VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY, MAY 23, 2025; PAGES 12 ₹4

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Playing with blood of Indians will cost Pak dearly: PM

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'COOKING WITH CELEBS IS CHAOTIC— BUT THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT'

10

'My father is my hero—my biggest INSPIRATION'



P12

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

When Al-Qaeda attacked the Twin Towers in America and killed 6,000 people, even a superpower like the U.S. couldn't act for 10 years. Only after 10 years did they catch and kill Osama Bin Laden. But in just 15 days after the Pahalgam incident, the army wiped out the terrorists—that is my Indian Army. Our Prime Minister is Modi... now tell me, who is greater? Is it a small war to go deep into Pakistan and destroy 9 terrorist camps, 11 military bases of the Pakistan Army, 20% of Pakistan's military infrastructure? Let Kharge answer—what is a small war?



- Bandi Sanjay, MoS

P4

DON'T MISS...

Ration at doorstep for elderly: Min

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has announced that ration commodities will be delivered directly to the homes of elderly and differently-abled beneficiaries. The Minister held a meeting with representatives of the ration shop dealers' association on Thursday. He instructed the dealers to ensure ration commodities are delivered at the doorsteps of the elderly and differently-abled individuals by the 5th of every month. He pointed out that under the previous regime, rations were only delivered up to the end of the street...

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Japan expresses solidarity with India

Japan on Thursday said terrorism cannot be justified in any form and expressed solidarity with India and with the world in the fight against terrorism. Japan's Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya was speaking with an Indian Parliamentary delegation when its leader JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha requested Tokyo's support in the fight against terrorism. The delegation that Jha led is one of the seven multi-party delegations to 33 global capitals to reach out to the international community on Pakistan's designs and India's response to terror...

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India to surpass China in oil demand

China drove global oil demand growth over the last decade, but now India is poised to take the lead in demand growth over the next decade, according to a latest report by Moody's Ratings.
China and India are No. 2 and No.3 oil consumers in the world. But there are notable differences in demand growth in the two countries. "Demand growth and import reliance will be higher in India," Moody's said. "Demand will grow faster in India than in China over the next decade, as China's economic growth...

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Indian squad named for Thailand Open

A 19-member squad will represent India at the 4th Thailand Open International Boxing Tournament, scheduled in Bangkok from May 24 to June 1. Held under the aegis of Asian Boxing, the Thailand Open will see top national teams from across the continent compete, including powerhouses like China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Japan, Korea, and host nation Thailand. The squad comprises 10 men and 9 women. The Boxing Federation of India, being run by an interim committee, followed its selection criterion, providing...

-SPORTS

CM begins 2-day Delhi visit

TO SEEK CENTRAL SUPPORT FOR KEY PROJECTS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has embarked on a crucial two-day visit to New Delhi aimed at securing support from the Union Government for key infrastructure, energy, irrigation and governance initiatives in the state. The visit includes a series of high-level meetings with senior Union Ministers across various departments, highlighting the state's push for accelerated development through Centre-State collaboration.

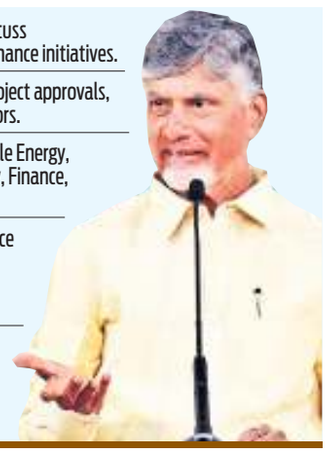
During his visit, the Chief Minister is expected to advocate for increased financial assistance, expedited project clearances and technical cooperation in emerging sectors. His agenda covers renewable energy, defence, digital infrastructure, water resource management and administrative reforms.

On Friday, 23 May, CM Naidu will begin his meetings at 10:00 am with Pralhad Venkatesh Joshi, Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy, to discuss opportunities for collaboration on green energy projects as part of Andhra Pradesh's ambitious clean energy roadmap.

At 11:00 am, he is scheduled to meet Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to explore potential defence and aerospace sector investments in the state, including the establishment of strategic manufacturing zones.

Continued on Page 2

- Naidu to meet senior Union Ministers to discuss infrastructure, energy, irrigation, and governance initiatives.
- The agenda includes financial aid, faster project approvals, and technical cooperation in emerging sectors.
- CM to meet Ministers for New and Renewable Energy, Defence, Jal Shakti, Science and Technology, Finance, Home Affairs, and Electronics and IT today.
- Discussions to focus on green energy, defence investments, irrigation, research, funding, criminal law implementation, and digital infrastructure.
- On Saturday, he will attend the 10th NITI Aayog Governing Council Meeting to present Andhra Pradesh's governance model and seek wider cooperation.



'Crop planning should align with market demand'

VIJAYAWADA: Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday instructed the agriculture department to prioritise crop-specific planning aligned with national and global market demands. Naidu emphasised the need to inform farmers in advance about suitable crops based on market dynamics to ensure a balance between supply and demand and prevent losses. "Farmers must cultivate only high-demand crops to avoid losses," said Naidu in an official release. He directed officials to adopt scientific planning and monitor global agricultural developments regularly.
During a review on key crops such as tobacco, cocoa, mango, and paddy, he discussed immediate and long-term farmers' issues. Naidu instructed officials that cocoa stocks with farmers should be purchased at Rs 500 per kg, and if the companies fail to do that, he said the government should step in for direct procurement. He also ordered accurate registration of HD Burley tobacco stocks through an app and approved a crop holiday for that variety due to lack of market demand.
The CM is pursuing the inclusion of HD and White Burley varieties under the Tobacco Board and will discuss farmer concerns with union ministers during his Delhi visit this week, the release said.

SC reserves interim orders in Waqf case

Reiterates presumption of constitutionality

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reiterating its observation on the presumption of constitutionality in favour of the law, the Supreme Court on Thursday reserved interim orders on three key issues after hearing both sides in the waqf case.

One of the issues relate to the power to denotify properties declared as "waqf by courts, waqf-by-user or waqf by deed" prescribed in Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

Before reserving the interim order, a bench comprising Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih heard senior advocates including Kapil Sibal, Rajeev Dhavan, Abhishek Singhvi and Huzefa Ahmadi for those challenging the amended waqf law and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, on three consecutive days.

On the last day, the CJI said, "I have already said that there is a presumption of constitutionality."

On May 20, the CJI noted the same and said, "For interim relief, you have to make out a very strong and glaring case. Otherwise, presumption of constitutionality will be there." The bench previously identified the three issues, on which a stay was sought by the petitioners, for passing interim orders.

Apart from the issue of denotification, petitioners have raised questions over the composition of state waqf boards and the Central Waqf Council, where they contend only Muslims should operate except ex-officio members.

Continued on Page 2



Medico found dead in hostel room at KGH

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A first-year medical student was found dead in his hostel room at the King George Hospital (KGH) postgraduate accommodation facility here on Thursday evening, sending shockwaves through the campus.

The deceased, identified as Motilal, was a native of Srikakulam district and was pursuing his first year in the Radiology Department at KGH.

Continued on Page 2



'Sthree Nidhi' app for SHG loan repayment

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a move to alleviate poverty and strengthen the livelihoods of underprivileged women, the Andhra Pradesh government has launched a digital platform under the Women's Fund initiative, named Sthree Nidhi, to streamline loan repayments.

Minister for SERP, MSME, and NRI Affairs, Kondapalli Srinivas, inaugurated the Sthree Nidhi mobile application at a programme held here on Thursday. The app is designed to facilitate and expedite loan repayments for beneficiaries. A live demonstration of the app's features—including downloading, login, and payment processing—was conducted by a member of a Self-Help Group (SHG).

Minister Srinivas stated that the initiative aims to simplify loan disbursement to economically disadvantaged women using advanced technologies such as mobile applications and biometric verification, in collaboration with government departments, banks, and financial institutions. He noted that the programme intends to ensure loan delivery within 48 hours.

He commended the officials for revitalising the previously inactive State Rural Livelihood Mission (SERP) and stressed the importance of leveraging modern technology to empower rural women. The Minister also underlined the need to train SHG members to use the app effectively. Union Bank General Manager Bhaskar Rao highlighted that the technological upgrades introduced under SERP and Sthree Nidhi could help reduce financial fraud impacting women in rural areas.

SERP CEO Vakati Karuna added that Sthree Nidhi plays a vital role in improving the financial wellbeing of poor women in both rural and urban areas.

'MANA OORI KOSAM MANAMANTHA'

Dy CM grants Rs 15 cr for Ravivalasa in Srikakulam

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Panchayat Raj, K. Pawan Kalyan, has announced a grant of Rs 15 crore for the development of Ravivalasa panchayat in Srikakulam district.

As part of the 'Mana Oorikosam Mana Mantha' initiative, Pawan Kalyan interacted with the villagers of Ravivalasa through a video conference on Thursday. In a novel approach, villagers were taken to a cinema theatre in Tekkali town to view the Deputy Chief Minister's address on the silver screen.

"For the first time, cinema theatres, traditionally meant for entertainment, have become platforms for social responsibility. It was a unique experience to connect with the people this way," he remarked.



Explaining the rationale behind the programme, Pawan Kalyan said it was launched to dispel the notion that political leaders neglect villages and fail to provide basic amenities. "The goal of 'Mana Oorikosam Mana Mantha' is to foster unity among villagers and encourage collective discussions on local development," he stated.

He described the Rs 15 crore allocation as a significant step and stressed that true development requires both government support and public participation. "Development does not come merely through funding. Real progress is possible only when all villagers work together. Those who have risen in life should never forget their roots," he added.

Water released from NS right canal



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In response to the ongoing summer heat, the Andhra Pradesh government has released water from the Nagarjuna Sagar Right Canal from Thursday afternoon to replenish local tanks and meet drinking water requirements, announced Water Resources Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu.

The minister stated that water would be supplied to 447 drinking water tanks located across the districts of Palnadu, Guntur, Bapatla, and Prakasam—areas within the command region of the Right Canal. He emphasised that the water should be used strictly for drinking purposes and instructed officials from the Irrigation, Revenue, and Rural Water Supply (RWS) departments to coordinate the supply accordingly.

Minister Ramanaidu further noted that following a three-crop holiday, the government had successfully provided irrigation water to the Nagarjuna Sagar command area, resulting in a good harvest. He added that the administration is now systematically addressing the region's drinking water needs through a well-planned initiative.

Liquor scam probe has Jagan rattled: Satya Kumar



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a sharp rebuttal to former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's recent press conference, Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav accused him of making baseless claims and revealing his fear over the ongoing investigation into the liquor scam that allegedly took place during his tenure. Addressing the media, Yadav questioned Jagan's move to cancel digital payments for liquor sales. "If there was no wrongdoing, why was digital payment scrapped? Why were manual transactions enforced?" he asked, alleging that the policy shift aimed to divert government revenue into private hands under the YSRCP regime.

Referring to the statements given by key accused individuals such as Vasudeva Reddy, Vijaysai Reddy, Raj Kasireddy, Dhanunjay Reddy and Krishna Mohan Reddy, Yadav said Jagan's attempt to downplay their depositions indicated his growing unease.

Continued on Page 2

A diversion to shield Naidu, says YSRCP chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) President and former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday accused the coalition government of orchestrating a false liquor scam to divert attention from the corruption charges against Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief N Chandrababu Naidu, who is currently out on bail.

Addressing the media at the YSRCP office in Tadepalli, Jagan claimed that junior officials and employees were being wrongfully arrested and coerced into giving statements, creating a counter-narrative to weaken the original case implicating Chandrababu.

He declared that June 4 would be observed as 'Betrayal Day' to expose the failures of the present government.

Continued on Page 2



AP strengthens ties with Foxconn to boost high-tech manufacturing

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA/TAIPEI

A high-level delegation from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, led by Katamneni Bhaskar, Secretary of Information Technology, visited Foxconn's headquarters in Taipei to deepen bilateral cooperation and explore new opportunities in high-tech manufacturing.

The discussions with Foxconn's senior leadership centred on establishing a long-term strategic partnership to drive innovation-led industrial growth.

Andhra Pradesh officials highlighted the state's strong infrastructure, investor-friendly policies, and its goal to become a leading hub for electronics and semiconductor industries in India.

Continued on Page 2

Juno Joule, German firm ink $1.3 b pact

GREEN HYDROGEN HUB IN AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Juno Joule Green Energy Pvt Ltd, a prominent Indian renewable energy firm, signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with German clean energy company Select Energy GmbH at the World Hydrogen Summit 2025 in Rotterdam. The collaboration aims to co-develop a $1.3 billion green hydrogen and ammonia export facility at Mulapeta Port in Andhra Pradesh.

The MoU was signed by Juno Joule CEO Nagasharath Rayapati and Select Energy GmbH Managing Director Felix Danger, in the presence of key dignitaries including Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) Secretary Santosh Kumar Sarangi and National Green Hydrogen Mission Director-General Abhay Bakre. The agreement signifies a major Indo-German partnership in the clean energy sector.

The proposed facility is slated to begin operations by 2029 and will produce up to 180 KTPA of green hydrogen and one million tonnes of ammonia annually. It will be powered entirely by solar, wind, and hydropower sources. The project also includes desalination units and port-linked pipeline infrastructure to support exports to Europe, Japan and South Korea.



The MoU was signed by Juno Joule CEO Nagasharath Rayapati and Select Energy GmbH Managing Director Felix Danger, in the presence of key dignitaries including Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) Secretary Santosh Kumar Sarangi and National Green Hydrogen Mission Director-General Abhay Bakre.

Juno Joule is notably the only private Indian company independently exhibiting at the summit. The initiative is expected to generate between 5,000 and 6,000 jobs across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, while also helping to avoid 1.8 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually. "This partnership strengthens India's role in the global green hydrogen value chain," said Rayapati, noting its alignment with the objectives of India's National Green Hydrogen Mission.

The agreement also covers equity participation, the development of an ammonia terminal, and long-term offtake arrangements under EU-aligned regulatory frameworks.

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AP team seeks tech ties at Taiwan Science Park

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



A high-level delegation from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, led by Katamneni Bhaskar, Secretary for Information Technology, held a strategic meeting with Wayne Wang, Secretary General of the Allied Association for Science Park Industries (ASIP), at Taiwan's renowned Hsinchu Science Park — a global hub for advanced manufacturing and semiconductor innovation.

During the meeting, the Andhra Pradesh delegation outlined the state's ambitious vision to position itself as a global destination for electronics and semiconductor manufacturing. Highlighting Andhra Pradesh's robust industrial policies, infrastructure readiness, and proactive investor support, the delegation invited Taiwanese industrial parks and companies to explore investment and collaboration opportunities in the state.

The interaction also provided valuable insights into the development and operational success of the Hsinchu Science Park. Discussions focused on potential areas of partnership between ASIP member companies and Andhra Pradesh, particularly in advanced electronics manufacturing, research and development, and innovation-led industrial growth. The visit marks a significant step in Andhra Pradesh's ongoing efforts to attract high-tech investments and establish itself as a leading destination for global electronics and semiconductor industries.

GITAM to introduce new management programmes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

New courses include B. Com with ACCA, BBA in Financial Markets and Business Analytics, and MBA in Healthcare Management

GITAM (Deemed to be University) School of Business announced on Thursday the introduction of several new undergraduate and postgraduate management programmes set to begin in the 2025–26 academic year. Addressing the media, Dean Prof. Raja P. Pappu emphasised the institution's commitment to aligning with international standards and preparing students for global careers. "Our aim is to equip students with the skills required for a global career," he said.

Key highlights include a new B.Com programme integrated with the ACCA qualification, offering students a globally recognised pathway in finance and accounting. Additionally, two new BBA specialisations will be launched: BBA in Financial Markets, in partnership with NSE Academy, and BBA in Business Analytics, developed with support from Bloomberg and NSE Labs. "These programmes are tailored to meet the evolving demands of industry," Prof. Pappu added.

At the postgraduate level, GITAM School of Business will introduce an MBA in Healthcare and Hospital Management, created in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh MedTech Zone (AMTZ) and the Academy of Hospital Administration. This programme will combine core management education with specialised healthcare electives, internships, and immersive field experiences.

Prof. Pappu also highlighted the expansion of international collaborations through the International Consulting Immersion Programme (ICIP), developed with the University of North Carolina Wilmington (USA) and the University of Surrey (UK). This initiative allows students to work on live consulting projects with global corporate partners.

Regarding infrastructure, GITAM boasts state-of-the-art facilities including smart classrooms, Bloomberg and NSE Labs, an Analytics Lab, and Language Labs, with a strong focus on experiential learning and fostering leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

Admissions for undergraduate management courses will be conducted via the GITAM Admission Test (GAT-2025) on May 25, across 44 cities nationwide. MBA aspirants must hold a bachelor's degree with a minimum of 60 per cent marks. GITAM School of Business also accepts valid scores from national-level entrance exams including CAT, XAT, GMAT, MAT, NMAT, CMAT, and the AP & TS ICET.

Relief for APSRTC staff as govt revives key circular

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major relief to nearly 48,000 employees of the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC), the alliance government has decided to restore the long-pending 1/2019 circular, which had been suspended by the previous YSRCP regime.

The move follows a series of protests and representations by APSRTC staff under the leadership of the National Mazdoor Union (NMU), who demanded the revival of the circular. The directive prescribes a more employee-friendly framework for handling disciplinary matters within the organisation. According to sources, NMU leaders pointed out that APSRTC staff were being subjected to unduly harsh punishments for minor infractions. Responding to these concerns, APSRTC management, acting on government instructions, held discussions with NMU representatives and subsequently issued formal orders to re-implement the provisions of the 1/2019 circular.

The latest orders direct that all disciplinary proceedings must strictly comply with the guidelines outlined in the circular, thereby ensuring a fairer and more transparent process for employees.NMU leaders welcomed the decision and extended their gratitude to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Transport Minister Ramprasad Reddy, and the APSRTC Managing Director.

To raise awareness of the new directive, the NMU has announced that gate meetings will be conducted across all bus depots on Friday. The union also plans to thank the government formally for safeguarding employees' rights and job security through this decision.

Medico found...

Continued from Page 1

According to officials from the One Town Police Station, the incident came to light when Motilal's roommate returned to the hostel after work and found the door locked from the inside. Despite repeated knocking, there was no response. Growing concerned, the roommate broke open the door and found Motilal lying unresponsive.

Police arrived at the scene shortly after being alerted. Preliminary investigations suggest that the incident occurred while Motilal was alone in the room.

No signs of foul play have been detected so far, officials said.

Motilal's family has been informed, and the body was sent for post-mortem examination to determine the exact cause of death. A further investigation is underway.

Fresh Covid case sparks alarm in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A fresh Covid-19 case reported in the city has raised concerns among residents and prompted swift action from health authorities.

The patient, a married woman from Maddilapalem under the UPHC Pithapuram Colony limits, initially underwent tests for suspected malaria and dengue. However, a subsequent RT-PCR test at Vijaya Diagnostics confirmed a Covid-19 infection on Thursday.

Her husband and two children have also been tested, and their results are awaited. Following medical advice, the woman is expected to be discharged from hospital care this evening and placed under home isolation for one week.

In response, the State Government has ordered a door-to-door survey in the affected area. Three medical teams have been deployed to screen residents and conduct precautionary diagnostic tests in the surrounding locality.

Health officials have expressed concern, especially given the devastating toll of the pandemic during 2020–2021. Though Covid-19 cases had seen a sharp decline in Andhra Pradesh, the emergence of a new case has heightened public anxiety.

Doctors are urging the public to remain vigilant and continue following Covid-appropriate behaviour, including wearing masks, using sanitisers, and maintaining social distancing.



TTD Chairman offers *Pattu Vastrams* to Japali Hanuman

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

On the auspicious occasion of Hanuman Jayanti, TTD Chairman BR Naidu on Thursday presented Pattu Vastrams on behalf of TTD to the renowned Japali Anjaneya Swamy at Japali Theertham in Tirumala.

Upon his arrival at the temple, the Chairman was welcomed by the priests, who facilitated his darshan of Japali Hanuman.

After performing special pujas to the deity, the priests honoured the Chairman with a Sindhoora vastram and offered Theertha Prasadams.

Speaking to the media on the occasion, the TTD Board Chief said that offering Pattu Vastrams to Japali Hanuman on Hanuman Jayanti is a long-standing tradition.

He added that he prayed to Japali Hanuman to bestow His blessings on all devotees.

VGO Surendra, Health Officer Dr Madhusudan, and other officials also took part in the event.

AP strengthens...

Continued from Page 1

During the talks, the delegation outlined Andhra Pradesh's comprehensive vision to attract and support global technology leaders, positioning the state as a key player in India's ambition to become a global centre for innovation and manufacturing. The meeting emphasised shared interests in advancing smart manufacturing, semiconductor production, and supply chain integration.

"This visit marks an important step in strengthening our engagement with global industry leaders such as Foxconn. Andhra Pradesh is committed to creating an enabling environment for technology-driven growth," said Katamneni Bhaskar.

The dialogue reaffirmed the mutual commitment between Foxconn and Andhra Pradesh to collaborate on impactful projects aligned with national initiatives like Make in India and Digital India.

The meeting also highlighted the state's readiness to support global firms through streamlined approvals, world-class infrastructure, and skilled human resources.

SCR launches drive against plastic pollution

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



South Central Railway, Vijayawada Division, launched a two-week campaign on Thursday to mark World Environment Day, with a focus on ending plastic pollution.

The campaign will conclude on 5 June, World Environment Day. This year's theme is 'End Plastic Pollution'. Over the next two weeks, the division will actively conduct awareness programmes, cleanliness drives, street plays (Nukkad nataks), and tree planting activities to collectively tackle the plastic menace. On the launch day, an Environmental Awareness Pledge was administered to staff at all stations.

At the Divisional Office Compound in Vijayawada, Narendra A. Patil, Divisional Railway Manager of Vijayawada Division, South Central Railway, administered the pledge to staff and branch officers. During the pledge, staff committed to making changes in their daily lives to protect the environment and to continually encourage their family, friends, and others to adopt eco-friendly habits.

PE Edwin, ADRM Infrastructure; Srinivasa Rao Konda, ADRM Operations; M Kishore, Senior Divisional Engineer of Health & Maintenance; and other branch officers participated in the pledge. Similar pledges were taken by staff at all major stations across the division.

Final exam for constable posts on June 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh State Level Police Recruitment Board (SLPRB) Chairman Rajeev Kumar Meena on Thursday has announced that the Final Written Examination for the recruitment of SCT Police Constable (Civil) (Men & Women) and SCT Police Constable (APSP) (Men) will be conducted on June 1, 2025.

This recruitment was initially notified under Rc.No.161/SLPRB/Rect.2/2022 dated November 28, 2022. Following the successful completion of the Physical Measurements Test and Physical Efficiency Test (PMT/PET) across all 13 district headquarters from December 30, 2024 to February 1, 2025, candidates will now proceed to the final stage of the selection process.

The Final Written Exam will be held from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM on June 1 and consists of a single Objective Type paper. The exam will be conducted at designated centers in Visakhapatnam, Kakinada, Guntur, Kurnool and Tirupati.

Candidates can download their Hall Tickets from 5:00 PM on May 23, 2025, to May 31, 2025, by visiting the official website of SLPRB at https://slprb.ap.gov.in.

In case of any issues while downloading the hall ticket, candidates may contact the SLPRB helpdesk at 9441450639 or 9100203323 or send an email to mail-slprb@gov.in during office hours for assistance, according to the Chairman.

Legal Metrology Inspector caught red-handed by ACB

PNS ■ SRIKAKKULAM

Officials of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Thursday arrested T. Sridhar, Legal Metrology Inspector of Weights and Measures at Palasa in Srikakulam district, on charges of demanding and accepting a bribe from a licensed technician. According to ACB sources, the inspector was caught red-handed while receiving a bribe amount of Rs 1,78,000 from N. Satyanarayana, a licensed technician from Kasibugga in Palasa mandal. Satyanarayana, who undertakes repairs and certification of electronic weighing and measuring devices, had inspected a total of 445 such units and was required to submit the corresponding verification reports to the Legal Metrology Department.

However, Sridhar allegedly demanded a bribe of Rs 400 per unit inspected, insisting on the payment of Rs 1,78,000 before accepting the verification certificates and issuing official approvals.

Following this, Satyanarayana lodged a formal complaint at the ACB office in Srikakulam. A case was registered under Crime No. 3/RCT-SKL/2025, invoking Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018. Based on the complaint, the ACB laid a trap. As per the plan, the accused was apprehended while accepting the bribe at his office in Palasa. The arrested inspector will be produced before the ACB Special Court in Visakhapatnam on Friday, officials said.

SC reserves...

Continued from Page 1

The third issue relates to a provision that says a waqf property will not be treated as a waqf when the collector conducts an inquiry to ascertain if the property is government land.

The Centre strongly defended the Act, saying waqf by its very nature was a "secular concept" and can't be stayed given the "presumption of constitutionality" in its favour.

Moreover, though waqf was an Islamic concept, it was not an essential part of Islam, it added.

Sibal, leading the petitioners, described the law as a "complete departure from historical legal and constitutional principles" and a means to "capture waqf through a non-judicial process".

"This is a case about the systematic capture of waqf properties. The government cannot dictate what issues can be raised," he said.

On Thursday, Mehta began his submissions by urging the court not to rush into staying a duly enacted law and said, "It is not difficult to raise a proposition, and only because it can be argued does not justify staying a statute passed by a competent legislature."

Highlighting the tribal land exclusion clause under the law, he said Scheduled Tribes in scheduled areas were a constitutionally protected class, and the amendment respected that status.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:	Krishna Paksha
Tithi:	
Ekadashi:	May 23 01:12 AM to May 23 10:30 PM
Dwadashi:	May 23 10:30 PM to May 24 07:20 PM
Nakshatram:	
Uttara Bhadrapada:	May 22 05:47 PM to May 23 04:02 PM
Revati:	May 23 04:02 PM to May 24 01:48 PM
Rahukalam:	10:36 AM to 12:13 PM
Yamagandam:	3:26 PM to 5:03 PM
Varjyam:	02:55 AM to 04:22 AM
Gulika:	7:22 AM to 8:59 AM
Amritakalam:	11:35 AM to 01:04 PM
Abhijit Muhurtham:	11:47 AM to 12:38 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly Cloudy
Temp: 34°c
Humidity: 71%
Sunrise: 5:35 AM
Sunset: 6:34 PM

Updated: May 22, 2025 5:00 PM

CM begins 2-day...

Continued from Page 1

Later, at 12:00 pm, the CM will meet CR Patil, Union Minister for Jal Shakti, to address long-pending irrigation projects and water infrastructure challenges. This will be followed by a 1:00 pm discussion with Dr Jitendra Singh, Minister of Science and Technology, to strengthen cooperation in research, innovation and industrial science.

In a key financial consultation, CM Naidu will meet Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at 3:00 pm to seek support for the state's financial roadmap, including funding assistance and policy coordination for large-scale development projects.

Between 4:00 and 5:00 pm, he will participate in a review meeting chaired by the Union Home Minister focused on the implementation of new criminal laws across states, assessing Andhra Pradesh's administrative readiness and legal transition strategies.

The day will conclude with a 9:00 pm meeting with Ashwini Vaishnaw, Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, to discuss Andhra Pradesh's role in India's digital economy and plans to strengthen digital infrastructure and emerging technology industries in the state.

On Saturday, 24 May, CM Naidu will represent Andhra Pradesh at the 10th Governing Council Meeting of NITI Aayog, scheduled at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. During this high-level policy forum, he will present the state's reform-driven governance model, outline key socio-economic initiatives and seek enhanced cooperation from the Centre and other states to foster inclusive and sustainable development.

Liquor scam probe...

Continued from Page 1

"The former CM is clearly unsettled by the ongoing revelations," he remarked.

Mocking Jagan's claim that liquor companies did not make profits under his government, Yadav asked whether distilleries operated at a loss merely for public welfare. He also dismissed Jagan's assertion that his liquor policy improved public health, citing a significant rise in liver, kidney and neurological disorders from 2018 to 2024.

Yadav strongly criticised Jagan's remark describing June 4 – the day election results were announced – as "Betrayal Day", calling it undemocratic. He reminded Jagan that the electorate had delivered a decisive mandate against his administration. The Minister went on to accuse Jagan of hypocrisy, pointing out that he had earlier targeted senior police officials and former CM Chandrababu Naidu, but was now portraying himself as a victim of political vendetta.

Responding to Jagan's criticism of the state's revenue growth under the current government, Yadav said even a 3% increase was a sign of recovery from the alleged financial mismanagement during the YSRCP rule.

Concluding, Yadav stated that Jagan's emotional remarks invoking divine justice reflected his anxiety, and asserted that no individual, regardless of position, is above the law.

A diversion to shield...

'*Continued from Page 1*

"The so-called liquor scam is a fabricated ploy to protect Chandrababu, who faces serious charges backed by documentary evidence," Jagan said, accusing the government of manipulating the investigative process.

He condemned the arrests of individuals including Dhanunjay Reddy, Krishna Mohan Reddy, and Balaji Govindappa, a director at a multinational company, warning that such actions would harm the state's investment climate. Jagan dismissed statements by Vasudev Reddy and former MP Vijaysai Reddy as politically motivated, and alleged that business associate Raj Kasireddy was falsely implicated after resisting political pressure.

Referring to Chandrababu's earlier tenure, Jagan alleged that tenders for liquor outlets were skewed in favour of five distilleries that secured 69% of orders, with privilege fees waived, resulting in a loss of Rs 5 crore to the exchequer. He claimed the TDP regime allowed private syndicates to dominate the liquor business and increased commissions without cabinet approval.

"In contrast, our government ensured transparency, raised taxes to curb consumption, and cracked down on unauthorised brands," he said.

Jagan alleged that the state was facing an "undeclared emergency", with a spate of politically driven arrests, including those of senior police officials. He said data on these incidents would soon be made public. Responding to criticism over his government's fiscal management, Jagan maintained that audit reports from the CAG and other institutions proved better economic performance under his rule, with higher growth and purchasing power.

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VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025

TDP Mini-Mahanadu calls for Bharat Ratna for ex-CM NTR

• Highlights development, welfare, and legacy issues in NTR district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) held the NTR District Mini Mahanadu at the CA Convention in Guntupalli of Ibrahimpatnam mandal near Vijayawada on Thursday. Key resolutions were passed, focusing on infrastructure development, environmental protection, historical justice, and improved public services across the district.

Prominent leaders, including party district president and Krishna District Cooperative Central Bank (KDCCB) Chairman Nettem Raghuram, Vijayawada MP Kesineni Sivanath alias Chinni, MLC Alapati Rajendra Prasad, MLAs Gadde Rama Mohan, Vasantha Venkata Krishna Prasad, Sriram Rajagopal (Tataiah), politburo member Varla Ramaiah, and others were present.

The leaders discussed organisational matters, reviewed recent developments, and emphasised the need to reconnect with the public, particularly in the wake of the party's re-emergence as a major force in the State. The mini Mahanadu also served as a platform to reaffirm the TDP's commitment to development and good governance, with leaders urging workers to gear up for future electoral battles with unity and determination.

The programme resolved to strongly urge the Central government to posthumously award Bharat Ratna to late Chief Minister and TDP founder Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, recognising his monumental contributions to politics, cinema, and the uplift of Telugu identity in the country. Nettem Raghuram released the resolutions.



TDP NTR district president Nettem Raghuram releasing a poster demanding Bharat Ratna for former Chief Minister and TDP founder Dr Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, during the mini Mahanadu held at CA Convention at Guntupalli on Thursday

Also, a resolution was passed seeking the modernisation and restoration of the Budameru rivulet, to prevent seasonal flooding and improve urban drainage in Vijayawada. The government was urged to complete the Chintalapudi Lift Irrigation Project without further delay, which is critical to addressing the irrigation needs of farmers.

Demand to develop industrial corridor in G Kondur

Meanwhile, the party demanded the development of an industrial corridor in G Konduru mandal (Mylavaram constituency) and called for strict measures to curb pollution from ash emissions of Dr NTRPS in Ibrahimpatnam. Additionally, resolutions emphasised the importance of rewarding loyal TDP workers from the seven constituencies in the district with appropriate nominated posts at the district/State level.

Furthermore, the mini Mahanadu resolved the establishment of three pumping stations along the River Krishna retaining wall to handle floodwater.

Land regularisation for residents in hilly areas, endowment lands, irrigation lands, and archaeological zones was demanded through clarity from the Revenue Department.

The mini Mahanadu also asked for the replacement of outdated underground drainage systems in Vijayawada.

The programme made resolutions for several road works to be undertaken from Autonagar Terminal to Eluru Road (Ramavarappadu), Jawahar Autonagar to Kannur Autonagar, and Mahanadu Road to Kankipadu.

Build second flyover at Ajith Singh Nagar

The TDP criticised the YSRCP government's rebranding and delay tactics on the Muktyala Lift Scheme and demanded its immediate completion for the benefit of farmers. The Mahanadu asked for the construction of a second flyover at Ajith Singh Nagar to ease traffic congestion from Payakapuram-Singh Nagar. It also sought immediate initiation of two halted flyovers, Gunadala to Ulavacharu Company and Gunadala to Don Bosco School.

Also, the TDP event demanded initiation of the flyover construction from Maduranagar Mill to Vambe Colony. In addition, the meeting passed other resolutions that to register long-standing houses under GO 30, establish an Urdu medium school for the linguistic minority population, safe drinking water, and healthcare facilities in Thiruvur constituency.

The meeting asked for the immediate implementation of the Rs. 126-crore Krishna water supply project for safe drinking water.

Also, several key resolutions were addressed to address fluoride-related health crises in A. Kondur mandal by ensuring Krishna water access, establishing a permanent dialysis centre and PHCs in all major panchayats with essential medicine supplies.

Later, the meeting focused on the completion of the Vinagadapa-Kattaleru Bridge, which will improve road connectivity between NTR and Khammam districts. Additionally, the mini Mahanadu passed several resolutions for the development of all seven Assembly constituencies in NTR district.



Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashowry addressing the Achievers Day celebrations held at Krishna University Arts and Science College on Thursday

Job is not the ultimate goal: Masula MP Balashowry

Appointment letters distributed to 238 graduates on Achievers Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna University Arts and Science College grandly held its Achievers Day celebration at the Rabindranath Tagore Seminar Hall located on the campus in Machilipatnam on Thursday. The event marked a significant milestone in the success of students, as job appointment letters were distributed to 238 graduates. The parents of the employed students were honoured on stage and they received job appointment letters on behalf of their children.

Machilipatnam MP Vallabhaneni Balashowry and Krishna District Superintendent of Police (SP) R Gangadhara Rao were the chief guests on the occasion. Before the commencement of the programme, tributes were paid to Dr BR Ambedkar, with Balashowry and Gangadhar Rao placing garlands on his statue.

In his address, the MP highlighted that securing a job is not the ultimate goal for students. It's rather a stepping stone towards greater accomplishments. He encouraged the students to aspire beyond conventional career paths by citing examples such as Phanindra Sharma, the founder of Red Bus, and Dr. Anji Reddy, the founder of Reddy Labs.

"Phanindra Sharma launched Red Bus with an investment of Rs 5 lakh and later sold it for Rs 800 crore. Anji Reddy transitioned from a modest position at IDPL to establish a pharmaceutical empire.

Let their journeys motivate you to achieve extraordinary success," Balashowry remarked, emphasising that success requires dedication and discipline.

Besides, MP Balashowry announced that proposals have been forwarded to the Central government for the development of an athletic track, indoor stadium, swimming pool, and tennis court at Krishna University, noting the commitment of both State and Central governments to enhance sports and games alongside education.

Meanwhile, SP Gangadhar Rao shared his personal story of rising from humble beginnings to becoming a leading police official, underscoring the impact of education. He also cautioned students against engaging in gambling and other distractions.

Krishna University Vice Chancellor Prof K Ramji praised the students for securing job offers with salary packages ranging from Rs.2.5 to Rs.4 lakh per annum. He encouraged them to continually improve their personal and professional skills.

The event was presided over by Registrar Prof N Usha. Krishna District Cooperative Marketing Society (DCMS) Chairman Bandi Ramakrishna, Placement Cell Director Prof YK Sundara Krishna, Coordinator Dr Kishore, faculty, students, and proud parents were present.

Development, welfare will go hand in hand: Minister Anitha

TDP's Mini-Mahanadu held in Anakapalli

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

Reaffirming the coalition government's commitment to inclusive growth, Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha, on Wednesday, declared that development and welfare will go hand in hand under the new regime. She was addressing a massive crowd during the Telugu Desam Party's (TDP) mini-Mahanadu held in Anakapalli district. "The people have reposed great faith in our leadership. I thank them wholeheartedly," Anitha said, lauding the voters of Payakaraopeta constituency for giving her a resounding mandate.

The day-long convention drew an impressive turnout of nearly 10,000 party leaders, grassroots workers, and supporters. Anakapalli district in-charge Minister Kollu Ravindra, local MLAs, and senior TDP functionaries were present. The programme commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, unfurling of the party flag, and tributes to party founder and former Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao.



In a scathing critique of the previous YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government, Anitha alleged that TDP cadres were systematically targeted with fabricated cases and political vendetta. "There was zero development in Payakarao peta for five years. But today, under the coalition leadership, progress is tangible and unstoppable," she asserted.

Unveiling the government's forward-looking agenda, she announced that a bulk drug park and a steel plant were in the pipeline, expected to generate thousands of jobs and fuel the economic revival of the region. She described Payakaraopeta as a fortress of the TDP and reiterated her commitment to recognising and uplifting the party's grassroots workforce.

Commending Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Anitha said, "Every leader has something to learn from him — his vision, resilience, and governance are unmatched." Taking aim at YSRCP chief Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, she remarked, "If Jagan returns, it will only plunge the State into confusion. The public's recent mandate is a loud and clear message."

The event concluded with the felicitation of TDP leaders and booth-level workers from Payakaraopeta constituency for their exceptional dedication and service.

Global cybercrime racket busted in Anakapalli; 33 arrested

PNS ■ ANAKAPALLI

The Anakapalli District Police have dismantled an international cybercrime syndicate operating from Atchutapuram, arresting 33 individuals involved in defrauding American citizens through elaborate impersonation scams. Addressing the media on Thursday, District Superintendent of Police (SP) Tuhin Sinha said the racket was unearthed following a tip-off from a vigilant Village Revenue Officer (VRO). "This operation marks one of the largest crackdowns on international cyber fraud in the region," he said.

The syndicate had set up a multi-layered operation that impersonated Amazon customer support agents. Using spoofed VoIP calls, the gang targeted unsuspecting victims in the United States. The operation followed a structured hierarchy — "Dialers" contacted victims under the guise of Amazon's fraud alert division; "Bankers" posed as officials from US-based banks or the Federal Trade Commission; and "Closers" manipulated victims into purchasing and sharing gift card codes.

"These codes were subsequently laundered through cryptocurrency exchanges and dark web networks," the SP said. An HR and administrative team managed recruitment and training, drawing manpower largely from Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Gujarat.



The police revealed that the syndicate paid Dialers Rs 20,000, Bankers Rs 35,000 to Rs 40,000, Closers Rs 50,000, and Managers as much as Rs 75,000 per month. The two prime accused—Puneet Goswami of Maharashtra and Avihant Daga of Rajasthan—are now in custody.

Raids conducted at three different locations led to the seizure of computers, digital infrastructure, Rs 3 lakh in cash, vehicles, and other incriminating material. Several premises used as residences and training centres for the fraudulent operations have also been secured.

SP Sinha detailed the technical methods employed by the syndicate, including VoIP masking, identity theft, and the use of international laundering channels to obfuscate money trails. Cases have been registered under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Information Technology Act, and the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for electronic cheating, identity theft, impersonation, criminal conspiracy, and organized fraud.

Provide quality services in Anna Canteens: VMC chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) Commissioner HM Dhyanachandra has directed officials to ensure that no inconvenience is caused to the public at Anna Canteens, emphasising the importance of quality service and timely maintenance.

The Commissioner made a surprise inspection of the Anna Canteen located at Gandhiji Mahila Kalasala at One Town in the city on Thursday. He interacted directly with beneficiaries to assess the quality of food and facilities.

He instructed municipal officials to closely monitor food quality, token distribution, and overall canteen management on a regular basis. He also stressed that nodal officers must inspect their respective Anna Canteens daily and attend to any repairs or service issues immediately.

"There should be no problems in any of the Anna Canteens under VMC's jurisdiction. Officials must be proactive in identifying and resolving issues," the Commissioner said.

Also, he said that the VMC is committed to maintaining the welfare-oriented Anna Canteen scheme in the city. The VMC will provide affordable and hygienic meals to the public, especially the underprivileged, he added.

Closure of RGUKT Ongole campus sparks student protests

AISF slams NDA government for neglecting education

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The All India Student Federation (AISF) has come down heavily on the TDP-led NDA government for what it calls a "complete failure" to safeguard students' future, following the sudden closure of the Rajiv Gandhi University of Knowledge Technologies (RGUKT) Ongole campus due to non-payment of rent.



AISF State vice-president M Sai Kumar released a press statement on Thursday condemning the government's eight-month delay in paying rent for the Rao and Naidu Engineering College campus, which has been hosting RGUKT's IIIT classes since October 2019.

He said that the government had been disbursing Rs.15 lakh monthly to the college for the utilisation of its 1.65 lakh square feet of facilities. However, after several months of payment cessation and the accumulation of property tax liabilities amounting to Rs.4 crore, the college administration issued eviction notices to RGUKT. This has caused concern among the 1,300 students presently enrolled at the institution, he said.

"This is an inexcusable failure by the coalition government. It has pushed students and their families into deep uncertainty," said Sai Kumar. "Instead of resolving the crisis, the government has issued orders to discontinue the existing campus and shift students to other locations."

As per the information obtained by the AISF, it has been indicated that second-year students will be relocated to the SS campus, while new enrolments for the upcoming academic year are being redirected to the Idupulapaya and Nuzvid IIIT campuses, he said.

Sai Kumar has urged the immediate settlement of outstanding rent dues and emphasised the necessity for classes to proceed at the current campus to prevent further disruptions.

He cautioned that should the government fail to take action, the AISF will commence extensive protests advocating for the students' right to uninterrupted education. He said that this situation has raised significant concerns among students, parents, as well as educators.

State govt orders probe into GVMC, Tourism Dept projects

Probe into allegations of fund misuse in Smart City and other civic works

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The State government has ordered a comprehensive investigation into several high-value projects under the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) and the Tourism Department, following serious allegations of financial irregularities and misappropriation of public funds.

The probe was initiated by Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu after a formal complaint from Jana Sena Corporator Peethala Murthy Yadav, who accused officials of large-scale corruption involving projects worth several crores. The complaint has been forwarded to both the State and Central Vigilance Commissions for further scrutiny.

Projects under investigation include the controversial hill paintings along Beach Road, Smart City Mission initiatives, and major tourism infrastructure works such as renovations at Yatri Niwas, developments at Ananthagiri and Araku, and revised estimates for Rushikonda beach. The urgency of the inquiry heightened following the collapse of a retaining wall at Simhachalam, linked to a tourism project, which resulted in seven deaths.

Officials have been tasked with identifying procedural



lapses, assessing work quality, and submitting detailed reports. A senior official from the Chief Minister's Office reiterated the government's commitment to financial accountability, stating, "Every rupee spent from the public exchequer must be properly accounted for."

Preliminary findings by Vigilance teams have raised concerns over inflated bills, substandard materials, and poor project monitoring. Public criticism has mounted over several completed works, including a Rs 3-crore football field with cracked tiles, fading rock art at Tenneti Park, and ornamental solar trees with limited functionality. Allegations also include misappropriation of materials in beautification schemes.

Further scrutiny is focused on projects worth Rs 115 crore executed under GVMC's 'G-2' preparatory phase, with reports of improper tendering and quality lapses.

Vigilance teams are currently examining documents and financial records, with a consolidated report on project progress and fund utilisation expected soon. The investigation aims to ensure transparency and restore public trust in civic governance.

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'Ration will be door-delivered to elderly, differently-abled'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



"Issuing new ration cards is a continuous process. There is no last date. Eligible individuals will receive a ration card within 21 days, free of cost." So far, e-KYC has been completed for 2,24,59,029 cardholders, while 22,59,498 are yet to complete the process.

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendla Manohar has announced that ration commodities will be delivered directly to the homes of elderly and differently-abled beneficiaries.

The Minister held a meeting with representatives of the ration shop dealers' association on Thursday. He instructed the dealers to ensure ration commodities are delivered at the doorsteps of the elderly and differently-abled individuals by the 5th of every month.

He pointed out that under the previous regime, rations were only delivered up to the end of the street, not to the beneficiaries' homes. The present government has decided to dispense with Mobile Dispensing Units (MDUs) to curb the rice mafia, he said.

From June 1, subsidised commodities will be distributed at ration shops in a festive atmosphere, he added. Manohar also directed all ration shops to install CCTV cameras. There are over 30,000 ration shops across the State providing subsidised goods to cardholders, he noted.

Emphasising the role of technology, the Minister said ration dealers must ensure hassle-free distribution without forcing people to wait in long queues.

He suggested that WhatsApp groups be created—one exclusively for elderly, disabled, and bedridden beneficiaries, and another for the remaining cardholders—to ensure better communication and smooth distribution.

Strict action will be taken against any dealer who causes inconvenience to beneficiaries, he warned.

Addressing a press conference later at the Civil Supplies office, the Minister clarified that there is no deadline for applying for new ration cards or making changes to existing ones.

"Issuing new ration cards is a continuous process. There is no last date. Eligible individuals will receive a ration card within 21 days, free of cost," he said. So far, e-KYC has been completed for 2,24,59,029 cardholders, while 22,59,498 are yet to complete the process.

He further informed that over 60,000 applications for new ration cards have been received, and more than 12,500 requests have been made for address changes. The ration card dates have now been synchronised with the village and ward secretariats following the formation of the coalition government.

Injustice to TDP leaders in nominated posts, says Jaggampeta MLA Jyotula

PNS ■ KAKINADA



TDP Jaggampeta MLA Jyothula Nehru has expressed anguish over the alleged injustice to party workers in allocating nominated posts among alliance partners. Speaking emotionally at the Kakinada District Mahanadu held at Godavari Kalakshetram on Thursday, he stated that two key nominated posts were given to a single individual from one of the alliance parties.

Though Nehru refrained from naming anyone directly, he appeared to refer to Tummala Ramaswamy (Babu) of Jana Sena, who was recently appointed Chairman of KUDA and also of the DCCB. Nehru stressed that TDP workers, who have toiled for the party, deserve recognition and appointments to sustain themselves.

He recalled that the district once had 21 MLAs, with leaders like Yanamala Ramakrishnudu coordinating developmental efforts. At present, with only seven MLAs, there is a lack of coordination, he said. Nehru also highlighted that the Kakinada SEZ was established nearly 30 years ago, yet not a single industry has been set up. He urged the party leadership to address this seriously in light of the growing unemployment, particularly at the forthcoming State Mahanadu.

District In-charge Minister Ponguru Narayana, who was the chief guest, held YSRCP chief Jagan Mohan Reddy responsible for the state's deteriorating economy. He alleged that misgovernance by the YSRCP had pushed the state into debts totalling Rs 10 lakh crore. Despite the financial crisis, he said, the government was committed to welfare schemes and would begin implementing Thalliki Vandanam and Annadatha Sukhibhava from next month.

The Mahanadu commenced with floral tributes to the statue of party founder, the late N.T. Rama Rao. TDP District President Jyothula Naveen Kumar presided over the meeting. Among those present were MLAs Jyothula Nehru, Varupula Satyaprabha, Kondababu, Nimmakayala Chinarajappa; Rajya Sabha MP Sana Sathish Babu; MLC Perabathula Rajasekhar; former Minister Chikkala Ramachandra Rao; former MLA SVSN Varma; Pilli Anantha Lakshmi, Pilli Sathibabu and several others.

A resolution was passed unanimously at the district Mahanadu, demanding elections to six suburban panchayats — Ramanaiahpeta, Vakalapudi, Valasapakala, Indrapalem, Toorangi, and Cheediga — which were proposed to be merged with Kakinada Municipal Corporation. Elections to these panchayats have been kept pending for the past 13 years under the pretext of the merger. As a result, the 15th Finance Commission funds due to these panchayats have not been released, the resolution noted.

Three notorious burglars held; booty worth Rs 1 cr recovered

PNS ■ RAYACHOTI



Police have arrested three notorious burglars at Otukuru village in Rajampet mandal of Annamayya district and recovered stolen property worth over Rs 1 crore, including gold and silver ornaments, cash, and vehicles.

Addressing the media on Thursday, Annamayya district Superintendent of Police V. Vidyasagar said the accused were found in possession of nearly 1 kg of gold jewellery, 3 kg of silver ornaments, Rs 1.45 lakh in cash, two motorcycles and an autorickshaw.

The arrested have been identified as Thota Shiva Kumar (A1), Jetti Subramanyam (A2), and Surepalli Venkatesh (A3), all with criminal backgrounds. A1 and A2 became acquainted while serving time in Guntur prison. After their release, they teamed up with A3 and began a series of burglaries, renting a house in Rajampet to facilitate their operations.

The trio is said to have committed 17 burglaries across several locations including Nakkapalli, Bommuru, Thiruchanur, Pileru, Rayachoti, Rajampet, Obulavaripalli and Mannuru. Multiple cases have been registered against them at various police stations. A1 Thota Shiva Kumar alone has been involved in over 150 offences and has faced multiple convictions. The gang's modus operandi involved identifying locked houses during the day and breaking in at night. SP Vidyasagar commended ASP Manoj Ramanth Hegde, Mannuru Inspector S. Kullayappa, and CCS Inspector M. Chandrasekhar for their efforts in apprehending the accused.



Poster released to make public aware of pre-eclampsia

PNS ■ ELURU

District Collector K. Vetri Selvi unveiled a poster to raise awareness about pre-eclampsia on Thursday at the Collectorate, marking the occasion of World Preeclampsia Day.

Speaking at the event, the Collector highlighted the dangers of pre-eclampsia for both mother and child, noting it can result in maternal and infant fatalities. She urged the public to be informed about the condition and emphasised the importance of taking timely preventive measures. She also stressed that any woman experiencing high blood pressure before or during pregnancy must seek immediate medical advice. Collector VetriSelvi instructed health officials to actively educate the public about early detection through regular blood pressure monitoring and urine tests.

She listed the symptoms of pre-eclampsia as severe headaches, difficulty breathing, abdominal pain, swelling of the head, hands or feet, excessive urination, and changes in eyesight.

The event was attended by DCHS Dr Paul Satish Kumar, DMHO Dr R. Malini, N.T.R. Arogyasri District Coordinator Dr Rajiv, DIO Dr Nageswara Rao, and ICDS Project Director P. Saradha.

Eluru Collector inspects EVM godown

PNS ■ ELURU



District Collector K Vetri Selvi on Thursday inspected the godown housing the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), located on the Collectorate premises.

During the visit, she reviewed the security arrangements in place and checked the CCTV surveillance system at the godown. She also signed the inspection register as part of the formal procedure.

The inspection was carried out in line with the guidelines of the Central Election Commission.

The Collector examined the security seals affixed to the storage units, the functioning of CCTV cameras, and the availability of firefighting equipment.

Speaking on the occasion, Collector VetriSelvi said that stringent security measures had been implemented at the EVM godown under the directions of the Election Commission of India. She added that the godown is subject to regular inspections, and reports are being submitted to the Election Commission.

She also stated that police personnel deployed at the site remain vigilant at all times.

District Revenue Officer V Visveswara Rao and other officials from the Election Department accompanied the Collector during the inspection.



In 15 days, Army wiped out terrorists

Bandi at Hindu Ekta Yatra despite torrential downpour

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home, Bandi Sanjay, challenged Mallikarjun Kharge, the AICC President, saying he is attempting to undermine the Indian Army's efforts by labeling the conflict with Pakistan as a "small war." "When Al-Qaeda attacked the Twin Towers in America and killed 6,000 people, even a superpower like the U.S. couldn't act for 10 years. Only after 10 years did they catch and kill Osama Bin Laden. But in just 15 days after the Pahalgam incident, the army that wiped out the terrorists—that is my Indian Army. Our Prime Minister is Modi… now tell me, who is greater?" He further challenged: "Is it a small war to go deep into Pakistan and destroy 9 terrorist camps? Is it a small war to destroy 11 military bases of the Pakistan Army? Is it a small war to destroy 20% of Pakistan's military infrastructure? Is it a small war if Pakistan gets scared by our army's blows and comes begging for a ceasefire? Let Kharge answer—what is a small war?"

He criticized Rahul Gandhi for making light of the Rafale jets and the Indian Army's efforts. That's why, he said, Rahul Gandhi has more fans in Pakistan than in India. He added that the fact that Rahul Gandhi is trending on Pakistani social media is proof of this.

Hats off to all of you who came here despite this heavy rainfall. Looking at your enthusiasm, rage, and energy, I feel overwhelmed with happiness. My blood is boiling… I will work with double the enthusiasm.

When I started the Ekta Yatra in Karimnagar, people ridiculed me and called me a Hindu lunatic. On the very day of the Ekta Yatra, rival rallies were organized to sabotage it. Today, Bandi Sanjay is very fortunate. Seeing this crowd, I feel like fighting till the very end.

During a previous Hindu Ekta Yatra, I had a heart attack. Before completely losing consciousness, I prayed to the Goddess to give me life again. Because I had vowed that from then on, I would live only for Hindutva and Sanatan Dharma. The Goddess showed mercy and gave me a rebirth.That is why my bonus life is entirely dedicated to the saffron flag and Sanatan Dharma.That is why I went to the Old City and held a rally to show the strength of the saffron flag.

Yogandhra-2025 to be organised in Central Prison on May 29

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY



District Collector P. Prasanthi announced that the Yogandhra-2025 programme will be organised at the Central Prison in Rajahmundry on May 29 as part of a series of yoga events being conducted across the district.

The Collector convened a meeting with officials from various departments on Thursday to review the arrangements for the Yogandhra-2025 programmes.

Speaking to the media, she said the yoga session at the Central Jail would be held for inmates as part of the statewide initiative. She further stated that yoga programmes would also be held at Kadiyam, Gopada Kshetram, and various ghats to promote tourism in the district. Collector Prasanthi emphasised that yoga contributes not only to physical and mental well-being but also instils discipline in life. She urged everyone to make yoga a part of their daily routine.

To raise awareness about the benefits of yoga, the Collector directed departments to take turns in conducting yoga sessions, with one department holding an event each day for a month.

She detailed the schedule of upcoming sessions: with the Yoga Association on May 27, Anganwadi and health workers on May 28, medical officers and doctors on May 30, ex-servicemen on May 31, families on June 1, auto and lorry associations on June 2, fishermen on June 3, tribal communities on June 4, ASHA workers and ANMs on June 5, teachers on June 6, residential associations on June 7, senior citizens on June 8, and engineering students on June 9. The Collector also noted that over two crore people are expected to participate in yoga activities across the state on International Yoga Day, June 21. She instructed officials to ensure participants register on the official yoga website.

Joint Collector S. Chinna Ramudu, Prisons SP Rahul, and DRO Sitaramamurthy were present at the meeting.

Nimmala lays stone for Rs 64L works

PNS ■ PALAKOLLU



State Minister for Water Resources, Dr Nimmala Ramanaidu, laid the foundation stone for development works worth Rs 64 lakh in Palakollu on Wednesday, and came down heavily on YSRCP leaders, asserting they had "no moral right to speak" after failing to deliver on development during their five-year rule.

The works inaugurated include excavation of Old No. 3 Channel near the Sub-Registrar's office at a cost of Rs 9.99 lakh, excavation of Pulapalli Channel in Nagarajupeta (Rs 4 lakh), construction of a gravel road along Rapaka Channel in Tillapudi (Rs 16 lakh), and a CC retaining wall along the same channel (Rs 38 lakh).

Addressing the gathering, Dr Ramanaidu said YSRCP leaders had woken from a five-year political slumber only to don white shirts and hold microphones now. He questioned their concern for farmers and development, alleging that the previous government had neglected crucial irrigation projects.

The Minister noted that in just ten months of the TDP-led coalition taking charge, irrigation works worth Rs 70 crore had been launched. He particularly criticised the YSRCP for abandoning the Damayiparthi drain project after completing just 15% during the previous TDP term. He said the project is now being revived with Rs 14 crore in funding.

Ramanaidu also outlined the ongoing works including gravel roads, canal excavations, construction of concrete retaining walls, and repairs to shutters and locks along various irrigation canals. Farmers and locals gave him a warm welcome during the visit.

Prominent local leaders including Kodi Vijayabhaskar, Dindu Lakshman, and Ambati Seshagiri were present at the programme.

CM Naidu thanks Siddaramaiah for kumki elephants

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday thanked his Karnataka counterpart Siddaramaiah and others for sending kumki elephants (trained elephants) to the state to tackle rogue wild elephants destroying crops and attacking people.

On Wednesday, Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan personally received four kumki elephants in Bengaluru.

"Heartfelt thanks to Chief Minister of Karnataka Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar and Forest & Environment Minister Eshwar Khandre for their generous support in sending kumki elephants to Andhra Pradesh," said Naidu in a post on X. These magnificent tuskers will play a vital role in protecting our farmers and their crops from wild animal attacks, he said.



Several tourism projects coming up in AP: Ajay Jain

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

State Tourism Special Chief Secretary Ajay Jain has announced that numerous major tourism projects are underway in Andhra Pradesh, with the aim of positioning the state as a leader in the tourism sector within five years.

Speaking at a press conference at Kopalle in Kalla Mandal near Bhimavaram on Thursday, Ajay Jain said the Andhra Pradesh government has decided to grant industrial status to the tourism sector. Several projects will be developed to make Andhra Pradesh the top state in tourism in the country.

"Under the new State Tourism Development policy, projects are being developed through public-private partnerships. These include a floating restaurant on the Krishna River, a berm park in Vijayawada, and single-bedroom luxury houseboats in the Konaseema backwaters. A wire bridge connecting Polavaram and Pattiseema will also be constructed. Land will be allotted on a bidding basis to companies (MSMEs) investing less than Rs 50 crore," he revealed.

He added that currently 1,842 homestay units operate successfully across the state, with 561 of these in Tirupati alone. The policy aims to highlight the importance of rural areas as tourist attractions, emphasising agricultural fields, village culture, and handicrafts.

Ajay Jain pointed out that the Mantena Heritage Homestay in Kopalle, West Godavari district, has become a prime example of this approach, attracting tourists with its unique atmosphere.

Andhra Pradesh is the 12th state in India to grant industrial status to the tourism sector. The government plans to encourage tourism-related industries and strengthen support systems. A new policy has been formulated to enable comprehensive development across tourism sub-sectors, he said.

Following the announcement of the new tourism policy, leading hospitality companies are showing interest in establishing operations in the state. So far, 27 prominent hotels have begun operations, creating nearly 18,000 jobs, Ajay Jain added. Joint Collector T Rahul Kumar Reddy, RDO K Praveen Kumar Reddy, Assistant Director of Tourism A Laj Vanthinayudu, Manager A Rajyalakshmi, District Tourism Officer A V Appa Rao, and DWMA PD Dr K C H Appa Rao were present at the event.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025

ACROSS THE STATES



IAF personnel tries to get off moving train in Bihar, dies

A 27-year-old Indian Air Force personnel on Thursday died while trying to get off a moving train in Bihar's Khagaria district, police said. According to Khagaria GRP police station SHO Dhananjay Kumar, deceased Kunal Kumar was a resident of Khataha Nagar Parishad area in the district. "He was posted at Bagdogra. After the military conflict with Pakistan ended, he had sought leave to be with his family. He got married seven months ago," the SHO said. The IAF personnel boarded the Guwahati-Jammu Tawi Express to reach home, and he tried to get off at Gauchhari, the station closest to his home, where the train had slowed down, though it did not have a stoppage there, the police officer said. He died on the spot, said the SHO, adding that the body has been sent for post-mortem and family members have been informed.



Mob kills Royal Bengal tiger in Assam

A Royal Bengal tiger was killed by a mob, who also took away some of the body parts of the animal, in Golaghat district of Assam on Thursday, officials said. The incident took place at Dumukhia village in Khumtai area where the villagers killed the adult male tiger, who had attacked a few people in the last couple of days, a forest department official said. "The people considered the tiger to be a man-eater and so killed it. We retrieved the carcass and found that some body parts like a portion of skin, one leg and some meat are missing," he added. As per reports, the villagers surrounded the tiger from different sides and then chased it before killing it. They used local weapons like machetes, sticks and rods to attack the tiger. "On receiving information about the attack, a team of forest and police officials rushed to the spot. But the big cat had already been killed," the official said. Seeing the security personnel, all the villagers fled from the scene, he added.



Myanmar national held for entering India illegally

A 37-year-old auto-rickshaw driver, suspected to be a Myanmar national, was arrested in the Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh for allegedly entering India illegally and residing here for nearly a decade, police said on Thursday. Accused Mohammad Sahil was apprehended on Wednesday during a routine vehicle check at Bada Chauraha, Assistant Commissioner of Police (Kotwali), Ashutosh Kumar said. Sahil was stopped by the police for verification of his driving licence and vehicle-related documents. His inability to speak Hindi during questioning aroused suspicion, following which he was taken to the police station for further inquiry, Kumar said. On being asked to furnish identity and domicile proof, Sahil produced an Aadhaar card issued from Shuklaganj in Unnao, where he claimed to have been residing for the last eight years. However, during intensive interrogation, he broke down and allegedly confessed to having entered India illegally via Bangladesh around 10 years ago, the police said. Sahil told the police that he first went to a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, by boat and stayed there for over three years before crossing into India with the help of touts, whom he allegedly paid Rs 1,200.

'SINDOOR' RUNS IN MY VEINS

Playing with blood of Indians will cost Pak dearly: PM

PNS ■ BIKANER (RAJ)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that the country's enemies have learnt what happens when 'sindoor' becomes gunpowder, and lauded India's armed forces for creating such a trap that Pakistan was forced to go down on its knees.

In his first public address in Rajasthan after Operation Sindoor that was launched in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, the prime minister slammed Pakistan, and said in response to the attack on April 22, "we destroyed nine biggest terror hideouts in 22 minutes".

"The world and the enemies of the country have seen what happens when 'sindoor' turns into 'barood' (gunpowder)," he said at the public meeting in Palana in Bikaner, which shares border with Pakistan.

"Ab toh Modi ki naso mein lahu nahi garam sindoor beh raha hai (Not blood but sindoor runs in Modi's veins)," he said, adding, Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for every terrorist attack. He said India's response to the terror attack was not a game of vengeance but a "new form of justice" and there will be no trade or talk with Pakistan, there will be talk only about Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In a stern message to Pakistan, he said India is not going to be scared by nuclear threats and if there is a terrorist attack on the country then it will give a befitting reply.

"If there is a terrorist attack on India, it will get a befitting reply. The time and methods will also be decided by our army and the conditions will also be ours. India is not going to be scared by the threat of atom bomb. Thirdly, we will not see the perpetrators of terror and the government patronising the terrorists separately. We will consider them as one," he said, adding these are three "sutras" from Operation Sindoor.

He said the game of Pakistan of state and non-state actors will not work anymore.

Lauding the armed forces for carrying out Operation Sindoor, he said "Our government gave free hand to all three armed forces. Together they created such a trap that Pakistan was forced to go down on its knees".

Noting that Pakistan had tried to target the Nal air base in Bikaner but could not cause any damage to it, he said in contrast "No one knows when Pakistan's Rahimyar Khan air base will open again.



"Ab toh Modi ki naso mein lahu nahi garam sindoor beh raha hai (Not blood but sindoor runs in Modi's veins)," he said, adding, Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for every terrorist attack. He said India's response to the terror attack was not a game of vengeance but a "new form of justice" and there will be no trade or talk with Pakistan, there will be talk only about Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.



Japan expresses solidarity with India in fight against terrorism

PNS ■ TOKYO

Japan on Thursday said terrorism cannot be justified in any form and expressed solidarity with India and with the world in the fight against terrorism.

Japan's Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya was speaking with an Indian Parliamentary delegation when its leader JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha requested Tokyo's support in the fight against terrorism.

The delegation that Jha led is one of the seven multi-party delegations to 33 global capitals to reach out to the international community on Pakistan's designs and India's response to terror, especially in view of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people. Takeshi Iwaya expressed heartfelt condolences to the victims of Pahalgam Terror attack and extended his sympathies to those injured in the attack.

"He emphasised that terrorism cannot be justified in any form and expressed solidarity of Japan with India and with the world in the fight against terrorism," said a statement from the Embassy of India here.Jha conveyed that the terrorist attack in Pahalgam was a nefarious attempt to disturb development and peace in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it added.

Through Operation Sindoor, India responded to the attack in a precise, targeted, proportionate and non-escalatory manner, Jha said and added that India has zero tolerance for terrorism and that it does not differentiate between terrorists and those supporting them.

Jha requested Japan's support in the fight against terrorism and, in this context, called for giving effect to the UN Security Council Press Statement of April 25, 2025 that underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organisers, financiers and sponsors of this reprehensible act of terrorism accountable and to bring them to justice, the statement said.



Akhilesh predicts BJP rout in 2027 UP polls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday called a recent advertisement to recruit 1.93 lakh teachers in Uttar Pradesh a political 'jumla' (gimmick) that will result in a massive electoral setback for the ruling BJP in the 2027 Assembly elections.

In a detailed post on X, Yadav presented a "mathematics of political backlash" that will stem from the "disappointment" of lakhs of job aspirants and their families.

"If we assume at least 75 aspirants per post, it will amount to around 1.45 crore affected candidates. If we include just two family members per candidate, the number of affected voters translates to more than 4.34 crore," the former chief minister said.

Dividing this number across the 403 Assembly constituencies in Uttar Pradesh will translate to nearly 1.08 lakh voters per seat, he said.

"Even if half of these numbers are BJP voters, the party would still lose about 54,000 votes per seat. In such a scenario, the BJP would be reduced to double digits in the Assembly in 2027," Yadav said.

Border talks with India and Bhutan advancing

China's white paper on security

PNS ■ BEIJING

Talks to resolve border issue with India and Bhutan "continue to advance", a new white paper on China's national security has said, identifying a host of internal and external threats faced by the country and its one-party political system.

The 23-page security paper released recently in Mandarin has outlined a host of threats and challenges faced by China.

China has settled boundary issues with 12 of its 14 land neighbours and the negotiations with India and Bhutan continue to advance to resolve the border disputes, said the white paper titled 'China's National Security in the New Era'.

Beijing has completed the demarcation of the Beibu Gulf waters between China and Vietnam, signed border defence cooperation agreements with nine neighbouring countries, established border defence talks and meetings mechanisms with 12 countries, and regularly carried out friendly visits, working talks, joint patrols, and joint cross-border crime drills, the paper said.

While China's border disputes with India and Bhutan remain to be resolved, the country has a maritime dispute with several countries, including Japan in the East China Sea, and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan in the South China Sea. India and China have held 23 rounds of Special Representatives-level talks to resolve the border disputes spanning 3,488 km along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

AI startup ecosystem driving change in India: Envoy

PNS ■ BEIJING

India's vibrant AI startup ecosystem is driving change and creating opportunities and revolutionising diverse sectors such as urban renewal, healthcare, clean energy and agriculture, India's Consulate General in Shanghai Pratik Mathur has said.

Over 4,000 AI startups are transforming diverse sectors in India which is currently the world's fastest growing economy, Mathur said on Wednesday, speaking at the annual technology symposium of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai, one of the largest and oldest business chambers in the region. "India's vision is bold. A USD three billion investment in AI infrastructure, the National Quantum Mission, and 25 AI Centres of Excellence are propelling advancements in agriculture, cleantech, spacetech, and beyond, he said according to a press release from the Consulate.

BJP highlights economic strength, Ujjwala Yojana

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The BJP on Thursday cited a host of developments to project buoyancy in the Indian economy and the positive impacts of the Modi government's welfare measures.

Its national spokesperson Tuhin Sinha noted that the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, a scheme providing LPG connections to poor households that completed its ninth anniversary on May 1, has provided 10.33 crore connections so far, with nearly nine crore beneficiaries turning out to be sustained users of the programme. This negates the opposition's claim that many beneficiaries did not opt for refills after utilising the initial free gas cylinders , Sinha told reporters.

The scheme has led to an expansion in the LPG network with 7,959 more distributorships, overwhelmingly in the rural areas, he said, adding that the per capita consumption was 3.95 cylinders.

Sinha said the beneficiaries include 1.85 crore in Uttar Pradesh, 1.23 crore in West Bengal and 1.16 crore in Bihar, adding that it shows the wide popularity of the welfare programme that also led to a drop in carbon footprints.

He also cited several case studies to assert that the scheme led to the mitigation of pulmonary diseases among women, as they began using smoke-free mode of cooking.

Grand sounding but hollow filmy dialogues

Cong slams PM, asks why he's mum on Trump's claims

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Congress on Thursday alleged that the diplomatic delegations being sent abroad were part of the government's "WMD -- weapons of mass distraction" exercise and demanded Prime Minister Narendra Modi call a special session of Parliament and clarify US President Donald Trump's India-Pakistan ceasefire claims.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh also said that instead of throwing out grand sounding but hollow filmy dialogues in public rallies, as he did in Bikaner on Thursday, the prime minister should answer the serious questions being asked of him.

"Why are the brutal killers of Pahalgam still free -- according to some reports, they had been responsible for three earlier terror attacks in Poonch, Gagangir and Gulmarg over the past 18 months. Why have you not chaired any all-party meeting and taken the opposition parties into confidence?" Ramesh said in a post on X.

Shah calls for holistic approach for cleaning Yamuna

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday directed the concerned ministries and officials to work with a holistic approach for cleaning the Yamuna river, ensuring clean drinking water for the capital's residents and upgrading the city's sewage system.

This was conveyed at a meeting chaired by Shah and attended by Union Urban Development Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Paatil, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and senior officials.

The Union home minister held a meeting on the cleaning of the Yamuna, ensuring clean drinking water supply and improving sewage systems in Delhi, and he directed that the work be done with a holistic approach, an official statement said.

Addressing the meeting, Shah said the Yamuna is not just a river but also a symbol of faith, making its cleanliness a priority for the Modi government.

UP: 20 teachers dismissed for fudging educational qualifications

PNS ■ KUSHINAGAR

Twenty teachers appointed in the Kushinagar district have been dismissed for submitting false information in their job applications, officials said Thursday. Investigations revealed discrepancies in the teachers' qualifications, District Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) Ram Jiyavan Maurya told reporters.

"Following the directives from the Secretary Basic Education Council Surendra Tiwari, 20 such teachers posted in Kushinagar district since 2021 have been identified who have discrepancies between the merit list and academic cut-off marks," the BSA said, adding that the teachers are now dismissed.



Pahalgam locals count loss of earnings, pin hope on Amarnath Yatra

PNS ■ PAHALGAM

A month after the deadly terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam, locals in the south Kashmir resort town stare at mounting livelihood losses, even as the perpetrators have managed to evade the massive crackdown launched by security forces to track them down.

The locals have now pinned their hopes on the upcoming Amarnath Yatra to undo some of the damage done to their livelihood.

While several top terrorists have been killed in various operations launched after the deadly April 22 attack at Baisaran meadows, the terrorists who carried out the massacre have eluded the security forces, officials said on Thursday.

Terrorists descended on the picturesque Baisaran meadows of Pahalgam on April 22 and shot dead 25 tourists and a local man who tried to save them. Though the exact number of terrorists who carried out the attack is not known, sources have said there were between four and six terrorists.

Preliminary investigations have revealed that the terrorists shot the victims after verifying their religion by asking them to recite the "kalma", the verse recited to profess Islamic faith.

The officials said the security forces were conducting relentless operations to track down the terrorists.

"They have managed to evade the security forces thus far but it won't be too long before we get them," a senior police officer said.

Thousands of suspects across Kashmir were called in for questioning while hundreds were detained as the security grid launched a massive crackdown to hunt down the perpetrators of the massacre.

Nearly 100 persons were booked under the Public Safety Act and sent to various jails.

There are reports that security forces also picked up youngsters who had already served terms for past associations with militancy.

Meanwhile, locals in Pahalgam and adjoining areas are counting their losses as tourists have stopped visiting.

Consider Maha's Zudpi Jungle as forest lands: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday declared Zudpi Jungle lands in Maharashtra's eastern Vidarbha region as forests in line with its 1996 verdict but protected the structures existing on it for decades.

The apex court 1996 verdict defined the term "forest".

A bench of Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih noted that "zudpi" was a Marathi word, literally translating to bushes or shrubs and "zudpi" lands meant an inferior type of unoccupied lands with bushy growth.

The top court was dealing with the issue over the status of such lands in the districts of Nagpur, Wardha, Bhandara, Gondia, Chandrapur and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra's eastern Vidarbha region.

The bench directed such lands would not be permitted to be used for compensatory afforestation unless there was a certificate of the state chief secretary regarding non-availability of non-forest land for afforestation.

In such cases, compensatory afforestation must be carried out on double the area of "Zudpi Jungle" lands, according to the existing guidelines of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, it added.

"Zudpi jungle lands shall be considered as forest lands in line with the order of this court dated December 12, 1996 in the present proceedings," the verdict penned by the CJI said.



The top court underlined maintaining a balance between environmental protection and the need for sustainable development. Various developmental activities, it said, were already undertaken on "Zudpi Jungle" lands like construction of irrigation dams, roads, schools, public health centres and other utilities facilities.

The bench annexed a list of institutions, buildings, residential areas, public utilities which would be affected in the city of Nagpur alone.

It said even the buildings in which the high court, high court judges' residences, state governments' secretariat, central government's buildings, defence buildings, Air Force buildings and graveyards were situated, would be impacted.

"... we direct that as an exception, and without the same being treated as a precedent whatsoever for any matter, the zudpi jungle lands allotted by the competent authority up to December 12, 1996 and for which land classification has not been changed, the State of Maharashtra shall seek approval under Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 for their deletion from the 'List of Forest Areas'," the bench said.

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Editor's TAKE

Harmony with nature is non-negotiable

Sustainable development is impossible without conserving biodiversity, as the two are deeply interconnected

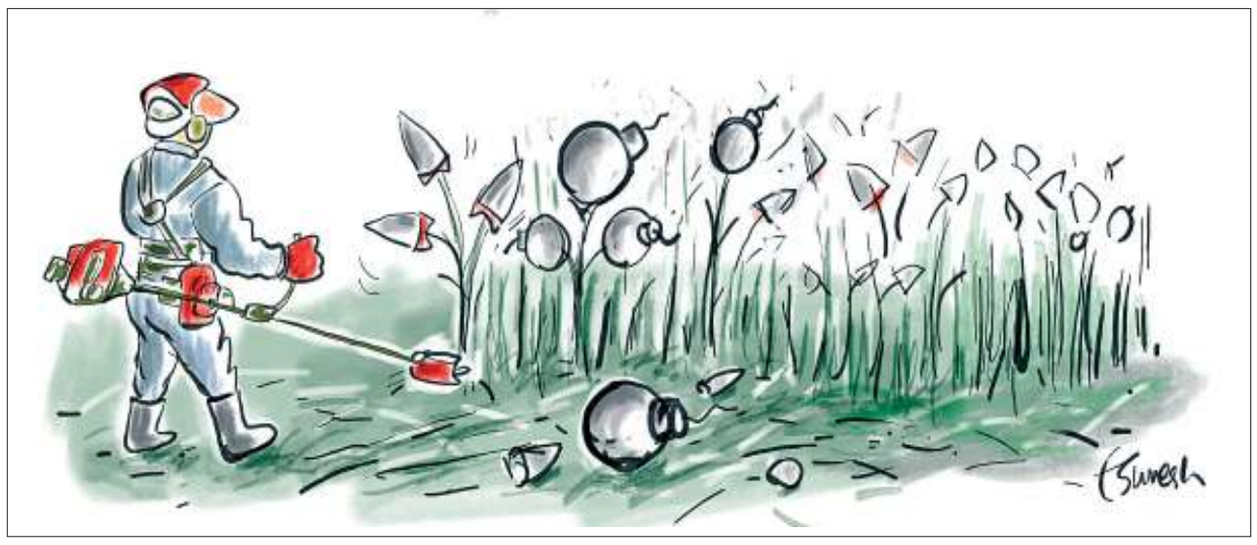
Each year in May, the world marks the International Day for Biological Diversity — a reminder that our lives are inextricably linked to the natural world around us. In an era of rapid technological advancement and urban expansion, we are being called to re-examine a fundamental truth: human survival depends entirely on the health of Earth's ecosystems. Nature is not a distant concern; it is the source of the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the medicines we rely on, and even the clothes on our backs and the energy that fuels our homes. Biological diversity, or biodiversity, is often understood as the sheer variety of life forms on the planet — from plants and animals to fungi and microorganisms. But it goes deeper. It includes genetic diversity within species, such as the different breeds of livestock or varieties of crops, and the richness of ecosystems, from rainforests and coral reefs to lakes, deserts, and farmland. These systems are not just scenic backdrops. They are, quite literally, the operating system of life. Yet, that operating system is faltering.

One million species are now threatened with extinction. Three-quarters of the land-based environment and two-thirds of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human activity. These changes are not without consequence. When biodiversity is in crisis, humanity is in crisis. The effects are already evident. Fish, a critical source of animal protein for over three billion people, are disappearing due to overfishing and ocean degradation. Over 80 per cent of the global diet depends on plants, yet the genetic diversity of our crops is shrinking. And in many rural communities across the developing world, traditional plant-based medicines — the primary source of healthcare for up to 80 per cent of the population — are becoming harder to find. Biodiversity is not just about saving tigers or whales; it's about preserving the systems that make human life possible. Moreover, biodiversity loss threatens our collective health.

When ecosystems are degraded, the natural buffers that prevent diseases from spreading between animals and humans collapse. In recognition of this urgency, the global community came together in December 2022 to adopt the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. This ambitious agreement sets out 23 measurable targets to be achieved by 2030 and five long-term goals for 2050. Among the immediate goals are restoring at least 20 per cent of degraded ecosystems and cutting the spread of invasive alien species by half. The framework envisions a future in which humanity lives in harmony with nature — a world where development and conservation go hand in hand. This year's Biodiversity Day theme, "Harmony with Nature and Sustainable Development," emphasises that the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals are not parallel agendas but deeply interconnected. We cannot hope to end poverty, ensure food security, or build healthy societies without protecting the ecosystems that support them. As we look to the remaining five years before 2030, the message is clear: the time to act is now and everyone has a role to play.

Op Black Forest: Decisive blow to Naxals

This holistic approach, balancing security and development, force and compassion, is steadily dismantling the ideological and logistical base of the Naxalite movement. The target of Naxal-free India by next year is within reach



The 21 days long intelligence-based operation "Operation Black Forest" jointly conducted by the CRPF along with Chhattisgarh police achieved remarkable success. The joint operation between the CRPF and the Chhattisgarh Police was launched in April 2025 at Karrenguttalu Chhattisgarh — Telangana border. Since its launch on April 21, 2025, till May 14, 2025 in a span of 21 days 21 encounters took place in which nearly 50 wanted Naxalites were neutralized by the security forces. The Karreguttalu Hill (KGH) was considered to be the impregnable stronghold of naxalites located in Chhattisgarh-Telangana border housing the integrated headquarter of banned naxal organisations PLGA battalion, CRC Company, Telangana State Committee etc.

The remarkable feat achieved in this operation is reflection of coherent operational synergy between multi-agency dedicated teams, CAPFs and the state police and have established an area dominance for the CAPFs in this geographically complex region. As a result nearly 214 naxal hideouts and well-constructed bunkers were destroyed and 450 IEDs, 818 BGL shells, 899 bundles of Codex, detonators, huge cache of small arms, explosive material along with 12,000 KGs of ration have been recovered.

So far, a total of 214 Naxal hideouts and bunkers have been destroyed in this operation and a total of 450 IEDs, 818 BGL shells, 899 bundles of Codex, detonators and a huge amount of explosive material have been recovered during the search. In addition, nearly 12,000 kilograms of food supplies have also been recovered.

Analysis of the information obtained during this historic 21-day-long anti-Naxal operation suggests that several senior Naxal cadres were either killed or seriously injured during the operation. However, due to the difficult geographical conditions, the security forces have not yet been able to recover the bodies of all the injured or killed Naxalites. The well-coordinated anti-naxal operation are conducted under the Joint Action Plan (JAP) filling security gaps by achieving area dominance and establishing camps, realising the aspirations of the local citizens and implement comprehensive development scheme reflects the Government of India's policy commitment towards the naxal affected region and its policy ultimatum to eliminate the menace of Left Wing Extremism by March 31, 2026 from India. The assured development and tactical success is not achieved by the Government overnight but is a reflection of pro-development and proactive policies implemented by the Government in collaboration with the state Governments of the affected states. Left Wing Extremism has always been a prominent threat not only to India's internal security but indeed to the fundamental democratic, pluralistic political order enshrined in the constitution. The movement started in 1967 in a few Parganas in West Bengal has widespread across more than 195 districts spanning prominent states in the east, central and southern region of India described it as Red Corridor. The concept of the Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) is based on creating anarchy in the society through violent means and creating a fraction amongst masses on the basis of urban rural, tribal non-tribal endangering national integration. The whole movement has survived on some of the basic issues like poverty, disparity and discontent amongst masses and have posed severe challenges to the security of the country. Till now more than 30,000 citizens and security personnels have been martyred. Due to decisive success achieved by the forces in the tactical domain paving the way for comprehensive development the LWE movement has also received great support from urban India as well.



RAMANAND N GARGE

The non decisive orientation of internal security policies has blind folded the policy orientation making it a mere law and order issue rather than a prominent internal security threat. The Government changed its policy outlook after 2014 and further intensified after the present Home Minister Amit Shah took office in 2019. He introduced the zero-tolerance policy against naxalism and launched a 3-pronged strategy to effectively deal with the menace of left wing extremism.

1) Intelligence-based security
2) Centre state coordination
3) Comprehensive development

Due to this multi-prong strategy utilized by the Government the spread of naxalism has been restricted to mere 6 districts and is breathing its last into certain villages and blocks of Chattisgarh and Jharkhand. As a result the naxal incidencts recorded in 2014 were 1080 which has reduced to 374 in 2024. In 2014, 88 security personnel made supreme sacrifice during the operations. Due to area dominance achieved by the forces the naxals received a big blow in fatal casualties in 2024, 2089 naxals were neutralised.

As a result 928 LWE cadres left the violent path and embraced social integration by surrendering their arms in 2024. In this year May 14, 2025 total 718 cadres have surrendered. This great operational success results in to establishing strong 320 camps in naxal affected region which includes 68 night-landing helipads, 555 fortified police stations which were merely 66 in 2014. This underscores the changing defensive posture of the forces to decisive assertive outlook committed to achieve desired result in timebound manner.

This long-term comprehensive policy started yielding fruits of development. The ill famed reginos of Bastar, Sukma, Dantevada regions which known for violent activity are embracing development and remained considerably peaceful. In an historic moment, the Hon'ble Home minister made a night stay and extensively engaged with local citizens and launched various development initiatives like Bastar Pandum. The initiatives like Bastar Battalion, Bastar Pandum have truly sensed the pulse of masses in the region and have provided avenues to integrate themselves with the mainstream. The apt use of assuring development and security is backed by appropriate budgetary allocation has gained the trust of citizens. The ₹1 Cr per village in naxal affected region has truly realising the transformation. The people of Bastar and around severely affected region have actively participated in the political process by casting their votes in general elections in 2024 and assembly elections. The dedicated development and security policy have redefined the policy priorities of the Government through which transformative infrastructure is developed in naxal affected region.

Total 11,632 km roads are developed facilitating seamless movement of people across the region. Fully operational 5731 post offices, 1007 banks, 937 ATMs have facilitated growth in the region. In addition, the 8500 towers seamlessly facilitating 4G connectivity truly strengthened the expression of the people of this region and connected them with various avenues of growth like e-commerce, sales portals etc. The budding generation is receiving quality education through 250 Ekalavya schools.

This holistic approach, balancing security and development, force and compassion, is steadily dismantling the ideological and logistical base of the Naxalite movement. With the current momentum, the Government's vision of a Naxal-free India by March 31, 2026 is not merely aspirational, it is increasingly within reach.

(The writer is a distinguished scholar in security studies, brings extensive experience in diplomacy, research, and academia. He holds a Master's degree from the Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Savitribai Phule Pune University. Views are personal)

PIC TALK



Lightning over historic Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus as pre-monsoon rains lash Mumbai. PTI

Who said aging means slowing down?

SECOND Opinion

On an autumn afternoon in the southern Bavarian town of Schliersee, I once watched an elderly woman likely in her eighties dismount her bicycle, take a ticket to ride from the ticketing machine and when the train arrived, fluidly embark it with the cycle. She deboarded in the same station that we did, and with poise cycled away to wherever she was headed. To me, it was an exceptional sight, but in a place where old age comes with silvery grace, it was a norm. Closer home, I have been witness to yet another exception. My mother-in-law, in her early nineties, still travels alone, possesses the sharpest memory, and leads a life of abundant mirth and mindful engagement. Whether it is fixing a meal, going on trips, maintaining relations, or keeping up with current affairs, she does it all with an enthusiasm that belies her age. Many around her see this as an anomaly or a quirky rare luck. But to me, it feels more like the reward of a life lived with care, discipline, and a quiet commitment to staying active in body and spirit.



ASHA IYER KUMAR

And more recently, I watched a middle-aged couple setting up a pergola in my sister's home in the US, the lady working with equal energy and swiftness as the man. As I saw them working in tandem on the high-intensive occupation, I wondered why on earth did most people back in India, with a few exceptions like my mother-in-law, capitulate very easily to the to the perceived inevitability of ageing. Why do we, as a culture, tend to accept physical slowing down, aches, and ailments as unquestionable markers of advancing years, rather than see them as challenges to be met with pre-emptive and intentional action? Is it genetic predisposition, social conditioning, or a subtle resignation woven into our cultural narrative that old age is a time to recede rather than rise? In many Indian households, aging is seen as a call to withdraw quietly from active life as a prelude to taking up a spiritual mindset that recommends renouncing the so-called good things, and settle for a minimalist living. There is a kind of sanyas-like acceptance of the degeneration of the body and mental faculties, whereas in the west, aging is viewed as a stage to resist decline, stay mobile, and remain socially and physically engaged. Why are we inclined to accept slowing down as a natural tendency that cannot be fought back with resilience? Why is it even considered noble to be resigned and resolved in the tamed confines of the body and mind?

Growing old brings with it challenges, no doubt, but what makes life robust till the end of it is a willingness to stay alive with every cell of the body, tending to it wherever there is a need to repair and reset and to adopt a mindful attitude to living a life that enables than cripples both psychologically and physically.

How many times have we heard people getting reconciled and philosophical about the winding down of the body not taking the necessary precautions or being proactive about ageing with vitality as the cornerstone of the twilight years?

"Fitness is a huge thing here. No one compromises on it,' my sister said to me. 'And so is the attitude of women towards work. There is no task that they don't or can't do." It underpinned the lackadaisical attitude we adopted back in India about how ageing somehow absolves us from the responsibility of personal upkeep. The moment we step into our fifties, we start using age as an alibi — for stiff joints, low energy, forgetfulness, and even disinterest in personal grooming or exploration. We resign ourselves to limitations even before they truly arrive. In contrast, what I observe in the West is not an obsession with youth, but a reverence for independence.

To move without help, to drive, to cook, to manage one's chores, to take walks in the park, to engage socially — even at 75 or 80 — is not seen as extraordinary, but expected. There is a deep sense of personal dignity anchored in one's ability to take care of oneself. And the foundation for that is laid not in old age, but in how consciously one lives through middle age, and in shifting our perspective from seeing ageing as a red flag. Living full lives doesn't mean spending long years on earth. It means giving every moment that leads us towards the inevitable end its due, with mind, body and action.

If there is one thing that I would wish for my old age it is this willingness to do whatever it takes to stay in shape than succumb to the easy inertia that often masquerades as grace.

(The writer is an author and a writing coach. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Rice, Respect, and Responsibility

If you ask a Japanese person about their favourite food, the answer has remained unchanged for centuries — rice. As a staple of the Japanese diet, rice is served with nearly every meal, including breakfast. But today, this deeply rooted tradition is under threat. With Japan's shrinking population and a labor shortage in the agricultural sector, rice production has significantly declined. The result? Soaring prices.

A single kilogram of rice now costs around 2,650 yen-roughly 1,600 Indian rupees.This dramatic price hike led to a political scandal. Japan's Agriculture Minister Taku Eto had to resign after jokingly claiming he didn't need to buy rice because supporters gifted him plenty. What might seem like a casual remark elsewhere sparked widespread outrage in Japan. In such a climate, a joke about free rice wasn't just insensitive — it was unacceptable. Now, contrast this with India — the world's largest democracy. A politician here insulted a female army officer, and despite video evidence and public backlash, no resignation was demanded. Even the Supreme Court appeared reluctant to act, choosing instead to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and delay any meaningful verdict. This stark difference is telling. In Japan, respect for the public and accountability in leadership still matter. In India, such values often take a backseat to political convenience. It's time we ask ourselves what kind of democracy we want to be.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

Reimagining Consumer Protection

This letter is in response to the article "Overhaul Consumer Protection Act to empower consumers" published on May 20. Consumers are central to any nation's socio-economic progress.

Their protection isn't just a legal obligation; it's a foundational pillar for sustainable business growth. However, in reality, consumers often face imbalances of power in transactions with businesses. The lack of clear, correct, and accessible information frequently leaves consumers vulnerable. To correct this, we urgently need a reformed legal framework — one that includes active state surveillance to maintain a balance between consumer interests and business operations.

The law must shield consumers from unfair practices while ensuring transparency. Information on pricing, terms, and other key factors should be readily available and comparable.

An effective consumer protection structure should not only empower consumers but also make dispute resolution faster and more affordable. With strong legal safeguards and regulatory oversight, consumers will have the tools to challenge malpractice and demand fairness in the marketplace. With strong legal safeguards and regulatory oversight, consumers will have the tools to challenge malpractice and demand fairness in the marketplace.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENAI

The Illusion of American Mediation

If I'm not mistaken, this is the eighth time since May 10 that former US President Donald Trump has claimed credit for brokering peace between India and Pakistan — this time citing trade as a factor. His remarks, made during a tense Oval Office meeting with South Africa's President Ramaphosa, are both misleading and intrusive. India has always maintained that Kashmir is a bilateral issue, to be resolved only between India and Pakistan — without third-party interference. Following recent civilian casualties in Pahalgam, the DGMOs of both countries agreed to halt all military actions by land, sea, and air — without US involvement. Let me remind Mr Trump: peace is a national prerogative, not a spectacle for foreign applause.

Kashmir is an integral part of India. The solution lies in Pakistan returning occupied territories and halting terrorism — not in American theatrics. Historically, US actions have not favoured India. During the 1971 war, it sent the fifth fleet to intimidate us. Even today, the US funds states like Pakistan while publicly denouncing terrorism.

This duplicity must not be ignored. What's worse is how Trump appears to announce Indian policy decisions before our own Government. The Modi administration remains silent, only to issue clarifications later. This isn't diplomacy; it's political ventriloquism. India must lodge a formal protest.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

POLITICS IN BANKING: THE HIDDEN COST OF INFLUENCE

The call to keep banks out of politics, reiterated in your piece dated May 22, is long overdue. Though banks run on public deposits, depositors have no voice in decision-making. Governments, however, wield undue influence, using banks as tools for populist schemes.

The banking sector is squeezed between willful defaulters and Government mandates. Massive loans taken by corporate giants often turn into Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) — eventually written off, waived, or settled through "haircuts" that result in huge losses for lenders. These outcomes aren't random; they often carry political fingerprints. While banks chase small borrowers, they appear helpless against the politically connected elite who flee the country or default with impunity. Accountability is a joke. Bank officials, if forced to speak, would likely expose the political figures shielding these defaulters. One alarming example was a now-scrapped bill that sought to pass banking losses onto customers — a blatant injustice against those with no role in bank mismanagement. If we want a healthy banking ecosystem, we must develop a clear policy on banking operations.

Penalising small account holders for not maintaining minimum balance, while granting easy escapes to billionaires, is deeply unjust. Let's not allow political games to ruin our financial institutions, and the trust of millions who depend on them. To restore trust in our financial system, banks must be shielded from political interference.

A transparent, accountable framework is essential — one that protects small depositors and holds the powerful to account. Without urgent reform, political games will continue to undermine public faith and destabilise the backbone of our economy.

A G RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

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

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025

Debunking the 'India alone' narrative of Operation Sindoor

A closer examination of international responses, diplomatic statements, and geopolitical alignments reveals a very different reality. Far from being diplomatically abandoned, India received strong global backing, especially in its fight against cross-border terrorism

FIRST Column



In the wake of the heinous Pahalgam terror attack and India's swift, precise military response through Operation Sindoor, a digital narrative began trending: #IndiaAlone. It wasn't just an organic social media wave-it was a carefully constructed piece of cognitive warfare, seeded by Pakistani-aligned media outlets and amplified by Chinese and Turkish media ecosystems. The message was simple but potent: India, in taking decisive action against cross-border terrorism, had allegedly isolated itself diplomatically.

Yet a closer examination of international responses, diplomatic statements, and geopolitical alignments reveals a very different reality. Far from being diplomatically abandoned, India received strong global backing, especially in its fight against cross-border terrorism. This makes it imperative to unpack, challenge, and dismantle the 'India Alone' narrative-point by point.

Origin of '#IndiaAlone' Hashtag?

The narrative's roots can be traced directly to Pakistan's strategic propaganda machinery. Following the 22 April terror attack in Pahalgam, Pakistan not only dismissed responsibility but rapidly launched an influence campaign, extending from the Indus Waters Treaty controversy to misinformation around Operation Sindoor.

By early May, former Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto issued dire warnings after India suspended the Indus Waters Treaty. Around 4 May, Radio Pakistan actively pushed this emerging narrative, predicting India's diplomatic fallout. Soon after, during the peak of Operation Sindoor (9-10 May), Pakistani media outlets and social platforms began asserting-not just predicting-India's isolation.

An analysis of X (formerly Twitter) posts from 11-12 May revealed the majority of users tweeting with the #IndiaAlone tag were based in Pakistan, or were part of overseas anti-India groups-especially Pakistani diaspora in London and Khalistani elements in Canada. A key component of their strategy was to attempt sectarian division, particularly by portraying Sikh sentiments as separate from broader Indian national interests.



TEJUSVI SHUKLA



ARPAN A CHAKRAVARTY

Media Collusion and International Amplification

Pakistan's narrative-building extended into international journalism. Several journalists of Pakistani origin working for global outlets like CNN, Bloomberg, Reuters, and the New York Times produced stories that either questioned India's military response or subtly downplayed the terror aspect of the Pahalgam attacks.

On 14 May, Disinfo Lab published findings that a significant number of stories minimising the terror dimension or questioning India's legitimacy came from writers with known affiliations to Pakistan. The intent was clear: reframe the aggressor as the victim, and the victim as the provocateur.

This was not a solo act by Pakistan. China, Turkey, and Qatar-often at geopolitical odds with India-joined in. Chinese-language platforms on Baidu, and Turkish state media like TRT World and Anadolu Agency, consistently pushed the "India Isolated" theme. Interestingly, this wasn't the first time such a narrative was deployed-it had circulated within Chinese media ecosystems even before 31 March 2025, well before the launch of Operation Sindoor.

China's motivations are rooted in hard strategic interests. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir-an area of deep concern to India.

With this route providing access to the Indian Ocean and serving as a lifeline to China's Xinjiang region, any Indian military action threatens Chinese stakes directly. Further, with the Trump administration easing tariffs on China, Beijing no longer feels the same diplomatic need to appease New Delhi-a factor that explains its open backing of Pakistan.

The Real Global Response: Far from Isolation

Despite the online cacophony, the actual diplomatic response from around the world was overwhelmingly supportive of India. Contrary to what the narrative suggested, key global powers acknowledged India's right to respond decisively to terrorism:

a) United States: Condemned the Pahalgam attack, expressed condolences, and affirmed India's right to self-defence.

b) United Kingdom: Foreign Secretary David Lammy and former PM Rishi Sunak offered unequivocal support.

c) France: Expressed "unwavering solidarity" with India.

d) Russia: Urged restraint, but recognised the legitimacy of India's response.

e) Israel: Applauded India's anti-terror response and supported its sovereignty. Furthermore, countries across Asia, Europe, the Gulf, and even Palestine extended support. Nations such as Japan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, and Australia condemned the terror attack and upheld India's sovereign right to respond.

A report by the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) found that 123 nations issued independent statements backing India, with no major power opposing Operation Sindoor. If anything, this showed a global diplomatic convergence, not isolation.

China, Turkey, and Azerbaijan

Only three nations-China, Turkey, and Azerbaijan-openly backed Pakistan after its failed retaliation attempts. These alignments are neither new nor surprising. China and Pakistan call themselves "all-weather allies," though the relationship is transactional-based on military cooperation and Chinese investment.

With Chinese-made weapons now facing their first real combat test in the India-Pakistan theatre, Beijing had a vested interest in managing perception. Any indication that Indian, French, or Russian systems outperformed Chinese hardware would damage China's arms export credibility.

Turkey's motivations are rooted in its neo-Ottoman ambitions. President Erdo?an aspires to a leadership role in the global Islamic community, positioning Ankara as a challenger to Saudi Arabia's dominance. Turkey's support for Pakistan is part of this strategy, also reflected in its support for Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia-where India sided with Armenia.

The Russia Factor

Critics noted that Russia's muted stance reflected a shift away from its historical closeness with India. However, such a reading is simplistic.

India continues to rely on Russia for defence technology-from S-400 missile systems to the BrahMos missile programme. During the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India resisted Western pressure to condemn Moscow, maintaining a nuanced stance rooted in strategic autonomy.

One reason for Russia's measured tone could be the involvement of the Trump administration in ceasefire negotiations. With Trump's unpredictability in foreign policy, Moscow may have preferred to observe and wait. This does not amount to strategic drift, but rather, realpolitik diplomacy in action.

Pakistan Hyphenation

A more worrying trend is the possible revival of the India-Pakistan hyphenation in Washington D.C., especially with Trump's potential return to the White House. This outdated framing-treating both countries as equal stakeholders-ignores ground realities. During a recent West Asia tour, Trump appeared to take a transactional diplomatic approach, meeting leaders from Qatar and others as though collecting "tributes." Such performative diplomacy risks undermining the mature, growing U.S.-India strategic partnership forged over the past two decades.

India's Communication Strategy

One of the standout aspects of Operation Sindoor was India's internal narrative management. The Ministry of Defence and the Press Information Bureau provided timely, fact-based updates, helping shape domestic understanding. India's Ambassador to the U.S. and High Commissioner to the U.K. actively engaged with international stakeholders.

Further, the All-Party Delegation, split into seven outreach groups, worked to disseminate India's perspective globally-an effective initiative that should be institutionalised.

Still, more is needed. Information statecraft must become a national priority. As India rises on the world stage, it must build systems that can counter disinformation in real-time, especially in a digital landscape where perception often precedes truth.

Conclusion

The 'India Alone' narrative is not just a falsehood-it is a strategic attempt to weaken India's diplomatic muscle through cognitive warfare. It was seeded, amplified, and repeated by known actors with clear motives: Pakistan, China, Turkey, and their associated media arms. But facts tell a different story. India is not alone-not diplomatically, not strategically, and certainly not morally. The world is watching, and most of it is watching with India, not against it.

In the modern age, the battles of narratives are as vital as battles on the ground. India's success in Operation Sindoor extended beyond military strikes-it lay equally in countering misinformation and affirming its global voice. The next step is to institutionalise this capability and ensure that India's story is told loud, clear, and globally-by India itself.

(Arpan A Chakravarty is a Research Fellow at India Foundation and Tejusvi Shukla is a Doctoral Candidate at OP Jindal University. Views expressed are personal)

India's suspension of Indus Waters Treaty: A legally justified response to terrorism



As a counter-measure to the devastating terrorist attack in Pahalgam which claimed 26 lives including 25 Indians and one Nepali national, India's Cabinet Committee on Security announced on April 23, 2025, that "The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960 between India and Pakistan will be held in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism." While Pakistan has termed this suspension as an "act of war," India's position rests on solid legal foundations within international law, particularly given the doctrine of rebus sic stantibus (fundamental change of circumstances). This piece examines the legal validity of India's decision and reaches the view that India's denouncing the IWT aligns with established principles of international law.The Indus Waters Treaty, signed in 1960 under World Bank mediation, considered a rare success in India-Pakistan diplomacy, surviving multiple wars and persistent tensions, is more in favour of Pakistan.

The treaty divided the six rivers of the Indus system between the two nations: India received rights over the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej), while Pakistan gained control over the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab). In this arrangement, India received approximately 30 per cent of the total water carried by the rivers, while Pakistan received 70 per cent. The lopsided nature of the treaty is reflected as it allowed India limited use of western rivers for non-consumptive purposes such as power generation and irrigation under strict regulations, leaving the huge remainder in favour of Pakistan. Remarkably, the IWT has endured for over 65 years despite intermittent tensions between the two nations, a testament to its robust framework but more reflective of India's resilience in not scrapping it for humanitarian considerations.



SIDDHARTHA MISRA

Numerous occasions arose in the past when India could have reconsidered the continuation of the treaty, however, it observed restraint perhaps in the hope of not undermining the prospects of friendliness with Pakistan in future. Unilateral denunciation of IWT by India may be seen as an act of reprisal against the Pahalgam attack, but it is also a reflection of changing realities that now challenge its continued application in its current form. Though the IWT framework has no exit clause or specified duration, and conventionally, any modification of its terms would require consent from both parties, however, international law provides mechanisms for treaty suspension/termination under certain circumstances, which India has now invoked.

India's suspension of the IWT finds legal validity in the doctrine of rebus sic stantibus, codified in Article 62 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT), 1969.

Although India is not a signatory to the VCLT, the principle is widely recognised as part of customary international law, making it applicable regardless of ratification status. Moreover, the VCLT does not provide all the circumstances under which a treaty could be suspended/terminated eg, aggression, fomenting civil strife and sponsoring terrorism in the territory of a treaty party, that could justify the validity of Indian stand under customary international law.

Moreover, a fundamental change in circumstances can be invoked u/a 62 as ground for treaty termination or suspension when: "(a) the existence of those circumstances constituted an essential basis of the consent of the parties to be bound by the treaty; and (b) the effect of the change is radically to transform the extent of obligations still to be performed under the treaty". Importantly, paragraph 3 of Article 62 explicitly mentions that a party may invoke fundamental change as grounds for "suspending the operation of the treaty", which is precisely what India has done-not terminating the treaty but holding it in abeyance.

In addition, the doctrine of rebus sic stantibus provides an escape from the principle of pacta sunt servanda (agreements must be kept), embodied in Art 26 of the VCLT, which requires that "every treaty in force is binding upon the parties to it and must be performed by them in good faith". The key element here is "good faith" a condition that India argues Pakistan has violated through its continued support for cross-border terrorism, further justifying the Indian stand.

For invocation of rebus sic stantibus to be valid, it must be demonstrated that a fundamental change in circumstances has occurred since 1960 that was not foreseen by the parties, constituted an essential basis for consent to the treaty, and radically transforms the extent of obligations under the treaty. India's stand on IWT satisfies these requirements on multiple grounds taken up hereinafter.

When the IWT was signed in 1960, the nature and scale of cross-border terrorism that India has faced over decades from Pakistan did not exist. The treaty was negotiated with the assumption of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect for sovereignty, however, the persistent support for terrorism directed against India fundamentally alters the context in which the treaty operates, violating the good faith principle that underlies all treaty obligations.

India's suspension of the IWT is not a permanent termination but a conditional abeyance "until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism." This formulation leaves room for the treaty's revival under changed circumstances if Pakistan takes verifiable steps to address India's security concerns.

By framing the suspension as conditional rather than permanent, India has demonstrated restraint and left open pathways for resolution. India's action may well establish an important precedent in international hydro-diplomacy as it sends a clear message that water-sharing agreements cannot be isolated from broader bilateral relations, especially when those relations are marred by security threats. The ball now rests in Pakistan's court and by addressing India's concerns regarding cross-border terrorism, Pakistan can create conditions for the treaty's revival. Until then, India's suspension stands as a legally defensible response to fundamentally changed circumstances in a volatile region.

(The writer is an Associate Professor at Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Views expressed are personal)

Cooperative insurance: Inclusion and Service

During a recent field interaction with Self-Help Group (SHG) women in Rajasthan, several shared their disheartening experiences with insurance companies. Despite understanding the importance of insurance to mitigate risks-whether personal, agricultural, or business-related-many women reported cases of mis-selling, delayed settlements, and partial or denied claims, even in the event of accidental deaths. One woman, unsure whether her premium was even deposited after handing it over to an agent, reflected the trust deficit that exists at the grassroots. A woman serving as an insurance agent under the "Lakhpati Didi" scheme shared her difficulty in convincing rural people to buy insurance, given their prior negative experiences.

In some cases, policies lapsed without refunds, leading to a complete loss of paid premiums. Though insurance is recognised as crucial for risk coverage, a lack of awareness and unsatisfactory service delivery keeps many rural Indians skeptical and excluded from the formal system.

Against this backdrop, the announcement by the Union Home Minister, who also leads the newly formed Ministry of Cooperation (established in 2021), to launch a cooperative-based insurance company has been widely welcomed. Alongside this, a cooperative structure for cab drivers akin to Ola and Uber was also proposed. These initiatives were hailed across party lines as potentially transformative moves, especially in a country where insurance penetration remains far below global benchmarks.



DINESH KUMAR TYAGI

India currently hosts 67 insurance companies regulated by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI). Despite this large number, insurance penetration stands at just 3.7 per cent of GDP-far below the global average. Life insurance forms the bulk of this at 2.8 per cent. With nearly 70 per cent of India's population residing in rural areas, it is striking that less than 20 per cent have health coverage and less than 10 per cent hold life insurance.

Though several Government-backed schemes-like PM Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Fasal Bima Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat-attempt to plug this gap, private insurance players largely avoid rural markets, citing higher risks and low profitability. Public sector insurers alone lack the scale and resources to fill the void.

So, why propose a cooperative insurance model? Cooperatives, by their very nature, are owned and managed by their members, operating for collective benefit rather than shareholder profit. This makes them uniquely suited to serve underserved, high-risk segments like farmers, artisans, SHGs, and rural entrepreneurs. Unlike commercial companies that target only low-risk, high-return customers, cooperative insurers can design inclusive products and offer personalised service.

However, under current laws, cooperative societies in India cannot operate as licensed insurers. Section 2C of the Insurance Act, 1938, allows only companies, statutory bodies, or foreign reinsurance branches to conduct insurance business. Cooperatives may act as intermediaries-agents or brokers-but not as insurance providers themselves. While IFFCO-Tokio, a joint venture involving a successful cooperative (IFFCO), is an exception, it does not operate fully on cooperative principles where all policyholders are also members.

This legal bottleneck must be addressed if India is to tap into the potential of cooperative insurance. Amending the IRDAI Act to recognise cooperative insurers under a formal regulatory framework, as practiced in countries like France, Germany, Japan, and Canada, is essential. These nations have strong mutual insurance sectors, which reinvest profits into benefits for members rather than distributing them as dividends.

A cooperative insurance model here should leverage existing cooperative banks and societies as distribution networks. Using mobile technology, Aadhaar-based services, and UPI integration can improve transparency, claim processing, and fraud control. Digital infrastructure is key to scaling such a model.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Indian cooperatives, especially in banking, have had a mixed track record. Of 1,888 cooperative banks, 430 have failed, marred by mismanagement, scams, and political interference. While Amul, IFFCO, KRIBHCO, and Lijjat Papad have proven cooperative success is possible, success depends heavily on leadership and a strong cooperative culture. This is more prevalent in Gujarat and Maharashtra than in northern states.

Thus, expecting a cooperative insurer to fix all issues in India's insurance sector immediately is unrealistic. But it does hold long-term promise. Success will require a professional, independent governance model-possibly modeled after ONDC-where the Government does not hold equity but provides enabling support. The governing board must consist of passionate leaders with grassroots understanding and integrity. Ultimately, cooperative insurance could significantly enhance inclusion, service quality, and trust in the sector. It can democratise access, offer community-rooted solutions, and address the rural-urban divide in insurance penetration.

With the right regulatory reforms, digital backbone, and visionary leadership, India can build a cooperative insurance ecosystem that not only complements the private sector but also strengthens social protection and community resilience in the decades ahead.

(The writer is a retired IAS officer. Views expressed are personal)

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IN BRIEF



Gold rises Rs 200 to Rs 98,650/10 g

Gold prices rose Rs 200 to Rs 98,650 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to a pick-up in local demand by jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased by Rs 200 to Rs 98,200 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Thursday. In contrast, silver prices in the local markets breached the crucial Rs 1 lakh per kg level by rallying Rs 2,040 to Rs 1,01,200 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) on Thursday.
Firm global trends and escalating tensions in the Middle East also supported the local prices, the association.
"Gold prices extended their rally as the US dollar remained under pressure, following renewed concerns over economic stability," Abans Financial Services Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said. US President Donald Trump's proposed budget, which includes significant tax reductions, is projected to add over USD 3 trillion to the national debt.
This has heightened fears of financial instability and weakened confidence in US government bonds, Mehta said.



Adani Ports to raise up to Rs 6,000 cr via debentures

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Thursday said its board has approved a proposal to raise up to Rs 6,000 crore by issuing debentures on a private placement basis for capex and refinancing of existing debt.
APSEZ, in a regulatory filing, said its board in a meeting held on May 22, 2025, has given its in-principle approval for issuance of non-convertible debentures for capex/refinancing of existing debt and general corporate purpose for an aggregate amount not exceeding Rs 6,000 crore in one or more tranches on a private placement basis. The type of securities proposed to be issued are secured, rated, listed, redeemable, and non-convertible debentures through private placement.
APSEZ, part of the globally diversified Adani Group, is the largest port developer and operator in India with 7 strategically located ports and terminals on the west coast and 8 ports and terminals on the East coast.



Rupee falls 37 paise to close at 85.96 against US dollar

Rupee depreciated 37 paise to close at 85.96 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on dollar demand from importers and foreign banks as well as surge in crude oil prices. Forex traders said surging US bond yields are rattling global investors. Moreover, the narrowing yield differential between India and the US, is making Indian assets less attractive. Besides, elevated crude oil prices amid rising geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, further dented investor sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 85.59 then touched an intra-day high of 85.58 and a low of 86.11 against the US dollar. The domestic unit settled for the day at 85.96 (provisional), lower by 37 per cent over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee settled at 85.59 against the greenback. In the last three trading sessions, the rupee has declined 54 paise. "The Indian rupee has ebbed for a third straight session, influenced by importers' appetite for the dollar and the unwinding of short positions after a key technical level was breached," said Dilip Parmar, Senior Research Analyst, HDFC

PUBLIC PROCUREMENT UNDER FTA

UK to give fair treatment to Indian firms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The UK for the first time has agreed to accord non-discriminatory treatment to Indian companies in its public procurement system under the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries, an official said.

On May 6, the two announced conclusion of negotiations for the FTA. It will be implemented next year.

"For the first time, UK agreed to take binding commitment to provide non-discriminatory treatment to our suppliers under UK's Social Value regime in their public procurement system," the official said.

Under the UK's Social Value law, the British government departments require public authorities to have regard to economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts.

According to the UK government, the trade pact will give UK businesses "unique and unprecedented" access to India's public procurement market, comprising about 40,000 tenders with a value of at least 38 billion pounds a year.

On the other hand, India has agreed to allow British companies to participate in public procurements only in the non-sensitive sectors.

The UK firms, however, will not be allowed to participate in procurements by state government entities and local bodies.

"UK-based suppliers would be allowed to bid for domestic tenders above the agreed thresholds (above Rs 200 crore) as deemed Class II local suppliers under public procurement.

Carve out is also provided for India's 'Make in India policy' as well as medium and small enterprises.

Earlier, India opened the government procurement segment in the comprehensive trade pact with the UAE. Under that pact, UAE firms are allowed to participate in procurement tenders worth over Rs 200 crore.

In 2020, the government modified public procurement norms to give maximum preference to companies whose goods and services have 50 per cent or more local content to promote 'Make in India'.

The revised Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India), Order 2017, has introduced a concept of Class-I, II and non-local suppliers, based on which they will get preference in government purchases of goods and services.

Class-I local suppliers will get the most preference in all government purchases because their domestic value addition is 50 per cent or more. They will be followed by Class-II suppliers, whose value addition range is more than 20 per cent but less than 50 per cent.

India's government procurement market is one of the largest in the world and it is estimated at nearly USD 600 billion annually, or approximately 15 per cent of the country's GDP, as per estimates.

This expenditure fuels development across infrastructure, healthcare, power, education, transport, and defence.

However, GP is more than a budgeting tool as it is a critical industrial policy instrument, used to promote local manufacturing, build MSME capacity, and advance national programs like Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat.

India to surpass China in oil demand growth: Moody's

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

China drove global oil demand growth over the last decade, but now India is poised to take the lead in demand growth over the next decade, according to a latest report by Moody's Ratings.

China and India are No. 2 and No.3 oil consumers in the world. But there are notable differences in demand growth in the two countries.



"Demand growth and import reliance will be higher in India," Moody's said. "Demand will grow faster in India than in China over the next decade, as China's economic growth slows and penetration of new energy vehicles accelerates."

Consumption of crude oil - the raw material for making fuels like petrol and diesel - in China will peak in the next 3-5 years, while in India Moody's expect annual growth of 3-5 per cent in the same period.

Stating that both countries rely heavily on oil and gas imports, the rating agency said it expects China's reliance on oil imports to fall, reflecting slower demand growth and increased domestic production.

"India's reliance on imports will increase if it is unable to stem a production decline," it said.

Moody's said China's larger oil and gas consumption underpins the scale of its national oil companies (NOCs), which will likely outpace their Indian peers in production growth over the next 3-5 years.

Investments in complex shale gas and offshore projects bolster Chinese NOCs' reserves and production, while Indian NOCs face challenges from aging wells and slow investment. Additionally, Chinese NOCs' greater value chain integration mitigates earnings volatility, and they have lower leverage and higher interest coverage. Moody's saw investment focus vary, reflecting national objectives.

RBI likely to announce dividend for Centre today

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank is likely to announce on Friday the dividend amount that will be paid to the central government for fiscal 2024-25.

For the 2023-24 fiscal, the RBI had transferred a record surplus amount or dividend of Rs 2.1 lakh crore to the government. The quantum was more than double that of Rs 87,416 crore paid for 2022-23 financial year.

The dividend payout is expected to be higher this time, the decision about which is likely to be taken at the next meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India to be held on May 23.

Last week, the RBI's Central Board reviewed the Economic Capital Framework (ECF) which is the basis for deciding the surplus transfer to the government.

The RBI had said that as part of the agenda the Board reviewed the ECF.

Sensex tumbles 645 pts on global sell-off

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex declined by nearly 645 points while Nifty retreated to 24,600 level due to selling in IT, oil and FMCG shares amid a global equity rout triggered by surging bond yields and US debt concerns.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 644.64 points or 0.79 per cent to settle at 80,951.99 with 27 of its constituents ending lower. The index opened lower and tanked further 1,106.71 points or 1.35 per cent to hit a low of 80,489.92 during the day due to across-the-board selling.

The NSE Nifty tumbled 203.75 points or 0.82 per cent to 24,609.70.

From the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, ITC, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries and Maruti were the biggest laggards.

IndusInd Bank, Bharti Airtel and UltraTech Cement were the gainers.

"The key benchmark indices witnessed declines amid US fiscal concerns that the proposed budget bill could significantly increase the national debt, pushing US treasury yields higher due to tepid long-term bond demand. Adding to the pressure, a major credit rating agency's downgrade of the US credit outlook sparked broad-based selloffs across Asian markets," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

US bond yields breached the 5 per cent mark while Japanese bond yields surged to 3.5 per cent which prompted sell-off in riskier assets and emerging markets like India.

"Indian equities followed their global counterparts and witnessed major sell-off after a sharp spike in US and Japanese bond yields made investors risk averse towards equities," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.33 per cent while smallcap index went up by 0.17 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, energy dropped the most by 1.25 per cent, followed by FMCG (1.25 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.19 per cent), oil & gas (1.13 per cent), IT (1.09 per cent) and auto (0.87 per cent).

Telecommunication and services were the gainers.

As many as 2,178 stocks declined while 1,741 advanced and 167 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower. Markets in Europe were trading in the negative territory.

US markets ended sharply lower on Wednesday.

FMCG, IT shares major losers



From the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, ITC, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries and Maruti were the biggest laggards. IndusInd Bank, Bharti Airtel and UltraTech Cement were the gainers

Sebi to auction 30 properties of Rose Valley group worth Rs 409 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday said it will auction 30 properties of Rose Valley group of companies on June 27 at a reserve price of Rs 409 crore in a bid to recover money raised by the firm from the public through illicit schemes.

The properties to go under the hammer include land with building, flats, resort, hotels and amusement park, buildings, plots and land parcels located in West Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Tripura, and Bihar, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a notice.

The e-auction will be conducted between 11 am and 1 pm on June 27. The total reserve price of these properties is pegged at Rs 409.02 crore, it added.

The markets watchdog said it has appointed C1 India as the e-auction service provider while it has engaged Quikr Realty to assist it in sale of the properties of Rose Valley.

Looking into 'egregious violations' by IndusInd Bank officials: Sebi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Thursday said the market regulator is looking into any "egregious violations" by senior management of IndusInd Bank, hit hard by accounting frauds, which according to estimates involve a staggering about Rs 3,400 crore.

Pandey said the issues at IndusInd Bank will be dealt with by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), but Sebi is also looking at securities market violations by officials of the crisis-hit bank.

"The RBI is looking into whatever Sebi has to do in relation to...whatever Sebi's remit is...Sebi is doing... If there are any egregious violations by anyone in their capacity, Sebi is looking into it," Pandey told reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by industry body Assocham.

On Wednesday, IndusInd Bank's board said it suspects involvement of certain employees in the fraud and directed the management to report the matter to investigative agencies and regulatory authorities.

Fraud in the derivatives and microfinance portfolio as well as balance sheet disclosures have rattled the private sector bank. The bank, which has seen top-level resignations, has ordered an internal audit review and is undergoing a forensics probe.

The internal audit report of the bank revealed "involvement of senior Bank officials, including former Key Management Personnel (KMP), in overriding key internal controls".

The bank has reported the likely involvement of the senior management in the accounting fraud to the central government. Also, IndusInd Bank said it has accounted for and reflected the impact of all discrepancies identified in these reports while finalising the financial results for the quarter/twelve months ended March 31, 2025.

Accenture to promote 15,000 Indian employees, 50,000 globally

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global IT firm Accenture will promote around 15,000 employees in India as part of a global promotion drive of nearly 50,000 staff in June this year.

"I am writing to share and celebrate with you that Accenture will promote almost 50,000 people around the world in June, including approximately 15,000 people in India. In total, across all of FY25, more than 43,000 of our people in India will have received a promotion," Accenture India Senior Country Managing Director Ajay Vij wrote in an internal memo to employees, seen by PTI.



Accenture follows a September-August financial year.

In December, Accenture did some stay-at-level (base pay) increases for some employees.

Between June and December, a majority of Indian employees will have got base pay increases.

"As a reminder, bonus and performance equity decisions for those eligible will continue to be made as part of the December cycle, and we will also continue to evaluate the opportunity for stay-at-level increases at that time," Vij added.

Promotions and base pay increases will be internally communicated to employees between May 26–29.

In September 2024, the Ireland-headquartered firm permanently shifted its promotion cycle from December to June, citing better visibility of client spending and demand.

"We've now permanently shifted that promotion cycle, so we will do our big promotion cycle in June, and our smaller one in December, to better match when our clients are setting their budgets and we have better visibility, and that's what we're seeing again.

"The justification for that is clear that we'll really know IT spending and spending on our services in the budgets in January and February," Accenture CEO Julie Sweet had said during the company's earnings call in September.

'Omanisation' last issue in conclusion of India-Oman FTA talks'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The negotiations for the proposed India-Oman free trade agreement are nearing conclusion with both sides discussing the last issue of the Gulf country's labour-related 'Omanisation' policy, as New Delhi wants the current regime to remain unchanged for its workers, an official said.

Omanisation is a policy implemented by Oman to boost the employment of its citizens in the private sector. The policy mandates companies to meet specific quotas for hiring Omani nationals. These quotas vary by sector and are periodically revised.

"There is a requirement in Oman for companies to employ a specified percentage of Omani nationals, which varies by sector - 15 per cent or 20 per cent or 30 per cent...What we want is that this current regime of Omanisation should remain permanent for us, so that it does not become more restrictive in the future after the FTA is finalised," the official said.

The negotiations received a much-needed impetus after the visit of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal to Muscat in January this year.



The talks for the agreement, officially dubbed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), formally began in November 2023.

In such agreements, two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on a maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and attract investments.

Oman is the third largest export destination among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries for India. India already has a similar agreement with another GCC member UAE which came into effect in May 2022.

The bilateral trade was about USD 9 billion (exports USD 4.42 billion and imports USD 4.52 billion) in 2023-24.

India's key imports are petroleum products and urea. These account for over 70 per cent of imports. Other key products are propylene and ethylene polymers, pet coke, gypsum, chemicals, and iron and steel.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025



Ali Fazal trains in Jujutsu with Italian black belt holder, Umberto Barbagallo for *Rakht Brahmand*

Actor Ali Fazal is currently undergoing intense training in Jujutsu to prepare for the next schedule of Rakht Brahmand. The actor has been training under Italian expert and black belt Umberto Barbagallo, who is known for his deep knowledge and experience in the martial arts. Ali has been learning under Umberto's guidance for the past one month.

The series helmed creatively by Raj and DK, will be resuming shoot in new few weeks in Mumbai and will include action sequences that require physical preparedness and skill. Ali has committed himself to the training in order to perform the sequences with authenticity.

Speaking about the preparation, a source from the production said, "Ali was clear from the beginning that he wanted to train properly for the role. He didn't want to rely on doubles for the action scenes. That's why the team brought in Umberto to help him get into shape and learn the technique."



Woman detained for attempting to trespass Salman Khan's Mumbai residence

In a concerning incident on May 22, 2025, a woman was apprehended by Mumbai Police after she allegedly attempted to trespass into the residence of Bollywood megastar Salman Khan. The attempted intrusion took place at Galaxy Apartments, the actor's well-known home in Mumbai's Bandra area. Authorities swiftly intervened and detained the woman at the scene before she could gain access to the property. While the police have confirmed the incident and are currently interrogating the woman, details about her identity and the motive behind the trespass remain undisclosed.

This episode comes just over a year after a more serious security breach at the same location. In April 2024, two unidentified assailants on a motorbike opened fire outside Khan's residence. The attack, which sent shockwaves across the film industry and Khan's massive fanbase, was later linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. Anmol Bishnoi, the brother of the notorious gangster, reportedly claimed responsibility for the shooting via a Facebook post.

The incident prompted a significant upgrade in Salman Khan's personal security. By July 2024, the actor issued a statement recounting the terrifying moment he heard a loud bang outside his home, initially mistaking it for a firecracker. His police bodyguard then informed him that two men had fired shots at his apartment's balcony. Khan also acknowledged receiving prior threats to his and his family's safety and confirmed that the gang had publicly taken credit for the attack. Given the past threats and the heightened tension surrounding Khan's security, the latest trespassing attempt has raised fresh concerns. Investigations are ongoing as authorities work to determine whether the incident is an isolated act or linked to previous threats.



Aishwarya Rai Bachchan silences divorce rumours with striking appearance at Cannes 2025

Bollywood icon Aishwarya Rai Bachchan once again captivated the global stage with her appearance at the 78th Cannes Film Festival. Dressed in a regal heirloom ivory saree adorned with exquisite traditional jewels, the former Miss World made heads turn. But it wasn't just her couture choice that set the internet ablaze — it was the striking sindoor (vermilion) on her forehead that sparked waves of speculation and admiration.

A Cannes veteran, Aishwarya's presence on the red carpet has always been a talking point, and 2025 was no different. Her elegant ensemble celebrated her Indian roots, seamlessly blending heritage with high fashion. Yet, beyond the glitz and glamour, fans were quick to interpret a deeper message in her appearance.

Social media platforms erupted with reactions, with many users suggesting that the visible sindoor was a subtle yet powerful response to swirling divorce rumours involving her and actor-husband Abhishek Bachchan. Admirers praised her for carrying herself with grace and dignity amid ongoing speculation about her personal life.

On X (formerly Twitter), one user remarked, "One appearance at Cannes and divorce rumours put to rest. Aishwarya Rai Bachchan slays it like the OG queen of Cannes in ivory saree and flaunts sindoor." Another echoed, "She came and shut down not only the red carpet but also the gossip mills. #AishwaryaAtCannes."

The actress, who has been representing India at Cannes for over two decades, once again proved why she remains a timeless figure in both cinema and fashion. Whether it was a conscious decision or simply her personal style, Aishwarya's look made a statement that resonated far beyond the red carpet.



Athiya Shetty steps away from Bollywood to embrace motherhood and a private life

After nearly a decade in the Hindi film industry, actress Athiya Shetty has made the decision to step away from Bollywood. The actress, known for her understated charm and poise, has opted to prioritise her family life, especially motherhood, over the hustle of showbiz.

The news was recently confirmed by her father, veteran actor Suniel Shetty, who revealed that the decision was entirely Athiya's own. Reflecting on her choice, he shared that she had received multiple offers following her film Motichoor Chaknachoor, but turned them down in favour of a quieter life.

"She said, 'Baba, I don't want to,' and she just left," Suniel Shetty said in an interview. "That's what I salute her for — saying, 'I'm not interested. I don't want to do films.' After Motichoor Chaknachoor, a lot came her way, but she said, 'I don't want to. I'm comfortable, you know?'" he added.

Athiya's decision appears rooted in a desire to spend quality time with her daughter and shift focus toward motherhood. Her exit from the spotlight signals a conscious choice to live a life away from the constant glare of the cameras — a rarity in an industry that often equates success with visibility.

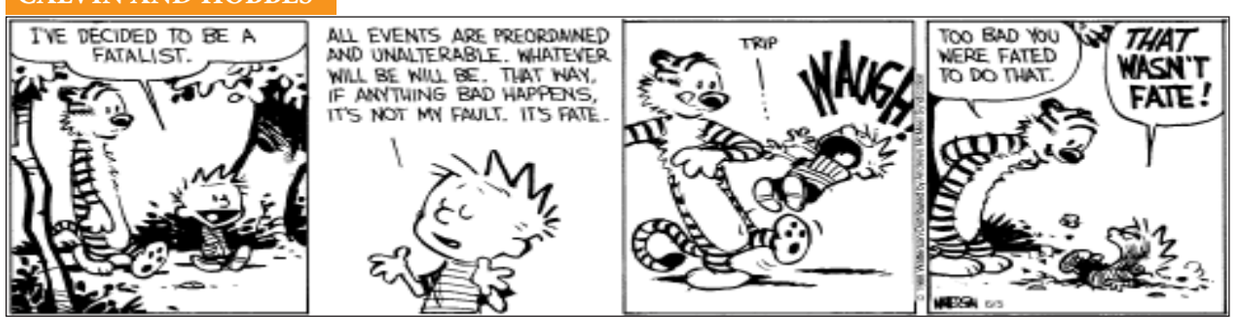
Debuting with Hero in 2015, Athiya's career may have been brief, but it was marked by steady growth and a selection of diverse roles that hinted at her potential. Her departure leaves behind a quiet yet dignified legacy, reflecting the grace with which she entered — and now exits — the world of cinema.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBES



GARFIELD



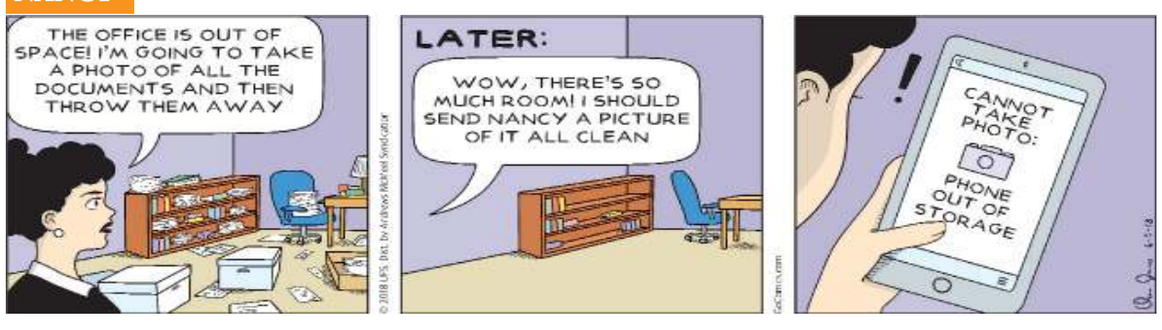
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

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9				2		3		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

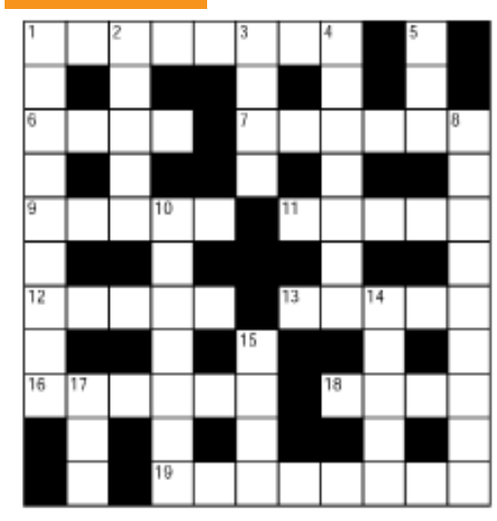
Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Train stops
6 Tumble over and over
7 Young cows
9 A tall type of building
11 A feeling of rage
12 Bees make this
13 One third of twenty-one
16 Instructions for cake making
18 The part along the side or end of something
19 Always ready to give away or share what you have

DOWN

1 A thing with handles for carrying an injured person
2 Let
3 Say this when you get hurt
4 Complete quiet
5 Tell a fib
8 People unknown to you
10 The late part of the day
14 A machine that can record television programmes
15 A type of blood vessel
17 Pixie

SOLUTION

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	I	N	V	I	T	A	T	I	O	N
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The Pioneer
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FRIDAY MAY 23, 2025

'COOKING WITH CELEBS IS CHAOTIC— BUT THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF IT'



In an exclusive chat with ***The Pioneer***, celebrity chef **Harpal Singh Sokhi** spoke about his exciting return to television with Colors' latest offering, *Laughter Chefs Unlimited Entertainment*. Blending comedy with culinary chaos, the show marks a refreshing shift in his career, allowing him to explore the lighter side of food and entertainment. As he teams up with popular television faces in a kitchen filled with unscripted moments, Harpal brings his signature energy and charm to a format that promises both hearty laughs and a taste of nostalgia



TEJAL SINHA
tejal.sinha30@gmail.com

From bringing *Namak Shamak* into our kitchens to becoming the face of India's most entertaining cooking show, *Laughter Chefs*, Chef Harpal Singh Sokhi is a name that resonates with food, fun, and flavour. As the host of *Laughter Chefs*, he's not just serving dishes, but dishing out smiles too. In this exclusive conversation, the celebrated chef-turned-entertainer takes us through the recipe behind the show's success, how he found his unique voice and why laughter is the best garnish of all.

Reflecting on the massive success of *Laughter Chefs*, Sokhi says, "Any new concept that brings happiness and laughter into families is always special. When something brings light into a home and helps people forget their worries, that's what *Laughter Chef* does." According to him, the secret sauce is a potent mix of two things Indians love the most—comedy and cooking. "Clean comedy is something everyone can enjoy together. And cooking is part of every Indian household. When you bring these together, you get something truly enjoyable."

But *Laughter Chef* isn't just about chuckles. "It's real," he says. "If someone's dish doesn't turn out well, it's accepted. If something goes wrong, that's okay—it just wasn't their day. That's real cooking, and the audience is appreciating this honesty."

After the roaring success of Season 1, expectations soared for the next chapter. "We received great appreciation, and that gave us a lot of motivation," Sokhi shares. "Season 2 was more exciting and more challenging. New contestants had to dive into something they had only watched before. That was a big leap."

To raise the bar, the team introduced more complex, yet relatable challenges. "We made sure the tasks had an appeal—something the audience could connect with and even try at home. And to our delight, many of the dishes created on the show were picked up by street vendors and restaurants. That has been one of the most satisfying things for us."

With decades in the industry, Sokhi has been at the forefront of transforming how food is seen on Indian television. "We've made cooking bigger," he says proudly. "Today, even in shows not related to cooking, you'll find celebrities cooking. We've brought more excitement and attention to it."

His earlier show Turban Tadka had already redefined food entertainment, and now *Laughter Chef* is taking it to the next level. "Earlier people thought, 'Oh, celebrities don't cook.' But now they see them taking on real kitchen challenges."

Some of the most unforgettable moments on the show have come from pure spontaneity. "The punchlines just fly in the air," Sokhi laughs. "You have to quickly pick one and reply. That's how the comedy on *Laughter Chef* works—it's not scripted, it flows naturally."

Particularly memorable for him are his exchanges with Krushna and Kashmera. "I used to be the quiet judge standing in one corner," he chuckles. "But I thought, why not get involved in the comedy too? While doing that, I share food facts and cooking history, and the contestants love it."

Describing the *Laughter Chef* set as a "crazy playground," Sokhi compares it to "a grand recipe where you mix a hundred ingredients to create one dish—and that dish is fun and entertainment." Whether it's Bharti or Krushna, the unpredictability on set keeps things fresh and thrilling. "It's not planned, it just happens—and that's what makes it so beautiful and real."

In a time dominated by OTT platforms, *Laughter Chef* has lured audiences back to television. "It's created history," says Sokhi. "It's clean, real, and something people can relate to. It's not just about food—it's about chaos, fun, emotions, comedy, and storytelling. Everything is woven together beautifully with cooking as the thread."

Chef Sokhi's infectious energy and signature catchphrase "Namak Shamak" have become culinary folklore. But the story behind it is as flavourful as the phrase itself.

"While filming Turban Tadka in Lonavala, my director Girish asked me, 'How will people remember you?' I didn't have an answer then," he recalls. That evening, a book his daughter gave him led him to a chapter about the Salt Satyagraha. "It hit me—salt, such a simple thing, had sparked a revolution. In food, salt is just as essential. That thought led to 'Namak Shamak.' It became my identity—simple, joyful, memorable." And now, people chant the jingle even in his restaurants. "They send me videos after dining, saying, '*Chef, zubaan ki ho gayi balle balle*!' That's so heartwarming."

From his early days in five-star kitchens to becoming India's beloved 'chef-entertainer,' Sokhi believes he was always meant to make people smile. "Even as a kid, I entertained friends with jokes and timing. This fun-loving nature has stayed with me. When the opportunity came, I embraced it and evolved."

He doesn't just cook; he connects. "People tell me they don't watch me for cooking alone, but because I make them feel happy and a part of my life. That's the biggest reward." As one of India's first celebrity chefs, Sokhi's journey has inspired countless aspiring cooks. "I feel proud to be a name people associate with joy and food. Everything I've achieved has come from hard work, blessings, and family support."

He adds, "I never watched my own shows much, but I watch *Laughter Chef*. It's so destressing—I laugh and think, 'Wow, this is making people's lives lighter.' When I'm happy, I believe others feel happy too."

His ever-evolving style, full of energy and warmth, has been shaped by the people who watch him. "When fans write in from around the world, it's humbling. It makes me want to do more. We live in a stressful world and if my face and food can bring smiles, then that's my calling."

BREAKING SILENCE

How trans community is paying price of financial apathy

PNS|HYDERABAD



At the intersection of activism and compassion stands Abhina Aher, founder of the TWEET Foundation—a trans-led powerhouse transforming lives in Delhi and Mumbai. With a mission rooted in dignity and equity, Abhina leads efforts that span crisis response, shelter, healthcare, legal aid and employment for the transgender community. Beyond grassroots support, she's shaping the national narrative, partnering with government, civil society and industry to champion trans rights and policy reform across India.

Could you explain the reason behind today's pressing discussion on finance and the trans community, Abheena?

A quiet crisis is taking place. In India, a large number of trans-led and trans-affirmative programs are closing or reducing in scope—not because they are ineffectual, but rather because financing has dried up! The abrupt removal or rerouting of resources, whether from development aid, philanthropic contributions, or corporate social responsibility programs, is destroying years of grassroots work. Hundreds of transgender people's livelihoods are immediately and cruelly at risk when the aid ends.

Which immediate repercussions have you witnessed on the ground?

It has a terrible effect. Once at the forefront of HIV awareness and health promotion, peer educators and community health workers are losing their positions. Project managers and transgender professionals who made a living in development are starting over. Programs for skilling have been suspended in the middle. The most agonising thing is that safe communal places that provided dignity in addition to refuge are closing. This is a survival issue, not merely an economic one.



What do you think is causing the withdrawal of corporate funding and CSR?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and changing economic priorities, a significant portion of CSR resources have been reallocated to larger, more noticeable infrastructure or educational initiatives. Sadly, transgender rights and livelihoods are frequently left off of the priority list. The loss of support from important foreign donors like USAID, which had previously provided funding for HIV prevention, healthcare and empowerment initiatives for the trans community, has been another devastating blow. Programs that were lifelines for thousands of transgender people are either fighting for survival or have completely shut down as a result of USAID's withdrawal, leaving a huge void. This is about the breakdown of a support structure that was established over many years, not simply about money. The implications are profoundly structural and real, albeit sometimes it's because of a lack of knowledge and other times because of discomfort with gay topics.

Which industries or services are most impacted?

HIV prevention and care, in particular, have been severely impacted by grassroots health services. Programs for trans adolescents that emphasise entrepreneurship, job preparedness and skill development are disappearing. Additionally, drop-in centers that offered food, psychiatric help, or even just a safe haven have vanished. These are essentials, not extravagances.

How do those who were employed under these schemes fare?

They are forced, not voluntarily, to return to dangerous informal economies, such as begging or sex work, as a result of their income loss. Here, we are discussing lives, identities and futures that were at last given some light but now feel abandoned; we are not discussing numbers. It's devastating.

What part might CSR and domestic money play in turning things around?

CSR leaders and domestic funders must take the initiative. Resources must be redirected toward social security, health care and trans livelihoods. Businesses need to understand that trans inclusion is an essential component of inclusive development and not a side issue. Impact can be increased through long-term public-private collaborations, particularly when transgender individuals are in charge of the programs.

What is your current call to action for businesses and policymakers?

Put money into us. As a dedication to justice and equity, not as charity. CSR financing for trans-led initiatives should be revived. Create public-private collaborations that prioritise transgender individuals rather than marginalising them. To bridge the gap left by foreign contributors, promote domestic philanthropy. India cannot afford to ignore its transgender residents if it hopes to be genuinely inclusive and prepared for the future.

Redefining future of global nutraceutical innovation



In an era where speed, science, and sustainability define the nutraceutical industry, Amit Srivastava, Chief Catalyst and Founder of Nutrify Today, stands at the intersection of innovation and responsibility. With transformative platforms like NutrifyGenie AI, groundbreaking summits like SumFlex, and a rapidly expanding global footprint, Nutrify Today is spearheading a movement to position India as a $100 billion nutraceutical powerhouse. In an in-depth discussion, Srivastava shares how his organization is reshaping the contours of nutrition science and industry practices—grounded in ethics, driven by data, and inclusive by design.

"Time-to-market has always been a fundamental bottleneck in nutraceutical innovation. NutrifyGenie was built to remove that," says Srivastava, highlighting the platform's profound impact on reducing development cycles.

NutrifyGenie streamlines complex processes—identifying validated actives, regulatory mapping, and connecting with manufacturing partners—significantly reducing decision latency. "Today, companies are fast-tracking their product cycles in ways that were unthinkable even two years ago," he explains.

Looking ahead, NutrifyGenie's capabilities are set to expand. "The next evolution is where we bring even more intelligence to the front end. NutrifyGenie will begin offering predictive formulation paths based on geography, demographic demand, and clinical substantiation. It is moving from an engine of acceleration to one of precision."

Reflecting on the recently concluded SumFlex 2025 summit, Srivastava calls it a pivotal moment in India's nutraceutical journey. "SumFlex was not designed to be a typical industry gathering. It was meant to serve as a turning point," he states. Two developments from the summit stand out. "First, the Rural Economic Forum MoU creates a formal bridge between rural nutraceutical entrepreneurship and global value chains. That is a structural shift in how inclusivity can be embedded in high-growth sectors. Second, the launch of Rx.NutrifyToday.com. It signals to the medical community that we are serious about accountability, clinical relevance, and science-first nutrition." According to Srivastava, these outcomes equip India with both scale and credibility to lead globally. At the core of Srivastava's mission is a deep commitment to ethical innovation. "If this industry becomes driven solely by commercial opportunity, it risks losing trust. For us, 'karma in action' is a discipline," he asserts.

He emphasizes that integrity is not a side note but central to the Nutrify Today model. "It is embedded in how we validate science, engage with micro-enterprises, and select which innovations to back. The economic model has to align with the long-term public good. Growth happens when you stay grounded in that, but it does not come at the cost of integrity." Nutrify Today's inclusivity initiatives go beyond rhetoric. "This work begins with recognising that innovation is not limited to city labs," Srivastava notes, speaking about the organisation's focus on rural and tier-2 institutional R&D. "Our job is to give those innovations a legitimate pathway into the global market. Project One Future and the MoU with the Rural Economic Forum allow us to formalise that process. We are not just aggregating micro-enterprises but enabling them to compete and scale in global wellness frameworks." India's role in the global nutraceutical arena is poised to expand, thanks to its unique assets. "India has a unique leverage right now. We sit at the intersection of scientific capability, biodiversity, and scalable manufacturing," Srivastava explains. This strategic position allows India to lead in regulatory harmonization and standard-setting. "We have already begun engaging with international forums to propose more cohesive, evidence-backed frameworks. The goal is leadership grounded in collaboration and responsibility."



With more than 3.6 million curated data points, NutrifyGenie ensures that its insights are not just fast but credible. "A large volume of data is meaningless without context and transparency," Srivastava stresses.

He elaborates on the platform's integrity-focused structure: "Every data point, clinical trial output or toxicology input is referenced, tiered by credibility, and linked to compliance pathways. We also keep interfaces open for medical professionals and researchers to challenge or contribute, making it a dynamic validation loop. This is not a tool for speed alone. It is built to enable informed, accountable decisions."

The launch of Rx.NutrifyToday.com has been a major step towards bridging the gap between clinical medicine and nutraceuticals. "Clinical adoption of nutraceuticals has been limited not due to lack of efficacy, but due to lack of trust and evidence standardisation," says Srivastava.

The platform provides doctors with a reliable reference point. "It equips doctors with a reference environment that aligns with their training: objective data, risk-benefit analysis, toxicity profiles, and validated claims. We already see early signs of improved physician engagement and confidence in using nutraceutical interventions alongside primary treatment. That is the shift we want to institutionalise."

Platforms like Dealsphere promise commercialization within just 15 days, but Srivastava assures that this speed doesn't sacrifice quality. "Dealsphere's speed comes from compression, not omission," he clarifies. "We have digitised the licensing journey, matched it with validated manufacturing partners, and layered it with Nutrify Genie's regulatory insights. What used to be a long chain of disconnected workflows is now a single continuum. No shortcuts are taken on compliance or safety. In fact, the system flags and halts any formulation that lacks scientific or regulatory backing. Acceleration only makes sense when it increases quality, not just velocity."

With a 50% women workforce and a cross-disciplinary team, Nutrify Today embraces diversity as a strength. "Our products are meant to serve diverse populations. If the people building them don't reflect that, we lose nuance, empathy, and insight," Srivastava affirms. He underscores that this inclusivity is intentional. "Having a gender-balanced team and cross-disciplinary input forces better questions, deeper discussions, and more resilient outcomes. This is a function of how we hire, who we mentor, and what we value. Innovation isn't just technical but cultural. And diversity strengthens that culture."

Looking to the future, Srivastava outlines the company's mission to address growing global health issues. "The biggest challenge is the erosion of preventive health infrastructure. Whether it is metabolic disorders, micronutrient imbalances, or gut health, the problem is systemic and growing."

Nutrify Today is proactively building the future of responsible nutrition. "Our goal is to make scientifically backed, accessible preventive nutrition a core part of healthcare and not an afterthought. We are actively pursuing collaborations with clinical research organisations, hospitals, and even insurance providers to get there. We are also investing in platforms that bring consumer data into formulation strategy so that we can design with clarity and scale with confidence."

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025

RCB LOOK TO STRENGTHEN TOP TWO SPOT AGAINST SRH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow



Already through to the playoffs, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will aim to secure a top-two league stage finish for the first time in nine years when they take on Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in their Indian Premier League clash here on Friday.

RCB haven't finished inside the top two since the 2016 season when they signed off as runners-up eventually. However, currently second on the table with 17 points from 12 games, victories in their remaining two matches could potentially lock a top-two spot. Friday's fixture, originally a home game for the Bengaluru outfit, was shifted due to the onset of monsoon.

RCB was in red-hot form prior to the league's disruption due to the India-Pakistan military conflict and the side had strung together four consecutive wins. But the momentum was halted by a washout in their first game after resumption. Following a 20-day break, it will be interesting to see whether they retain their rhythm and competitive edge. Chasing an elusive IPL crown, RCB have managed one of their most consistent campaigns in recent memory. The ever-reliable Virat Kohli has been in imperious form, scoring seven fifties in 11 innings and anchoring the top order with characteristic elegance. Skipper Rajat Patidar, Tim David, and Romario Shepherd have complemented him well with timely bursts of power hitting.

That said, Patidar's form took a dip just before the break. After averaging 37.2 in his first five games, he managed only 53 runs in the next five at an average of 10.6. A finger injury, sustained during the home clash against Chennai Super Kings, forced him into a splint. However, he has been batting freely in the nets once again in a promising sign for RCB heading into the business end.

The spin duo of Krunal Pandya and Suyash Sharma has been very effective while Josh Hazlewood and Yash Dayal have bowled the difficult overs with ease in the pace department. However, Hazlewood will not be available for the game as he recovers from his shoulder injury.

In an added boost, most of RCB's foreign recruits are available for this match and beyond. Last year's finalists, Sunrisers Hyderabad, are coming off a convincing six-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants and will be eager to carry that momentum and finish this forgettable season on a high.

While SRH's campaign has had flashes of brilliance, particularly from explosive openers Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head, consistency has remained elusive, leading to their eighth position on the table. Their bowling unit, despite featuring marquee names like skipper Pat Cummins and India pacer Mohammad Shami, has struggled to deliver collectively and assert control in key moments.

Teams:

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Phil Salt, Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar (c), Mayank Agarwal, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Tim David, Krunal Pandya, Romario Shepherd, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Suyash Sharma, Josh Hazlewood, Yash Dayal, Rasikh Dar Salam, Manoj Bhandage, Jacob Bethell, Swapnil Singh, Liam Livingstone, Nuwan Thushara, Lungi Ngidi, Mohit Rathee, Swastik Chikara, Abhinandan Singh.
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Smaran Ravichandran, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Simarjeet Singh, Zeeshan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga.

Ayush Mhatre to lead India U-19 in England tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi



Mumbai's Ayush Mhatre was on Thursday appointed captain of the India U-19 team for next month's tour of England, while 14-year-old batting sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi is also included in the squad. The tour, scheduled to begin on June 24, will include a 50-over warm-up match, followed by a five-match Youth One-Day series and two Multi-Day matches against England U-19.

Suryavanshi's selection comes on the back of a breakthrough IPL season with Rajasthan Royals. The baby-faced big-hitter from Bihar's Samastipur had become the toast of the nation after becoming the youngest to smash an IPL hundred and his 35-ball century last month against Gujarat Titans was also the second fastest of the league.

He has played five first-class matches and six List A games for Bihar but is yet to score a hundred in any of those matches. However, Suryavanshi had made a hundred against the Australia U-19 in the first Youth Test at Chennai last year. Seventeen-year-old Mhatre, on the other hand, has played nine first-class matches and seven List A games, scoring 962 runs. The opener replaced Chennai Super Kings skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad midway this season after the latter was ruled out with an elbow injury.

Mumbai's Wicketkeeper batter Abhigyan Kundu has been named Mhatre's deputy.

While another interesting selection is that of Kerala leg-spinner Mohammed Enaan, who was impressive against Australia U-19 in December last year. Enaan grabbed 16 wickets from two Youth Tests against the Aussies to emerge the top wicket-taker in that series. Punjab off-spinner Anmoljeet Singh, who was the second highest-wicket taker of that series with 9 scalps, too found a place in the squad.

India U-19 Squad

Ayush Mhatre (Captain), Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vihaan Malhotra, Maulyarajsinh Chavda, Rahul Kumar, Abhigyan Kundu (Vice-Captain & WK), Harvansh Singh (WK), R S Ambrish, Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan Patel, Henil Patel, Yudhajit Guha, Pranav Raghavendra, Mohammed Enaan, Aditya Rana, Anmoljeet Singh.
Standby Players: Naman Pushpak, D Deepesh, Vedant Trivedi, Vikalp Tiwari, Alankrith Rapole (WK).

Indian team announced for European leg of FIH Hockey Pro League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi



Hockey India on Thursday announced a 24-member Indian men's team for the European leg of FIH Hockey Pro League to be played in Amstelveen, Netherlands and Antwerp, Belgium, from June 7. India will begin their European leg with two matches each against the Netherlands on June 7 and 9, followed by a double header against Argentina on June 11 and 12 at the Wagner Stadium in Amstelveen.

They will then travel to Antwerp to face Australia on June 14 and 15 before ending their campaign against hosts Belgium on June 21 and 22. India played the home leg of the Pro League in Bhubaneswar earlier this year where they secured 15 points with five wins in eight games and now stand third in the points table. "We wanted a bit more experience in the squad this time around and I am really happy with the selection," chief coach Craig Fulton said. "The team has been training well as we're looking to try and push as hard as possible and win the Pro League. Since there's qualification for the World Cup on the line, we want to try and get as many points to put ourselves in a good position for that," he added.

India have pruned down their squad from 32 to 24 members since their Bhubaneswar leg. Those missing out include defender Varun Kumar, midfielder Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, and forwards Boby Singh DHami, Araijeet Singh Hundal, Uttam Singh, Angad Bir Singh and Arshdeep.

"We haven't drawn any games so far in the tournament and I believe we need to turn our losses into draws and then go for a shootout, so if we don't really get the desired results, we can still get points on the board," Fulton said. "We also need to improve our penalty corner conversion rate so yes, we've got some good objectives to try and achieve this time around," he concluded. With the highest-placed team of the league securing a spot in the 2026 Men's FIH World Cup, India will be hoping to improve upon their performance and win maximum points in the remaining eight matches of the tournament.

Team:

Goalkeepers: Krishan Bahadur Pathak,Suraj Karkera.
Defenders: Sumit, Amit Rohidas, Jugraj Singh, Nilam Sanjeep Xess, Harmanpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Sanjay and Yashdeep Siwach
Midfielders: Raj Kumar Pal, Nilakanta Sharma, Hardik Singh, Rajinder Singh, Manpreet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh
Forwards: Gurjant Singh, Abhishek, Shilanand Lakra, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh.



Srikanth enters Malaysia Masters quarterfinal, Prannoy faces loss

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kuala Lumpur

Seasoned Indian badminton player Kidambi Srikanth entered the quarterfinals of Malaysia Masters after defeating Ireland's Nhat Nguyen in his second-round match but H S Prannoy bowed out with a straight game loss here on Thursday.

In the mixed doubles pre-quarterfinals, the duo of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto beat France's Julien Maio and Lea Palermo 21-17 18-21 21-15. Prannoy, however, suffered a 9-21 18-21 defeat to Japan's Yushi Tanaka in his men's singles pre-quarterfinal match. In the day's other pre-quarterfinal matches involving Indian players, Ayush Shetty lost to France's Toma Popov 13-21 17-21, Sathish Kumar Karunakaran went down to Christo Popov of France 14-21 16-21.

In the women's doubles round of 16 outing, Prerana Alvekar and Mrunmayee Deshpande lost to Hsu Yin-Hui and Lin Jhih Yun 9-21 14-21.

Srikanth prevailed 23-21, 21-17 in the 59-minute showdown against world number 33 Nguyen. Srikanth, whose world ranking has plummeted to 65 owing to a prolonged lean patch, will face France's Toma Popov in the last-eight stage. Also bowing out was Sathish Karunakaran. He was beaten 14-21, 16-21 by Toma's brother and doubles partner Christo Popov.

In the doubles competition, Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila advanced to the quarterfinals of the mixed event with a 21-17, 18-21, 21-15 victory over France's Lea Palermo and Julien Maio.

Neeraj Chopra up against Weber again in Poland

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chorzow

The coveted 90m frontier finally breached in Doha last week, Neeraj Chopra will be eying an even bigger throw in yet another top-class men's javelin field at the ORLEN Janusz Kusocinski Memorial meet here on Friday. Chopra sent his spear to 90.23m at the Doha Diamond League though he had to settle for a second-place finish after German Julian Weber produced a 91.06m effort in his last attempt to upstage the Indian. It was also Weber's maiden 90m throw.

Weber, an European champion in 2022 and silver-medallist in 2024, will be there in Poland too along with two-time world champion Anderson Peters (PB: 93.07m) of Grenada, who finished third in Doha with a throw of 84m.

Polish national record holder Marcin Krukowski (PB: 89.55m) and compatriots Cyprian Mrzyglod (PB: 84.97m) and Dawid Wegner (PB: 82.21m), Andrian Mardare (86.66m) of Moldova and Ukraine's Artur Felfner (PB: 84.32m) complete the eight-man field.

Since crossing 88m in 2018, the 90m-mark has been on the 27-year-old Chopra's radar. Relieved that the monkey is finally off his back, Chopra made it clear that "it was just the beginning" and he will be gunning for farther distances in the long season ahead. The climax of the season will be the World Championships in September in Tokyo where he will be defending his title.

He is no longer troubled by the groin niggle that affected his performance in the last few years. He is also much more confident after roping in the iconic Jan Zelezny, who holds the world record for longest throw. "I and my coach are still working on some aspects of my throw. I am still learning things."

Indian squad named for Thailand Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi



A 19-member squad will represent India at the 4th Thailand Open International Boxing Tournament, scheduled in Bangkok from May 24 to June 1. Held under the aegis of Asian Boxing, the Thailand Open will see top national teams from across the continent compete, including powerhouses like China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Japan, Korea, and host nation Thailand.

The squad comprises 10 men and 9 women. The Boxing Federation of India, being run by an interim committee, followed its selection criterion, providing opportunities to silver medallists from this year's men's and women's National Championships. "With the team set to leave for the Thailand Open, we're entering a very exciting phase for Indian boxing," interim committee chairman Ajay Singh said. "This marks the beginning of a packed international calendar, with the World Cup stage tournament in Kazakhstan, the World Championship in Liverpool, the World Cup Finals in New Delhi, and several key tournaments, including the Asian Championship, lined up towards the end of the year."

The national camp, currently underway at NIS Patiala, initially brought together 60 male and 60 female boxers, shortlisted after standout performers at the Nationals and gold and silver medallists from the 2024 REC Combined National Talent Hunt in Rohtak and Chief of Army Staff Cup in Pune. Following a round of internal assessments, the pool was pruned to 40 in each category. This refined core group will continue training through June, with additional athletes from an upcoming elite women's competition joining in July.

The Thailand Open marks an important international outing in India's boxing calendar, providing a platform to elite boxers to test themselves against Asia's best, with momentum building toward the World Boxing Cup later this year.

Squad:
Men: Naothoi Singh Kongkham (47-50kg), Pawan Bartwal (50-55kg), Nikhil (55-60kg), Amit Kumar (60-65kg), Hemant Yadav (65-70kg), Deepak (70-75kg), Dhruv Singh (75-80kg), Jugnoo (80-85kg), Naman Tanwar (85-90kg), and Anshul Gill (90kg+).
Women: Yasika Rai (45-48kg), Tamanna (48-51kg), Abha Singh (51-54kg), Priya (54-57kg), Sanju (57-60kg), Saneh (65-70kg), Anjali (70-75kg), Lalfakmawii Ralte (75-80kg), and Kiran (80kg+).

Man United faces financial turmoil after Europa League final loss

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manchester



The financial consequences of Manchester United losing in the Europa League final should be painful and affect the club for years.

It was a zero-sum game Tottenham won 1-0 on Wednesday: Winner goes into the Champions League — plus the UEFA Super Cup game in August — and loser is out of Europe next season and gets nothing.

United lost a drab match despite, as soccer finance expert Kieran Maguire noted on Thursday, having higher revenue than Tottenham and spending 64 per cent more on wages for a more expensively acquired squad of players. Tottenham also beat United twice in the Premier League this season, and in the domestic League Cup.

"If I was teaching this at management school (I) would conclude that there is something seriously wrong with the culture of the organization … which is set by senior management," Maguire wrote on X.

Beyond the loss of sporting opportunities and reputational prestige, the club owned by the Glazer family from the United States and British billionaire industrialist Jim Ratcliffe has short and longer-term financial hits ahead.

No Champions League play next season is an instant loss of at least 80 million euros ($90 million), and approaching 150 million euros ($169 million) for a run deep into the knockout stage.

United also misses out on the 4 million euros ($4.5 million) Tottenham will get from UEFA for playing the Super Cup against the Champions League titleholder — either Inter Milan or Paris Saint-Germain - on August 13 at Udinese's stadium in Italy.

The winner gets a bonus of 1 million euros ($1.1 million). After failing to qualify for the 2025 Club World Cup - which has a $ 1 billion prize fund from FIFA and should pay more than $100 million to a successful European team — United is now far behind in qualifying for the 2029 edition. European teams qualify for the FIFA event only by being in the Champions League, either winning the title or building consistent results over four seasons.

United already will miss the entire first half of the 2024-28 qualifying period, and it is hard to project the team that last won the Premier League 12 years ago both qualifying for and then winning a Champions League title within three years.

One clear solution to growing financial issues and the ability to comply with Premier League rules is selling the club's best players, like captain Bruno Fernandes and out-of-favour forward Marcus Rashford, or its homegrown prospects. Some already earn high wages which are problematic for potential buyers.

A talent drain risks speeding a spiral of decline on and off the field if coach Ruben Amorim is left trying to rebuild with a weaker pool of players.

While United is still one of Europe's highest-earning clubs, UEFA's annual research shows its advantage is in decline, even though revenue was a club record 661.8 million pounds (USD 887 million) last year.

A UEFA chart showed that over five years from 2019-24 - pre-COVID-19 through to the post-pandemic recovery in the soccer industry - United's revenue grew at a slower rate than all of its biggest English rivals except Chelsea.

Revenue now risks dropping, and another income cut is coming from falling to 16th in the Premier League standings with one round left on Sunday.

Kirsty Coventry completes ceremonial baton change

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Brisbane

Kirsty Coventry has completed a ceremonial baton change before she takes over as International Olympic Committee president next month, handing off oversight of preparations for the Brisbane 2032 Games during a three-day inspection visit to southeast Queensland state.

Mikaela Cojuangco Jaworski replaced Coventry as head of the IOC's coordination commission for the 2032 Summer Games after the Olympic swimming champion from Zimbabwe was elected to take over from Thomas Bach in the sporting organization's top job.

All three were part of the IOC team that met in Brisbane and the Gold Coast for their first on-the-ground update on the planning overhaul from local organisers. "I'm here to formally hand over the baton, or the Olympic flame ... Boomerang!" Coventry said as she introduced Jaworski at an IOC coordination commission news conference Thursday at Brisbane's Suncorp Stadium. "I hope that I'm leaving some good vibes."

Coventry made her Olympic competition debut at the Sydney 2000 Games and has family living in Australia.

She said feels right at home after chairing the coordination commission since soon after the IOC awarded the 2032 Games to Brisbane in 2021. "I'm very excited about what Brisbane 2032 is going to do," she said.

"Not just for the region, but for Australia and for the world." It took more than 1,000 days and at least three major concept changes before a newly elected Queensland state government settled on a comprehensive venue plan in March.

That includes a new 60,000-seat stadium and an aquatics center to be built in parklands close to downtown Brisbane, as well as proposals to share events with regions outside the capital.

The surprising call to host rowing in a crocodile-inhabited river in Rockhampton on the central Queensland coast has attracted concern and criticism from the public and sports administrators.

Veteran IOC Olympic Games executive director Christophe Dubi said there's time for local organizers and sports federations to consider all options and collaborate on specifics for venues, and there's absolutely no need to panic with seven years until the Brisbane Games.

The Pioneer
VIJAYAWADA | FRIDAY | MAY 23, 2025

'My father is my hero—my biggest inspiration'

After a nine-year hiatus, actor Manchu Manoj returns to the silver screen with the intense action drama *Bhairavam*, releasing on May 30. In an emotional comeback, Manoj opens up about his powerful role, the strong bond with co-stars Nara Rohit and Bellamkonda Sai Srinivas, and how his father Mohan Babu's disciplined life continues to inspire him



SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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After nearly a decade-long break from the big screen, Manchu Manoj is making a powerful comeback with the much-anticipated film *Bhairavam*, set to release on May 30. Known for his intense screen presence and emotional depth, Manoj gets candid about his return, the bond he shares with his co-stars, and how his father—veteran actor Mohan Babu—remains his greatest inspiration both in life and cinema.

"That's why I got emotional at the pre-release event of the film," said Manoj. "Because of some reasons, I took a break of nine years and came back with this film, so I was a bit emotional after attending my film event," he explained.

Talking about how the project came to him, Manoj shared that he met Bellamkonda Sai Srinivas at an event, and it was Srinivas who informed him that director Vijay Kanakamedala wanted to speak with him. "He gave me his number and then the director called and narrated the *Bhairavam* story. I liked it and agreed to do it immediately," said Manoj.

He revealed that he is playing the role of Gajapathi Varma in the film. "It's an intense and ferocious character. This film is definitely a special one in my career," said Manoj. He added that the other two characters, played by Nara Rohit and Bellamkonda Sai Srinivas, have also been crafted very well. "The director has written all three characters in a meaningful way and each of us gets importance," he noted. Manoj shared that through this film, he developed a strong bond with Nara Rohit and Sai Srinivas. "Sai is like my brother and Rohit is a good friend of mine. We spent a lot of time together and our bonding became strong. Though I had some personal problems, I never missed shooting and completed it. For this, I drew inspiration from Nara Rohit. A very sad incident happened in his family, but he still wanted to complete a song despite it. I learned from him," said Manoj, admiring Rohit's dedication.

When asked what he has learned from his father, the versatile actor Mohan Babu, Manoj replied, "His journey is a big inspiration. He struggled a lot to reach the top, and he always follows discipline. The other big thing I learned from him is to take care of the people who support you throughout and to help others as much as you can. I learned from him to be honest in life. My father is my hero," he said. Talking about his brother Vishnu, he added, "I have to learn from him how to speak in a situation," he said, in a more satirical tone.

Aditi Shankar, one of the female leads in the film, mentioned that Manoj cooks biryani very well. Manoj responded, "When I was in the hostel, I knew how to cook, so on the sets, I started cooking when I had time. Nara Rohit also cooks very well," he shared about their on-set bonding.

Manoj praised director Vijay Kanakamedala, saying, "He is a very good director, and people who have seen Garudan will definitely be surprised after watching Bhairavam. He has written the story so strongly. In fact, he even designed my costumes and look. We have seen the film and liked it very much. We are confident that this film is going to be a big success." When asked about when his solo film is coming out, Manoj said, "I had the story of Aham Brahmasmi ready, which I wanted to do as a solo project. But due to some reasons, it didn't happen. God had other plans — like Bhairavam and Mirai, in which I am playing important roles," said Manoj.

A dream come true to work with Pawan Kalyan: Jyothi Krishna



The first media event of the much-awaited Pawan Kalyan starrer *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* was held in Hyderabad. The film, which began production five years ago, was completed only recently after Pawan Kalyan wrapped up his portions. Now, the makers are thrilled to kick off promotional activities. The film, featuring Niddhi Agerwal as the female lead, is directed by Jyothi Krishna, with music composed by MM Keeravani. After multiple postponements, *Hari Hara Veera Mallu* is finally set to hit the screens on June 12.

While two songs from the film had already been released online, a special media event was organised for the third track. The song, titled Asura Hananam, is a goosebump-inducing composition that captures the valor of a warrior fighting evil forces. With MM Keeravani's stirring composition and Rambabu Gosala's powerful lyrics, the song evokes a strong sense of rebellion and courage.

Producer AM Rathnam, who is presenting the film, reflected on the long and demanding journey of making it. "It's been almost five years, and we've put a lot of hard work into this. My journey in cinema spans 54 years across Telugu, Tamil, and Hindi industries. Over 90 per cent of my films have been successful. I believe cinema should not only entertain but also offer a message, like Bharatheeyudu and Oke Okkadu. This film became possible because of Pawan Kalyan garu," said Rathnam.

Music director MM Keeravani praised Pawan Kalyan's persona, saying, "Everyone calls Pawan Kalyan the Power Star, but I call him the embodiment of 'Righteous Fury.' Anger is natural, but when it's for society, it becomes righteous. This film is tailor-made for him. He's a wildfire that doesn't stop, no matter how much rain pours."

Director Jyothi Krishna, who has taken the reins of the project, expressed his gratitude for the opportunity. "Every director dreams of working with Pawan Kalyan; it's like winning an award. I consider myself lucky to have gotten this opportunity. While Krish laid the foundation for the project, Rathnam sir planned to take it to the next level. Krish handed me the responsibility like an Olympic torch, entrusting me to carry it forward," he shared.





NTR overwhelmed with the response to *War 2* teaser

After many South Indian stars like Kamal Haasan, Rajinikanth, Chiranjeevi, Dhanush and Madhavan, NTR is now making his Hindi film debut with *War 2*. The teaser of the film was released on NTR's birthday, and the actor is overwhelmed by the positive response it has garnered.

NTR, a true-blue pan-India superstar lovingly called the 'Man of the Masses,' once again proved his massive popularity across the country. His super-spy avatar in the much-awaited YRF Spy Universe franchise has become a sensation on the internet, with fans praising his powerful screen presence.

Expressing gratitude, NTR shared, "It is truly a blessing to be an actor because you get to experience so much unconditional love from people. It is a very precious and rare feeling, and I'm really lucky to be receiving the same for *War 2*. This YRF Spy Universe film presents me in an all-new avatar, which I had a lot of fun portraying, and I'm overwhelmed with the positivity and love coming in from every quarter of the country."

NTR revealed he is thrilled by the unanimously positive response to *War 2*, especially after pouring every drop of emotion and energy into the big-screen entertainer. He added, "This character is extremely special to me. When you give so much emotion, so much intensity and energy to your role, it is all the more exciting to see this kind of response from my fans, from people who love to see good cinema on the big screen."

He further said, "The YRF Spy Universe has always created new cinematic and box office benchmarks, and I'm really happy to see the start of our campaign making such a huge mark on people. Can't wait to see the madness unfold in theatres from August 14th."

Produced by Aditya Chopra and directed by Ayan Mukerji, War 2 stars Kiara Advani as the female lead. The film is set to release on August 14 in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu.

Ace is a complete entertainer, says Vijay Sethupathi

Tamil actor Vijay Sethupathi, known for his versatility, has earned a strong fanbase in the Telugu-speaking states. With several of his films finding success in Telugu, fans have been eagerly awaiting his next release. Now, he's all set to entertain audiences with his upcoming film *Ace,* which is hitting the screens on Friday, May 23.

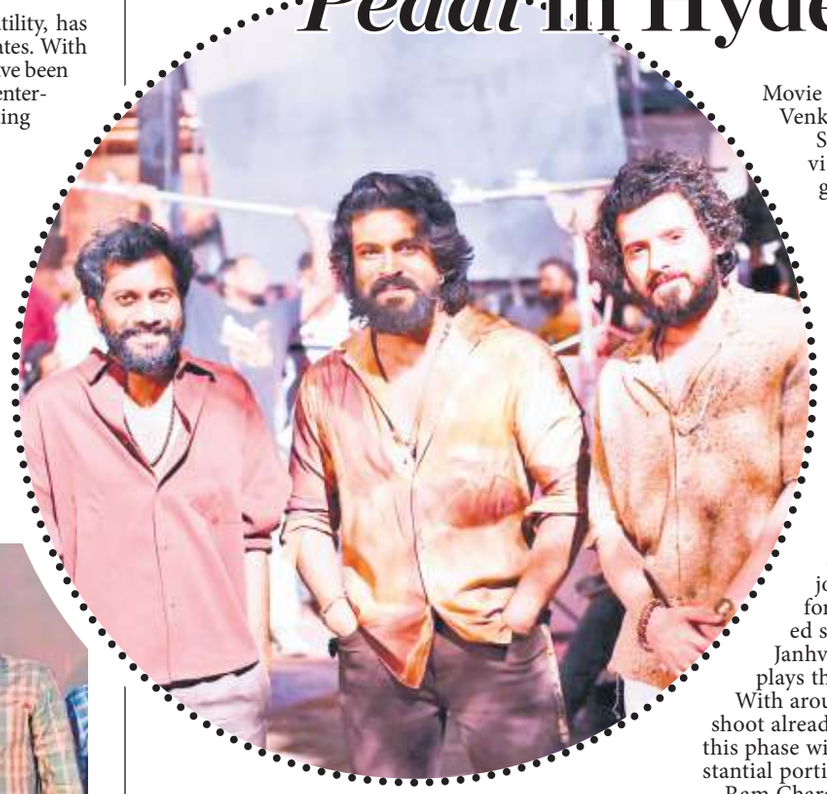
Directed and produced by Arumuga Kumar, Ace features Rukmini Vasanth as the female lead opposite Vijay Sethupathi. In Telugu, the film is being released by Shree Padmini Cinemas, headed by B. Shiva Prasad. The actor is currently in Hyderabad to promote the film.

"I've known Arumuga Kumar for many years. In fact, he was the one who gave me my first break in cinema. I'm happy to be working with him again. *Ace* has a mix of action, romance, and entertainment," said Vijay Sethupathi, adding that he is thankful to everyone involved in the project. "The Telugu dubbing has come out really well," he added.

Director Arumuga Kumar described the film as a complete entertainer. "Vijay Sethupathi is an all-rounder, and words fall short to describe his talent," said the director.



Ram Charan begins filming key sequences for *Peddi* in Hyderabad



Actor Ram Charan and director Buchi Babu Sana's much-anticipated film *Peddi* is currently being shot in Hyderabad. The makers have erected a massive set for the film, and crucial scenes are now being filmed at this specially constructed location.

The promotional videos released earlier have already created significant buzz, offering a glimpse into this high-stakes production, which has quickly become one of the most sought-after films in Indian cinema.

This ambitious project marks a grand collaboration between top creative forces and is shaping up to be a landmark cinematic moment. The film is presented by renowned production houses Mythri Movie Makers and Sukumar Writings, with Venkata Satish Kilaru producing.

Staying true to a raw and earthy visual tone, the team has gone to great lengths to ensure an immersive cinematic experience. Production designer Avinash Kolla and his crew have built an elaborate village set where a pulse-pounding stunt sequence and key dialogue scenes will be shot during this schedule.

Bollywood actor Divyendu Sharma has joined the cast for this extended schedule. Janhvi Kapoor plays the female lead. With around 30% of the shoot already completed, this phase will cover a substantial portion of the film.

Ram Charan has undergone a striking transformation for the role. He sports a rugged, rural look with long hair, a thick beard, and a nose ring—bringing intensity and authenticity to his character. The film also features veteran actors Shiva Rajkumar and Jagapathi Babu in pivotal roles.

Peddi is slated for a grand release on March 27, 2026, coinciding with Ram Charan's birthday.

ACTOR KAYADU LOHAR REPORTEDLY UNDER ED SCANNER IN TASMAC SCAM CASE



Actor Kayadu Lohar, who rose to fame for her role in Ashwath Marimuthu's Dragon alongside Pradeep Ranganathan, is reportedly under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with the TASMAC scam case in Tamil Nadu, according to reports.

The report claims that Kayadu has come under the radar of the ED for her alleged link to the scam. Individuals associated with the scam and caught during recent ED raids have reportedly named her. It is further alleged that Kayadu charged ?35 lakh to attend 'night parties'.

For the uninitiated, the TASMAC scam is an alleged financial scandal involving Tamil Nadu's state-run liquor company, TASMAC (Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation). According to a PTI report, the Supreme Court on Thursday remarked that the ED is "crossing all the limits" and violating the federal concept of governance. The apex court has also stayed the money laundering probe against TASMAC over the alleged corruption. Meanwhile, a law officer opposed the order, stating that the case involves corruption exceeding Rs 1,000 crore and that the ED is "not crossing the limits, at least in this case."

As of now, Kayadu Lohar has not issued any official statement regarding the alleged link to the case.