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MICROFINANCE
SUFFERS FROM HIGH INTEREST: RBI DY GUV

Akhil Akkineni's star-studded reception becomes talk of

THE TOWN



QUOTE OF THE DAY

The Pioneer

Strong action must be taken against Prabhakar Rao as per the court's guidelines. Public confidence in the Congress Government is already weakening. Not even a single corruption case has been properly investigated in the last 18 months of Congress rule. At least now, the government should argue strongly in court.

Prabhakar and the masterminds behind him must be proved guilty

- Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

P4

DON'T MISS...

'Steady progress in Polavaram works'

Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu has strongly denied reports published in a YSRCP-friendly newspaper about the Polavaram project, calling them baseless and misleading. He accused the opposition of deliberately spreading falsehoods at a time when the project is back on track and construction is progressing steadily. Speaking to the media in Rajahmundry, the minister criticised the previous YSRCP government, saying its negligence had put...

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'India cannot hold talks on IWT'

India will not engage with Pakistan on the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) till New Delhi's concerns regarding terrorism are addressed and the pact is completely revamped, sources said. They said Pakistan's Water Resources Secretary Syed Ali Murtaza has reached out multiple times, urging India to reconsider the decision to put the IWT in abeyance. In multiple letters to his Indian counterpart, Debashree Mukherjee...

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Silver soars Rs 1K to hit fresh peak

Silver prices soared Rs 1,000 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 1,08,100 per kilogram in the national capital on Monday, in line with firm global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association. On Saturday, the metal traded flat at Rs 1,07,100 per kg (inclusive of all taxes). Prior to that, the white metal on Friday had soared Rs 3,000 to hit another record high of Rs 1,07,100 per kilogram. Traders said silver prices surged due to strong investor demand, a weak dollar against...

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India gear up for Hong Kong test

Seeking its first win in the tournament, the Indian football team will face another acid test when it takes on Hong Kong in a crucial AFC Asian Cup 2027 round three qualifier match here on Tuesday. As per reports in the local media, all 50,000 tickets for the match have been sold out, setting a new attendance record for Hong Kong football. Manolo Marquez's men will have their task cut out as they face a Hong Kong side that has been resilient under...

-SPORTS



Early monsoon fizzles in AP, with 59% deficit rainfall

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Although the southwest monsoon arrived earlier this year in Andhra Pradesh compared to the past six years, it has not been bountiful, recording a 59 per cent deficit in the first nine days of June, said the Meteorological Department on Monday.

The southwest monsoon had set in on May 26 this year, nine days earlier than its usual date of June 4. However, the state recorded only 10.1 mm of average rainfall against the normal of 24.4 mm during this nine-day period, said a data set from the Met department.

Continued on >> P2

NAIDU's FIAT ON HIGHWAY PROJECTS

All hurdles must go by July-end

CM targets completion of 1,040 km of NHs in 2025 with Rs 20,067 cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has instructed officials to resolve all pending issues related to land acquisition, forest, and wildlife clearances for national and state highway projects by the end of July. He emphasised the need for uninterrupted and accelerated road construction across Andhra Pradesh.

Chairing a review meeting at the Secretariat on Monday with top officials and contractors, the Chief Minister expressed displeasure over delays in several infrastructure projects. He made it clear that further setbacks in road works would not be tolerated.

Officials briefed the CM that 770 km of roads were completed in the last financial year under the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) at a total cost of Rs 11,325 crore. Andhra Pradesh currently has 8,744 km of national highways, including 4,406 km under NHAI, 641 km managed by MoRTH's Project Implementation Unit (PIU), and 3,697 km overseen by the



- 770 km of roads were completed last financial year under NHAI and MoRTH at a cost of Rs 11,325 crore.
- Andhra Pradesh has a total of 8,744 km of national highways under various agencies.

- Currently, 144 highway projects covering 3,483 km are under construction at a cost of Rs 76,856 cr.

- "Mission Pothole-Free Roads" has achieved 97% completion, with 19,475 km repaired so far.
- Remaining pothole repair works to be completed by July 31.

NH (R&B) wing.

At present, 144 projects covering 3,483 km are under construction at an estimated cost of Rs 76,856 crore. Of these, 1,392 km are under NHAI and 2,091 km under MoRTH. The

Chief Minister has set a target to complete 1,040 km of highway works within 2025, at a projected cost of Rs 20,067 crore.

Meanwhile, the "Mission Pothole-Free Roads," launched

in November last year with an outlay of Rs 860.81 crore, has reached 97% completion as of June 6. A total of 19,475 km of roads have been repaired, with the remaining works to be completed by July 31.

Water to be released into Krishna Delta canals by June 20

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Water Resources Department (WRD) is preparing to release water into the Krishna Delta canals—including the Krishna Eastern and Western Delta—by June 20 to facilitate the commencement of Kharif agricultural operations across the region. The Kharif season is expected to begin in the first week of June.

This move is part of a coordinated effort to meet the irrigation needs of farmers in the



erstwhile Krishna and Guntur districts, as well as parts of Prakasam and West Godavari, where lakhs of acres of fertile farmland rely on water from the Prakasam Barrage and its extensive canal network.

Although the department typically releases water by 10 or 12

June for both irrigation and drinking purposes, this year's schedule may be delayed by a week or two, despite adequate storage in the Srisailem, Nagarjuna Sagar, and Pulichintala reservoirs on the Krishna River.

At a recent meeting of the Krishna District Irrigation Advisory Board (IAB), chaired by District Collector D.K. Balaji, WRD officials stated their intention to begin releasing water by June 10 to support seedbed preparation.

Continued on >> P2

Kakani's bail plea hearing adjourned

PNS ■ NELLORE

The court on Monday adjourned the hearing of former Minister Kakani Govardhan Reddy's bail petition to June 11.

Kakani faces several charges including illegal bauxite mining, unlawful use of explosives, and offences under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. His three-day police custody ended on Sunday evening.

Sources revealed that Kakani did not respond adequately to police questioning during the interrogation. He is named as Accused 4 in the illegal mining and explosives case and is currently held at Nellore Central Prison.

Senior journalist Kommineni held



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Senior journalist and a vernacular TV channel anchor Kommineni Srinivasa Rao was arrested by Andhra Pradesh police on Monday

for allegedly making derogatory remarks against women from the Amaravati region during a televised debate.

He was detained at his Hyderabad residence and taken to A.P. A case was reg-

istered at Thullur Police Station based on a complaint by State Madiga Corporation Director Khambampati Sirisha Rao, analyst VVR Krishnam Raju, and the TV channel management were booked under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and relevant IPC sections.

The remarks, allegedly calling Amaravati a "capital of prostitutes," sparked outrage.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan condemned the comments, calling for accountability and strict action.

A blot on democracy, says YSRCP

VIJAYAWADA: YSRCP strongly condemned the arrest of senior journalist Kommineni Srinivasa Rao, calling it a grave assault on democracy. Party State Coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy alleged that Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is sending a chilling message—fall in line or face consequences. He said the anchor had cautioned analyst Krishnam Raju during the debate and did not endorse the remark,

yet TDP leaders, including Naidu and Pawan Kalyan, orchestrated a media campaign, culminating in Kommineni's arrest. Despite Sakshi distancing itself from the analyst's view, the narrative was deliberately prolonged to target the YSRCP and divert attention from the government's failures. Sajjala warned this was dangerous politics aimed at silencing dissent and demanded civil society raise its voice.



'Shining Stars' ignite dreams of AP's brightest students

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

Brimming with pride and emotion, meritorious Class 10 and Intermediate students received the prestigious 'Shining Stars' awards from Andhra Pradesh Education Minister Nara Lokesh at a heartfelt ceremony held in Parvathipuram.

The awards, recognising outstanding performance in board examinations, served as a powerful reminder that encouragement and recognition can ignite ambition and self-belief in students, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Sai Bhuvanakruthi



Vakudavath, a Class 10 student from Narayana School who scored an impressive 594 out of 600, described the honour as a "brilliant idea" that uplifts morale. "Receiving the award from Lokesh sir is a once-in-a-lifetime moment. I feel emotional and grateful. My

mother works as a lab technician in Guntur—I wish she could be transferred to Parvathipuram so we could live together," she said. She credited the 100-Day Action Plan for boosting her exam confidence and expressed her dream of becoming an IAS officer.

Singh Bangaruthalli, an Intermediate vocational student from Government Junior College, Salur, who secured 901 out of 1,000, thanked the government for recognising vocational students on par with others. "Schemes like Dokka Seethamma midday meals

and the supply of quality books and bags helped us concentrate on our studies. I want to become a bank officer," she shared.

Karunam Rohit Kumar of Sri Sathya Sai Junior College, who scored 940/1,000, said the award proves that poverty is no obstacle to success. "I want to pursue software engineering in the CSE stream and use innovation to serve the underprivileged," he said.

Parents too were moved by the recognition. Vasanthala Srinivasa Rao, father of Deekshith Sai—a visually impaired student who scored 761/1,000 with

the help of a scribe—said, "Lokesh sir's support gives us hope. This is my son's first award, and it is a huge inspiration."

Aluvuri Santhoshi, mother of Tanuja who scored 576/600 from ZP High School, Makkhuva, said, "We never expected such recognition. My husband is a mechanic and I am a homemaker. We humbly seek financial support for her higher education."

The 'Shining Stars' awards seek to celebrate academic brilliance and foster aspirations among Andhra Pradesh's promising youth, regardless of their economic standing.

LOKESH SOUNDS THE BUGLE

‘TDP is a 1-crore strong family, not a party of palaces’

PNS ■ PARVATHIPURAM

In a spirited address that doubled as both a call to arms and a roadmap for revival, Telugu Desam Party (TDP) national general secretary Nara Lokesh fired up party workers at Chinabondapalli near Parvathipuram on Monday, declaring that the TDP is more than a political outfit—it is a one-crore-strong ideological family.

Lokesh underscored the importance of unity and discipline within the party ranks, urging every worker to stay committed to TDP's core principles, especially during turbulent times. "It took us three months to reach consensus on key reforms. That's the kind of internal democracy we practise," he said, citing the hard-fought implementation of Mahaanadu resolutions.

Pointing fingers at some bureaucrats allegedly continuing partisan practices from the YSRCP era, Lokesh warned, "I will not tolerate harassment of our cadre. Officials who refuse to shed their bias will face strict action."

Reaffirming the party's vision for the future, Lokesh stressed the need to internalise the "Six Declarations" unveiled by TDP—covering



youth, women, farmers, social justice, and empowerment of grassroots workers. He also rolled out welfare updates, announcing that the "Talli Ki Vandanam" scheme would soon provide direct financial assistance to mothers and promised free bus travel for women from August 15.

While acknowledging fiscal challenges left behind by the previous regime, he assured that welfare schemes would not be compromised and would be rolled out in phases.

In a sharp jab at YSRCP Chief Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Lokesh said, "Even in opposition, he stayed in a palace in Bengaluru, behind 30-foot gates. TDP, whether in power or not, will always stay close to the people."

He urged grassroots workers to stay active and resolve local issues at zonal and mandal levels, warning that indifference would only help the forces that "damaged Andhra Pradesh."

Lokesh ended his speech

with a promise to address pending NREGS and Neeru-Chettu bills and quash all politically motivated cases foisted on TDP workers during the previous government.

Ministers Gummadi Sandhya Rani, MLA Bonela Vijayachandra, North Andhra Coordinator Damacharla Sathya, and Girijan Corporation Chairman Kidari Shrivani were also present at the event, reinforcing the party's united front in North Andhra.

Amaravati's Quantum Valley to mirror Silicon Valley: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday emphasised that Amaravati's proposed Quantum Valley must emerge as a globally recognised innovation hub, akin to Silicon Valley. Chairing a high-level review meeting with IT experts at the State Secretariat, the Chief Minister stated that the Andhra Pradesh State Quantum Mission would be key to positioning the state at the forefront of quantum technologies and artificial intelligence (AI).

A major outcome of the meeting was the announcement of a dedicated Quantum Mission Workshop, slated for June 30 in Vijayawada. The Chief Minister directed officials to develop an iconic architectural design for the Quantum Valley campus, similar to Hyderabad's Hi-Tech City building, which symbolised the tech boom of the early 2000s. The Andhra Pradesh State Quantum Mission will concentrate on



four core areas: Quantum Computing, Quantum Communication, Quantum Sensing & Metrology, and Quantum Materials & Devices

The mission will be implemented in two phases: In Phase 1 (2025–2027), the government wants to establish core infrastructure, promote education and research, and initiate pilot projects and in Phase 2 (2027–2030) drive commercialisation, foster global collaborations, and scale up exports

An investment of Rs 4,000 crore is projected over the next five years. Andhra Pradesh will also serve as a pilot state for public infrastructure projects based on quantum technology.

The Chief Minister will chair the mission, which will also include the IT Minister, Chief Secretary, Finance Secretary, IT Secretary, Mission Director, and an expert committee. IBM

Mission goals and investment
Establish Andhra Pradesh as a Quantum Innovation Hub
Align with the National Quantum Mission
Strengthen the state's knowledge-based economy

has been brought on board as the mission anchor.

A director will be appointed shortly. The upcoming workshop will invite participation from academia, startups, IT firms, pharmaceutical companies, agro-tech enterprises, and healthcare innovators. Naidu reiterated that quantum technologies would drive the next wave of digital transformation, and Andhra Pradesh aims to lead this revolution.

Early...

Continued from Page 1

Across the state, four districts -- Konaseema, Bapatla, East Godavari, and Krishna - apart from Yanam, an enclave of union territory of Puducherry, recorded no rain in the first nine days. Under the Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam sub-division, only two districts — Anakapalli and Vizhianagaram — received normal rainfall, while Srikakulam logged excess rainfall, an official noted.

Large deficits were recorded in (per cent of deficit in brackets) Eluru (80 per cent), Guntur (95), Kakinada (66), NTR (81), SPSR Nellore (64), and West Godavari districts (96). Other districts that experienced deficit are: Chittoor (72 per cent), Kurnool (66), Sri Sathya Sai (76), Tirupati (76), and YSR districts (77 per cent), as per the data.

Mudragada scotches ‘ill health’ rumours, credits son Giri for care

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Kapu Nadu leader and former minister Mudragada Padmanabham has dismissed rumours about his deteriorating health as "false and malicious". Addressing the media at his Kirlampudi residence on Monday, Mudragada clarified that apart from minor age-related ailments, he is in good health — thanks to the care provided by his youngest son, Giri.

He alleged that a "certain family" — widely understood to be his estranged daughter's — has been spreading false claims that he is suffering from cancer and that Giri is neglecting him. "In fact, it is Giri who is taking care of me diligently. My good health today is largely due to him,"



Mudragada affirmed. He further accused the family of being envious of Giri's political rise and said the latest misinformation campaign is aimed at creating discord between him and his son. "They could not tolerate Giri's progress in politics," he said.

Recalling a painful incident, Mudragada said, "When my wife was hospitalised, we returned from Hyderabad for postoperative rest, but that family inhumanly sent us

away." Dismissing claims that he was being held under duress, Mudragada said he continues to attend political events and regularly meets well-wishers and supporters. "No one can confine me illegally or subject me to mental torture," he declared.

Issuing a direct challenge to his daughter's family, Mudragada asked them to advise Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Minister Nara Lokesh, and the Deputy CM on the Kapu reservation issue and the implementation of pre-poll promises like the 'Super Six' schemes. "Only then can you claim political strength," he said.

He also released a signed press statement reiterating his remarks.



Ambati condemns Kommineni's arrest

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former Minister Ambati Rambabu has strongly condemned the arrest of senior journalist Kommineni Srinivasa Rao, alleging that the coalition government is indulging in vindictive politics and displaying a selective approach towards law and order.

Addressing the media in Guntur on Monday, Rambabu said that while supporters of the coalition were using abusive language against the YSR Congress Party, no action was being taken against them. In contrast, Kommineni was arrested in an undemocratic manner, driven by political vendetta, he alleged. He further claimed that the arrest was a diversionary tactic and recalled that former Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu had earlier pressured N TV to sack Kommineni out of personal vengeance.

"Kommineni has conducted his programme with dignity, unlike certain other channels that resort to vulgar language," Rambabu stated. He criticised the lack of action against those who have posted objectionable content targeting the YSRCP leadership. "My complaint against two individuals who produced a spoof on the YSRCP was ignored, yet the police travelled to Hyderabad to arrest Kommineni," he said. Rambabu also pointed out that serious charges were filed against the journalist solely to deny him bail, and accused the government of resorting to vindictive measures to cover up its failures.

Savitha slams Jagan for ‘vilifying women’ through media network

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for BC, EWS Welfare, Handlooms and Textiles, S Savitha, launched a scathing attack on YSRCP chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, accusing him of demeaning women and deriving "demonic joy" by vilifying them through his media network.

In a statement on Monday, Minister Savitha alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy had stooped lower than the Kauravas by insulting women in the name of political analysis. "A man who brings tears to his own mother and sisters is now taking sadistic pleasure in humiliating other women in the state," she said. Savitha particularly condemned Jagan's remarks about women who gave up their lands for the construction of Amaravati, calling them shameful and unworthy of a leader. "It is disgraceful that his personal vendetta against Amaravati is being



redirected against the women who supported the capital," she stated.

Calling Jagan Mohan Reddy a "brute" who had lost the right to live in a civil society, the Minister demanded an immediate ban on Sakshi TV, which she accused of broadcasting slanderous content against Amaravati women under the guise of political commentary. She also welcomed the arrest of

Kommineni Srinivasa Rao, a senior journalist associated with the channel, who allegedly made derogatory remarks against women.

Minister Savitha reiterated that the current state government stands firmly in support of women. She warned that any individual who attempts to harass, demean or harm women and girls would face severe consequences.

‘Vision Units’...

Continued from Page 1

"These sectors form the foundation of our transformation agenda. Our mission is to build a Healthy, Wealthy and Happy Andhra Pradesh," the CM said.

Naidu noted that every district now has a five-year roadmap and a four-year action plan is being finalised. "We're already delivering 400+ services via WhatsApp Governance and will transition to the 'Mitra' platform within two months," he added. Departments including Planning, GAD, ITE&C, RTGS, and the CMO are working in tandem to ensure timely implementation.

Among major welfare announcements, Naidu said 15 lakh "Golden Families" would be adopted by mentors under the Zero Poverty–P4 scheme by Independence. Other key initiatives are Talli Ki Vandhanam launch this month, free bus travel from August 15, direct benefit transfers under the Deepam scheme, MSME parks in every constituency and Ratan Tata Hubs in Amaravati "We're integrating technology with compassion. As incomes rise, welfare will scale accordingly," he stated.

Naidu slammed the previous government for neglecting the Polavaram diaphragm wall, leading to delays. He set completion targets: Polavaram by 2027, Amaravati by 2028, and Bhogapuram Airport by 2026. He also reiterated plans for metro rail in Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada, completion of the Visakhapatnam Railway Zone, and fast-tracking of port and harbour projects. "Despite fiscal constraints, we've revived 78 of 93 central schemes. Investor confidence is returning, and public trust has been restored within just a year," Naidu said. He congratulated Union Minister Ram Mohan Naidu for pledging to adopt 10 Golden Families and urged other leaders to do the same, underscoring the vision's humanitarian focus.

Water to...

Continued from Page 1

However, local MLAs expressed concern over pending canal repair works. Officials responded that desiltation, weed removal, and regulator inspections are nearing completion. Final checks are underway to ensure uninterrupted water flow from the barrage into the main and branch canals. These works will be completed within 10 days, after which water will be released.

The Krishna Delta System — one of India's oldest irrigation networks — caters to more than 13.07 lakh acres across Krishna, NTR, Guntur, Palnadu, Prakasam, and Eluru districts. Timely water release is critical for the commencement of paddy nursery operations, the main crop in the region. R. Mohana Rao, Superintending Engineer of the Vijayawada Irrigation Circle, said: "We are closely monitoring inflows and storage levels. Once desiltation and weed removal are complete, water will be released into the Krishna Delta canals by June 20." Speaking to The Pioneer, Mohana Rao also appealed to farmers to use water judiciously and adhere to cropping patterns advised by the Agriculture Department.

He further urged Gram Panchayats to fill drinking water tanks using available irrigation sources to prevent shortages in villages. Meanwhile, farmers across the delta have welcomed the announcement, hoping it will ensure a smooth Kharif season without delays in transplantation.

20-yr-old woman murdered, decomposed body found

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

In a gruesome incident, a 20-year-old woman was brutally murdered and her decomposed body was found in thorny bushes near Manipal School at Gotkur village in Kuderu mandal on Sunday.

The miscreants reportedly killed her and later attempted to burn the body. Police identified the deceased as Yerukala Thanmai, who had recently completed her Intermediate education. She had gone missing on June 3 after leaving her home and failing to return.

Her parents lodged a complaint, alleging that a youth from Rayadurg had been harassing their daughter. Six

days later, her body was discovered on the village outskirts. The police are awaiting the post-mortem report to ascertain the cause of death. Sources said three youths have been detained and are being interrogated in connection with the case.

Home Minister V. Anitha spoke with the district Superintendent of Police and directed him to ensure the swift arrest of those responsible.

Minister Nara Lokesh expressed shock over the murder and vowed that the culprits would be punished severely. MLA Dagguapati Prasad offered financial support to the victim's family and spoke to her



parents over the phone. Meanwhile, YSRCP workers led by former MLAs Thopudurthi Prakash Reddy and Ushasri Charan staged a protest in front of the SP's

office, condemning the attack on a Dalit girl. They carried placards and raised slogans such as "We Want Justice" and "CM Down Down."

YSRCP PAC Member and former Minister Vidadala Rajini criticised the TDP-led coalition government for failing to ensure the safety of women in Andhra Pradesh. She blamed police negligence for the incident, stating that no serious efforts were made to trace the girl despite a missing persons complaint being filed six days earlier. Rajini alleged that police only act under pressure from ruling party MLAs and accused the government of being indifferent to women's safety.



Goddess blesses devotees on third day of Teppotsavam

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

On the third day of the ongoing Teppotsavam at Tiruchanur, Goddess Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru graced the decorated float and glided majestically across the sacred Padma Sarovaram, blessing devotees with her divine presence.

The day began with Suprabhatam, followed by Sahasranama Archana and the daily rituals to awaken the deity. A special Abhishekam was performed from 3 PM to 4.30 PM, using milk, curd, honey, sandalwood paste, and other aromatic substances as part of the ritual

bathing ceremony.

In the evening, at 6.30 PM, the Utsava Murthy was taken to the Padmapushkarini. The Teppotsavam was conducted with devotional fervour from 6.30 PM to 7.15 PM. Later, Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru was taken in a procession through the four Mada streets, accompanied by devotees, showering divine grace on the gathering.

TTD Deputy EO Harindra Nath, AEO Devarajulu, Superintendent Ramesh, Temple Inspector Chalapathi, other temple officials, priests, sevaks, and a large number of devotees took part in the event.

‘Sadgamaya’ in TTD schools from June 16

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

TTD Executive Officer J Syamala Rao has announced that the 'Sadgamaya' programme will be conducted in TTD-run schools from June 16 to 19. Aimed at instilling values such as devotion, discipline, and social responsibility among students, the initiative will also introduce teachings from the Bhagavad Gita in simple language to aid comprehension.

The programme is intended for students of Classes 7, 8, and 9 and will be held across

various TTD schools in Tirupati and Tirumala.

The EO also reviewed the progress of ongoing initiatives, including the Annamacharya and Dasa Sahitya Projects, and developments at SWIMS. He directed officials to ensure the timely completion of all works.

Those present at the review meeting included HDPP Secretary S. Raghunath, Annamacharya Project Special Officer Dr Medasani Mohan, SWIMS Director R.V. Kumar, and Chief Engineer T.V. Satyanarayana.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
TRIBAL WELFARE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

NIT No. 87 to 95/2025-26/S.E/T.W.D.B Date: 08-06-2025
Online tenders are invited. Estimated Value of 9 works: Rs. 1027.00 Lakhs.
Tender Schedule: Start Date: 11th June 2025, 4:00 pm onwards. Last Date for Submission: 25th June 2025, 4:15 pm. For further details, please visit www.apcprocurement.gov.in. Phone Number: 0891-2783210.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Tribal Welfare, Visakhapatnam

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Women's safety collapsed under TDP rule: Vidadala Rajini

Govt has resorted to diversion politics instead of addressing governance failures

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former minister and YSRCP PAC member Vidadala Rajini has lashed out at the TDP-led coalition government for its complete failure to ensure women's safety in Andhra Pradesh. She pointed to the shocking murder of an Intermediate student in Anantapur, blaming the incident on police negligence.

Despite a missing complaint being filed six days earlier, no serious effort was made to trace the student. Rajini said such tragedies could have been avoided if the police had acted responsibly.

She accused the government of indifference and said complaints are only acted upon when pressure comes from ruling party MLAs.

Speaking to media at the party central office, Rajini said that instead of addressing such grave governance failures, the Chandrababu-led coalition has resorted to diversion politics. She criticised the arrest of senior journalist Kommineni Srinivasa Rao as a deliberate act of political revenge. The remarks made during a Sakshi TV debate were not endorsed by Kommineni, who even cautioned the panellist. The analyst who made the remarks, Krishnam Raju, publicly apologised, yet the TDP escalated

the issue for political mileage. Rajini said this was an attempt to silence dissenting voices and create fear among the press and the public alike.

She also condemned the coordinated attacks on Sakshi offices across the State, calling them a direct assault on press freedom. She alleged that N Chandrababu Naidu and TDP leaders were targeting Sakshi for consistently exposing the government's failures. The issue was dragged out with false narratives and manipulated outrage, while real problems were ignored. Rajini said this was a clear sign of the "Red Book" governance style that threatens democracy and media independence in Andhra Pradesh.

Rajini said that the administration of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy empowered women through landmark schemes like the Disha app and Disha police stations. She said Jagan took firm steps to ensure women's safety, economic independence, and equal participation. She condemned the attacks on YSRCP leaders and said the coalition government is trying to shift public attention away from its one-year failures. Rajini urged the public to see through this political drama and stand up for justice, democracy, and the protection of women and press freedom.



NTR District Collector Dr Lakshmisha, Joint Collector Ilakkia, and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra participating in the Mega YogAndhra Rally organised from IGMC Stadium to Benz Circle on Monday

Mega YogAndhra rally receives huge response

3,000 people join grand yoga march in Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YogAndhra campaign continues to garner tremendous public support, with more than 3,000 employees, volunteers, and yoga enthusiasts participating in the Mega Yoga Andhra Rally held in Vijayawada on Monday. The event was organised by the NTR district administration in collaboration with the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) and the AYUSH Department, as part of the month-long celebrations.

The rally began at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation (IGMC) Stadium and proceeded to Benz Circle, with NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha, Joint Collector S Ilakkia, and VMC Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra leading the march. Officials and participants highlighted the health benefits of yoga and called upon citizens to adopt it as a daily practice.

Dr Lakshmisha unveiled posters with the slogan 'Drugs Vaddhu Bro' and highlighted the 1972 toll-free helpline. He

reaffirmed the administration's commitment to a drug-free district and State.

Addressing the gathering, Collector Dr Lakshmisha emphasised that the campaign aims to teach yoga asanas to 10 lakh people in the district by June 21, as part of a Statewide goal to reach two crore citizens. He noted that 5,000 trainers are currently being trained to support this ambitious outreach.

"Yoga, a gift from Indian heritage, is now a global phenomenon. With the encouragement of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, awareness and respect for yoga are growing significantly," the Collector said. "Practising yoga daily can prevent many diseases and lead to a healthier, stress-free life."

Vijayawada RDO Kavuri Chaitanya, DMHO Dr M Suhasini, VMC Additional Commissioner D Chandra sekhar, yoga institutions, NGOs, walkers' associations, yoga guru Satyanarayana, and staff from various departments were present.

No compromise on temple security: Seena Naik

Durga Temple EO orders measures to curb unauthorised vehicles atop Indrakeeladri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Expressing serious concerns over the growing breach of security protocols, Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam at Indrakeeladri in Vijayawada, Executive Officer (EO) VK Seena Naik has directed temple staff at all levels to ensure that no action compromises the security of the temple or inconveniences the thousands of devotees visiting daily.

On Monday, while inspecting key infrastructure points, including the parking lot, Pongali preparation shed, bus shelter, and Protocol Office along Ghat Road, the EO observed unauthorised vehicular movement up to the Protocol Office and chaotic two-wheeler parking.

Further, he warned that allowing vehicles to reach this proximity without proper checking is a direct threat to temple security. Protocol and security personnel revealed that they are under tremendous pressure from various



quarters to allow vehicles to move beyond the safe zone. It has been leading to traffic congestion and even altercations, they said.

The EO instructed that no unauthorised vehicles be allowed beyond the Pongali Shed, which is located after Om Turn. Battery vehicles are now transporting VIPs and other individuals within the protocol limits. Staff stationed at Om Turn will be further screened under Protocol Phase 1 before allowing any advance, he said.

Seena Naik has instructed

Engineering Deputy Executive Engineers Ashok Kumar and Ravindar to immediately implement the revised transport arrangements. Naik stated that even his official vehicle will not be permitted to enter the restricted zone.

"We should never prioritise convenience over the security of the temple. I also wait behind the devotees when it comes to worshipping the goddess," he stated. He urged staff and officials to cooperate, noting that security must take precedence over personal comfort in sacred spaces.

Remarks on Amaravati women: BJP seeks apology from Jagan

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

BJP State official spokesperson and TTD Board member Bhanu Prakash Reddy has demanded an unconditional public apology from YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) president and former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for failing to condemn derogatory remarks made against the women of Amaravati by a journalist on Sakshi TV.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, Bhanu Prakash Reddy alleged that Jagan's silence amounted to tacit approval of the remarks. "While the journalist may have uttered the words, the script, screenplay, and direction were clearly by Jagan Mohan Reddy," he alleged.

Stating that the comments had deeply hurt the sentiments of Amaravati women, the BJP leader reiterated his demand that Jagan Mohan Reddy issue

a public apology without further delay.

Defending a recent police action in Tenali where three youths were beaten in public, Reddy said the individuals were allegedly involved in ganja trade and other unlawful activities. He criticised Jagan for visiting them and extending sympathy. "If he continues supporting such elements, he will remain confined to 'Odarpu Yatras' and will never undertake a 'Jaitra Yatra,'" Reddy said.

He recalled that Jagan had earlier referred to Amaravati as 'Kammaravati', a comment seen as derogatory and as an obstacle to capital development.

Reddy asserted that the coalition government would act firmly against rowdism and anti-social activities. He warned that the YSRCP, which won only 11 seats in the recent Assembly elections, might face further decline if it did not mend its ways.



BJP spokesperson and TTD Board member Bhanu Prakash Reddy addressing the media in Vizag on Monday

Metro Rail authorities conduct inspection

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Visakhapatnam Metro Rail Project has taken another significant step forward, with key site inspections conducted by Metro Rail authorities and representatives from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

As part of the ongoing progress, officials surveyed the designated locations along the proposed metro corridor.

Andhra Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Managing Director Ramakrishna Reddy briefed the media following the inspection.

He stated that the team examined all the identified locations for metro stations between Kommati and Kurmannapalem. He further revealed that the entire metro corridor will span approximately 46.23 kilometres and include a total of 43 stations.

According to preliminary estimates, the first phase of the project is expected to cost around Rs 11,000 crore.

Seminar held by SDMSM College on new NAAC framework

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Sri Durga Malleswara Siddhartha Mahila Kalasala organised a seminar on 'Quality Assurance Parameters for the New NAAC Framework - Paradigm Shift in Higher Education Institutions' on Monday. The event was conducted by the IQAC division



of SDMSM College.

The chief guest, Prof. S Hari Sriramulu, spoke about the quality standards of the new NAAC framework. He emphasised the importance of faculty encouraging female students to participate actively and uphold gender equality. The college principal, S Kalpana, also addressed the gathering.

Medicover Hospitals recognised as Referral Centre for paediatric cardiac care

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has recognised Medicover Hospitals, Visakhapatnam, as a Referral Centre for Paediatric Cardiac Care under the Dr NTR Vaidya Seva Scheme. This recognition solidifies Medicover's role in providing lifesaving interventions for children born with congenital heart disease (CHD) across North Andhra Pradesh.

Following an official inspection by district health teams and senior faculty from government medical colleges, the hospital has been approved to offer free screening, diagnostics, catheter-based procedures, and cardiac surgeries for children, especially those from underprivileged families.



At the forefront of this initiative is Dr Ashok Raju Alluri, an accomplished Paediatric Cardiologist whose dedication, precision, and outcomes have helped shape Medicover Vizag into a trusted centre for paediatric cardiac care. Over the past year alone, the hospital has screened more than

1,000 children and completed 250+ successful cardiac interventions, many of which were for families unable to afford specialised care.

To expand outreach, Medicover will conduct monthly paediatric cardiac camps across DEICs in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram,

Today's shining stars, tomorrow's diamond stars: Health Minister

Satya Kumar Yadav distributes awards to 174 top performers in Class 10 and Inter exams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

"Today's shining stars will become tomorrow's diamond stars," stated Minister for Medical, Health and Family Welfare and NTR District In-charge, Satya Kumar Yadav. He emphasised that education is the foundation of a progressive society, and reiterated the government's commitment to supporting students in achieving their aspirations.

The 'Shining Stars-2025' Awards Ceremony of NTR district was held at Tummalapalle Kalakshetra in Vijayawada on Monday. The event, organised to celebrate academic excellence, honoured 131 Class 10 students and 43 Intermediate students from the district, each awarded with Rs.20,000 in cash, certificates, and shields for securing top marks in the 2024-25 board examinations.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister highlighted the role of teachers as guides who help shape the dreams and futures of students. He also underscored several innovative educational schemes being implemented by the State government, including Dokka Seethamma Midday Meal Scheme, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishna Vidyarthi Mitra, Quantum Rally (to foster innovation), and Digital India & Make in India initiatives in partner-

ship with the Centre. He added that over 500 AI-based startups are being encouraged to make the State a hub for Artificial Intelligence, noting that previous governments had weakened the educational infrastructure. "However, under the leadership of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and Human Resources and IT Minister Nara Lokesh, major reforms are now being rolled out," he said.

Presiding over the event, NTR District Collector Dr G Lakshmisha commended the unique initiative, stating that this year's 'Shining Stars' Awards included three specially-abled students—a first in the programme's history. "This is a sign of confidence and empowerment. It shows that no dream is beyond reach," he remarked.

Among those present at the function were Government Whip and Vijayawada Central MLA Bonda Uma Maheswara Rao, another Government Whip and Gannavaram MLA Yarlagadda Venkata Rao, Vijayawada East MLA Gadde Rama Mohana Rao, Municipal Commissioner HM Dhyanaachandra, District School Education Officer UV Subba Rao, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan APD G Umamaheswara Rao, and parents and guardians of the awarded students.



YSRCP slams TDP's 'smear' tactics

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP official spokesperson Putta Shiva Shankar Reddy has alleged a calculated conspiracy to malign State Coordinator Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and condemned the unlawful arrest of senior journalist Kommineni Srinivasa Rao, calling it an assault on press freedom. He also decried the politically motivated attacks on the offices of a venacular TV channel across Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing a press conference at the party's central office, Shiva Shankar Reddy stated that the debate aired on Sakshi TV occurred a full 24 hours before a fabricated campaign began.

Despite this, TDP supporters deliberately connected the YSRCP and the TV channel to the remarks and launched protests filled with abusive and vulgar rhetoric, particularly targeting Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's family, including his wife, Bharathi Reddy. He asserted that Sajjala had already condemned the orchestrated political drama in an earlier media briefing. However, "Yellow Media" and TDP leader Nara Lokesh allegedly distorted Sajjala's remarks to falsely claim he had insulted women—thereby fuelling yet another smear campaign.

To counter this narrative, the YSRCP has released the full video of Sajjala's press conference, including a three-minute clip highlighting the actual statements. The party denounced what it described as diversionary tactics by the TDP and its allies, accusing them of resorting to cheap tricks to deflect attention from governance failures and the rising incidence of crimes against women.



Revolutionary reforms underway in education sector: Manohar

PNS ■ ELURU

Minister for Civil Supplies Nadendra Manohar has said that revolutionary reforms are being implemented in the education sector, with Rs 31,805 crore allocated for the sector in the 2025–26 financial year.

The Minister took part in the 'Shining Star' programme held at the CR Reddy Engineer Collector Auditorium in Vaturu near Eluru on Monday. During the event, he distributed scholarship cheques and appreciation certificates to intermediate students. Eluru District Collector K. Vetri Selvi and local MLAs also participated in the programme.

Speaking on the occasion, Manohar said the government is prioritising education and healthcare, and significant changes are being introduced. He urged that Eluru district should become a model for innovation in education through coordinated efforts.

He pointed out that out of 2.78 lakh students in the district, only 1.30 lakh are enrolled in Government schools, and stressed the need to increase this number. He suggested that the Zilla Parishad allocate more funds towards education, noting that the district has over 10,000 teachers. The Minister called upon the teaching fraternity to deliver quality education in a



Manohar said the government is prioritising education and healthcare, and significant changes are being introduced. He urged that Eluru district should become a model for innovation in education through coordinated efforts.

planned and effective manner.

Manohar announced that fine quality rice ('Sanna Biyyam') will be supplied to Government schools and welfare hostels across the State starting 12 June, to ensure nutritious food for students. This rice will be delivered to over 41,000 schools and more than 4,000 welfare hostels. He added that QR codes on the rice bags will carry details of the farmers who cultivated the paddy, and distribution will be

carried out by the farmers themselves on the same day.

Emphasising the importance of education, the Minister encouraged students to remain focused on their studies and aspire to high-ranking positions such as IAS and IPS officers. Collector Vetri Selvi said the 'Shining Star' programme was organised to honour top-ranking students and urged them to make the most of the

Government's educational initiatives. MLA Chintamaneni Prabhakar also addressed the gathering. ZP Chairperson Ghanta Padmasree, MLAs Badeti Radhakrishnaiah (Chanti), APCA Chairman Ganni Veeranjanyulu, RTC Vijayawada Region Chairman Reddy Appalanaidu, SP KPS Kishore, Joint Collector P. Dhatri Reddy and former MLA Ghanta Murali Ramakrishna were also present.



3 engg students held for pelting stones at train

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Police have arrested three engineering college students for allegedly pelting stones at the Vande Bharat train.

According to police, three coaches—C5, C8, and C11—were damaged during the incident.

Speaking to the media on Monday, Railway DSP Muralidhar said the attack occurred at Ongole railway station on 5 June at 6:30 pm.

The police reviewed CCTV footage and identified the three students responsible for throwing stones at the train. The accused had purchased liquor from a wine shop and, while intoxicated, hurled stones at the Vande Bharat train, the DSP added.



Minister urges youth to set up industries using govt incentives

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Minister for Labour Vasumsetti Subhash has urged the youth to come forward and establish industries by availing themselves of the incentives provided by the government.

Speaking as the chief guest at the Konaseema Start-up Summit held in Ramachandrapuram town on Monday, the Minister said that

both the state and central governments were extending support to unemployed youth to set up small and medium-scale industries through bank loans and subsidies.

He claimed that the Alliance government is committed to empowering 1.75 lakh women entrepreneurs every year by facilitating financial assistance and incentives. He added that there is potential to obtain

bank loans ranging from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1 crore for such ventures.

MSME State Chairman Siva Sankar stated that the government aims to ensure that every household has an industry by 2030.

Flipkart Director Dipsy Vankani, TDP senior leader Vasumsetti Satyam, Industries GM Prasad and others also spoke on the occasion.

VSP earned Rs 17 cr profit due to special package: Union Minister

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Union Minister of State for Steel and Heavy Industries Bhupatiraju Srinivasa Varma has stated that the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) registered a profit of Rs 17 crore owing to a special package announced by the Central government.

Speaking at a press conference here on Monday, the Minister also revealed that the third blast furnace at VSP would soon be inaugurated, boosting the plant's production capacity.

Highlighting development works in the Narasapuram Parliamentary constituency, he said several new projects had been sanctioned within the past year. He added that Rs 100 crore had been allocated under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) for the development of the Losari-Bhimavaram-Pippara road.

He announced that the long-delayed NH 165 Phase 2 Akiveedu-Digamaru road project had been revived. "The alignment has been modified, and the two-lane road has been upgraded to a four-lane one. Permissions from the Centre have been secured, and a Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been submitted. The project will be taken up at a cost of Rs 2,500 crore," he said. A gazette notification has been issued, and Union Cabinet approval is expected shortly.

Addressing concerns over compensation delays for farmers who gave land for NH 165



Phase 1 six years ago, the Minister said the Rs 25 crore compensation issue had been resolved after consultations with senior National Highways officials.

Srinivasa Varma further stated that Rs 200 crore had been sanctioned under the PM Gati Shakti project for the construction of three Road Over Bridges (ROBs) in the constituency. Proposals for 43 ROBs and RUBs had been submitted to the Railway Ministry to address traffic bottlenecks at level crossings, and approval was expected soon.

He also announced that the Vande Bharat Express would be extended from Chennai-Vijayawada to Narasapuram, with technical formalities being addressed. A request was also made to provide a halt for the

Hyderabad-Visakhapatnam Vande Bharat at Tadepalligudem.

The Minister said CSR funds of Rs 10 crore had been sanctioned to establish dialysis centres in each assembly constituency, with work already under way in Tanuku, Tadepalligudem, Attili, Achanta, Bhimavaram, and Palakollu.

Srinivasa Varma strongly condemned the derogatory remarks made by a veteran journalist during a debate on a vernacular news channel.

MLAs Pulaparthi Ramanjaneyulu, Arimilli Radhakrishna, Bommi Nayar, APIIC Chairman M. Ramaraju, BJP State General Secretary Garapati Sitaramanjaneya, and BJP District President Ainapudi Sridevi were present.

Masula Beach Fest showcased AP's coastal potential: Kollu

PNS ■ MACHILIPATNAM

Minister for Mines, Geology and Excise, Kollu Ravindra, has extended heartfelt thanks to the people of Andhra Pradesh and the district administration for the grand success of the Masula Beach Fest 2025. The four-day celebration of food, culture, and entertainment, held at Manginapudi Beach near Machilipatnam, attracted large crowds and received widespread acclaim.

In a statement, Minister Ravindra expressed special gratitude to Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, Deputy Chief Minister K. Pawan Kalyan, and Minister Nara Lokesh for their encouragement and support. "It is a matter of pride that Machilipatnam served as the venue for such a spectacular event," he said.

The Minister noted that the beach festival marks a significant step towards realising the Chief Minister's vision of transforming Andhra Pradesh into a hub for tourism and sports. "This festival provided a wonderful opportunity to showcase our state's rich arts, culture, traditions, and sporting potential," he remarked.

Emphasising the untapped promise of the coastline, Ravindra highlighted plans to develop Machilipatnam's shores as a driver of employment and economic growth. "We will convert Krishna district into a model of rapid development," he added.

Dy Speaker inaugurates purified drinking water supply system

PNS ■ BHIMAVARAM

Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, K. Raghu Ramakrishna Raju, along with West Godavari District Collector Chadalavada Nagarani, inaugurated the supply of purified drinking water at Peda Amiram village on Monday.

The purified water is being supplied through newly installed 'Micro Filter Bed' equipment. Local women were seen collecting the water from a public tap following the launch.

Later, the Deputy Speaker and the Collector laid the foundation stone for the construction of 'NTR Kalavanam', an open-air theatre, at the same village. The project will be developed at an estimated cost of Rs 70 lakh — with Rs



30 lakh funded by the village panchayat and the remaining Rs 40 lakh contributed by donors.

Speaking on the occasion,

Raghu Ramakrishna Raju said the initiative aims to ensure a steady supply of purified drinking water across the constituency. He stressed the

importance of preventing contamination by prohibiting the release of household wastewater and water from aqua ponds into canals and drains. Strict action would be taken against those releasing fish pond water into irrigation canals, he warned.

He added that the open-air theatre is being constructed at the Peda Amiram panchayat site in Kalla Mandal, near Bhimavaram, as there was no suitable facility for cultural programmes. "The foundation stone has been laid today to address this need," he said.

The Deputy Speaker said the facility would greatly help in organising cultural events in the area. Canara Bank MD and CEO K. Satyanarayana Raju, who travelled from Bengaluru, also took part in the event, along with other dignitaries.

Municipal sanitation workers stage dharna over wage arrears

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Municipal sanitation workers affiliated with the AITUC-backed Andhra Pradesh Municipal Workers Union staged a dharna in front of the Collectorate here on Monday, demanding redressal of long-pending issues, primarily related to wage arrears.

Addressing the protesters, AITUC district general secretary Thokala Prasad demanded stringent action against officials who had shown negligence in processing the sanitation workers' wage bills.

He alleged that APCOS sanitation workers received wages for only 15 days in May, due to the apathy of secretariat health secretaries and inspectors.

"As a result, the sanitation workers have been forced to run from pillar to post at the municipal corporation offices in search of justice. The



Municipal Commissioner must intervene and initiate action against the health secretaries and inspectors working in Circles 12 and 14. The unpaid wages must be recovered from the erring officials," Prasad said.

He further demanded that permanent sanitation employ-

ees be provided with uniforms, raincoats, soaps, oils, and that service-based pay scales be implemented without delay. Union leaders Bangaru Rajesham, Janapalli Appanna, Katari Nageswara Rao, K. Ravindra, Singampalli Durga, and Lendha Kavayamma led the agitation.

Twins drown in sump, bodies recovered

PNS ■ KAKINADA

In a tragic incident, twin boys drowned in a sump at a mango orchard in Bala Thimmaiah Gari Palli village of Chakrayapet mandal on Monday.

According to police, the deceased — Ram and Lakshman, both aged 11 — had entered the sump while playing and accidentally drowned. Their bodies were later retrieved.

The twins were orphans and had been living under the care of their maternal uncle. Their bodies were shifted to the Government General Hospital for postmortem.

AI, Quantum Computing will shape the future: MP Putta

PNS ■ ELURU

Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar has said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Quantum Computing will be key to shaping the future, and the government is already taking steps to create opportunities for youth in these advanced fields.

Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu virtually inaugurated the Swarnandhra Vision offices across all 175 Assembly constituencies. The event was attended by MLAs and Ministers, including Eluru MP Putta Mahesh Kumar.

Speaking on the occasion, the MP said the coalition government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, is guiding Andhra



Pradesh on the path of development after the "chaos and destruction" of the previous YSRCP regime.

Highlighting key initiatives, Mahesh Kumar said the state government has launched the ambitious "P-4 Programme"

aimed at poverty eradication, which is making good progress with support from donors.

He stressed that the future would be driven by AI and Quantum Computing and added that the government is actively working to equip the

youth with skills and opportunities in these emerging areas.

To boost employment and provide livelihoods to the unemployed, the state government is promoting the establishment of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). In the Chintalapudi constituency, the foundation stone for one such unit has already been laid. The Chief Minister also announced plans to set up MSME industrial parks in all constituencies across the state.

Mahesh Kumar further said the government is committed to both welfare and development. As part of efforts to make governance more accessible, CM Naidu plans to introduce additional services soon through "WhatsApp Governance."

Prabhakar Rao was 'counselled' by KCR family in US: Sanjay



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Bandi Sanjay Kumar, said that former Special Investigations Bureau (SIB) chief Prabhakar Rao is no ordinary man.

Holding Prabhakar responsible for the troubles faced by many public activists like him, Sanjay described Prabhakar as a 'scoundrel'. He said that "Prabhakar underwent the KCR family's counselling" in the US. "Prabhakar surrendered and appeared for the inquiry as per a well-crafted plan. The statement given by Prabhakar during the inquiry

must be made public as it is not just Chief Minister Revanth Reddy's phone he had tapped, but the phones of the leaders of the Congress, the BJP, the BRS, judges, and also mine," Sanjay said.

He said that many lives were destroyed by Prabhakar. "Numerous families were ruined and were pushed onto the streets. Prabhakar stooped so low that he even tapped the private conversations between husbands and wives, creating a situation where couples couldn't even speak freely on the phone," Sanjay said.

He said the public has the right to know as per whose

orders the phones were tapped.

"After the phones were tapped, what was done with that data? Who got the recordings? Who was blackmailed using those audio files?" he asked. "Strong action must be taken against Prabhakar Rao as per the court's guidelines. Public confidence in the Congress Government is already weakening. Not even a single corruption case has been properly investigated in the last 18 months of Congress rule. At least now, the government should argue strongly in court. Prabhakar and the masterminds behind him must be proved guilty," he said.

Steady progress in Polavaram works, says Nimmala

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Irrigation Minister Nimmala Ramanaidu has strongly denied reports published in a YSRCP-friendly newspaper about the Polavaram project, calling them baseless and misleading. He accused the opposition of deliberately spreading falsehoods at a time when the project is back on track and construction is progressing steadily.

Speaking to the media in Rajahmundry, the minister criticised the previous YSRCP government, saying its negligence had put the future of Polavaram at risk. In contrast, he stated, the current government is ensuring steady progress. He noted that international experts have inspected the project four times, confirming its quality and direction.

Responding to claims that the diaphragm wall (D-wall) is being built with reduced thickness, Minister Nimmala clarified that such allegations are entirely false. "The article published in Sakshi claiming the D-wall is thinner is incorrect. During deep construction up to 100 metres, slight variations are natural and within the approved design.

ACROSS THE STATES



Delhi CM Rekha plants 'sindoor' sapling

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday planted a 'sindoor' sapling at a government school in her Shalimar Bagh constituency and said the country's military response was a reflection of our 'national spirit'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi too had planted a 'sindoor' sapling, presented to him by a group of women who had shown remarkable courage during the 1971 war, at his residence on World Environment Day on June 5. The gesture was seen as a nod to the recent Operation Sindoor. Launching the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam 2.0 campaign, Gupta called it a historic step by the Delhi government. She emphasised that this is not just an "environmental" initiative but an emotional, cultural and social commitment dedicated to our mothers, motherland, and Mother Nature. While appreciating the inspiration provided by prime minister, she took a dig at the previous Delhi government for "rejecting" several "people-centric" initiatives of the central government purely for political reasons.



HC no to stay demolition in Batla House area

The Delhi High Court on Monday refused to grant an immediate stay on the demolition of alleged illegal constructions in Batla House. A division bench of Justices Girish Kathpalia and Tejas Karia was acting on a PIL filed by AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan and posted it on June 11, the day of the scheduled demolition after the matter came up at around 6.10 pm on Monday. "For submissions on two issues, list the petition on June 11. We are not going to stay it (for now) because we are told that the Supreme Court has declined..." the bench said. The court, which was hearing the PIL, observed that the single judge had already granted the interim relief to several persons in their petitions but the case at hand was filed in public interest. Justice Karia earlier in the day while sitting as a single-judge granted status quo to certain residents of the area. He noted that a similar relief was granted in relation to a similarly-situated property in Batla House area on June 4 and asked the DDA to file its response to the present plea in four weeks.



80pc work for Rath Yatra in Puri completed

Odisha Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Monday said that about 80 per cent of the work for smooth organisation of annual Rath Yatra in Puri is complete. The Rath Yatra of the Lord Jagannath will be held on June 27. The second coordination meeting to discuss the preparations for the famous chariot festival was held in Puri under the chairmanship of Harichandan during the day. Lakhs of devotees gather in the seaside town every year on the occasion. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Harichandan said about 80 per cent of the work for the festival has been completed, while the remaining job will come to an end before the Rath Yatra. With the blessings of Lord Jagannath, this year's Rath Yatra will be completed smoothly with the cooperation of all, the law minister asserted. The administration of Lord Jagannath's temple in Puri functions under the law department of the state government. Asked about the measures taken in view of the spread of Covid-19, Harichandan said neither the Centre nor the state health department has any advisory for it.

'India witnessed changes across diverse sectors'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Monday that under the 11 years of his government India has not just become the fastest-growing major economy but is also a key global voice on pressing issues like climate action and digital innovation.

A clear focus on good governance and transformation, Modi said of the last 11 years as his government finished the first year of its third term on Monday. A link shared by him noted that 60 per cent of the current Union ministers are from the SC, ST and OBC categories, a message aimed at burnishing social justice credentials of his government amid attempts by opposition parties like the Congress to paint it as working against their interests.

This is the highest ever representation of these marginalised groups in the Union Council of Ministers, it added.

In his post on X, Modi said powered by the blessings and collective participation of 140



crore Indians, India has witnessed rapid transformations across diverse sectors.

Guided by the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', the NDA government has delivered path-breaking changes with speed, scale and sensitivity, he said. From economic growth to social upliftment, the focus has been on people-centric, inclusive and all round progress, he added.

The prime minister said, "We are proud of our collective suc-

cess but at the same time, we look ahead with hope, confidence and a renewed resolve to build a Viksit Bharat."

He used the hashtag of "11 year of seva" (11 years of service) with the post, while sharing links to the details of changes effected in different sectors. It said Modi has brought the politics of development, 'Vikasvaad' into the mainstream, making it the focal point around which political discourse and policy action now revolves.

Odisha increases compensation for loss of life

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government on Monday announced the enhancement of compensation for loss of life in an attack by a wild animal to Rs 10 lakh from the existing Rs 6 lakh, an official statement said.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved a proposal in this regard taking into account the loss of life and property caused due to attacks by wild animals, mainly in areas close to forests. The government also made a provision for assistance for damage caused to houses by wild animals.

If a house is damaged, then the affected persons will be given a dwelling unit under the Antyaodaya Griha Yojana or a financial assistance equivalent to the house will be provided," the statement issued by the CMO said. If the kitchen, grain storage house or goat shed is damaged, a compassionate assistance amount of Rs 3,000 will be provided, it said.



'India cannot hold talks on IWT until terror concerns addressed'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India will not engage with Pakistan on the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) till New Delhi's concerns regarding terrorism are addressed and the pact is completely revamped, sources said.

They said Pakistan's Water Resources Secretary Syed Ali Murtaza has reached out multiple times, urging India to reconsider the decision to put the IWT in abeyance.

In multiple letters to his Indian counterpart, Debashree Mukherjee, Murtaza has repeatedly expressed his government's readiness to discuss specific objections raised by New Delhi. India has not responded to any of Pakistan's letters and will not engage with the neighbouring country in any capacity till New Delhi's concerns regarding terrorism are addressed and the pact is completely revamped, the sources said.

India placed the 1960 IWT

in abeyance following the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, in which 26 people were killed and Mukherjee had officially conveyed the decision to Pakistan.

Brokered by the World Bank, the IWT has governed the distribution and use of the water of the Indus river and its tributaries between India and Pakistan since 1960.

The Indus river system comprises the main river, the Indus, and its tributaries. Ravi, Beas and Sutlej are collectively referred to as the eastern rivers, while the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab are known as the western rivers.

After putting the IWT in abeyance, India is planning a study to maximise the utilisation of its share of water within the treaty with Pakistan. The study aims at optimising water resources, including the development of new infrastructure, and ensuring that India's rights under the treaty are fully utilised.

DMK not afraid of 'ordinary persons' like Modi, Shah: A Raja

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The DMK was not afraid of "ordinary persons" like Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah and has a "counter-ideology" to that of the BJP that would ensure the saffron party doesn't gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu, senior party leader A Raja said here on Monday.

Addressing a press conference here in response to Amit Shah's criticism of the ruling DMK in Madurai on Sunday, Raja claimed the BJP veteran's remarks on various issues were "blatant lies, disgusting and divisive."

The Lok Sabha MP asserted that the BJP cannot gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu, where Assembly polls are due next year, unlike



Delhi or Maharashtra since the Dravidian ideology was a counter to the saffron one.

BENGALURU STAMPEDE

IPS officer moves CAT challenging suspension

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Senior IPS officer Vikash Kumar Vikash, who was among the five officers suspended in connection with the stampede outside the Chinnaswamy Stadium, has moved the Central Administrative Tribunal challenging his suspension, official sources said on Monday.

Vikash, who was the Additional Commissioner of Police (West), moved the tribunal last week, they said.

The tribunal is likely to hear the matter in the days ahead, sources said. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on June 5 ordered the suspension of five officers, including those of the Circle Police Inspector of the Cubbon Park Police station A K Girish and Assistant Commissioner of Police



C Balakrishna, Deputy Commissioner of Police of central division Shekhar H Tekkanavar, and Commissioner of Police Bengaluru city Dayananda.

Defending the police suspensions, Siddaramaiah on Friday said prima facie those who have not fulfilled their responsibility properly have been suspended.

The suspension order said, "It is found that there has been on the face of it substantial dereliction of duty by these officers."

Ayodhya land prices soar as circle rates hiked up to 200%

PNS ■ AYODHYA (UP)

After eight years, the circle rates of Ayodhya have been revised upward, with an increase ranging from 30 per cent to 200 per cent, depending on location and land use, officials said here on Monday.

The new rates, which came into effect on Monday, have particularly impacted areas within a 10-kilometre radius of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, where rates have jumped by over 150 per cent.

Shanti Bhushan Chaube, sub-registrar of Sadar (Faizabad) tehsil, said the revised rates were implemented following a proposal submitted in September 2024.

"After addressing objections, the new circle rates were approved by District Magistrate Tikaram Funde and have now been enforced," he said.

Congress flags rising hunger, inequality

Releases BJP's '11 year' report card,

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday released a booklet to mark Narendra Modi's 11 years at the Centre, highlighting stagnated growth rate, rising hunger, and his "unfulfilled promises". Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh in a post on X said that the booklet, '11 Saal, Jhoote Vikas ke vade', commemorates 'some of the biggest lies of this Government.'

Addressing a press conference, AICC research department head Rajeev Gowda, who prepared the booklet, alleged, "This government is very good at fake news and propaganda. It is our job as the Opposition to get people to know this grim reality."

He said that to expose the BJP's on its promises the party



was releasing two sets of documents. The booklet, 'Ek Aur Baar Jumla Sarkar', he said, looks at the promises made by the BJP in its 2024 manifesto, and has since made. The other one, he said, is '11 Saal Jhoote Vikas Ke Vaade', which is a "detailed exposé" of the "hollow promises" of the BJP.

"In the 11-Saal document, one of the first themes that they (BJP) highlight is taking care of the poor and the marginalised. They are very happy that 81 crore people are getting free food grains under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan

Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). But the basic problem of hunger is a much larger crisis in India, and it puts us at 105th out of 127 countries in the World Hunger Index.

"Its implications: malnutrition is affecting our children in a horrible way, crippling their growth. Stunting is at 35.5 per cent; Wasting is at 19.3 per cent; Underweight is at 32.1 per cent," Gowda said.

He said that nearly a third of Indian children are suffering from malnutrition, even as the BJP insists on Viksit Bharat.

Tension between India, China has eased significantly: Russian FM Lavrov

PNS ■ MOSCOW

The tension between India and China has eased "significantly" and the stalled work of the RIC troika could be restarted, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Monday.

Speaking at the "Forum of the Future-2050" here, he said the resumption of joint work in RIC format could be the first step towards pan-Eurasian processes, including the formation of a multi-polar architecture.

"I really hope that we will be able to restore the work of the Russia-India-China trio. We have not met at the level of foreign ministers for the last



couple of years, but we are discussing this issue with my Chinese colleague and with the Indian head of the External Affairs department.

"I really hope that now that the tension has eased, in my opinion, has eased significantly on the border between India and China, and the sit-

uation is stabilising, there is a dialogue between New Delhi and Beijing, we will be able to resume the work of this Russia-India-China trio," Lavrov was reported as saying by Russia's state-run TASS news agency.

Lavrov said that Russia and China can and should play a leading and proactive role in the pan-continental process, including in the formation of a multi-polar architecture, and added that the restoration of the RIC format could act as the first step towards this.

"This will also be a very important step forward in the movement of continental processes," Lavrov added.

No letup in heatwave in Punjab, Haryana; Sirsa hottest at 46.4°

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

There was no respite from blistering heat in Haryana and Punjab on Monday as Sirsa touched 46.4 degrees Celsius while Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, recorded season's highest maximum so far at 43.8 degrees Celsius.

Haryana's Sirsa continued to reel under intense heat, even as most other places in the state also recorded above normal maximum temperatures. According to the weather department here, Rohtak recorded a maximum of 45.6 degrees Celsius while intense heat also swept Hisar, which registered a high of 44 degrees Celsius.



Can EC announce date by which electoral-roll data of Haryana, Maha will be handed over: Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday lauded the Election Commission's (EC) reported decision to share the electoral-roll data for Haryana and Maharashtra as "a good first step" and urged the poll body to announce the exact date by which the data will be handed over in a digital, machine-readable format.

The leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha shared the screenshot of a media report that claimed that the EC has cleared the way for sharing the electoral-roll data for Haryana and Maharashtra from 2009 to 2024, following an assurance it gave to the Delhi High Court earlier in the year.

There was, however, no official word from the EC on the reported move as yet.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "Good first step taken by EC to hand over voter rolls."

"Can the EC please

announce the exact date by which this data will be handed over in a digital, machine-readable format?" the former Congress chief asked.

In a post on X, the Chief Electoral Office in Maharashtra said electoral rolls are revised annually through a participatory exercise.

"During this annual exercise, the electoral rolls are shared, free of cost, with recognised political parties, including INC, first at draft stage and second time after its finalisation.

The similar exercise was done in 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024 and copies of such electoral rolls were then shared with INC, as well as with other political parties.

A complete copy of electoral roll used in general elections to Legislative Assembly, Maharashtra-2024 is also available on website for public to freely download," it said.

70% people surveyed in US favour global climate policy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A climate policy at the global level to tackle warming might be strongly backed by public, a study has claimed.

Global carbon pricing, coupled with a system of redistributing the revenues -- either among citizens or for investing in mitigating climate change -- is considered by economists as a 'reference climate policy' as it can both reduce emissions and promote equity.

Co-authored by researchers at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany, the study, in 2021, surveyed over 40,000 people from 20 countries, which

account for about three-quarters of the global carbon emissions.

The team found a "strong and genuine" support for global climate policy, with 70 per cent people favouring it in the US and 94 per cent in Japan.

The findings, published in the journal Nature Human Behaviour, also showed that respondents backed policies, including a global carbon pricing scheme, in which the remaining global emissions budget -- how much can we emit more before we breach 2 degrees Celsius warming -- is divided according to population, with countries receiving emission rights they can trade.



"We were pleasantly surprised by the results. Politicians should not be too afraid of citizens when pushing ahead with global climate protection," co-author Linus Mattauch, head of societal transition and well-

being research group at Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, said.

A second survey, conducted in 2023 among 8,000 people in the US and European Union, showed that the respondents

supported a concrete timeline for carbon pricing -- with, for example, USD 90 per tonne of carbon dioxide in 2030, and a per capita reimbursement of USD 30 per month for every adult worldwide. This would be a substantial financial inflow to the Global South, where per capita carbon emissions are relatively low and where 30 dollars has more purchasing power than in the wealthy Global North, researchers said.

They added that three-quarters of the participants in the EU, and more than half in the US, expressed support for the idea, despite understanding that their own country might incur a financial loss under

these conditions. "When asked 'At which level(s) do you think public policies to tackle climate change need to be put in place?' 70 per cent (in the US) to 94 per cent (in Japan) choose the global level," the authors wrote.

"Three quarters of Europeans and half of Americans support the GCS (global climate scheme), even as they understand its cost to them," they wrote. Lead author Adrien Fabre, from the International Research Center on the Environment and Development (CIRED), France, said, "Against this backdrop, the question is why the international community is not making faster progress."

Editor's TAKE

Greta Thunberg's humanitarian voyage

Greta is on a mission to make world aware of the pressing humanitarian crises of our time, siege of Gaza

In an age where silence is complicity, Greta Thunberg has once again placed herself at the forefront of a moral reckoning — this time not for the climate, but for humanity. Her latest act of defiance is a brave and urgent mission to breach Israel's naval blockade of Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid to a region ravaged by war, hunger, and despair. The vessel Madleen, carrying Thunberg and 11 other activists, set sail from Sicily with the goal of not only providing relief but also bearing witness to the suffering that has become normalised in Gaza.

The Gaza Strip, home to over two million Palestinians, has been under an Israeli-led land, air, and sea blockade since 2007. What began as a measure to contain Hamas has, over the years, evolved into a systematic form of collective punishment, trapping civilians in a nightmare of restricted movement, economic stagnation, and relentless bombardment. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas has repeatedly left Gaza's infrastructure in ruins, its people traumatised, and its future uncertain. After the October 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas, Israel intensified its military offensive, enforcing a "total blockade" for nearly three months. During this period, food, fuel, and medical supplies were cut off almost entirely. While some aid has trickled in since, international agencies warn of a looming famine. According to the United Nations and other humanitarian groups, Gaza's children are starving, hospitals are collapsing, and entire communities are without access to clean water. Greta Thunberg, known globally for her fearless climate activism, has turned her attention to Gaza's humanitarian emergency with the same clarity and urgency. Alongside fellow activists, including Brazilian social activist Thiago Ávila and French Member of European Parliament Rima Hassan, Greta seeks to defy the blockade and deliver critical supplies. Their journey is not only symbolic — it is a desperate attempt to fill a moral void where world leaders have failed.

Defence Minister Israel Katz has declared that Madleen will not be allowed to reach Gaza, calling Thunberg and her fellow activists "antisemitic" and "Hamas propagandists." But labelling humanitarians as enemies does not negate the horror unfolding in Gaza. It only reveals the depth of Israel's moral detachment from the humanitarian consequences of its siege. Greta Thunberg's mission is not about politics — it is about principle. When Governments dehumanise an entire population, it is the duty of civil society to act. Her boat, carrying food, medicine, and dignity, represents more than aid — it is a statement that the world is watching, and that silence is no longer an option. She must be supported because she is doing what international institutions have failed to: bring real attention, real supplies, and real compassion to a suffering population. Let us not forget: humanitarian aid is not a threat — it is a right. Greta Thunberg's journey to Gaza is not merely about a boat and some supplies. It is about reclaiming our shared humanity. It is about saying no to indifference. And in this moral struggle, we must stand with her — not just in word, but in action.

The world of dharmic war

Unlike the Abrahamic tradition of conquest and domination, the Hindu approach to war — rooted in Dharma — seeks justice, not territory; balance, not revenge

The Hindu civilisation was first exposed to a new experience when Muhammad bin Qasim, an Arab invader, arrived in Sindh. He came from Arabia by land and sea routes. While defending his kingdom, Sindh, Raja Dahir Sen, its last Hindu ruler, was killed and subsequently, common folk were butchered. For no rhyme or reason evident to Hindus, many temples were demolished, their idols smashed and priests killed.

We call this a new experience because common folk and priests, who had nothing to do with fighting the invader Qasim, too were butchered. Nor was there any reason to demolish temples, except for the reason that they were of another religion the invaders hated (and still do). In the Hindu understanding, these are outright adharmic acts. From that day in the year 712 AD to the time of writing this article, the invaders, except for the Europeans, have not bothered to understand what temples and the idols worshipped in them mean for Hindus. Temples are not mere prayer halls, as the Abrahamic places of worship are.

They are deeply spiritual, sacred places where the worshipper connects with the divine. In the Hindu worldview, a war is seldom fought with the intent of capturing the enemy's territory. Attacking others' kingdom(s) is normally to rectify a wrong and not to dispossess the enemy for self-aggrandisement.

It is not that such aggression has not been committed by Hindus against each other; there might have been a few such wars, but they were adharmic acts, deserving of punishment due to their being dushkarmas (bad deeds).

Let us look at the most recent example of Operation Sindoor. India's declared aim was to defeat and destroy terrorists — only terrorists — and, as far as possible, not to touch either common folk or even enemy soldiers. Our representative regularly informed the required channels of our intent in this regard, because our military action was against terrorists, and no one else.

That is the essence of the term dharmic, i.e., ethical, distinct from merciless. In contrast, Pakistan invariably does not care whether civilians, women and children, old or young, are hit or killed. It has chosen terrorism as it is a cheap way of fighting a superior India whose military might it cannot match.

Uniforms aren't needed; ragtag outfits can kill and escape accountability. If terrorists are captured or killed, the sponsoring country can safely disown the slain individual. No contact is maintained with

the families of the killed. All in all, from the patrons' point of view, terrorists are assets with few liabilities. Pakistani infiltrations, therefore, could continue no matter how poor the country's economy has become in recent years. It is a wonder that the country has managed to remain a member of the United Nations Organisation (UNO), which is generally seen



PRAFULL GORADIA

as a respectable global body. Not only that, Pakistan has once even been the president of the Security Council by a strange 'rotating' arrangement! Fundamentally, anyone wise would agree that the proper purpose of war should be deriving as well as enjoying a lasting peace. This means that such a war ought to be a dharmic or an ethical one. In common parlance, the minimum expectation

would be that in such a combat, there should be no hitting below the belt.

In the Hindu view, no matter how ethical the combat or hostilities are, the killing of women and children is unthinkable. The murdering of husbands in the presence of their wives and children is even worse, because, to a Hindu woman, her husband's life is more sacred than her own. All this is so far as means go.

As far as the ends are concerned, it should not be the acquisition of another country's territory or assets to enrich one's own country. India's experience of invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad Ghori has been detestable. Ghori, an Afghan Turkic invader, was routed by the Hindu monarch of Delhi, Prithviraj Chauhan, in the First Battle of Tarain in 1191 AD, but his life was spared by the Hindu victor.

Ghori, instead of remembering his debt to Maharaja Prithviraj Chauhan, attacked again in 1192 AD. He managed to win the Second Battle of Tarain but, far from showing any gratitude for being let off alive the previous time, had Prithviraj blinded and

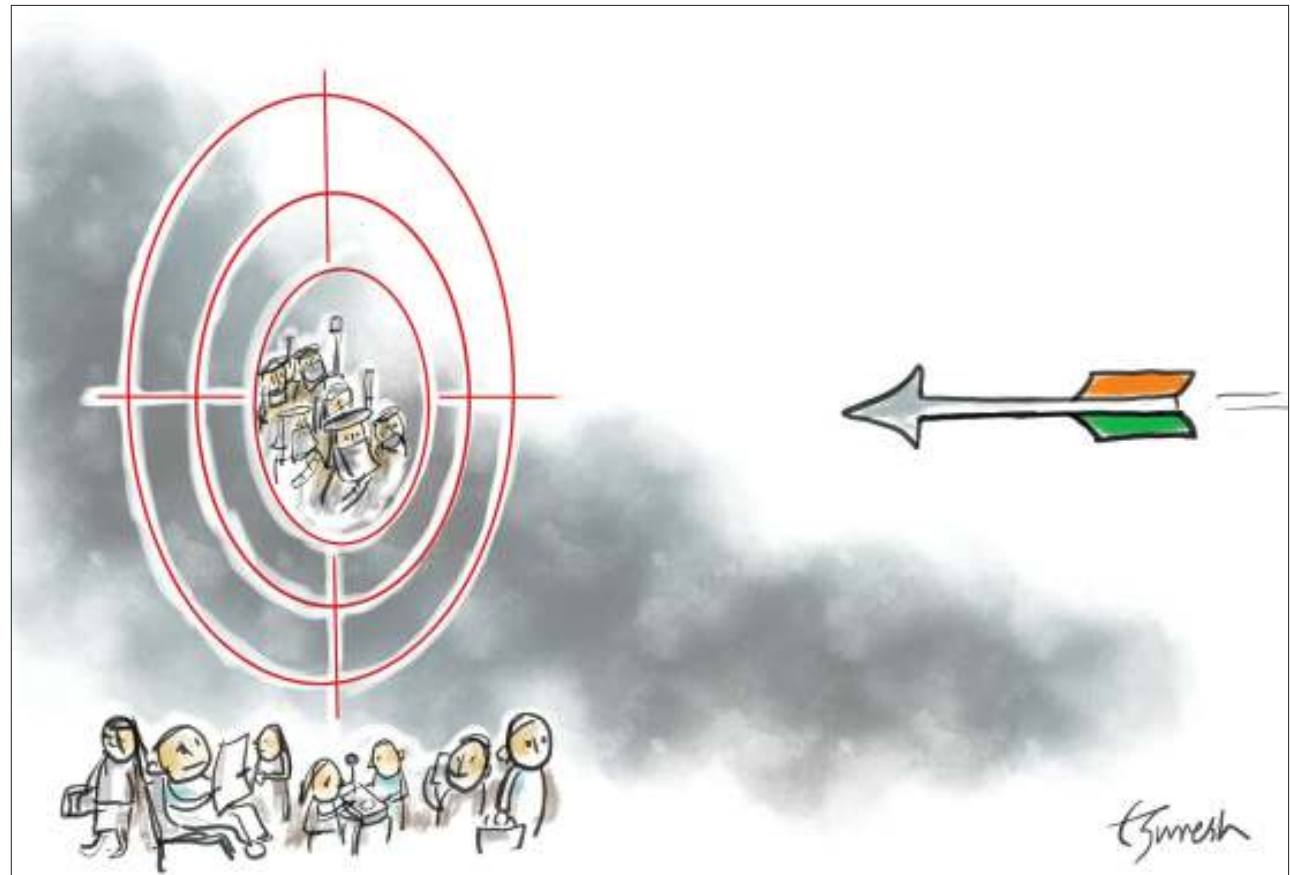
murdered. This was the Islamic invader's 'gratitude' towards a man who could have easily had him killed but chose to spare his life.

Europe has over the centuries witnessed many a war. The cruelties witnessed, especially in the intra-Christian wars (Catholic versus Protestant, Orthodox versus non-Orthodox) were harsh.

World Wars I and II claimed up to 100 million people, soldiers and civilians. WWI solved nothing; it only led to WWII, which produced the infamous Cold War, which ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which formerly had been the Czarist Russian Empire. Europe is still at war. There are guidelines set out by the Geneva Convention on how to treat captured and/or wounded soldiers in war.

However, there are no ethical rules. The concept of the dharmic has no place in the European ethos. The difference between the Hindu and Western/Abrahamic world-views is stark.

(The writer is a former Member of Rajya Sabha and a well-known columnist. Views are personal)



PICTALK



Macaques cool off in a pond on a hot summer day, in New Delhi. PTI

How women are reshaping the future of business leadership

SECOND Opinion

India is witnessing a significant transformation in its educational and professional landscapes, with an increasing number of women enrolling in Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes and advancing into top leadership roles in the corporate world. This shift marks not only a welcome departure from past trends but also signals a more inclusive and dynamic future for Indian businesses. Historically, business education in India was predominantly male-dominated. However, recent data highlights a steady and substantial increase in the participation of women in MBA programmes.

According to the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), women accounted for 42.11 per cent of total MBA enrolments in the 2022-23 academic year — an impressive leap from 33 per cent in 2018-19. In raw numbers, this represents a jump from 78,374 women in 2018-19 to 1,20,142 in 2022-23. This progress is not limited to statistics alone. The country's top 10 business schools have reported that 50 per cent or more of their 2024 MBA cohorts comprise women, marking a notable move towards gender parity. Even at the state level, such as in Maharashtra, the shift is evident. According to data from the state's Common Entrance Test (CET) cell, women now form nearly half of all MBA stu-

dents — a remarkable rise. While metro cities lead in women's business education, tier 2 and tier 3 cities are not far behind. Cities like Indore, Nashik, and Coimbatore have seen a 27 per cent rise in women enrolling in MBA programmes since 2020, as noted in the India Higher Education Report 2023.

Regional business schools are playing an instrumental role in this expansion. The digital revolution has also democratised access to business education. A KPMG report revealed that between 2021 and 2023, online MBA enrolment by women in non-metro cities rose by 54 per cent, allowing women to access quality education without needing to relocate — an essential consideration for many. Several factors have contributed to this positive trend. First and foremost is economic empowerment. An MBA is increasingly seen as a gateway to financial independence and career advancement, enabling women to break traditional socio-economic barriers. Secondly, business schools are becoming more inclusive. Many institutions now offer scholarships, mentorship programmes, and flexible learning options specifically designed for women. There is also a notable push for innovation in financing, particularly for students from tier 2-3 regions, including customised scholarship schemes and staggered fee payment plans. In addition, Government and corporate initiatives are fuelling this shift. For instance, the Maharashtra Government introduced a 100 per cent fee waiver for girls pursuing pro-



ASHISH MUNJAL

fessional courses from families earning less than ₹8 lakh per year — a move expected to significantly boost female participation in higher education. The increased participation of women in MBA programmes is translating into real impact in the business world. Women MBA graduates are making their mark in industries ranging from finance to tech.

A study by Institutional Investor Advisory Services (IIAS) revealed that women now occupy 18 per cent of board positions among the top 500 NSE-listed companies. There are 22 women board chairs, 25 women CEOs, and 62 women holding executive directorships among these firms. Moreover, women are showing stronger performance in placements. Data indicates that female MBA graduates have a 36.7 per cent higher selection rate than their male counterparts, showcasing their preparedness and industry relevance. Entrepreneurship is also seeing a surge among women with MBAs. Armed with formal training and a fresh perspective, many are launching their ventures, driving innovation, and contributing significantly to the economy. While the progress is commendable, sustained efforts are required to deepen and expand the gains. Organisations must implement policies that promote gender equality, such as equal pay, anti-discrimination practices, and transparent promotions. Mentorship networks should be developed to provide women with guidance and role models. Additionally, flexible work arrangements can help balance professional and personal responsibilities, further reducing attrition.

(The author is Co-Founder and CEO of Sunstone. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Assembly elections in Bihar

The assembly election in Bihar is due later this year, and the new assembly will have to be constituted before November 22. There is intense political activity in Bihar with speculation about the final shape of rival alliances. The BJP is not confident. The 'jungle raj' dig of the party aims to remind people of the lawlessness during the 15 years between 1990 and 2005. The NDA coalition is finding it difficult to respond to the 20 years of 'jungle raj 2' jibe between 2005 and 2025. The past few months in particular have witnessed daylight robberies, shootouts, kidnapping of women and a brazen display of firearms.

On June 2, Congress leader Alka Lamba, on a visit to Patna, reminded the media of the extraordinarily high number of incidents of sexual violence and killing of minor girls in just the previous fortnight. The discomfiture of the BJP has also increased after a C-Voter survey this week showed Tejashwi Yadav leading the race as the preferred chief minister with a 36.9 per cent approval rating. Nitish Kumar trailed at the second position, with an approval rating of 18.4 per cent, with other contenders behind him. Another point to note is that the Prime Minister's appeal is seemingly not as strong as earlier, with people recalling his failed promises and calling out the tall claims made by the BJP in manifestos before assembly elections in 2015 and 2019.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

An eye opener for all

In a landmark moment for disability representation in the legal field, a visually impaired lawyer appeared in a case before the Supreme Court on June 6.

In what is believed to be the first instance of a blind woman advocate appearing before the Supreme Court, Anchal Bhatheja, who was born with low vision due to birth complications and later lost her eyesight completely due to retinopathy of prematurity, represented a petitioner in a case.

She lost her vision entirely just before her board examinations. She, however, completed her schooling with the help of audiobooks and became the first blind CLAT aspirant to get admission into the National Law School of India, Bengaluru.

She completed her law degree in 2023. In her first appearance before the Supreme Court, Batheja represented a petitioner challenging the constitutionality of the Advertisement dated 16.05.2025 issued for recruitment to the Uttarakhand Judicial Service Civil Judge (Junior Division).

The petitioner is a person with 100 per cent visual impairment. When there's a huge pendency of cases even in the Apex Court, the initiative of this young lawyer can become an eye-opener for the judiciary to emulate her as a glorious example in the legal field.

A P THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

The woman beneath the bridge

As work on the arch design progressed, a massive 476-metre span Professor Madhavi Latha ensured the foundation and slope stabilisation matched the immense loads the structure would carry.

It wasn't just rock and concrete. It was about ensuring decades of endurance through rain, snow, windstorms, and even potential earthquakes. Her work, though behind the scenes, became the bedrock of the project's integrity. The iconic steel arch that now defines the Chenab Bridge stands proud not just because of its metalwork, but because someone had read the ground, listened to the Earth, and planned every bolt with precision.

Even as she worked on the Chenab Bridge, Prof Madhavi Latha never stopped being a teacher. Her students at IISc remember how she'd take overnight flights from Kashmir to make it to morning lectures. How she'd bring real-world problems into the classroom and inspire young Indians, especially girls, to believe that engineering wasn't just about textbooks, but about shaping a nation's destiny.

When the Chenab Bridge was finally completed and trains prepared to run, the world applauded the achievement. She proved that bridges aren't just built with iron; they are built with vision, conviction, and indomitable human spirit.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

CJI REFORMS AIM TO RESTORE PUBLIC TRUST IN JUDICIARY

Chief Justice of India BR Gavai's attempts to enhance the image of the judiciary are commendable. He has taken steps to reform the judiciary since he assumed office. His attempts to bring transparency, commitment and accountability to the judiciary are certainly appreciable.

The most praiseworthy step taken by the CJI is the public declaration of assets and properties by the judges of the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice himself. Such declarations help restore the trust of people in the judiciary. Another significant declaration is that the CJI and some of his colleagues won't accept post-retirement positions from the Central Government.

This is significant in the context where many former Chief Justices and judges have accepted positions from the Government. It raises questions about the ethical rightness of the judiciary. Live streaming of all Constitution bench cases is another significant move. It will

help the public understand judicial processes and dispel suspicion about the judgement of cases. Despite all these measures, corruption still lingers in the judiciary. The case of Justice Yashwant Varma of the Delhi High Court serves as a reminder. That a judge can be removed only through impeachment shows the deficiency of the judicial system.

However, a motion will be tabled in the next session of Parliament to impeach Justice Yashwant Varma. From declaring judges' assets to refusing post-retirement positions and live-streaming Constitutional cases, these actions help rebuild public confidence. However, cases like that of Justice Yashwant Varma remind us that corruption still casts a shadow. The upcoming impeachment motion highlights the need for deeper systemic reforms to ensure the judiciary remains ethical, independent, and above reproach.

venu gs | KOLLAM

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

India's skilled workforce can power the ageing world

The developed world does not require capital; it requires skilled, mobile, and motivated individuals. With a cohesive strategy, legal and ethical frameworks, and a visionary approach; with its young workforce India can become the world's hub for skilled individual exports

FIRST
Column

By 2030, the world will face an unprecedented workforce shortage of nearly 50 million in developed economies such as the United States, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. A recent Global Access to Talent from India (GATI) foundation report indicates that this deficit could soar to 250 million by 2050 due to an ageing population, declining birth rates, and shrinking domestic talent pools.

While automation and artificial intelligence (AI) may offer some solutions, the pace of technological substitution will not keep up with the demand for human capital from ageing industrial economies. In this context, India has a significant advantage with its demographic dividend of over 900 million working-age individuals, which is often seen as our greatest asset but could also become a demographic burden. To address this challenge, developing the largest pool of skilled and semi-skilled youth and India's established reputation for adaptability and competence could serve as a vital solution.

India exports around 700,000 of its workforce overseas each year, primarily to sectors such as healthcare, transportation, technology, and hospitality. However, this number could increase to 2.5 million annually with an integrated national plan. Such growth in India's workforce exports would not only help meet global demand.

But also, it could generate up to \$300 billion in annual remittances — more than double the current \$129 billion, which ranks India at the top globally. This makes foreign employment a key pillar of India's global economic outreach.

Global Demand Hotspots

The GATI report indicates that 20 nations will account for nearly 90 per cent of the projected global workforce shortage. The United States will require 11 to 12 million additional workers, followed by the United Kingdom (5 to 6 million), South Korea, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (4 to 5 million each), Germany and Russia (3 to 4 million each), and Japan (2 to 3 million).

Other countries, including Canada, Australia, the Gulf states, Taiwan, the Netherlands, Austria, and Italy, will each need an additional 1 to 2 million workers. Additionally, smaller but high-income nations such as Singapore, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hong Kong will experience shortages ranging from 0.5 to 1 million. The demand is apparent, and India is poised to meet it head-on.

Low to High Skills, All in Demand



DINESH SOOD



The estimated global demand, 70 per cent will be for medium — and low-skilled jobs: approximately 18 to 20 million for low-skilled positions, 6 to 8 million for medium-skilled roles, and 10 to 12 million for high-skilled jobs. Therefore, India's policy must align workforce training with this demand matrix.

The challenge is not just to send more workers abroad but to align the right skills with the right locations and industries. A new approach to migration should focus on three key strategies: unleashing global demand, enhancing domestic supply, and building a resilient long-term migration ecosystem.

Scaling up Skills

Regarding demand, India must actively engage with destination countries to harmonise skill certifications and expedite mutual recognition agreements. To scale up skills on the supply side, India needs to invest significantly in enhancing technical education, soft skills, and foreign language training, particularly in countries like Japan and Germany, where language proficiency is crucial. Key strategies to overcome these barriers include school-level language exposure, industry-centric training, and efficient grievance redressal systems. Some forward-thinking state Governments are already making progress; for instance, certain Delhi Government schools have started offering Japanese as a language option and states like Telangana are pioneering returnee integration programs.

However, these efforts require a nationwide

INDIA EXPORTS AROUND 700,000 OF ITS WORKFORCE OVERSEAS EACH YEAR, PRIMARILY TO SECTORS SUCH AS HEALTHCARE, TRANSPORTATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND HOSPITALITY. HOWEVER, THIS NUMBER COULD INCREASE TO 2.5 MILLION ANNUALLY WITH AN INTEGRATED NATIONAL PLAN

approach and coordination. It is time for India to establish a centralised agency for global workforce mobility, similar to the Department of Migrant Workers in the Philippines or the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training in Bangladesh. Such an organisation could unite all stakeholders — ministries, state Governments, skill councils, recruitment agencies, and industry bodies — to coordinate recruitment, ensure ethical migration practices, and monitor global demand in real-time. Equally important is developing financial support options for migration to help cover travel, training, and placement expenses, particularly for low and middle-income workers. The country also needs robust welfare systems to protect Indian workers abroad and facilitate grievance redressal and reintegration support for returnees. Additionally, it is essential to continuously map and focus on high-demand sectors for Indian talent. Beyond the traditionally prominent fields of healthcare, hospitality, domestic work, and logistics, India should also concentrate on emerging sectors such as green jobs in renewable energy, infrastructure development, digital public goods, and sustainability-linked startups, where skill gaps rapidly widen worldwide.

Addressing Migration Barriers

Despite progress, several challenges remain: Indian qualifications are often not globally recognised, and workers face high migration costs along with risks of exploitation by unscrupulous agents. The politi-

cal discourse surrounding immigration remains contentious in countries such as the US, Canada, and Australia, with much of the opposition focusing on illegal migration. However, skilled, structured, and lawful migration is a top priority for most developed economies, not out of goodwill, but due to economic necessity. These countries require sufficiently skilled staff to sustain growth, support ageing populations, and maintain critical public services. This is where India, with its youthful population and expanding training infrastructure, can position itself as a credible global partner.

Diplomatic Push

Several initiatives have already been launched. For instance, Germany is expanding its Skilled Worker Visa program, while Japan has increased the categories of apprenticeship visas available for Indians. There are ongoing discussions with Eastern European countries regarding recognising Indian driving licenses. Meanwhile, India is signing Government-to-Government migration agreements with countries such as Australia, Austria, Denmark, Italy, and the UK. Through the Young Professionals Scheme, up to 3,000 Indians each year can reside and work in the UK for two years.

Eight-Point Strategy

India must implement an eight-point agenda to address these challenges effectively. First, it is essential to strengthen institutional coordination between central and state Governments. Second, a national migration agency should be established, incorporating international best practices.

Third, skill certification requirements need to align with global standards. Fourth, a national industry association should be created to oversee and facilitate international mobility. Fifth, frameworks for migrant financing and insurance should be developed. Sixth, a new regulatory system must be implemented to monitor recruitment agencies and prevent exploitation. Seventh, support for the reintegration of returnees should be enhanced. Finally, bilateral and multilateral agreements must safeguard labour rights and welfare.

The Way Forward

The developed world does not require capital; it requires skilled, mobile, and motivated individuals. As ageing economies seek workforce support, India is uniquely positioned to provide this talent. With a cohesive strategy, legal and ethical frameworks, and a visionary approach, India can become the world's hub for credible, trained, and empowered individuals. The next wave of growth will not be driven by capital or commodities but by a capable workforce.

The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres. View expressed are personal.

Chirag Paswan's political chess: General seat, BJP and family feud

Those who had predicted that Chirag Paswan would contest from a reserved seat were proven wrong when it was announced that he would enter the Bihar Assembly elections from a general seat. The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) has officially decided that Chirag Paswan will contest from an unreserved constituency — a significant political move, marking his first foray into state assembly politics. A resolution confirming this was passed at a party meeting, and now Chirag is poised to establish his own political turf — ready, like Hanuman, for a trial by fire.

What prompted this bold decision? A significant undercurrent of pressure seems to be at play. The recent meeting between former LJP MP Pashupati Kumar Paras and Prince Raj Paswan with Union Home Minister Amit Shah has undoubtedly raised the political temperature for Chirag. During the last session of Parliament, Chirag made several statements that seemed at odds with the BJP's stance — on issues such as the creamy layer in reservations, lateral appointments, and the Waqf Board Amendment Act, 2024. His assertive tone unexpectedly invigorated the INDIA bloc, sparking speculation about a potential political shift in Bihar.

In response, the BJP appeared to send a subtle message — neither Pashupati Paras nor Prince Raj is off-limits. The saffron party held individual meetings with several LJP MPs, leaving Chirag visibly unsettled. Even MPs close to the Paswan family were forced to issue clarifications. Meanwhile, RJD MLA Mukesh Roshan claimed that the BJP was in touch with three of Chirag's MPs. It seemed like an orchestrated pressure tactic by the BJP — an indirect attempt to rein in Chirag and remind him of the options available to them.

According to Sangh sources, the BJP prefers the LJP to remain united under a single umbrella. They believe that splitting the Paswan vote through multiple factions could weaken its effectiveness. Yet, the BJP has always been adept at quiet, incremental consolidation. In the Lok Sabha elections, Pashupati Paras was appeased with promises, while Upendra Kushwaha was accommodated in the Rajya Sabha. Now, Paras has his hopes pinned on the 2025 assembly elections — but he also knows that neither the BJP nor JDU is likely to sacrifice seats to accommodate him separately.

In the upcoming NDA seat — sharing arrangement, both Chirag and Paras will have to find a way to coexist within the limited number of seats allocated to LJP. If they fail to reconcile, it could deepen the rift and weaken the alliance. A splintered LJP — with Rashtriya Lok



Janshakti Party (Paras faction) potentially fielding candidates against Chirag — might end up damaging the NDA by splitting the Paswan vote.

There's also a looming risk that the Paras faction could drift toward the INDIA bloc.

This possibility gains traction considering that Chirag Paswan faces opposition from within his extended family. RJD leader and Ram Vilas Paswan's son-in-law, Anil Kumar Sadhu, often targets Chirag publicly. In the Congress camp, Sunny Paswan — son of Nitish Kumar's minister Maheshwar Hazari — is also gearing up to challenge Chirag. Former Samastipur MP Prince Raj Paswan, too, could

emerge as a contender.

Despite these tensions, Pashupati Paras has indicated that he's open to reconciliation. In media statements, he has hinted that the relationship with his nephew can be mended, famously saying, "Blood is blood." Paras has even expressed this wish to the NDA leadership. But Chirag has remained firm. In interviews, he has reminded everyone how Paras had once broken away with MPs from Ram Vilas Paswan's original party and evicted him from the party office founded by his father. At that time, Chirag remarked, Paras saw neither his nephew nor his own brother's son.

This political and personal tug-of-war is emblematic of a deeper struggle within Bihar's NDA ranks. Some believe the BJP is engaged in damage control, attempting to keep both factions

of the LJP under a manageable umbrella. During the Lok Sabha elections, it was Pashupati Paras who bore the brunt of this internal cold war — losing both his ministerial berth and MPs. When he asked for a ticket for his ally Sunil Pandey in the Tarari bypoll, BJP denied the request.

Still, during his recent meeting with Amit Shah, Paras reiterated his party's commitment to supporting the NDA in the 2025 assembly elections. Yet, his political future remains uncertain, caught between fading influence and limited bargaining power.

Historically, LJP's performance in state elections has been inconsistent. In 2015, when it was part of the NDA, it contested 42 seats and won only two. In 2020, when Chirag went solo, the party contested 143 seats but won just one. The 2025 assembly elections will be the first time LJP contests as part of a broader NDA coalition that includes BJP, JDU, HAM, and RLM. BJP and JDU are expected to contest an equal number of seats — perhaps 100 each — leaving limited space for allies like LJP.

Currently, a political "Laxman Rekha" has been drawn: Chirag Paswan's brother-in-law has been appointed Chairman of the SC Commission, and Jitan Ram Manjhi's son-in-law as Vice-Chairman-indicating NDA's effort to balance caste dynamics and internal ambitions. But the road to 2025 remains rocky, with family rivalries, alliance tensions, and a changing electoral map all in play.

(The writer is a senior journalist. Views are personal)

IICT: India's Bold Leap into the Creative Future at WAVES 2025

The announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit-WAVES 2025 in Mumbai last month to establish the Indian Institute of Creative Technology (IICT) is not just an only budgetary provision but a firm determination and bold declaration of the leadership with intent — "Na rukha hai, na rukega, ye desh hamesha aage hi bade-ga". The allocation of ₹400 crore for setting up IICT in Mumbai signals to the world that India is ready to lead in creativity, innovation, and digital transformation.

The WAVES 2025 was a celebration of artistic excellence that brought together the nation's dreamers and creators. In addition to recognising their talent, the event honoured a diverse group of innovators and storytellers, demonstrating the leadership's strong commitment to creating new opportunities for the country's creative economy. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav aptly put it that IICT will catalyse a new kind of economy rooted in imagination, technology, and cultural strength.

More than just an event, WAVES 2025 reflects our identity and roots. As technology changes how we create and share stories, this year's theme encourages us to stay connected to our heritage. It's about making room for every voice, every story, and every tradition-while keeping creativity fair, accessible, and ethical. WAVES 2025 stands for a future that blends innovation with identity.

It invites us to grow while staying true to who we are, letting our history guide and inspire the stories of tomorrow. As we move forward, supporting local ideas, traditions, and cultural expressions alongside modern creativity is just as important. More than an academic institution, IICT is poised to become a national launchpad for imagination. It aligns with the aspirations of millions of young Indians who don't just want to consume global digital content but are ready to create, lead, and shape it. With the right infrastructure and leadership vision, IICT offers a platform to translate raw talent into global — class innovation. In the age of innovation, creativity is the new capital — and India is investing in its brightest minds. This announcement comes at a pivotal time. During the YUGM Conclave in April this year, the Prime Minister emphasised a simple yet powerful truth: We have limited time and resources, but there is much to achieve. IICT represents a strategic response to this urgency — an ambitious leap toward a high-growth, innovation-led economy. This is more than an institution; it is a movement — a call for creators to rise, build, and lead from the front. Importantly, the evolution from 'Kala' (art) to Code, showcased at WAVES 2025, unites technology, storytelling, scripture, science, and script into one integrated national vision. This journey isn't just cultural — it is eco-

nom. Through AR and VR, ancient knowledge is not only preserved but repurposed. These technologies are being used not only to bring scriptures alive but also to assist in complex medical surgeries, helping doctors plan better and make safer decisions.

This transformation also highlights a deeper truth: creativity is foundational to success in key sectors like education, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. Creative thinking drives human — centred solutions, whether it's the design of digital classrooms, intuitive medical tools, or smart factories. IICT recognises this and places creative capacity at the core of India's future growth model.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi called WAVES 2025 a wave of "culture, creativity, and universal connection". He urged the young people to tell the world the "1 billion untold stories." With its enormous population, he emphasised, India is a "land of a billion-plus stories," rich in sports, science, culture, and other fields. "When the world is looking for new ways of storytelling, India has a history of stories which is timeless and thought-provoking," he said, calling on the WAVES platform to carry this legacy forward globally. Highlighting the global appeal of Indian narratives, he noted that "foreign audiences are watching Indian content through subtitles" and spoke of the growing influence of OTT platforms: "Screen size is small but the scope is huge. Screen is micro but growth is significant."

IICT will also be the first-of-its-kind institution where storytelling transforms from a cultural tradition into a thriving economic avenue. In India, storytelling isn't just entertainment — it's heritage. From the heartfelt "Dadi-Nani ki kahaniyan" to the moral — rich tales passed through generations, storytelling has always been the soul of Indian wisdom. But in today's fast-paced digital era, this chapter of our cultural legacy is at risk of fading. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision is not to preserve heritage through nostalgia but to anchor it in opportunity. As he rightly observed, "In today's world, only that which creates value can sustain visibility." IICT transforms heritage from memory into prosperity by turning storytelling into a technology — supported profession.

The Government of India's decision to prioritise the creative economy is among the most futuristic and visionary acts of leadership. The policy of "Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi" is not only poetic but powerful. To survive in today's competitive world, imagination must not just be preserved; it must be empowered and rewarded. IICT is that empowerment. From idea to execution, India is investing in its creative, digital, and cultural future. The future isn't waiting, and neither is India.

(The writer is a freelance journalist. Views expressed are personal)



SANDEEP JOSHI



IN BRIEF



IRB Infra toll revenue rises to Rs 581 cr

IRB Infrastructure on Monday posted a nearly 9 per cent year-on-year rise in its toll revenue to Rs 581 crore in May 2025. Revenues from the toll collection business stood at Rs 536 crore in the same month last year, IRB said in an exchange filing. Of its 17 tolls, the IRB MP Expressway in Maharashtra contributed the major share of Rs 159.5 crore to the total revenue collection in April, up from Rs 152.6 crore contribution in May 2024. With Rs 73 crore, IRB Golconda Expressway (Hyderabad ORR) was the second largest contributor to the revenues in May 2025, up from Rs 62.7 crore last year. Contribution of IRB Ahmedabad Vadodara Super Express Tollway rose to Rs 68.7 crore from Rs 64.5 crore in May 2024, which is the third largest in the aggregate toll collection, it said. Last year, the company added T07-12 project Lalitpur Lakhnadon NH44 and collected Rs 37.5 crore toll revenue, higher from Rs 35.5 crore a year ago.



ZEE enters into equity partnership with Bullet

Leading broadcaster ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) on Monday said it has entered into a strategic equity partnership with Bullet, a new-age content & tech start-up. ZEEL did not share much details on the transactions, but said "it will invest/acquire stake in Bullet". Co-founded by entrepreneurs Azim Lalani and Saurabh Kushwah, Bullet has developed India's first micro-drama application focused on fast-paced, creator-driven content through short duration vertical format episodes targeted towards the younger audiences. "Bullet will be launched within the ZEE5 ecosystem, leveraging its strong user base by enabling access to high-quality, bite-sized entertainment directly through the platform," according to a joint statement. Moreover, to have a pan-India appeal, the application will be available across languages and will harness the company's rich content engine and repertoire of language content, it said.



'No impact of rare earth magnet shortage on production'

Maruti Suzuki India Chairman R C Bhargava on Monday said there is no impact on the company's production due to the shortage of rare earth magnets as of now. His comments come against the backdrop of restrictions imposed by the Chinese government since April 4 on the export of rare earth elements and related magnets. China has mandated special export licences for seven rare earth elements and related magnets. China controls over 90 per cent of global processing capacity for the magnets, used across sectors including automobiles, home appliances and clean energy. "There is no impact at the moment," Bhargava told PTI when asked if the auto major is facing any production issues due to the global shortage. The production activity at the country's largest carmaker is going on as planned, he added. When asked if the company sees a production crunch over the next few months due to the issue, he noted: "If the licenses come through and they are supposed to come through, there would not be a problem."

Microfinance suffers from high interest: RBI Dy Guv

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Microfinance continues to suffer from the vicious cycle of over-indebtedness, high interest rates and harsh recovery practices, RBI Deputy Governor M Rajeshwar Rao has said.

Addressing HSBC's event for financial inclusion here, the senior Reserve Bank official noted that microfinance has placed itself as a promising avenue for providing formal financial services to the excluded sections of the population.

While microfinance has played an important role in financial inclusion, some issues need attention, Rao said.

"The sector continues to suffer from the vicious cycle of over-indebtedness, high interest rates and harsh recovery practices. While some moderation in interest rates charged on microfinance loans has been observed in recent quarters, pockets of high interest rates and elevated margins continue to persist," he added.

Even lenders with access to low-cost funds have been found to be charging margins significantly higher than the rest of the industry and in several instances, appear to be excessive, Rao said.

Lenders should look beyond the conventional "high-yielding business" tag



The sector continues to suffer from the vicious cycle of over-indebtedness, high interest rates and harsh recovery practices. While some moderation in interest rates charged on microfinance loans has been observed in recent quarters, pockets of high interest rates and elevated margins continue to persist

for the sector and approach it with an empathic and developmental perspective, recognising the socio-economic role that microfinance plays in empowering vulnerable communities, the deputy governor pointed out.

"The frequency of disruptions in the microfinance sector has increased of late. Incidents of high borrower indebtedness coupled with coercive recovery practices sometimes lead to tragic con-

sequences," Rao said.

He stressed that it is in the collective interest of all stakeholders that such disruptions are pre-emptively addressed and avoided.

In this regard, he said regulated entities must also enhance their credit appraisal frameworks to prevent over-leveraging of borrowers.

"Additionally, they must eschew any coercive or unethical recovery practices, ensuring that financial services are

delivered in a manner that is both responsible and sustainable," he said.

In his address, he also mentioned reports of mis-selling financial services like insurance products.

While financial inclusion entails a bouquet of financial services, pushing the same indiscriminately to unaware consumers may be detrimental to their well-being and undermine its stated intent, the RBI official said.

Stock markets rise for 4th day on global rally

Gains in banking shares after RBI rate cut

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets closed higher for a fourth consecutive day on Monday driven by gains in banking and financial shares and a rally in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 256.22 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 82,445.21 as 21 of its constituents closed higher and nine declined. During the day, it jumped 480.01 points or 0.58 per cent to 82,669.

The 50-share NSE Nifty surged 100.15 points or 0.40 per cent to 25,103.20.

In the four-day rally to Monday, Nifty has gained over 560 points or 2.27 per cent while Sensex has jumped 1,707 points or 2.1 per cent.

Optimism over a new round of trade talks between the US and China also drove the markets higher.

Analysts said the RBI's

jumbo 50 basis point rate cut last week has boosted investor sentiment helping most sectoral indices close higher. Energy, IT, and financial sectors emerged as lead gainers while broader market indices outperformed benchmark indicators.

"Financial stocks extended their rally in Indian markets, driven by the RBI's supportive aggressive policy of rate and CRR cut.

These actions have boosted investor confidence and are expected to enhance liquidity in the near to medium term, especially in midcaps," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Among Sensex stocks, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv and NTPC were the biggest gainers.

Two-wheeler volumes likely to grow by 8-9 pc

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Domestic two-wheeler volumes are expected to grow 8-9 per cent this fiscal, surpassing the pre-COVID levels, driven by a host of factors including easing inflation and prospects of a favourable Monsoon among others, a report said on Monday.

The report by CareEdge Ratings also noted that the domestic two-wheeler industry has maintained a healthy volume growth of 8 per cent, 10 per cent, and 11 per cent in FY23, FY24, and FY25, respectively.

Volume growth in FY25 was supported by a substantial 21 per cent export recovery and a 9 per cent rise in domestic volumes. The export recovery was due to stabilisation in key markets affected by inflation, high interest rates, and currency issues in earlier years, it said.

Domestic volumes were supported by a substantial uptick in rural demand and sustained urban demand, CareEdge said.

Over 350 Indian cos join London Tech Week 2025

PNS ■ LONDON

Over 350 Indian technology companies joined the London Tech Week, which started on Monday, making it the largest-ever delegation from the country to attend the event.

The companies include a diverse mix of high growth and established firms such as The Black Box, Digi Osmosis, Bahwan CyberTek, Arya.ai, Mphasis, Helios Batteries, Fynd, Hyperready, MoneyHOP, Siam Computing, among others.

The Mayor of London's office described the rise in Indian participation as the deepening ties between India and London's thriving tech ecosystem following the recent signing of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Speaking at the London Tech Week, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced the launch of "Extract" -- an AI assistant for planning officers and local councils developed by the UK government with support from

Icra projects 6-8 pc growth for the hospitality sector

Downgrades outlook to 'stable'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Growth of India's hospitality sector is expected to "normalise" at 6-8 per cent in the current financial year, rating agency Icra said on Monday while downgrading the sectoral outlook to 'stable' from positive.

The rating agency also stated that foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) to India are expected to remain muted in the next few months in the aftermath of the terror attack at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, but are estimated to witness a gradual recovery thereafter.

However, domestic tourism has been the prime demand driver so far and is likely to remain the same in the near term.

Factors, including improvement in infrastructure and air connectivity, favourable demographics, and anticipated growth in large-scale MICE events, with the opening of multiple new convention centres in the last few years, will support the growth over the medium term, Icra said.

According to the rating agency, the domestic hospital-

ity sector's earnings and credit metrics are expected to remain stable in FY2026 with benefits from cost rationalisation measures and operating leverage.

A "stable" outlook indicates a low likelihood of change in the near to medium term,

whereas a "positive" outlook suggests a high probability of an upgrade in the near to medium term.

The rating agency estimates pan-India premium hotel occupancy to hold at 72-74 per cent in FY2026, slightly higher than the 70-72 per cent levels witnessed in FY2024 and FY2025.

The average room rates (ARRs) for premium hotels are projected to rise to Rs 8,200-8,500 in FY2026, after a healthy Rs 8,000-8,200 in FY2025 amid lagging supply additions and several hotels undergoing renovation, refurbishment and upgradation, the ratings agency said.



Google.

"For too long, our outdated planning system has held back our country -- slowing down the development of vital infrastructure and making it harder to get the homes we need built," said Starmer.

"This government is working hand in hand with business to change that. With Extract, we're harnessing the power of AI to help planning officers cut red tape, speed up decisions, and unlock the new homes for hard-working people as part of our Plan for Change. It's a bold step forward in our mission to

build 1.5 million more homes and deliver a planning system that's fit for the 21st century," he said.

Starmer also unveiled a new GBP 187-million government "TechFirst" programme to bring digital skills and AI learning into classrooms and communities, training people of all ages and backgrounds for the tech careers of the future.

Speaking about the growth opportunities for Indian SaaS platforms in London, Hemin Bharucha,

Chief Representative of the Mayor of London and Regional Director for India & the Middle East at London & Partners, pointed to the growing presence of Indian companies in London as a testament to the strength and vibrancy of the India-UK relationship in the tech space.

"London continues to be a preferred destination for Indian innovators and investors looking to scale globally, supported by a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures collaboration, innovation, and growth," said Bharucha.

Govt okays Micron Semiconductor's proposal to set up SEZ

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday said it has approved the proposals from Micron Semiconductor Technology India and Hubballi Durable Goods Cluster (Aequs Group) for setting up SEZs for manufacturing of semiconductors and electronic components.

Micron will establish its SEZ facility in Sanand, Gujarat, over an area of 37.64 hectares with an estimated investment of Rs 13,000 crore, while Aequs will establish its SEZ in Dharwad, Karnataka, over an area of 11.55 hectares to manufacture electronics

components with an estimated investment of Rs 100 crore.

The decision followed the easing of certain SEZ (special economic zone) rules to promote the manufacturing of semiconductors and electronics components.

"Subsequently, the Board of Approval for SEZs has accorded approval to the proposals received from Micron Semiconductor Technology India Pvt Ltd (MSTI) and Hubballi Durable Goods Cluster Private Ltd (Aequs Group) for setting up SEZs for manufacturing of semiconductors and electronic components, respectively," the com-



merce ministry said in a statement.

Since manufacturing in these sectors is highly capital intensive, import dependent and involves longer gestation periods before turning prof-

itable, rule amendments have been carried out to promote pioneering investments and boost manufacturing in these high technology sectors, it said.

As per a change in the rule, an SEZ set up exclusively for the manufacturing of semiconductors or electronic components will require a minimum contiguous land area of only 10 hectares, reduced from the earlier requirement of 50 hectares.

Now, the value of goods received and supplied on a free-of-cost basis will be included in Net Foreign Exchange (NFE) calculations.

and more reliable mail delivery, and shaping a strengthened digital infrastructure," Pemmasani said.

The DIGIPIN initiative aims to simplify location mapping, enhance logistics and emergency response, and ensure last-mile delivery, especially in rural and underserved areas.

Through the 'Know Your PIN Code' service, the Department of Post aims to modernise and refine its geographic accuracy of the six-digit PIN Code system, which was introduced in 1972 and has been serving as the backbone of India's postal delivery.

PIN Code' on May 27 in alignment with the National Geospatial Policy 2022, which envisions the development of an advanced geospatial infrastructure to support digital governance and public service delivery.

The minister asked Department of Posts (DoP) officials to ensure that the DIGIPIN initiative aligns with broader goals of Digital India, postal reform, and citizen-centric governance.

"Discussions included transitioning to an enterprise self-financing model to prevent revenue loss, ensuring faster, safer



MoS Telecom: Make DIGIPIN self-financing model

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Pemmasani Chandra Sekhar on Monday asked the Department of Posts to explore the transition of digital address system DIGIPIN to an enterprise self-financing model to curb losses.

The Minister of State for Telecommunications also asked DoP officials to ensure that the DIGIPIN initiative aligns with broader goals of Digital India, postal reform, and citizen-centric governance.

The minister, in a post on social media platform X, said, "Chaired a meeting on

DIGIPIN, India's open-source, geocoded addressing system, focused on enabling seamless service delivery while safeguarding data privacy."

The review meeting held by Pemmasani coincides with the completion of one year of his taking charge as the minister.

The postal department has developed the DIGIPIN (Digital Postal Index Number) as an open-source, interoperable, geocoded, grid-based digital address system in collaboration with IIT Hyderabad and NRSC, ISRO.

The postal department had announced the launch of 'Know Your DIGIPIN' and 'Know Your

Silver soars Rs 1,000 to hit fresh peak of Rs 1.08 lakh/kg

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Silver prices soared Rs 1,000 to hit a fresh peak of Rs 1,08,100 per kilogram in the national capital on Monday, in line with firm global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Saturday, the metal traded flat at Rs 1,07,100 per kg (inclusive of all taxes). Prior to that, the white metal on Friday had soared Rs 3,000 to hit another record high of Rs 1,07,100 per kg.

Traders said silver prices surged due to strong investor demand, a weak dollar against major currencies, heightened geopolitical tensions, and firm industrial demand from the EV and solar sectors.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity fell Rs 280 to Rs 97,780 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Monday. The precious metal had declined by Rs 1,630 to Rs 98,060 per 10 grams on Saturday.

The yellow metal of 99.5 per cent purity dipped Rs 250 to Rs

97,350 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had depreciated by Rs 1,500 to Rs 97,600 per 10 grams in the previous market close.

Globally, spot gold rose marginally to USD 3,312.84 per ounce.

"Gold consolidated in the lower end of its range on

Monday amid mixed signals. The highly anticipated talks between the US and China have raised hopes that the two largest economies can make progress on various disputes, which could reduce demand for safe havens".

"Additionally, the latest Nonfarm Payrolls report in the US was strong, prompting traders to re-evaluate their expectations regarding a potential easing of monetary policy by the Federal Reserve, which also serves as a headwind for the yellow metal," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.





'It feels good to see a content-driven film like Stolen connect globally'

Actor Abhishek Banerjee is over-the-moon as his latest release "Stolen" is getting rave reviews. He says that at a time when the spotlight is largely on big-budget and high-concept films, it feels good to see a content-driven movie connect with the audiences globally. Abhishek said: "At a time when the spotlight is largely on big-budget, high-concept films, it feels good to see a content-driven film like Stolen connect with audiences across geographies." The actor said that he has "always believed" in the strength of the story.

Abhishek added: "It's encouraging not just for us, but for many other filmmakers who are trying to create work that's rooted and honest. The kind of response we're getting—across social media, in reviews, and through

viewership—is proof that audiences are open to new narratives. This kind of momentum pushes all of us to keep taking creative risks and backing unique stories."

The film is a heart-wrenching story of a mother, whose baby is snatched from her as she sleeps at a desolate railway station. What follows is a relentless pursuit, as brothers Raman and Gautam, who join Jhumpa as they navigate treacherous terrain while hunting for the missing child deep in India's remote hinterlands, with hostile locals threatening their lives, their search evolves into a desperate fight for survival.

Directed by Karan Tejpal and written by Tejpal alongside Dhingra and Swapnil Salkar - Agadbumb, Stolen also features Harish Khanna, Mia Maelzer, Sahidur Rahaman, and Shubham Vardhan. Led by executive producers Anurag Kashyap, Kiran Rao, Nikkhil Advani, Vikramaditya Motwane, directed by Karan Tejpal and produced by Gaurav Dhingra, Stolen is a Jungle Book Studio production. "Stolen" is streaming on Prime Video. Abhishek has showcased his acting prowess in films such as Stree, Bhediya, Stree 2, Paatal Lok, Dream Girl, Dream Girl 2, Rashmi Rocket and Vedaa.

Diljit Dosanjh gets quirky and cunning in Detective Sherdil



ZE5 is gearing up to deliver another gripping original, Detective Sherdil, which is set to premiere on June 20. The recently released trailer has already sparked excitement, offering a sneak peek into what promises to be a thrilling ride packed with suspense, dark humour, and sharp storytelling.

Marking a refreshing departure from his trademark roles, Diljit Dosanjh steps into the shoes of Detective Sherdil—an eccentric and wildly intelligent investigator who brings a theatrical flair to every scene. On taking on such a character, Diljit shared, "The character's quirks and attitude are something I've explored differently this time. I hope audiences enjoy this character and the film."

The mystery kicks off with the shocking murder of billionaire industrialist Pankaj Bhatti (played by the ever-charismatic Boman Irani) in Budapest. What initial-

ly appears to be a hate crime soon unravels into a complex maze of family feuds, hidden motives, and billion-dollar stakes.

Joining Detective Sherdil on this mind-bending mission is Natasha, played by Diana Penty—a composed, razor-sharp investigator who balances out Sherdil's flamboyance with calm precision. Together, the duo navigates a high-stakes whodunnit filled with unexpected twists and betrayals.

Anurag Kashyap's 'Saas-Bahu' comment sparks war of words with Ektaa Kapoor

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has once again found himself at the center of controversy—this time, not just for his remarks on Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos, but for his jibe at Indian television's iconic "saas-bahu" serials. The comment has not gone down well with television czarina Ektaa Kapoor, who responded sharply through her Instagram stories, calling the Gangs of Washepur director "dumb."

Kashyap had taken to social media to criticize Sarandos' recent remarks about the success of Sacred Games. In a fiery post, Kashyap sarcastically noted that Sarandos should have backed a "saas-bahu" show instead, implying it would have been more commercially viable. He didn't stop there—he went on to label Sarandos as the "definition of dumb," adding, "I always knew tech guys are dumb when it comes to storytelling."

While Kashyap's post was aimed at the Netflix boss, his dismissive tone towards the popular soap opera genre clearly hit a nerve with Ektaa Kapoor, known for revolutionizing Indian television with serials like Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii, and Kasautii Zindagii Kay. In a strongly worded response, Ektaa Kapoor



addressed Kashyap directly via Instagram Stories. "Ur so dumb... saying this put u on an advantage 'I'm smarter, cooler' but naaaaaaa! Darling how about gracious!!! N self-aware????? An art a lot of artists don't have!"

She went on to highlight the significant cultural impact of "saas-bahu" dramas, referencing a Chicago-based research study that documented how such shows gave Indian women a voice in mainstream media. "Saas bahu" in their impact on Indian masses (how women got a voice in mass India) is well documented by a prestigious Chicago research! But artists who talk of an inclusive world are actually more classist."

Kapoor concluded her message with a pointed reminder about inclusivity and democratic storytelling: "We must do away with this 'U' can't sit with us we r better' attitude for democracy n fair play! Love n light to all."

This public spat has stirred conversation across social media, once again underlining the divide between popular, mass-oriented content and niche, critically acclaimed work. While both Kashyap and Kapoor are known for their strong opinions and game-changing contributions to Indian entertainment, their differing ideologies are now clearly on display.

Navjot Singh Sidhu returns to the laughter arena in The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 3

Former cricketer and TV personality Navjot Singh Sidhu is all set to make a roaring comeback to comedy television with The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 3, premiering June 21 on Netflix. The announcement was made on Monday, June 9, via the streamer's official Instagram handle, sparking nostalgia and excitement among longtime fans of the show. "Ek excitement among longtime fans of the show. "Ek kurti paai ke liye please," the post teased, confirming that Sidhu will reunite with Archana Puran Singh, adding, "Har Funnyvaar badhega humara parivaar with the comeback of Navjot Singh Sidhu & Archana Puran Singh."

The return marks a homecoming for Sidhu, who previously appeared as a regular guest on Kapil Sharma's earlier shows including Comedy Nights with Kapil, The Kapil Sharma Show, and Family Time With Kapil Sharma. In 2019, he exited the show due to political commitments, with Archana Puran Singh stepping in as his replacement. Now, both Sidhu and Archana will share screen space in this new season, bringing their signature banter and energy back to fans.

"Coming to The Great Indian Kapil Show feels like I'm coming home again. It is a home run for me," Sidhu said in a statement. "The audience wanted this reunion. Netflix made it possible. This season, we'll bloom for audiences worldwide." True to his poetic style, Sidhu added: "Guru, humne milkar yeh aashiyana sajaya hai. Guzra zamana phir se lautke aaya hai! Main yu hi nahi pohuncha hoon yahaan par dobara, Mujhe kheench kar janta ka pyaar laaya hai!" The Great Indian Kapil Show Season 3 will also feature fan-favourite regulars Sunil Grover, Krushna Abhishek, and Kiku Sharda. The new season streams every Saturday from June 21 at 8 PM, exclusively on Netflix.

FUN

ARCHIE

CALVIN AND HOBBS

GARFIELD

NANCY

GINGER MEGGS

REALITY CHECK

SPEED BUMP

CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5
6		7		8
9		10	11	
12			13	14
15				16
17				18
				19

ACROSS

- Small towns
- Overdue
- Changed direction
- In the lead
- A smelly vegetable
- Unlocks
- A measure of length
- Remained in the same place
- Nought
- Illnesses
- Something worn around the neck
- Likely to kill or harm you
- Cross and upset
- Paper is made from these
- Counts up
- Black stuff on roads

DOWN

- Mountains that erupt
- A measure for liquid
- A type of door in a fence
- Very unusual

SOLUTION

S	V	A	B	P
H	I	R	H	E
E	M	P	T	I
L	S	Y	M	E
I	N	N	E	R
N	E	A	O	T
S	O	S	N	K

SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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.

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

India gear up for Hong Kong test in Asian Cup Qualifiers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kowloon (Hong Kong)

Seeking its first win in the tournament, the Indian football team will face another acid test when it takes on Hong Kong in a crucial AFC Asian Cup 2027 round three qualifier match here on Tuesday.

As per reports in the local media, all 50,000 tickets for the match have been sold out, setting a new attendance record for Hong Kong football.

Manolo Marquez's men will have their task cut out as they face a Hong Kong side that has been revitalised under the guidance of manager Ashley Westwood, who knows a lot about Indian football and will certainly look to use his knowledge to the home side's advantage. Placed in Pot 1 for the qualifiers, India, ranked 127th, got off to a slow start with a draw against Bangladesh in March.

Meanwhile, Pot 2 side Hong Kong, ranked 153, also managed only a point in Singapore, meaning there is still nothing to separate the four sides in Group C after the first matchday.

For Hong Kong, the day will be a historic. The game is not only a crucial qualifier in their search for only a second AFC Asian Cup berth in 59 years, but also the inaugural football match at the 50,000 seater Kai Tak Stadium, part of the Kai Tak Sports Park, the largest sports complex in Hong Kong.



Featuring a retractable roof and constructed at a cost of HKD 30 billion at the site of the city's former airport, the stadium even features a flexible pitch system for other sports and entertainment events.

It will be India and Hong Kong's 25th meeting since their first in 1951. India lead the head-to-head with nine wins, Hong Kong have eight, while seven have been draws.

However, the Blue Tigers have won only once on Hong Kong soil, a 2-1 friendly victory in 1957.

The previous meeting in 2022 is still fresh in the memories of many — a 4-0 drubbing in a rain-lashed Asian Cup qualifier in Kolkata.

Defender Sandesh Jhingian,

however, reiterated that it's "all about now".

"It was quite a comfortable scoreline but since then, Hong Kong have changed a lot. They have a new coach and a lot of new players. So, it's not going to be as easy, and you cannot get complacent or take things lightly. "Every game on the international stage is tough, especially on away soil. We are preparing in the best way, and we will go for the maximum points on Tuesday," said the 31-year-old Jhingian.

Since August 2024, Hong Kong have been coached by Westwood, a familiar name in Indian football. The Englishman led Bengaluru FC from 2013 to 2016 and also took charge of ATK and

RoundGlass Punjab FC later.

He also coached the Afghanistan side that defeated India in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers last year.

Under Westwood, Hong Kong have only lost once in 12 matches — 0-1 to Liechtenstein in a friendly. But only two wins have come against higher-ranked opponents, Solomon Islands and Philippines (both friendlies).

In preparation for the match against India, Hong Kong played a non-official friendly against Manchester United FC that they lost 1-3 on May 30, and then a FIFA friendly against Nepal on June 5, which was a scoreless affair. Lallianzuala Chhangte shared his thoughts on the opponents.

"Playing against Hong Kong is a significant challenge because they have a good defensive setup, and we know their coach as well. He has a lot of experience in India," Chhangte said.

"Hong Kong are a good counter-attacking team as well, and we have to be well aware of that. We have a plan, and it's all about executing. If we go into the game with the right mindset, attitude and hunger, we can win this game," said the winger, who celebrated his 28th birthday on Sunday.

Apart from the new coach, the Hong Kong squad also features many new naturalised and foreign-born players. Among them are forwards Juninho and Stefan Pereira, midfielder Fernando, and defender Dudu — all born in Brazil. Spain-born forward Manolo Bleda and Japan-born midfielder Sohgo Ichikawa also made their Hong Kong debuts recently.

Among the experienced lot are goalkeeper Yapp Hung Fai, who has over a century of caps, defenders Sun Ming Him, Yue Tze Nam and Tsui Wang Kit, all of whom ply their trade in the Chinese Super League, and midfielder Tan Chun Lok.

The majority of the squad, however, play their club football in the Hong Kong Premier League for Kitchee SC, Southern District, Lee Man FC, Eastern FC and current champions Tai Po FC.

Shooting League of India to help develop sport, says Mary Tucker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Mary Tucker feels the Shooting League of India will provide huge opportunity to develop the sport both within India and across the world.

The 23-year-old, who won silver in the mixed 10m air rifle team event during Tokyo2020, has earlier competed for the University of Kentucky and West Virginia University in the NCAA competitions, and also represented Saltendorf in Germany's Bundesliga.

Tucker said she enjoys competing in team format tournaments.

"I really like leagues. I have experience with the NCAA and with the Bundesliga, and I really like being on a team and having that atmosphere of being able to have spectators rooting for an entire team.

"I really like the format of having top athletes and junior athletes competing together. I feel like that's a huge opportunity to develop shooting sports both within India and all around the world," Tucker was quoted as saying in a media release.

The ISSF has allocated the window between November 20 and December 2 for the first season of the SLI, and the tournament will feature mixed team events in pistol (10m, 25m), rifle (10m, 50m 3 positions), and shotgun (Trap & Skeet).



"India is at a really high level in the sport, so it's really a good opportunity for the Indian athletes to compete with people from outside, but also it's a great opportunity for international athletes because we get to compete with the really high-level Indian shooters.

"I think it will be a really great opportunity as well to build a kind of fan base and hopefully get some more interest in the whole world," she further added.

Tucker feels the experience of playing for several teams may give her an advantage in the upcoming league.

"Those athletes who have shot in the NCAA or in the Bundesliga for many years could have a bit of an advantage because we do know

what it's like to compete with the pressure of a team. It's very different."

Tucker also said that she believes that the league will not only help in growing the popularity of the sport across the USA and other regions, but also help her individual game. "The opportunity to travel more and train with other high-level athletes is going to help bring my level of shooting up. And there are going to be different types of opportunities and experiences that we will get with this league.

"It may put you in a situation that is super different or uncomfortable. And that will help a ton because we are going to be able to get used to those situations," Tucker said.

Leadership role brings out best in him, says Shreyas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Having guided Kolkata Knight Riders to their third title last year and led Punjab Kings to the IPL final this year, star India cricketer Shreyas Iyer says he "loves" leadership role as it helps to bring out the best in him.

Iyer was pivotal in guiding PBKS to the IPL final against Royal Challengers Bengaluru this year, scoring 604 runs, including six half-centuries. But, as luck would have it, he missed out on a Test spot for the five-Test away series against England beginning later this month. He also led Delhi Capitals in the past.

"It (captaincy) brings in a lot of maturity and responsibility. You are always expected to perform and contribute in the best way possible for the team because whenever there is a hurdle or some kind of adversity you face as a team, they always come to the captain," Iyer told the T20 Mumbai League.

Sinner's eye-catching run at French Open ends in heartbreak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

After a flawless fortnight in Paris, Jannik Sinner was on the brink of capturing his first French Open title after a dominant run on the clay courts of Roland-Garros.

Facing defending champion Carlos Alcaraz, the top-ranked Italian was firmly in control. Sinner's deep groundstrokes, excellent service, heavy top spin, and subtle variations had worn down Alcaraz, who found himself 5-3 down and trailing 0-40 in the fourth set, and facing three match points. At that moment, it felt like the best of all possible worlds for the 23-year-old Sinner.

But then the momentum swung. Alcaraz fought back, saved the first match point when Sinner sent a forehand long. On the second, Sinner missed a return. The third ended with Alcaraz winning a short baseline exchange.

Sinner had just let his chance slip away

From there, Alcaraz produced one of the greatest comeback in Roland-Garros history to win the longest final ever played on the Parisian dirt - 5 hours and 29 minutes — 4-6, 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (10-2). It's an amazing trophy, so I won't sleep tonight very well, but it's okay," Sinner said



during the trophy ceremony.

Exciting rivalry

There is hardly anything between the two best players in tennis at the moment, who have now combined to win the last six Grand Slam titles and appear poised to build one of the sport's most compelling rivalries in the years ahead.

Sunday's duel delivered a match of rare intensity, filled with punishing

baseline rallies, exquisite drop shots, and brilliant passing shots — thrilling a packed Court Philippe-Chatrier.

This one hurts!

Reflecting on the match in his post-final press conference, Sinner tried to draw positives from a devastating loss.

"Obviously, this one hurts," he said. "There's not so much to say right now. But again, I'm happy with how

we're trying to improve every day and put myself in these kinds of positions. It was a very high-level match, that's for sure. I'm happy to be part of it. But yeah, the final result hurts."

It was a particularly tough ending for Sinner, who had not dropped a set on his way to the final, including a dominant semifinal win over three-time French Open champion Novak Djokovic.

Before facing Alcaraz, Sinner had never lost a Grand Slam final, winning his first three. A victory would have made him just the fifth man in the Open Era to win three consecutive major titles.

"I'm pretty sure you are going to be a champion, not once but many, many times," Alcaraz told him during the trophy ceremony. "It is a privilege to share the court with you in every tournament, making history with you."

Sinner, who will remain world No. 1, said he'll lean on his family and loved ones to recover from the loss.

"Now it's my time to take something from the close people I have," he said. "As I've always said, before my career started, I never would've imagined finding myself in this position. It wasn't even a dream because it felt so far away — I wasn't even thinking about it. Now I find myself here, playing the longest final in the history of Roland-Garros.

Saptak finishes 44th in Swiss Challenge



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucerne (Switzerland)

India's Saptak Talwar struggled in windy conditions to card a 7-over 78 in the final round, finishing tied 44th at the Swiss Challenge here. After three steady under-par rounds had positioned him for a strong finish, the Indian golfer struggled on the final day and slipped out of contention. Talwar, who was inside the top 20 heading into the last round, tumbled down the leader board to end the tournament tied for 44th.

He began his round on the front nine and had already dropped five shots halfway through the round. He had a double bogey on the third fol-

lowed by a bogey on the fourth and another two bogeys on the sixth and seventh holes.

On the back nine, he picked up a shot on the 14th only to make three consecutive bogeys between the 15th and 17th holes and ended the week at a total score of even par. Felix Mory became a two-time winner on the HotelPlanner Tour after holding his nerve in a play-off to claim the Swiss Challenge title.

The Frenchman signed for a two under par round of 69 on the final day to reach 12 under par for the week alongside Spaniard Santiago Tarrío, before Mory birdied the first extra hole to secure victory.

Wrestler Hakuho quits Japan Sumo Association

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Tokyo

Hakuho, a retired "yokozuna" or grand champion and viewed by many as the sport's greatest wrestler, said on Monday he has quit the Japan Sumo Association after an apparent falling out with the governing body of the ancient sport.

The Mongolia-born Hakuho was earlier sanctioned by the Japan Sumo Association, accused of failing to control the behaviour of a wrestler in his so-called stable, the term used for a training team headed by retired wrestlers. Hakuho's stable was closed a year ago. Japanese media reports say the wrestler in question engaged in physical violence. But closing a stable, instead of just punishing an individual wrestler, was unusual. He did not directly criticize the professional Japan Sumo Association, but he said wrestlers who had trained under him were treated unfairly. Hakuho, who was granted Japanese citizenship, said he had been in talks with the association but recently decided to quit because there was no hope of reopening his stable.

His farewell and future



"After 25 years of loving sumo and being loved by sumo, I want to advance toward a new dream," Hakuho told reporters Monday at a Tokyo hotel. Hakuho said he wants to create a body to govern sumo outside Japan — the "world sumo project." He called it a "new dream" to "expand sumo to the world."

"When I think of my situation, I think it's best to contribute to sumo from the outside," he said, wearing a dark suit and referring to the Japan Sumo Association.

Appearing with a lawyer and other officials he had tapped for his team, Hakuho said they were getting corporate sponsors to back sumo grand slams, which draw amateur sumo wrestlers from around the world, including children and women.

Hakuho said he was friends with Toyota Motor Corp.

Chairman Akio Toyoda, who has expressed interest in supporting his efforts. Toyota already supports various amateur and professional sports activities. Toyota confirmed Akio Toyoda's friendship with Hakuho. "He (Hakuho) is devoted to trying to bring the world closer together through sumo," the company quoted Akio Toyoda saying in a statement. Many regard the Mongolia-born Hakuho as the greatest champion in the sport's history and he holds many of its records. Hakuho's late-father, who went by the given name of Monkhat, was an Olympic silver medalist for Mongolia in 1968. He also competed in at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Sumo encompasses very strict rules and traditions that have prompted other top wrestlers to pursue careers outside the sport.

US Open: Oakmont began removing trees, started golf trend

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Oakmont (USA)

Last month, Scottie Scheffler made mention of a trend in golf design that rubs him wrong — removing trees from courses.

This week, the world's best player and favourite to win the US Open will play a course that did just that, but didn't become one bit easier the way some layouts do when the trees go away. Under the dark of night three decades ago, the people in charge of Oakmont Country Club started cutting down trees. They didn't stop until some 15,000 had been removed. The project reimagined one of America's foremost golf cathedrals and started a trend of tree cutting that continues to this day.

While playing a round on YouTube with influencer Grant Horvat, Scheffler argued that modern pro golf — at least at most stops on the PGA Tour — has devolved into a monotonous cycle of "bomb and gouge": Hit drive as far as possible, then gouge the ball out of the rough from the shorter distance if the tee shot is off line.

"They take out all the trees and they make the greens bigger and they typically make the fairways a little bigger, as well," Scheffler said. "And so, the only barrier to guys just trying to hit it as far as they want to or need

to, it's trees."

Oakmont has stood the test of time

Scheffler and the rest in the 156-man field that tees off Thursday should be so lucky.

While the latest Oakmont renovation, in 2023, did make greens bigger, fairways are never wide at the US Open and they won't be this week.

Tree-lined or not, Oakmont has a reputation as possibly the toughest of all the US Open (or any American) courses, which helps explain why it is embarking on its record 10th time hosting it. In the two Opens held there since the tree-removal project was completed, the deep bunkers, serpentine drainage ditches and lightning-fast greens have produced winning scores of 5-over par (Angel Cabrera in 2007) and 4 under (Dustin Johnson in 2016).

In an ironic twist that eventually led to where we (and Oakmont) are today, the layout was completely lined with trees in 1973 when Johnny Miller shot 63 on Sunday to win the US Open. That record stood for 50 years, and the USGA followed up with a course setup so tough in 1974 that it became known as "The Massacre at Winged Foot" — won by Hale Irwin with a score of 7-over par.

"Everybody was telling me it was my fault," Miller said in a



look back at the "74 Open with Golf Digest. "It was like a backhanded compliment. The USGA denied it, but years later, it started leaking out that it was in response to what I did at Oakmont. Oakmont was supposed to be the hardest course in America."

In a precursor to what could come this week, Rory McIlroy and Adam Scott played practice rounds last Monday in which McIlroy said he made a 7 on the par-4 second and Scott said he hit every fairway on the front nine and still shot 3 over.

Nicklaus: Trees should only come down for a reason"

While Oakmont leaned into tree removal, there are others who aren't as enthused.

Jack Nicklaus, who added trees to the 13th hole at Muirfield Village after seeing players fly a fairway bunker on the left for a clear look at the green, said he's OK with tree

removal "if they take them down for a reason."

"Why take a beautiful, gorgeous tree down?" he said. "Like Oakmont, for example. What's the name of it? Oak. Mont. What's that mean? Oaks on a mountain, sort of. And then they take them all down. I don't like it." A lot of Oakmont's members weren't fans, either, which is why this project began under dark of night. The golf course in the 1990s was barely recognizable when set against pictures taken shortly after it opened in 1903. Architect Henry Fownes had set out to build a links-style course. Dampening the noise and view of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which bisects the layout, was one reason thousands of trees were planted in the 1960s and '70s.

"We were finding that those little trees had all grown up and they were now hanging over

some bunkers," R Banks-Smith, the chairman of Oakmont's grounds committee when the project began, said in a 2007 interview. "And once you put a tree on either side of a bunker, you lose your bunker. So, you have to make a decision. Do you want bunkers or do you want trees?" Oakmont went with bunkers - its renowned Church Pew Bunker between the third and fourth fairways might be the most famous in the world - and thus began a tree project that divides people as much today as it did when it started. "I'm not always the biggest fan of mass tree removal," Scott said. "I feel a lot of courses that aren't links courses get framed nicely with trees, not like you're opening it up to go play way over there."

Too many trees, though, can pose risks. Overgrown tree roots and too much shade provide competition for the tender grasses beneath. They hog up oxygen and sunlight and make the turf hard to maintain. They overhang fairways and bunkers and turn some shots envisioned by course architects into something completely different. They also can be downright dangerous. In 2023 during the second round of the Masters, strong winds toppled three towering pine trees on the 17th hole, luckily missing fans who were there watching the action.



Sukumar and Ram Charan



Allari Naresh and wife



Adivi Sesh



Venkatesh



Mahesh Babu and family with Akkineni family



Allu Aravind and wife



Dil Raju and wife

AKHIL AKKINENI'S STAR-STUDED RECEPTION BECOMES TALK OF THE TOWN

SURESH KAVIRAYANI
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All roads leading to Annapurna Studios, where Akkineni Nagarjuna hosted a glittering wedding reception for his younger son, Akhil Akkineni, who tied the knot with his girlfriend Zainab on Friday in a simple ceremony held at Nagarjuna's residence in Hyderabad. The wedding reception, held on Sunday at Annapurna Studios, turned into a grand affair with a star-studded guest list featuring prominent personalities from the South Indian film industry, politics and business circles. Superstar Mahesh Babu, who usually skips public events and sends his wife Namrata in his place, made an exception and attended the reception in a casual T-shirt, accompanied by Namrata and their daughter Sitara. Tollywood celebrities such as Ram Charan and his wife Upasana, director Sukumar along with his wife Tabitha, Nani, Nikhil, Adivi Sesh, Sudheer Babu, Venkatesh,

Brahmaji and Ali, among many others, were present to bless the newlywed couple. From the Kannada film industry, stars Yash and Kichcha Sudeep were also in attendance. Top producers including Ashwini Dutt, Allu Aravind, PVP, TG Vishwa Prasad, BVSN Prasad, KL Narayana, Dil Raju, Swapna Dutt and SKN were present for the gala evening. From the political arena, Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy had also attended the occasion, alongside leaders such as Andhra Pradesh MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao, MP Raghu Rama Krishnam Raju, CM Ramesh, Daggubati Venkateswara Rao and former Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu, among other dignitaries and business tycoons. Nagarjuna and Amala welcomed guests with radiant smiles and ensured everyone was comfortable with the impeccable arrangements made for the evening. Several guests were seen complimenting Nagarjuna for his warm hospitality. The entire Akkineni family was in attendance to greet and receive the guests. It was truly a night filled with glamour, celebration and heartfelt family moments.



Suriya and Venky Atiuri



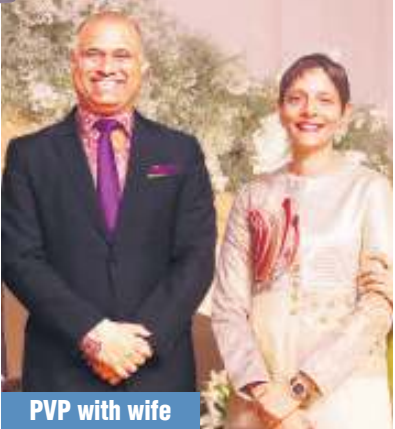
Sudheer Babu



Swapna Dutt



Nikhil Siddharth



PVP with wife



Raghu Rama Krishnam Raju



K L Narayana



Kichcha Sudeep

Rajasekhar embraces grey shades in *Rowdy Janardhan*

Actor Rajasekhar is in no mood to slow down in his second innings. He is currently shooting for a father-son drama with actor Sharwanand, set against a bike racing backdrop. At the same time, the veteran actor has bagged another big film — this time playing the villain.

Sources reveal that Rajasekhar will be seen as the antagonist in *Rowdy Janardhan*, which stars Vijay Deverakonda in the lead. The film is being directed by Ravi Kiran Kola and produced by Dil Raju. The team conducted a look test for Rajasekhar and is



reportedly very pleased with how it turned out. Rajasekhar had previously played a supporting role in Nithiin's *Extra Ordinary Man*, which unfortunately failed at the box office. But the actor seems to be moving past that and is now choosing impactful and intense roles — and he's even being paid a hefty amount for them. With one project alongside Sharwanand and another with Vijay Deverakonda in the pipeline, Rajasekhar's career is gaining momentum once again.



SUNIL JOINS RAJ TARUN'S TAMIL DEBUT IN A GAME-CHANGING ROLE

Telugu actor Raj Tarun is all set to make his Tamil debut in an upcoming untitled bilingual film directed by Vijay Milton, which will release in both Tamil and Telugu. The makers have now announced that actor Sunil has been roped in for a key role in the film. Following the massive success of *Pushpa*, Sunil has received immense love from audiences and has been getting numerous offers from the Tamil film industry. Known for his unique brand of humour and for his intense roles, Sunil's inclusion in the cast is expected to add a pan-Indian appeal to the movie. In this film, Sunil will be playing a character with both humor and emotional depth, something quite different from his earlier roles. His role is expected to be a standout, blending his comic timing with raw intensity. "Sunil is not just a crowd-puller — he's an actor with immense depth. This character is unlike anything he's done before. It's raw, vulnerable, and powerfully human. The audience will get to see a completely new side of him," said director Vijay Milton. Previously, actor Aari had been cast in the role of a cop and Bharath will also be seen in a key role. Debutant Paal Dabba has been brought in as well. With Sunil now on board, the film is shaping up to be an exciting, multi-genre entertainer. The official title is set to be announced on June 15.

Nithiin hopes to strike gold with *Thammudu* release

Nithiin's upcoming film *Thammudu* has locked in its release date as July 4. Earlier, the makers had planned to postpone the release after Vijay Deverakonda's *Kingdom* announced the same release date. However, since *Kingdom* is no longer releasing on that date, *Thammudu* is now reclaiming it. The film is directed by Venu Sriram of *Vakeel Saab* fame and stars Saptami Gowda of *Kantara* fame as the female lead. Yesteryear actress Laya also plays a key role as Nithiin's sister. The film's story reportedly revolves around the emotional bond between a brother and sister. Interestingly, *Thammudu* is also the title of one of Pawan Kalyan's early hits. Since Nithiin is a huge fan of the power star, this title is likely to attract the attention of Pawan's fan-base as well. Given that Nithiin's last two films — *Robinhood* and *Extra Ordinary Man* — didn't perform well at the box office, this film is being viewed as a crucial one for the actor's career.



'I started *Sardar 2* with the most challenging schedule of the film'

Malavika Mohanan is on a winning streak—effortlessly balancing stunning screen presence with solid acting chops. With three major films in her kitty alongside three leading superstars in different industries, she's riding a career high like never before. Whether it's her undeniable elegance, her fashion-forward persona, or her versatile performances, Malavika is showing the industry she's here for the long game. After lighting up the screens opposite big stars and gearing up with Prabhas, Mohanlal and Karthi in her upcoming releases, Malavika continues to strike the perfect balance between glamour and grit. Posting pictures from *Sardar 2*, she said "And it's a wrap for *Sardar 2*! I started this project with the most challenging schedule of the film & ended it with the most fun schedule in Bangkok. What a mad ride this one's been! @karthi_offl you've been an absolute gem to work with. Who knew we had so many interests in common @psmithran thank you for making me a part of this one. So unlike anything I've done before. This is a special one. See you in the cinemas soon." From action-packed sequences to breezy moments on international sets, Malavika's journey through *Sardar 2* looks as exciting as the film promises to be. Teaming up with Karthi, under the direction of PS Mithran, this film adds yet another refreshing chapter to her growing filmography. With *Sardar 2* wrapped, Malavika's cinematic calendar looks more thrilling than ever—The Raja Saab with Prabhas, and a much-awaited film with Mohanlal. A stunner with substance, Malavika Mohanan is steadily becoming one of the most promising names across industries.