove that sometimes, the most ordinary stories make the most extraordinary impact. Get ready to return to Phulera on July 2, only on Prime Video.





# SOHA ALI KHAN'S MYSTERIOUS 'DAASI MA' ADDS TO THE TERROR IN *CHHORII 2*

Prime Video has unveiled the spine-chilling trailer of *Chhorii 2*, the highly anticipated sequel of its 2021 Original horror film, *Chhorii*. Expanding the twisted world of its predecessor, which was celebrated for its suspenseful storytelling deeply rooted in folklore, this new chapter plunges even deeper into folkloric horror, supernatural terror, and the unbreakable will of a mother fighting against forces beyond comprehension. A T-Series, Abundantia Entertainment, Psych and Tamarisk Lane Production, the horror film is helmed by Vishal Furia, and it brings back Nushrratt Bharuccha as Sakshi, joined by Soha Ali Khan in a pivotal role, alongside an ensemble cast featuring Gashmeer Mahajani, Saurabh Goyal, Pallavi Ajay, Kuldeep Sareen, and Hardika Sharma. Set in the unexplored realm of underground caves, the trailer of *Chhorii 2* pulls viewers back into Sakshi's haunting world, now even darker, deadlier, and more perilous. Haunting rituals, ghostly figures and unsettling folklore build an atmosphere thick with dread as she confronts malevolent supernatural forces to protect her daughter, Ishani. Soha Ali Khan's mysterious, 'Daasi Ma' character only adds to the tension. Beneath the scares, the trailer reveals an emotional survival story, a mother's unyielding fight against evil, promising a chilling, more intense chapter filled with deeper fears and unexpected twists.

Soha Ali Khan, who joins the *Chhorii* franchise, added, "Joining the talented cast of *Chhorii 2* and stepping into such a compelling role was a thrilling new challenge for me. What drew me to the film was how it mixes unsettling, atmospheric horror with folklore that feels so rooted in our culture. My character is layered — there's menace but also mystery. She's not someone you can easily predict, which made her a fascinating character to portray on screen. Vishal has crafted a world where fear creeps in from all sides, and being a part of it allowed me to explore a completely new side of myself as an actor."

## FUN

### ARCHIE




### CALVIN AND HOBBES




### GARFIELD



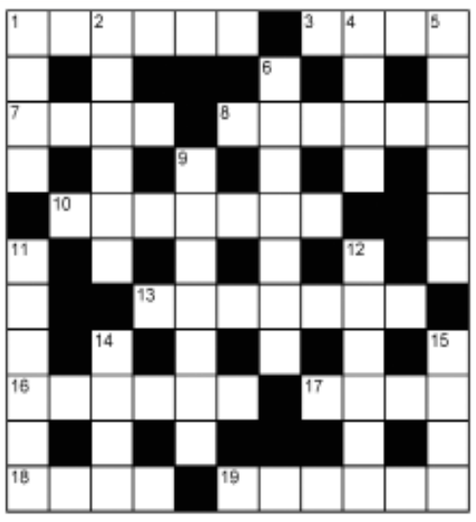

### REALITY CHECK




### SPEED BUMP




### CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**

1 An archer fires these
3 Seize
7 The body's covering
8 Wanting food
10 Rich
13 Not straight
16 Best
17 The world's most eaten grain
18 Utters
19 A fire-breathing monster

**DOWN**

1 Too
2 Spoiled
4 Scraps of cloth
5 Purchasing
6 A soft thing to sit on or put on a couch
9 A type of shop that sells flowers
11 High, steep rock-faces
12 Needlework
14 Jealousy
15 A blood vessel

SOLUTION




### NANCY




### GINGER MEGGS




### SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**Yesterday's solution**

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| 4 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| 6 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 8 |
| 1 | 9 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 8 | 5 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 2 |
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**Rules**

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

The Pioneer

# Vijayawada

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FRIDAY APRIL 4, 2025

# ‘The stories I choose to tell are influenced by the world around us’

**In a candid conversation with *The Pioneer*, acclaimed filmmaker Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari opens up about her journey from advertising to cinema, her passion for storytelling, and her role as a jury member at the Red Lorry Film Festival. She further also discusses the evolving landscape of independent cinema, the growing influence of women in the industry and why she sees filmmaking as a responsibility rather than just a craft**



A MAJOR PART OF BEING A STORYTELLER IS CELEBRATING STORIES AND THEIR TELLERS, NO MATTER WHERE THEY COME FROM

**TEJAL SINHA**
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari is a storyteller at heart—whether through cinema, literature, or advertising, her work has always been about amplifying voices and celebrating narratives that matter. From her critically acclaimed directorial debut *Nil Battey Sannata* to the widely loved *Bareilly Ki Barfi* and the empowering *Panga*, she has carved a unique space in Indian cinema. Her storytelling is rooted in authenticity, often capturing the nuances of everyday lives with warmth and depth. Now, as a jury member at the latest Red Lorry Film Festival, the *Faadu* filmmaker brings her keen cinematic sensibilities to the forefront, championing new voices and reflecting on the evolving landscape of filmmaking. In this exclusive conversation with ***The Pioneer***, she shares her thoughts on the power of independent cinema, the changing role of women in the industry and the responsibility that comes with shaping stories for the screen.

She believes that festivals like Red Lorry are crucial in shaping the future of cinema. “A major part of being a storyteller is celebrating stories and their tellers, no matter where they come from,” she says. When approached to be a jury member, she was more than happy to be part of a platform that honors fearless storytelling. “More than being a jury member, for me, it’s about celebrating these narratives. Festivals offer filmmakers and audiences a space where cinema is appreciated beyond its commercial value.”

For the *Bawaal* filmmaker, festivals are also a breeding ground for new talent. She emphasises how independent cinema has birthed some of the brightest filmmakers. “Festivals provide an outlet for unique voices. The idea of discovering new stories, engaging in discussions and learning nuances in cinema excites me. It’s an ecosystem that nurtures talent and allows fresh perspectives to thrive.”

As she evaluates films at the festival, she remains open to being moved by storytelling in any form. “We have a few parameters to adhere to, but great cinema always touches you in some way—whether through its story, performances, or technical brilliance.”

Before making her mark in cinema, she spent nearly 15 years in advertising, serving as Executive Creative Director at Leo Burnett. Her transition to filmmaking was not a calculated decision but an organic evolution of her creative instincts. “Filmmaking wasn’t a conscious shift. I’ve always enjoyed telling stories; only the format has changed. Now, I’m a lot more conscious of the stories I choose to tell.”

Her background in advertising, however, shaped her keen eye for detail and ability to craft narratives that resonate. It also instilled in her a deep understanding of visual storytelling, which has been evident in her films.

Her films often revolve around small-town settings and powerful female characters, a choice driven by her belief in relatable storytelling. “The stories I choose to tell are influenced by the world around us. Cinema has to be representative of a larger consensus. I truly believe that filmmaking is a responsibility and as filmmakers, we need to prioritise authenticity.”

Her projects, from *Bareilly Ki Barfi* to *Panga*, have consistently challenged stereotypes, offering refreshing portrayals of everyday people with extraordinary journeys. She remains committed to telling stories that strike an emotional chord with audiences.

Every filmmaker faces hurdles and for Tiwari, one of the most valuable lessons came from understanding the nature of criticism. “Someone once told me that you will always be remembered for the one wrong you do and never the many rights. The same applies to films. The focus should always be on giving your best and not getting too attached to the outcome.”

She acknowledges that creativity is subjective, and not everyone will appreciate one’s work. “There will always be someone who doesn’t like what you create. I remind myself that entire teams rely on me, and I need to do my best for them and myself.”

A recent moment at the Oscars further solidified her purpose as a storyteller. “I saw an edit featuring the greatest filmmakers of all time, and one line stayed with me—‘Pain is temporary, films are forever.’ That made my passion for storytelling even more meaningful.”

She is optimistic about the evolving role of women in the film industry. “Change, while slow, is definitely happening. Last year was phenomenal for women storytellers. Films like *All We Imagine as Light, Girls Will Be Girls* and *Laapataa Ladies* showcased powerful narratives by women filmmakers.”

Beyond directing, women are making strides across the industry. “There are so many empowering women running major entertainment studios, platforms and leading different verticals. The landscape is shifting, and it’s inspiring to witness.”

For the *Tarla* filmmaker, the film industry needs to invest more time in development to ensure authentic representation. “We need to analyse the stories being told and the impact they have. India’s cultural diversity is immense and our stories need to reflect that richness.”

She firmly believes that storytelling should go beyond entertainment—it should capture the nuances of different communities and give voice to underrepresented narratives.

Her production house, Earthsky Pictures, is actively involved in content creation across multiple platforms. “We are in a phase of creating content for all mediums. I’m currently working with Tips Films to develop a slate of projects, both as a director and producer. Collaborating with exceptional writers from different parts of the country has been an enriching experience.”

She is excited about the pipeline of stories waiting to be told. “The sheer joy of storytelling and bringing new ideas to life gives me happiness. Apart from film projects, our advertising films division is also active.”

As a filmmaker, she is eager to experiment with different genres. “I don’t think there’s any genre that is a ‘no’ for me. The story needs to strike a chord with me. I enjoy surprising and challenging myself. Learning new forms of art and filmmaking techniques excites me.”

# SHOWCASING HYDERABAD’S ARTISTIC BRILLIANCE

The India Art Festival 2025 is set to captivate Hyderabad’s art enthusiasts from April 4 to 6 at Kings Crown Convention, Pillar 68, PV Narasimha Rao Expressway. This year, the festival shines a special spotlight on Hyderabad’s thriving art scene, featuring 25 galleries and over 3,000 artworks from some of the finest names in Indian art.

Hyderabad’s rich artistic heritage takes center stage with Artbreez Art Gallery, Gallery Celeste and Icon Art Gallery displaying works by celebrated artists such as Laxma Goud, T Vaikuntam, Ramesh Gorjala, Laxman Aelay and Jagadish Chinthala. The festival will also present the diverse styles of Avani Rao Gandhra’s nature-inspired pieces, Kantha Reddy’s striking sculptures, and B. Narahari’s seamless blend of tradition and modernism.

While Hyderabad’s artists hold a strong presence, the festival also brings leading galleries from Mumbai and Delhi, showcasing works by Jogen Chowdhury, Manu Parekh, Paresh Maity and Seema Kohli. This mix of regional and national talent ensures a diverse artistic experience, uniting contemporary expressions with India’s deep artistic legacy.

Beyond its extensive collection of paintings, sculptures and mixed-media works, the festival offers live painting sessions, musical performances and an exclusive screening of The Eternal Canvas, a documentary exploring 12,000 years of Indian art history. Visitors can engage with artists, witness creativity in action, and gain deeper insights into India’s artistic evolution.

Now in its 15th year, the India Art Festival continues to be a vital platform for both established masters and emerging talents. Festival Director Rajendra emphasises its role in bridging the gap between artists, collectors, and art enthusiasts, fostering a vibrant dialogue around art and its evolving narratives.

With free entry and parking, the festival is open to all from 11 AM to 8 PM daily. Whether you are an art connoisseur, a collector, or simply someone who appreciates creativity, the India Art Festival 2025 promises an inspiring and immersive experience.



# Priya Saraiya: I don’t follow trends—I would rather be a clutter breaker

**In a rapidly evolving music industry, lyricist and playback singer Priya Saraiya continues to redefine her craft with passion and authenticity. Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Saraiya reflects on her creative journey, the importance of continuous learning and more**

PNS|HYDERABAD

Music has the power to transcend emotions, and few lyricists in Bollywood understand this as deeply as Priya Saraiya. As a playback singer and lyricist, she has given Bollywood some of its most memorable melodies, weaving stories of love, longing, and passion into her lyrics. With songs like *Sun Saathiya, (ABCD 2), Raabta (Agent Vinod), Jeene Laga Hoon (Ramaiya Vastavaiya) and Saibo (Shor in the City)*, she has established herself as a lyricist who can effortlessly capture the essence of human emotions.

But for the renowned singer-lyricist, success is not just about accolades—it’s about evolution. She firmly believes that an artist’s journey is a lifelong process of learning and unlearning. At the KOLAB HER MUSIC CAMP 2025, we connect with her and she says, “I’m really glad I’m part of this because it’s very important for any artist to keep learning. Learning should never stop if you are a musician, an artist, a singer, or a writer. Though I have done a lot of work, I still feel I have a lot to learn and I want to learn from every individual. Everybody who’s into music has something to teach me.”

At a time when the music industry is rapidly evolving, the *Bezubaan* singer remains grounded in her craft, constantly exploring new ways to push creative boundaries while staying true to her artistic instincts. From writing deeply emotional ballads to experimenting with high-energy dance numbers, her journey is a testament to the power of adaptability and passion in music.

Her lyrical strength lies in love songs, and she admits they come naturally to her. “I love writing love songs, sad songs,” she says. However, her musical taste is far more diverse. “I do enjoy listening to a lot of dance music, hip-hop and all kinds of genres. EDM is my favourite.”

While she is best known for romantic ballads, she enjoys pushing her creative boundaries to write high-energy dance tracks. “I like to challenge myself and also deliver dance music as a lyricist,” she adds.

When asked whether her personal experiences influence her lyrics, the *Khoya Khoya* singer clarifies that it depends on the type of project. “For film work, no. Definitely, no. Because we have to cater to the requirements of a certain project,” she explains. However, in independent music, she finds the freedom to be more personal. “You have the liberty to choose what you want to do, and you can express yourself the way you want.”

Her approach to writing lyrics is deeply connected to the melody. “I prefer writing on melody because then I know exactly what kind of mood is required in that particular song. It’s very subjective, actually. It depends on the situation of the song and the mood of the song.” Among her many successful songs, *Sun Saathiya* holds a special place in Saraiya’s heart. “That song has a special place in my heart,” she shares. The song became a massive hit, showcasing her ability to craft deeply emotional and melodious lyrics.

With Bollywood music often influenced by industry trends, the *Piya O Re Piya* lyricist takes a different approach. “I don’t follow trends because I believe that as an artist, I would rather be a clutter breaker. I always ask myself—how can I break the clutter and create something of my own?” Despite her extensive experience, the *Mileya Mileya* lyricist admits that the songwriting process comes with its challenges. “All the time, actually,” she laughs when asked if she ever struggles to find the perfect words for a song.

She recalls how minor changes can sometimes be the hardest. “Many times, directors or composers ask us to change just one word from the song, and that’s where I get stuck. Because sometimes, it’s not just about words—it’s about the emotion of the song and the thoughts we want to convey.”

With an ever-growing career in playback singing and lyricism, she remains dedicated to storytelling through music. “The joy of writing, of bringing emotions to life through words, is what keeps me going,” she concludes.



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# Los Angeles FC defeats Inter Miami in CONCACAF Champions Cup match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Los Angeles



Nathan Ordaz scored in the 57th minute, and Los Angeles FC kept Lionel Messi off the scoresheet on Wednesday night in a 1-0 victory over Inter Miami in the first leg of their CONCACAF Champions Cup quarterfinal match.

Messi had produced a goal (5) or an assist (2) in each of his first six Champions Cup appearances since joining Miami two years ago, including three goals in the early rounds of this year's tournament.

After returning from injury only last weekend, Messi played the entire match in Los Angeles. He put two of his five shots on target, but Hugo Lloris stopped both chances. "I think (Messi) always had a black jersey in front of him, and that's the point," LAFC coach Steve Cherundolo said. "You can't always defend him, nor can you always shut down Jordi Alba, (Sergio) Busquets, (Luis) Suárez. … Those guys are going to get a chance or two, and the only way to defend players of that quality and teams of that quality is with a collective effort."

The loss was the first of 2025 for Miami, which had won seven straight matches across all competitions while starting 8-0-1 under new coach Javier Mascherano.

"It was a game that we expected," Mascherano said after his first defeat with Miami. "We know LA. They have good players, and they have players in front that can (make) the difference. But I think we controlled them almost all the game in a good way. Obviously, we didn't have the best night tonight, but in the end, it's the first leg. We have the next game next week, and we will see. I believe that we can do the right things to (get) through."

The clubs meet again in Fort Lauderdale on Wednesday, April 9, for the second leg of the quarterfinal.

The aggregate winner advances to the semifinals to face MLS' Vancouver Whitecaps or Liga MX's Pumas, who played to a 1-1 draw in their first leg.

LAFC, which finished as the runner-up in this tournament in 2020 and 2023, ended its 0-4-1 skid over the previous 3 1/2 weeks with a strong performance on both ends against powerhouse Miami, which leads the MLS standings at 4-0-1.

"I think we saw a complete performance, a good one from the guys," Cherundolo said. "They invested a lot. We need to be a little sharper, a little more focused in the final third with our chances against good teams, and Miami is certainly a good team, maybe the best team."

The 37-year-old Messi has been slowed in recent weeks by an adductor injury, forcing him to miss duties with the Argentine national team last month. But he returned to MLS play last Saturday with a goal as a substitute in Miami's win over Philadelphia, and he was in the Herons' starting lineup in Los Angeles.

Messi took two free kicks in dangerous areas in the first half, but he sailed his first over the bar and sent the second directly to Lloris.

He had a good chance in the 80th minute, but his quick turnaround shot above the penalty area was also too high. He fired another low shot at Lloris in the 86th minute, and the French keeper smothered it after a bobble.

Messi earned one last free kick off a foul on a dribble in second-half injury time, but also sailed it high.

"Sometimes (we) couldn't find the spaces," Mascherano said. "They did very well in defense also, so sometimes you have to accept. Maybe we had some (chances) in the second half... At the end, I think we were not clear in attack, but the players tried until the end in many ways."

The 21-year-old Ordaz put LAFC ahead when he eluded Busquets and hammered a swift shot into the bottom corner of the Herons' net from well outside the penalty area. The promising homegrown player and Los Angeles native also scored against Columbus in a Champions Cup match last month.

Ordaz had narrowly avoided a red card in the first half when he became entangled with Maxi Falcón. The Uruguayan defender went down from what Miami felt was a punch by Ordaz, who was given only a yellow upon video review.

"There's contact, (and) there's contact prior to that from the opposing player," Cherundolo said. "I applaud the decision not to send guys off the field, and I would say the same thing if it was the reverse, if it was a Miami player in question."

The packed crowd included NBA stars Stephen Curry and Jimmy Butler, whose Golden State Warriors play the Lakers on Thursday night.

# Paris Saint-Germain look to clinch French league title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

The one-sided Ligue 1 title race could end on Saturday, with Paris Saint-Germain needing only a draw at home against Angers to clinch a record-extending 13th crown.

PSG's massive 21-point lead means it would have to lose the next seven games and Monaco win them all to overtake the Parisians, who are unbeaten in 27 league games. PSG could finish the league campaign unbeaten, although coach Luis Enrique's side still has to play Nice and has a tricky match away to Strasbourg, with both opponents locked in a tight battle to qualify for next season's Champions League. This season's Champions League, too, is in Luis Enrique's thoughts.

## Good time to rest players?

With a quarterfinal first-leg match against Aston Villa coming up in Paris on Wednesday, PSG can afford to rest several key players against Angers. Coach Alexandre Dujeux's side is 14th and has lost four straight league games without scoring a goal, conceding 11.

However, Enrique is not fond of squad rotation so may field close to a full-strength team at Parc des Princes.

## How can PSG lose a game?

It is hard to see how, given that PSG has not dropped any points since a 1-1 draw at home to Reims on Jan. 25, winning eight straight games. A glimmer of hope for PSG's remaining opponents is that the team starts slowly and is prone to conceding early goals. PSG fell behind early against Saint-Etienne last weekend, and it trailed 2-0 within 27 minutes to second-tier Dunkerque in the French Cup semifinal on Tuesday. PSG ended up winning both matches and scoring 10 goals in the process, but there is still a significant weakness against set-pieces and crosses.

## Rosenior makes his mark

One of the biggest success stories this season has been Strasbourg's remarkable rise to sixth place under English coach Liam Rosenior. Even more so considering it is his first season, and that he had only two weeks of preseason preparation with his new players. Led by striker Emanuel Emegha (12 goals), the Alsace-based side has lost only once in the past 14 league games to join the chase for a Champions League spot.

Rosenior's team is on a four-game winning run heading into Sunday's trip to play relegation-threatened Reims. It is one point behind fourth-place Nice and three behind third-place Marseille, with the top four qualifying. "I will never stop my players dreaming," Rosenior said about making the Champions League. "Of course it's possible." He'll find out soon enough. Strasbourg has back-to-back games against Nice and Monaco this month and, with the race so tight, may need to beat PSG on May 4.

## Marseille is in a slump

Marseille coach Roberto De Zerbi was fuming with his players after last Saturday's 3-1 loss at struggling Reims. So was midfielder Adrien Rabiot, who questioned the attitude of his teammates.

With good reason, as Marseille's third straight defeat allowed Monaco to move into second place. But De Zerbi may want to look a bit deeper. Perhaps he should not have allowed his players to get so carried away when, after beating Lyon 3-2 in February, they embarked on a lap of honor and posed for a giant team photo as if they'd won a trophy.

# All eyes on Rohit, Pant as MI set to take on LSG today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Two stalwarts of Indian cricket — Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant — will be hoping to overcome their lean patch when Mumbai Indians (MI) face Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in a clash between two struggling teams in the Indian Premier League here on Friday. Five-time champions Mumbai Indians have not really clicked so far this season, with just two points from three games.

India captain Rohit's form with the bat has put the MI team management in a tight spot. The same is for LSG skipper Pant whose extended dry run is not helping matters for the home side. With both the teams almost identically placed with a solitary win each in three games, the contest could boil down to who exploits the conditions better on the day. Given that the curators haven't been providing tailor-made pitches to the home sides — something that has caused frustration of the coaches and players in some franchises — the team that gets a head-start with the bat or ball in the power play overs could call the shots.

The prolonged absence of MI pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah due to injury and the management maintaining a stoic silence on his return is only adding to the frustration of the Hardik Pandya-led side.

MI, though, found success in the handy pace of young left-armer Ashwani Kumar, who single-handedly demolished defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders with excellent figures of 4/24 in three overs in their win at home on March 31.

It would be premature to pass a judgement about his pedigree but in the 23-year-old Punjab pacer, MI have got a glimmer of hope. Making his IPL debut for MI after playing only four T20 matches on the domestic circuit, he dismissed established names like Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey, Rinku Singh and Andre Russell to become the first Indian to take four wickets on IPL debut. IPL has, time and again, given a platform for young players to excel but few have been able to do that consistently. Mayank Yadav, after bedazzling everyone with his searing pace, just faded away. MI would be hoping Ashwani is not a one-match wonder. With MI finally giving a commanding performance against KKR at the Wankhede, it was South African keeper-batter Ryan Rickelton, who guided them to victory in the chase of a sub-par total. Rohit and 'Mr 360 degrees' Suryakumar Yadav will have big roles to play in a side that doesn't really bat deep but has an array of slow and fast bowlers who can deliver.

Lucknow Super Giants, placed sixth behind MI, have not really hit their strides following their demoralising one-wicket defeat to Delhi Capitals in the IPL opener at Visakhapatnam. While West Indies' Nicholas Pooran has been in sublime form and is leading the scoring charts with 189 runs from three games, including two half-centuries, his exploits have not rubbed off on other LSG batters, except Australian Mitchell Marsh, who too has two half-tons so far in this edition. Much of their woes are due to their bowling, led by Shardul Thakur and Ravi Bishnoi, and the poor form of their charismatic captain Pant with the bat.

After not being in the playing eleven during India's Champions Trophy campaign, with KL Rahul wielding the big gloves, Pant's form would be a cause for concern in the busy season ahead.

**The Teams (From)**

**Lucknow Super Giants:** Rishabh Pant (c & wk), Abdul Samad, Akash Deep, Akash Singh, Avesh Khan, Ayush Badoni, Matthew Breetzke, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Himmat Singh, Shamar Joseph, Aryan Juyal, Arshin Kulkarni, Aiden Markram, Mitchell Marsh, David Miller, Nicholas Pooran, Prince Yadav, Digvesh Rathi, Ravi Bishnoi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Manimaran Siddharth, Shardul Thakur, Mayank Yadav.

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Ashwani Kumar, Raj Bawa, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Jasprit Bumrah, Deepak Chahar, Will Jacks, Bevon Jacobs, Robin Minz, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Naman Dhir, Vignesh Puthur, Satyanarayana Raju, Ryan Rickelton, Mitchell Santner, Karn Sharma, Rohit Sharma, Krishnan Shrijith, Arjun Tendulkar, Tilak Varma, Reece Topley, Suryakumar Yadav.

# US, UK contenders for 2031 Women's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The United States and the United Kingdom looked set on Thursday to be picked by FIFA next year as hosts of Women's World Cups expanded to 48 teams from 32. Their respective intentions to bid for the 2031 and 2035 editions are now alone in the contests after a first deadline to enter the race passed. The first formal bid documents must be signed by the end of April.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino told European soccer officials the governing body received one expression of interest to host the 2031 edition — from the US. With the possibility of other countries in the CONCACAF region joining the project. That long-promised bid would likely include Mexico. FIFA has just one "valid bid" to host the 2035 edition, from the British member federations centered on England, Infantino said at UEFA's annual meeting in Belgrade, Serbia.

That 2035 project was quickly supported last month by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer when FIFA said it was formally seeking bids from member federations. FIFA excluded Europe from the 2031 contest, clearing the way for a long-expected US Win.

Spanish soccer officials said last week they hoped to bid, possibly with Portugal and Morocco in a repeat of the co-hosting plan for the men's 2030 World Cup.

**Their intentions to bid for the 2031 and 2035 editions are now the only ones in contention after the first deadline to enter the race ended**

Infantino's comments to the annual meeting of UEFA seemed to rule out a Spain bid being allowed. "So the path is there for the Women's World Cup to be taking place in 31 and '35 in some great countries," the FIFA president said, "to boost even more the women's football movement." FIFA is scheduled to confirm Women's World Cup hosts next year. The 2027 edition with 32 teams is being hosted by Brazil. The Women's World Cup would return to the US. For the first time since the 2003 edition. The US Also hosted in 1999. England hosted the Women's European Championship in 2022 — which the home team won — and the men's Euro 2028 will be co-hosted by England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Women's soccer at 2028 LA OlympicsIn a further boost for women's soccer, Infantino detailed FIFA's plan to have more women's teams than men's playing at the next Olympics. There were just 12 teams in the women's tournament at the 2024 Paris Olympics and 16 in the men's tournament. The final decision is for the IOC, which has an executive board meeting next Wednesday.

Infantino said on Thursday that FIFA's new proposal is to flip the numbers to have 16 women's teams and 12 in the men's tournaments. Though the International Olympic Committee strongly supports gender equality at the games, adding four more women's teams — and about 70 extra players, plus team officials — would push the limit of agreed athlete quotas for organisers in Los Angeles.

# HI Senior Men's National Championship begins in Jhansi today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jhansi

Thirty teams will compete in three divisions in the 15th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship to be held here from April 4-15. This will be the first time the men's tournament, to be held at the Major Dhyan Chand Hockey Stadium, is being played in the new three-division format. The Senior Women National Championship was played in the same new format in March.

The domestic competition, which will now also feature promotion and relegation battles, has been divided into three divisions — A, B and C.

The Division A will be the highest one as the teams in it will fight for the championship title. Division B will have teams competing for promotion to Division A next season while in Division C, the teams will fight for a spot in Division B for the next edition.

The Division B and C matches are scheduled to begin on April 4 while the Division A matches will commence on April 8. Division A has the top-12 teams in India, including defending champions Odisha and runners-up Haryana, based on their overall performances in the tournament over the years.

Other teams in Division A, which will have four pools, are Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Hockey, Karnataka and Puducherry. Each team will play every opponent once in their respective pools. This will be the only division featuring a knockout stage as the top-two teams from each pool will advance to the quarterfinals, scheduled for April 12.

The semifinals will be played on April 13, and the final and 3rd/4th place match on April 15. The bottom two teams from Division A will be relegated to Division B for the next edition.

# Red Bull-demoted Liam Lawso- does- 't sou- d hopeful of movi- g back up to its top F1 team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Suzuka

No one knows better than Liam Lawson how quickly things can change in results-driven, money-driven Formula 1. Last week the New Zealander was suddenly demoted to Racing Bulls after two poor Formula 1 races with the top team — Red Bull — in Australia and China to start the season.

Lawson had qualified 18th at the season-opening Australian Grand Prix but crashed out of the race; in China he qualified last for both the sprint race and the main event, finishing 14th and 12th.

Japanese Yuki Tsunoda, who was passed over for promotion a few months ago when Lawson was picked for the top team, is replacing Lawson in a driver swap. Lawson was asked at a media conference Thursday, ahead of Sunday's Japanese GP, if the thought he could get promoted back to the top team. "Yeah, I guess that's part of the conversation," he said. "In a way — that's great, but I was already there." His tone suggested another promotion didn't seem likely. And Tsunoda is also under pressure. He must perform and deliver as a teammate of four-time defending champion Max Verstappen. "Whatever happens down the line is more or less out of my control," Lawson added. "What I can control is the driving stuff — and to prove that. Where the future is at this point, I don't think about it too much."

Lawson attributes part of his failure in the first two races to unfamiliar circuits. He was hoping to show off at Suzuka, where he raced in Formula 1 in 2023.

"I was more surprised" about the sudden demotion, he said. "It's very early in the season and I would say I was hoping to go to a track that I'd raced before and have a chance." Ironically, that advantage falls to Tsunoda, who's in his fifth season in Formula 1 and who knows the Suzuka track in central Japan as well as any driver. "For Yuki, obviouly it's a great opportunity and on a track that he's done a lot," Lawson said. "He'll — I"m sure — probably be more comfortable."

Interestingly, Formula 1 made both drivers available at Thursday press conferences, but not in the same one. Tsunoda appeared after Lawson spoke in the first 30-minute session. Lawson said he learned of his demotion last Monday or Tuesday, just after the Chinese GP. He said he took a call and was told what was happening.

"It was more of a done deal," he said.

Lawson said he expected quick familiarity with the Racing Bulls team and setup. He had 11 F1 races under his belt coming into this season, and added two this season.

# Exposure to difficult conditions helped me: Sai Sudharsan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru



Opener B Sai Sudharsan felt exposure to "difficult conditions" during his current stint with IPL side Gujarat Titans (GT) has contributed immensely to him evolving as a T20 batter. Sudharsan played a fine innings of 49 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in GT's eight-wicket win here on Wednesday night to showcase the benefits of his hard yards at nets. "It's my fourth year (in the IPL), so I feel it has given me a lot of experience. I got exposed to a few difficult conditions. I got exposed to a lot of fast bowling in the nets with GT," Sudharsan said in the post-match press meet.

"I feel the most important thing which has helped my evolution or the way I've improved my T20 batting is the game-time I get here and the practice time I get here with the Titans, with the bowlers, all quality international bowlers," he added.

At GT nets, he has the privilege to horn his skills against the likes of Kagiso Rabada, Mohammad Siraj, Prasidh Krishna and Gerald Coetzee this season. In the previous years, he had faced the likes of Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav and Mohit Sharma. Sudharsan now sits on the second place in the run-markers' chart with 186 runs. The left-hander has made those runs at an average of 62 and at a strike-rate of 158. "So, I feel that has helped me even from the nets, I would say. I got exposed to a lot of things, a lot of difficult conditions.

"I've learnt a lot in these three years. I feel it has helped me understand the game better and the basics of the game as well," he said.

Sudharsan also lauded Jos Buttler for lending experience to the side at the No. 3 slot. "I feel Butler is bringing in a lot of experience and knowledge, which is helping us to to settle the middle-overs and have a very good last five overs," he said.

## Flower rues early wickets

RCB head coach Andy Flower said losing four wickets in the first seven overs made it tough for his side. "We played very aggressively in the power play and lost some wickets, lost three wickets in the power play. Four wickets in power play.

"So, that was obviously a big swing in the game — if you lose power play, you're in trouble," he said. Flower identified Siraj's outstanding spell (3/19) as one of the reasons for RCB's defeat, but stopped short of blaming a slower than usual Chinnaswamy deck for the result.

# Leverkusen to keep Bundesliga title fight going after cup exit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Duesseldorf

After one of Germany's all-time greatest cup shocks, Bayer Leverkusen needs to dust itself off and try to keep the fight for the league title going. After Leverkusen was stunned 2-1 by third-division Arminia Bielefeld in the German Cup semifinals on Tuesday, the Bundesliga is the only chance for Xabi Alonso's team to end the season with a trophy. It's a long shot.

Bayern Munich leads Leverkusen by six points with seven games remaining, though Leverkusen can focus solely on the league. Bayern has a slightly trickier Bundesliga schedule and a looming Champions League quarterfinal date with Inter Milan. Key matchups — Bayern has a potentially tricky trip to Augsburg on Friday night, having lost twice in the last four years at the home of its local rival.

Leverkusen plays Heidenheim on Saturday, facing another opponent it should be expected to beat easily but which, like Bielefeld, might have a sting in the tail. Relegation-threatened Heidenheim has won its last two games to climb to 16th.

Zsolt Low has his first Bundesliga game as Leipzig coach against Hoffenheim on Saturday. Low, formerly an assistant to Thomas Tuchel at Chelsea and Bayern, lost on debut on Wednesday to Stuttgart in the cup semifinals.

Players to watch — Bayern is used to relying heavily on an irreplaceable English player, but this week the focus is as much on defender Eric Dier as star striker Harry Kane. Squad injuries have put pressure on Dier to combine well with Kim Min-jae at center back.

Maximilian Beier's form has been key to Niko Kovac's efforts to turn around a disappointing season for 10th-placed Borussia Dortmund. Beier scored twice last week as Dortmund beat Mainz 3-1 and could be important against Freiburg on Saturday.

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# Feel-good song *Anaga Anaga Kathala* from *Tribanadhari Barbarik* released

Senior actor Sathyaraj is playing the lead in *Tribanadhari Barbarik*, directed by Mohan Srivatsa and produced by Vijaypal Reddy Adidhala. The film features Satyam Rajesh, Vasishta N. Simha, Sanchi Rai and Udaya Bhanu in prominent roles.

At an event held at TKR College, the makers launched the feel-good song Anaga Anaga Kathala. Sung by Karthik with music composed by Infusion Band, the song beautifully captures the emotional bond between a grandfather and his granddaughter. Lyricist Sanare has penned heartfelt words that complement the soothing melody.

Sathyaraj expressed his excitement at the event, saying, "I am thrilled to release the song in front of 14,000 students. I would like to thank Teegala Krishna Reddy garu for launching our song. We are eager for *Anaga Anaga Kathala* to reach audiences and for the film's release."

Director Mohan Srivatsa praised Sathyaraj, saying, "Working with him has been an absolute joy. His presence in the film adds immense value."

# 'I had accepted that *28°C* might never release, but now it's happening'

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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**Actor Naveen Chandra, known for his versatile roles across Telugu and Tamil cinema, finally sees his long-awaited film *28°C* hitting the big screen after six years. He opens up about the film's struggles, his journey in the industry, his growing presence in OTT and the exciting projects on his plate**

Actor Naveen Chandra has carved a niche for himself in Indian cinema, excelling in lead roles, negative characters, and impactful supporting performances. He has been making waves in Telugu and Tamil cinema while also becoming a well-known face in the OTT space. Now, after a long wait, his film *28°C* is finally set to release—a project that faced years of delays but is now getting the theatrical release it deserves.

The journey of *28°C* began in the most unexpected way. Naveen recalls how a chance meeting at a restaurant changed everything. "I was having lunch when a doctor approached me, saying he had been trying to get my number for two months. He told me he was a dentist and wanted to make a film with me. This was almost six years ago. At that time, I had doubts—can a doctor make a film without any prior experience?" he shares.

Despite his skepticism, Naveen gave his number. Two days later, they met again and the dentist-turned-director narrated a unique story that caught Naveen's interest. "I found the story fresh and different, so I decided to go ahead with it," he says. The doctor in question was Dr. Anil Viswanath, who later gained fame with Polimera. "This was his first film, and back then, no one showed much interest in it. But now, it's finally releasing," he adds.

Naveen Chandra, who won hearts with *Andala Rakshasi*, often gets requests from fans to do another love story. This was one of the reasons he took up *28°C*. "It's a love story with thrilling elements. The plot revolves around a husband who has to ensure that his wife's body temperature stays at 28 degrees. How he takes care of her and what challenges he faces form the crux of the story," he explains.

The lead characters are both doctors who meet in college, fall in love and get married. "Since the director is a doctor, he wrote the medical aspects convincingly. But in reality, such a condition doesn't exist—he was inspired by a book," Naveen reveals.

The film's production faced multiple hurdles. Originally planned to be shot in the USA, the team had to change locations due to visa restrictions. "Our team planned the shoot in Georgia instead. Out of the 22 members, only Raja Ravindra and I were allowed entry, while the rest were deported to Dubai. It was a chaotic situation. I thought the shoot would get canceled, but the team endured difficult conditions in Dubai for a day before finding an alternate route via Baku," Naveen recalls.

Even after reaching Georgia, the team had to brave harsh weather conditions, including heavy rain and freezing temperatures. "Despite all the challenges, we completed the shoot," he says. Some crucial scenes were also filmed in Visakhapatnam.

After wrapping up the shoot, the director showed *28°C* to several industry people, but no one was willing to back it. "They asked for changes, but nothing moved forward. Then the pandemic hit, and we even tried getting it released on OTT, but that didn't work either. My earlier films hadn't performed well, so that impacted this film's chances too," Naveen shares.

The turning point came when Dr. Anil Viswanath's later films—Polimera and its sequel—became successful. Director Vamsi Nandipati then watched *28°C* and decided to release it. "That's how a six-year-old film is finally seeing the light of day," says Naveen.

Now, the actor is excited to see how audiences will receive the film. "At one point, I had accepted that it might never be released. But now, it's finally happening, and I can't wait for people to watch it in theaters," he says.

Beyond films, Naveen Chandra has been making a mark in the OTT space. He believes that content consumption has evolved significantly. "Audiences today want fresh, engaging stories. There's no impact on my film career even though I'm doing web series and playing negative roles," he says.

When asked about the current trend of crime thrillers dominating OTT, Naveen has an interesting take. "Crime series are at the top because, even in reality, crime rates are rising. I don't know if audiences enjoy heavy violence, but they seem drawn to heroes who kill in creative ways," he observes.

He also notes the growing influence of Malayalam cinema in the digital space. "OTT platforms are focusing heavily on Malayalam films because they offer fresh narratives," he says. Naveen himself has found success in the streaming world—his web series Inspector Rishi ranks third in popularity after *Family Man* and *Mirzapur*. "The second season is on the way," he reveals. While Naveen is busy with multiple projects, he regrets missing out on a big break in Suriya's upcoming film *Retro*. "I was shooting for *Game Changer* at the time and couldn't adjust my dates. Otherwise, I would have played a strong villain role in *Retro*," he admits.



**"I was shooting for *Game Changer* at the time and couldn't adjust my dates. Otherwise, I would have played a strong villain role in *Retro***

Despite this, Naveen has plenty of exciting work ahead. "I have several projects in Tamil and multiple web series lined up," he shares.

Naveen previously played a key role in Trivikram's Aravinda Sametha alongside Jr. NTR, which proved to be a major turning point in his career. Now, years later, he is thrilled to be working with the same production house for Ravi Teja's *Mass Jathara*. "It's a great feeling to be back with them for another exciting film," he says.

# JR. NTR CONFIRMS *DEVARA: PART 2* IS ON

There have been speculations that the second part of *Devara* may not happen, but Jr. NTR has now put all rumors to rest. While promoting *Devara* in Japan, the actor confirmed that *Devara: Part 2* is very much in the works.

"The story is more about Vara and Devara," NTR revealed when responding to a fan's question during his tour.

Despite his busy schedule—including his Bollywood debut in *War 2* and an upcoming project with Prashanth Neel (tentatively titled Dragon)—NTR assured that *Devara 2* is still happening.

Sources indicate that once NTR returns from Japan, director Koratala Siva will begin work on the sequel. Filming may commence by the end of this year or early next year.

*Devara* stars Bollywood actress Janhvi Kapoor as the female lead, while Saif Ali Khan plays the antagonist in the first part. Fans eagerly await further updates on the much-anticipated sequel.



# I don't like the word comeback; I take my time to write: Bommarillu Bhaskar

Bommarillu Bhaskar is set to make a return with *Jack*, starring Siddu Jonnalagadda and Vaishnavi Chaitanya. Produced by BVSN Prasad, the film is slated for release on April 10.

"I have known BVSN Prasad garu since my early days, and now his son Baapi is a close friend. When I shared the story of *Jack* with him, he immediately arranged a meeting with Siddu," Bhaskar recalls.

The project took off in just one day. "After *DJ Tillu* and *Tillu Square*, this is a very different film for Siddu and for me too. While my signature emotions are there, the film has some action elements and dialogues tailored to Siddu's style," he explains.

Speaking about the synergy between him and Siddu, Bhaskar says, "The core idea was mine, but Siddu contributed his inputs as well."

The trailer has been entertaining audiences, blending Siddu's signature style with Bhaskar's emotional storytelling. "This is my first attempt at a different genre, but I won't disappoint the family audience that enjoyed my previous films," assures the director.

Praising Siddu's talent, he shares, "Working with him is easy. Just trust him, give him the scene, and the result is magic on the monitor."

Bhaskar also highlights Vaishnavi Chaitanya's exceptional performance. "I told her there would be no dialogues in certain scenes, and she had to convey everything through her eyes. She did it beautifully. She has a very promising future," he praises.

When asked if *Jack* marks his comeback, Bhaskar firmly states, "I don't like the word comeback. I take my time to write my stories. I love writing."



# *OH BHAMA AYYO RAMA* LATEST SONG OUT NOW

Actor Suhas, known for his unique script choices, is now starring in the romantic comedy *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama*. The film marks the Telugu debut of Malayalam actress Malavika Manoj (*Joe* fame) as the female lead. Directed by Ram Godala and produced by Harish Nalla, the film is slated for a summer release.

The teaser has been receiving positive responses. Following this, the lyrical video of the title song *Elaagunde Vaadane Elaaga Ayipoinae* was launched on Thursday. Penned by Sri Harsha Emani, sung by Sharath Santosh and composed by Rathan, the song has already struck a chord with listeners.

Director Ram Godala expressed his appreciation for music composer Rathan's contribution. "Rathan has delivered fantastic music for this film. All six songs have their own unique charm. *Oh Bhama Ayyo Rama* will be a refreshing summer entertainer, and every character has been crafted with great care," he shared.



## STANDALONE

Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Verma praised actress Poonam Kaur for her initiative *Shakti Aur Sanskrithi*, a programme that empowers women while celebrating India's rich heritage. Unveiling the programme's logo, he emphasised the importance of preserving culture and traditions for future generations. Anchored by Poonam Kaur, the show explores the significance of handlooms and the stories behind sarees, honoring the craft and the symbol of femininity they represent.

