

EYE SECRETS

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Spy in every blink

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AP powers through record summer demand

Vijayawada: Amid severe summer conditions and intense heatwave temperatures across the state, the Andhra Pradesh power utilities successfully ensured uninterrupted and quality power supply while handling the highest-ever electricity demand in the State's history. The Andhra Pradesh State Grid recorded an all-time high energy consumption of 288.9 million units (MU) on May 21, along with a record day peak demand of 15,016 MW and an evening peak demand of 12,474 mw. According to officials, the unprecedented surge in electricity demand was mainly due to soaring temperatures, high humidity levels and increased usage of air-conditioners, cooling appliances, drinking water systems and agricultural

pump sets across the State. Temperatures in several districts reportedly touched nearly 46 degrees Celsius.

Despite the extraordinary demand, APTransco, in coordination with APGenco and the discoms, maintained continuous and stable power supply without any disruption. Officials attributed the achievement to advance planning, round-the-clock grid monitoring, effective load management and optimum utilisation of available power resources. Special chief secretary to the Chief Minister K Vijayanand said that the milestone was achieved in line with the vision of Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and energy minister Gottipati Ravi Kumar to provide reliable and unin-



interrupted power supply to consumers across the State. He said additional power was procured through short-term market purchases whenever necessary to maintain grid stability and ensure uninterrupted supply to domestic consumers, farmers, industries, commercial establishments and essential services during peak demand periods. Vijayanand appreci-

ated the dedicated services of APTransco, APGenco and discom personnel, including engineers, field staff, system operators and maintenance teams, for successfully managing the historic demand. He reiterated that the State government remains committed to strengthening power infrastructure and ensuring quality electricity services to all consumers.

Telangana CM Revanth Reddy Flags Off Major Development Work at Yadagirigutta

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy is currently on a visit to Yadagirigutta, where he participated in a series of development activities. Arriving this morning, he first offered prayers to Lord Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy. Following this,



Revanth Reddy laid the foundation stones for projects worth Rs 100 crore. Among these was a new Vedic school, to be built at a cost of Rs 43.80 crore, for which he performed the Bhoomi Puja alongside Vijayendra Saraswati, the Pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham. The Chief Minister also laid the foundation for a Nitya Kalyana Mandapam (daily marriage hall) atop the hill, estimated to cost Rs 9.87 crore, and a canopy over the staircase from the Vaikunta Dwaram to the hilltop, valued at Rs 1.41 crore. Additional projects included steps connecting the Mada Streets to the Rathasala (chariot hall) at Rs 1.35 crore, along with dormitory halls and a Deekshaparula Sadan (vow-observing devotees' accommodation) costing Rs 43.12 crore. Revanth Reddy's visit underscores the government's focus on improving infrastructure and religious facilities at Yadagirigutta, a prominent pilgrimage site.

Atchanna hits back at Jagan's charges on deaths

Vijayawada: Agriculture minister K Atchannaidu on Friday strongly criticised YSRCP chief Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy for linking family deaths to the TDP and Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu. Speaking in Amaravati,



Atchannaidu said people were well aware of the circumstances surrounding the murder of Jagan's grandfather, Y S Raja Reddy. He alleged that victims of that era had spoken of a "reign of oppression and anarchy" under the Y S family. While most accused in the Raja Reddy case had since died, he claimed one accused remained in the YSRCP, exposing the party's "double standards." Rejecting Jagan's claims about former CM Y S Rajasekhara Reddy's helicopter crash, Atchannaidu said Chandrababu's Assembly remarks only referred to faith in Lord Venkateswara and had no link to YSR's death. He accused Jagan of twisting the statement for political gain. On the murder of Y S Vivekananda Reddy, Atchannaidu alleged the YSRCP initially portrayed it as a heart attack before evidence proved otherwise.

AP plans gold mining expansion to boost jobs, economy

Kurnool: Minister for mines and geology and excise Kollu Ravindra on Friday said the state government is focusing on expanding the mining sector to generate employment, increase industrial growth and strengthen the economy. The minister, accompanied by Pattokonda MLA K E Shyam Babu visited the Jonnagiri gold mine operated by Geo Mysore Services India Private Limited near Jonnagiri village in Tuggali mandal and reviewed mining and mineral processing operations. During the inspection, the minister examined underground mining activities, ore extraction systems, and gold refining processes being carried out with advanced technology. He said mining operations are currently being conducted at a depth of nearly 300 metres and may be expanded further in the coming years. According to officials, the mine is producing around one kilogram of gold every day, while



the monthly production has reached nearly 30 kilograms. Ravindra said geological assessments indicate the presence of nearly 13,000 tonnes of mineral reserves in and around the Jonnagiri belt, making it one of the most significant private gold mining projects in the country. Highlighting the state government's mining policy, the minister said Andhra Pradesh possesses vast mineral resources with strong industrial potential. He noted that efforts are underway to

identify and develop additional gold mining zones in the Ramagiri region of Anantapur district. He also pointed out that rare earth minerals available along the state's coastline have immense international demand and said the government is accelerating the tendering process for mineral blocks near Visakhapatnam. The minister added that value-added industries based on quartz and granite resources are also being promoted to encourage manufacturing activity and create large-scale employment opportunities. Speaking on the occasion, MLA Shyam Babu said the Jonnagiri gold mine has brought fresh economic activity to the region by providing direct and indirect employment to local youth. He said nearly 300 to 400 people from nearby villages have already secured jobs through the project, reducing seasonal migration in drought-prone areas.

Hike in fuel prices: Petrol nears Rs 110 in Jaipur, diesel crosses Rs 95

Saturday morning brought fresh concerns for consumers in Rajasthan as oil companies once again increased petrol and diesel prices for the third time in the last few days amid continued volatility in international crude oil markets. According to officials, petrol prices in Jaipur have climbed to Rs 109.87 per litre, while diesel prices have reached Rs 95.09 per litre following the latest hike. Over the past nine days, petrol prices have risen by Rs 5.12 per litre and diesel by Rs 4.84 per litre, adding to inflationary pressure and increasing transportation and household costs. Those heading to fuel stations or markets on Saturday may need to brace for higher expenses. While the new petrol price is Rs 109.87 per litre in Jaipur, which is an increase of Rs 5.12 per litre, the latest diesel price here is Rs 95.09 per litre, which comes with an increase of Rs 4.84 per litre. Petrol prices have witnessed a fresh hike



across several districts of Rajasthan. Kota recorded a 93-paise hike, with rates moving up from Rs 108.45 to Rs 109.38 per litre. Similar increases were reported in Sikar, where petrol climbed from Rs 109.84 to Rs 110.77, and Udaipur, where prices rose from Rs 109.73 to Rs 110.66 per litre. Ajmer and Jodhpur also saw a 93-paise increase, taking petrol prices to Rs 109.48 and Rs 109.66 per litre, respectively. Meanwhile, the highest

petrol prices were recorded in Sawai Madhopur and Barmer, where rates crossed Rs 111 per litre after hikes of 94 paise, reaching Rs 111.34 and Rs 111.31 per litre respectively. In Bhilwara, petrol prices increased by 93 paise, touching Rs 110.16 per litre. India news analysis The widespread rise in fuel rates across Rajasthan is expected to further impact transportation costs and household budgets. The impact is not limited to Rajasthan. Fuel prices have increased in major metropolitan cities as well, reflecting the broader trend of rising retail selling prices nationwide.

Market analysts and local trade bodies attribute the current inflationary trend to a combination of international and domestic factors - the first is Gulf Tensions, which created uncertainty over the Strait of Hormuz. Then there is growing biodiesel demand. Several countries are increasingly using edible oils for biodiesel production, reducing availability for food consumption and adding pressure on prices. The depreciation of the Indian

rupee against the US dollar has further made imports of crude oil and edible oils more expensive, adding to domestic price pressures. The increase in fuel prices is now expected to affect household budgets and food markets as well. According to traders at the Lalsot Agricultural Produce Market (Mandi), mustard prices have risen sharply by nearly Rs 600-Rs 700 per quintal in the last 10 days, increasing pressure on edible oil and grocery prices. Trade representatives, including Grain Merchants Association President Satyanarayan Sonkhiya, former president Naval Kishore Jhalani, and trader Suresh Chaudhary, said diesel prices directly influence freight and logistics costs. According to traders, once diesel prices cross the Rs 95-per-litre mark, transport operators typically revise freight charges upward. This could impact vegetables, fruits, pulses and grocery supplies reaching Jaipur's Muhana Mandi, potentially pushing prices of essential commodities higher within the next few days.



NIMS crosses 2,000 kidney transplants milestone

The Department of Urology at Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences has achieved a major milestone by successfully completing 2,000 kidney transplants, emerging as one of the country's leading renal transplant centres in the government healthcare sector.

The renal transplant programme at NIMS began in 1989 with its first kidney transplant and has since grown into one of India's most trusted public-sector transplant programmes.

Officials said the achievement reflects decades of clinical expertise, coordinated teamwork, and sustained commitment toward treating patients suffering from end-stage renal disease.

According to the institute, the transplant programme has witnessed rapid growth over the years. Between 1989 and 2010, NIMS carried out 448 renal transplants. Another 552 transplants

were completed between 2011 and June 2017, followed by 500 procedures between June 2017 and January 2023.

The latest 500 kidney transplants were completed within just three years and four months, highlighting the programme's accelerated expansion and operational efficiency.

Doctors at the institute said the department has handled several highly complex procedures, including kidney transplants involving multiple renal vessels requiring advanced vascular reconstruction, pediatric renal transplantation, and repeat transplants in patients with previously failed grafts.

In another significant development, NIMS performed the first robotic renal transplant in a government hospital in South India earlier this year, underlining the institute's push toward advanced and technology-driven patient care in public healthcare settings.

Apart from transplant services, the Department of Urology performs nearly 11,000 urological surgeries annually. More than 500 robotic surgeries have been conducted over the past three years alone.

The institute also reported strong clinical outcomes for transplant recipients. Live-related renal transplant cases recorded graft survival rates of more than 95 per cent at one year, over 90 per cent at three years, and nearly 85 per cent at five years.

Cadaver transplant outcomes were also encouraging, with graft survival rates remaining above 90 per cent at one year and around 80 per cent at five years.

Officials noted that nearly 95 per cent of transplant recipients received treatment free of cost through the Aarogyasri Healthcare Scheme and the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, making advanced renal care accessible to economically disadvantaged patients.

'TG emerging as a role model in digital transformation'

Telangana is strategically positioning itself as a national role model in digital transformation, according to State IT and Industries Minister Duddilla Sridhar Babu. The government is developing a comprehensive roadmap aimed at delivering citizen-centric services with greater efficiency, transparency, and accessibility directly to the public, he added.

The Minister was speaking as the chief guest at the "Digital Transformation Finance Summit 2026," organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India at Novotel HICC on Friday.

Addressing the gathering, Sridhar Babu stated that the global economy is undergoing an unprecedented digital shift, with transformative



digital ecosystems redefining traditional operational models. He emphasised that nations capable of adapting swiftly to this evolving digital landscape will lead the future global economy.

He noted that India has emerged as one of the world's largest digital economies, with remarkable advancements ranging from digital payments

to digital public infrastructure. According to him, Telangana has become a major growth engine driving India's digital transformation journey.

The Minister highlighted that the State government is proactively building a future-ready ecosystem that integrates next-generation innovation, skilled talent, and sustainable economic

growth. Telangana is moving forward with the ambitious vision of contributing 10% to India's GDP by 2047.

Speaking about the evolving role of finance professionals, he observed that Chartered Accountants, once primarily associated with bookkeeping and auditing, have now transformed into strategic business advisors for corporate enterprises.

He further pointed out that emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Data Analytics, and Cybersecurity are creating significant opportunities in the financial sector, while simultaneously introducing complex challenges including cyber frauds, deep-fakes, crypto scams, and cyber-crime threats. In this context, the Minister stressed that Chartered Accountants must

expand their focus beyond traditional financial auditing and actively contribute towards cyber assurance and digital risk management. He also called for greater emphasis on skilling, upskilling, and reskilling to meet the demands of rapidly evolving technological trends.

Sridhar Babu invited professional institutions and industry experts to collaborate closely with the Telangana Government in strengthening the state's digital and cybersecurity ecosystem. The summit was attended by several distinguished dignitaries, including Anand Mohan Bajaj, Abhishek Solanki, Rajagopal Sharma, Sahil Malik, Harshavardhan, Shailaja Rani Jampala, Rajesh Thapar, and Vinayak Godse, among others.

Hindustan Zinc showcases responsible mining, tech and community impact

Hindustan Zinc Limited, the world's largest integrated zinc producer and one of the top global silver producers, hosted G. Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Coal and Mines, at its Rajpura Dariba Complex in Rajasthan. The visit included a holistic tour of the company's Sindesar Khurd Mine, one of the world's largest silver-producing and technologically advanced underground mines, and Dariba Smelting Complex, a state-of-the-art smelting facility.

With an annual refined metal production capacity of over 1.1 million tonnes,



Hindustan Zinc plays a strategic role in strengthening India's mineral security and domestic metals ecosystem. The visit highlighted the growing strategic importance of India's mining and metals sector in securing the raw materials required for the country's infrastructure expansion, manufacturing growth, energy transition and emerging technologies.

Metals such as zinc, lead and silver are critical for sectors including steel galvanization, renewable energy, electric mobility, electronics, defence and advanced manufacturing. As India moves towards becoming a globally competitive self-sufficient manufacturing and industrial economy under Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the development of large-scale, technology-driven and globally competitive mining operations will play a vital role in reducing import dependence, strengthening mineral security and unlocking long-term economic value for the nation.

SBI invites applications for 7,150 apprentice jobs in Hyd, other cities



State Bank of India (SBI) has invited applications for 7150 apprentice jobs in Hyderabad and other cities across India. Interested candidates must be graduates from a recognized university or institution.

Apart from the educational qualification, candidates must satisfy the age limits. Their age must be between 20 and 28 years as of May 1, 2026.

Out of the total vacancies, 491 are in Telangana. In the state, the highest number of vacancies, 22, is in Rangareddy. In Hyderabad, there are 10 vacancies.

It must be noted that candidates can apply for engagement in one state only. The duration of the training is one year.

The candidates will be selected for the SBI apprentice jobs in Hyderabad and other cities based on an online written test and a test of the local language.

Selected candidates will get a stipend of Rs. 15,000 per month. The first stage of the selection process is an online written test which will be based on 'general/financial awareness', 'general English', 'quantitative aptitude', and 'reasoning ability and computer aptitude'.

After the written test, the candidates will need to take a test of the local language. However, those who produce a 10th or 12th standard mark sheet/certificate evidencing having studied the specified opted local language will not be required to undergo the language test.

The final selection will be subject to the verification of eligibility for the post and information furnished in the online application, qualifying in the test of the specified opted local language, where applicable, and qualification in the medical examination.



Driver flees with Rs 9 lakh cash, arrested within 48 hours

A driver for a support services company who fled with Rs 9 lakh cash was arrested by Sultan Bazaar Police within 48 hours of the crime, the police said on Friday. The full cash amount was also seized from his possession.

The accused has been identified as Shaik Rahman, 46, a resident of Hasmathpet, Bowenpally. According to the police, Rahman, along with two cash custodians and a gunman of Cleared Security Services Private Ltd, had set out for cash collection duties in a Toyota Innova Crysta on May 19.

After collecting cash from various business outlets, they reached the SBI main branch at Koti at around 02:20 pm to deposit the collections.

The two custodians went inside the bank with a portion of the cash, leaving

Rs 19 lakh in five bags inside the vehicle. Shortly after, the gunman also temporarily left the vehicle for the wash-room.

Seizing this opportunity, Shaik Rahman immediately fled with the transit vehicle. The car was later found abandoned near the District Hospital, King Koti.

Upon opening the vehicle with a duplicate key, it was discovered that the accused had fled away with two cash bags (from D-Mart and Mangalya Shopping Mall) containing Rs 5,88,932 and Rs 3,74,533, respectively.

After registering a case based on a complaint by one of the cash custodians, Gaddam Mallesh, the police started an investigation and traced the accused to Gulbarga in Karnataka.

A special team was sent to Gulbarga and the accused was apprehended from Sabera Guest House near the Gulbarga Bus Stand on Thursday.

IPL ticket hoarding racket busted ahead of SRH vs RCB match

As the city gears up for the high-voltage IPL 2026 clash between Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) and Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), the LB Nagar Special Operations Team (SOT) has busted a black-marketing racket operating near the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Uppal.

In a targeted raid on Friday, May 22, police apprehended four individuals while they were selling complimentary tickets at exorbitant prices to desperate cricket fans.



These tickets, which are strictly 'not for sale' and usually reserved for VIPs or sponsors, were being diverted to the black market to capitalize on the massive demand for the SRH vs RCB encounter scheduled for May 22. The SOT officials seized several tickets from the suspects before handing them over to the Uppal police for further investigation.

Min Ponnam urges farmers not to burn paddy stubble

Transport and BC Welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar on Friday appealed to farmers not to burn paddy and maize stubble after harvest, warning that the practice poses serious risks to the environment, public health, and agricultural property.

The Minister's appeal came in the wake of recent fire-related incidents in Telangana linked to stubble burning. Referring to an incident reported on Thursday in Gunturpalle village of Elkathurthy mandal in Husnabad constituency, Ponnam said a tractor carrying hay bundles was completely gutted after flames from burning paddy residue spread rapidly due to strong winds.

In another tragic incident, Noone Munthala Sattaiah, father of Transport Department beat reporter Venkanna, reportedly died after inhaling smoke while burning paddy stubble in agricultural fields. Expressing grief over the incidents, the minister urged farmers to remain vigilant and adopt safer alternatives for managing crop residue. He said burning paddy



and maize stubble destroys organic matter and beneficial microorganisms in the soil, reducing soil fertility and harming long-term agricultural productivity. The practice also increases air pollution and can lead to respiratory and other health issues among the public.

The Minister advised farmers to adopt alternative methods such as mixing crop residue back into the soil using tractors, using straw as cattle feed, preparing compost or organic manure, utilising it for mushroom cultivation, or collecting and selling the residue through baler machines.

He noted that the Agriculture Department has been promoting sustainable residue management practices and discouraging stubble burning across the State.

Education panel chief Murali resigns

In an unexpected move, Akunuri Murali, the Chairman of the Telangana Education Commission (TEC), tendered his resignation on Friday. In his resignation letter addressed to Chief Secretary K Ramakrishna Rao, he stated that he was submitting his resignation as the Commission had completed the task of submitting a comprehensive report on the situation of the public and private education sector in Telangana, along with its recommendations.

He thanked the state government for providing him with the opportunity to serve as the chairman of the commission.

Study links ultra-processed foods with high BP in Hyd youngsters

A new study led by scientists from the Hyderabad-based Indian Council of Medical Research - National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN) has highlighted a concerning association between frequent consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and elevated blood pressure among urban young adults in Hyderabad.

The findings revealed that students with higher intake of ultra-processed foods rich in fat and salt had nearly three times higher odds of elevated blood pressure compared to those with lower intake. The paper titled "Ultra-Processed Food Consumption Patterns and Their Association with Blood Pressure Among Young Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study," examined the dietary habits and blood pressure profiles among 311 undergraduate students aged 18-24 years from different colleges in Hyderabad. The study found that 12.5% of participants already had



elevated levels of blood pressure (140/90 mmHg), signalling an emerging cardiovascular risk among young adults.

The researchers used a structured food frequency questionnaire based on the NOVA food classification system to assess consumption patterns of 24 commonly consumed ultra-processed foods. Blood pressure was measured using validated standardized procedures, and the analysis accounted for socio-demographic factors including age, sex, residence, and family income.

Commonly consumed ultra-processed foods included biscuits, chocolates, packaged savoury snacks, bread products, sugary beverages, and instant foods for taste, convenience, affordability, and easy availability were identified as the primary drivers of consumption.

Importantly, students with higher consumption of high-fat and high-salt ultra-processed foods had nearly three times higher odds of having an elevated blood pressure, when compared to those with lower intake, even after adjusting the socio-demographic factors.

ED arrests Hyd 'Ponzi scheme' accused from Gurugram

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it has arrested Nowhera Shaik, the prime accused in the Heera Group-linked alleged investment fraud in Hyderabad, from an Airbnb property in Gurugram.

Shaik was arrested on Thursday during a joint operation conducted by the ED and the Haryana Police at the facility in Sector 45, Gurugram.

The ED said in a statement that she was living in Gurugram under a "fake" identity, using "forged" documents (Aadhaar) in the name of Shaik Khamar Jahan.



She was apprehended from an Airbnb property along with an associate, Sameer Khan, it added.

The agency said Shaik was taken to Hyderabad on Friday and produced before a special PMLA court that sent her to judicial custody. Shaik, the Heera Group of

Companies and others allegedly collected more than Rs 5,978 crore from the public, promising returns exceeding 36 per cent per annum.

However, they failed to return even the principal amount, thereby duping more than 1.72 lakh gullible

investors of Rs 3,000 crore, the ED said.

The agency said Shaik was "evading" investigation and arrest in the case since the Supreme Court recently cancelled her bail after taking "serious note of her conduct during which she misled" the apex court.

A special court in Hyderabad dealing with cases lodged under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) issued a non-bailable warrant against her on May 7 but she was not traceable at her Hyderabad and Bengaluru addresses, the ED said.

An intelligence input indicated she was in Gurugram,

it added.

The federal agency had attached assets worth Rs 428 crore in the case and obtained a green signal from the Supreme Court to auction the properties so that the funds derived from those can be restituted to the victims in accordance with a PMLA provision.

Some of the properties were successfully auctioned, fetching about Rs 122 crore, according to the ED.

However, Shaik failed to cooperate in the execution of sale deeds in favour of successful bidders and made repeated attempts to obstruct the auction proceedings, the agency alleged.

Chandigarh moves SC against HC order quashing FIR against CM Mann, others



(IPC). Before the high court, the counsel appearing for the petitioners, including Mann, had argued that no overt act or injury was specifically attributed to them.

They had also contended that in the absence of any order under section 144 of the CrPC, the police could not have prevented them from protesting peacefully or carrying out the demonstration. However, the counsel for the Chandigarh administration had argued in the high court that the petitioners along with other protestors were leading an unlawful political protest which had "turned unruly". There was no reason for the police to stop the protestors from marching ahead towards the chief minister's residence, as admitted by a prohibitory order under Section 144 CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code) had not been issued," the high court had noted.

The Chandigarh administration has approached the Supreme Court challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court order which quashed a 2020 FIR in an alleged rioting case against several AAP leaders, including Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. On November 29 last year, the high court had quashed the FIR, the chargesheet and all subsequent proceedings against Mann and others in the case. The FIR, registered in Chandigarh in January 2020, alleged that several Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Mann, and workers had gathered for a protest and the workers were incited to surround the residence of the then chief minister of Punjab. It was alleged that the leaders and workers started pushing and shoving the police force deployed on the spot during the

protest march against hike in electricity tariff. On Friday, the plea filed by the Union Territory of Chandigarh came up for hearing before a bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joydalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi.

The counsel appearing for the Chandigarh administration sought some time saying they would file a petition in relation to some other persons who were granted relief by the high court in the matter. In its order, the high court had noted that a charge sheet was filed in the case in July 2021 against the petitioners before it for the alleged offences including under Section 147 (punishment for rioting) of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code

India to create 'smart border' to stop infiltration: Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the government will launch a tech-enabled "smart border" project by the next year to make the 6,000-km fronts with Pakistan and Bangladesh impenetrable and ensure that the "conspiracy" to change the demography of the country is defeated. Delivering the annual Rustomji Memorial lecture hosted by the Border Security Force (BSF) here, the minister also reiterated that the government will find each and every infiltrator and send them out of India. K F Rustomji was the founding father and the first director general of the BSF, the world's largest border guarding force with about 2.70 lakh personnel tasked to guard Indian borders with

Pakistan on the west and Bangladesh on the east. It was raised in 1965.

"The government of India has decided that not only will we stop infiltration but we will find each and every infiltrator and send them out of the country," Shah said. He added his government will not allow "artificial change in our demography

being attempted from the other side." "I want to assure BSF troops that we will launch the smart border project within the 60th year of its raising and we will make the Bangladesh and Pakistan borders impenetrable through major technical assistance," Shah said.

The "smart border" will use technology, drones,

radars and smart cameras to help create an impenetrable border, he told the gathering.

Calling these two borders "vulnerable" and a "cause of concern" for the country from the security point of view, Shah said these fronts (about 1,289 km with Pakistan and 4,096 km with Bangladesh) cannot be guarded with "traditional" methods. The concept of border security should not be seen in isolation but as a "territorial responsibility" involving all agencies and state governments, he said.

He said these borders currently face threats like illegal infiltration, smuggling of drugs, weapons and arms through drones apart from cattle, fake Indian currency notes and organised crime.

"It is most important to identify future dangers, and it is our responsibility to

stop the artificial demographic change being attempted from the other side (of the border) through infiltration, and, for this, we have to remain alert and vigilant," he told the officers and jawans in attendance.

Shah said the Modi government brought a "radical" change to the security policy and border protection perspective since it took charge in 2014. "We have defeated all three attacks carried out by Pakistan whether it was in Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), or Pahalgam (2026)...we have given them a befitting response by striking deep inside Pakistan," he said.

Shah asserted that gone were the days when talks used to happen after a terrorist attack and when Naxalites used to undertake massacres without any fear.

BJP's Bengal win can reshape India's economic direction: Pollster



Pollster Pradeep Gupta has argued that the BJP's victory in the West Bengal Assembly election has the potential to reshape not just the state's future but also the economic direction of the entire country, citing eastern India's vast natural resources, ports and untapped trade potential.

The founder-chairman of Axis My India said states, such as Bihar, Odisha, Assam and West Bengal, collectively possess enormous economic and strategic importance.

"It is not just about Bengal. A victory there can change the direction and condition of the entire country," Gupta told PTI in an interview on Wednesday, while discussing the broader implications of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) poll triumph in West Bengal, dislodging the Trinamool Congress (TMC) from power after 15 years.

According to Gupta, eastern India's importance stems from its natural resources, maritime access and connectivity to the northeast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Referring to

West Bengal's geographical position, he said access to the Andaman Islands effectively passes through the state, underlining its strategic significance.

He noted that Bengali and Tamil-speaking communities form a substantial part of the population in the islands because eastern India historically served as an important resource and migration base.

Gupta pointed out that regions with a strong port infrastructure and trade networks historically became centres of prosperity.

"It is often said that countries with the highest number of ports become the most prosperous because trade and business move through them. Without the movement of goods and commerce, prosperity cannot

come," he said.

Lamenting what he described as the economic decline of eastern India, Gupta questioned the developmental trajectory of Bihar and Odisha despite their mineral wealth and natural resources. He also said Assam and much of the northeast had long remained geographically and economically isolated.

"Look at the condition of Bihar. If you separate Odisha's mines and natural resources for a moment, what remains of its economy? Assam and the northeast were virtually cut off for years," he said.

On West Bengal, Gupta said the state once served as one of India's foremost industrial and commercial centres, housing several major corpo-

rate headquarters during the colonial and early post-independence years. He referred to the migration of businesses and business communities out of Kolkata over the decades, saying many firms shifted operations to cities, such as Mumbai and Bengaluru, while several business families later moved abroad.

He also cited the collapse of the Tata Motors' Nano project in Singur as an example of how industrial opportunities were lost in West Bengal. "Those who tried to harness Bengal's potential, like the Nano factory project, were driven away," he said.

Gupta further claimed that migrant voters from eastern India appeared unusually determined to travel back home to cast their votes this time, suggesting a strong undercurrent of political change.

Recalling conversations with people travelling from cities such as Mumbai, Gupta said many voters were eager to participate despite logistical difficulties and fears around electoral participation.

'OMAR ABDULLAH MISSING' Poster sparks political row in J-K, Farooq hits back at BJP



A political storm erupted in Jammu and Kashmir after the BJP circulated online 'Omar Abdullah missing' posters in a bid to mock the chief minister.

The BJP's J&K unit shared the 'missing' posters on its social media handles, seeking information about Abdullah and claiming that he has been "missing for the last ten days".

The saffron party's criticism comes amid reports that the chief minister is outside Jammu and Kashmir on a personal visit. Reacting to the posters, National Conference president Farooq Abdullah hit back at the BJP, saying that the saffron party has "nothing better" to do.

"They have their own campaigns, they know what they are doing. We don't have to answer them," the senior Abdullah told reporters after offering the congregational prayers at the Hazratbal shrine here.

Farooq also brushed aside rumours of a split in alliance

with the Congress in Jammu and Kashmir.

"I think it is our enemies who are saying all this. The alliance is there, nothing will happen," he said.

Referring to concerns about the ongoing fuel supply crisis, Farooq hoped that the West Asia crisis would end soon. "I hope the war between Iran and the US will stop, and God willing, we will get out of these difficulties," he said.

On the row over the recent demolition of homes of Gujjar and Bakarwal families in Jammu's Sidhra area, the NC president said his party or the state government had no role. "We are not involved in that. They (the lieutenant

Delhi govt to develop 100 'oxygen parks' to improve city climate, says CM Gupta

PNS ■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced on Friday that the Delhi government plans to develop 100 "oxygen parks" featuring dense tree cover to improve the city's climate and address pollution issues.

Laying the foundation stone of the park to be developed on 3-acre land in Mukhmelpur village in north Delhi's Burari, Gupta stated that this will be the first such park in the city. "Delhi was turned into a gas chamber for years, but nobody was concerned to take steps to address pollution in Delhi," the chief minister said and announced that her government has set a target of planting more than 70 lakh trees, shrubs and hedges across the city this year.

She noted that her government has been actively working for the past year to combat pollution, and the establishment of these parks is part of that initiative.

Locals demolish mosque's 'illegal structure' in DDA park

Security was stepped up in Shakur Basti here, after locals demolished a wall of an alleged illegal structure erected on DDA land by mosque functionaries, police said on Friday.

BJP MLA from Shakur Basti, Kamail Singh, told reporters that the mosque management was building a Madarsa on encroached land in outer Delhi. "I informed the mosque's maulvi not to run the madarsa within the mosque. I will not allow any illegal structures in my constituency," said the BJP MLA. In a video, a mob can pur-

portedly be seen demolishing a newly constructed wall of the structure, amid chanting of slogans.

Police said the crowd was pacified and dispersed, the situation is under control, and no untoward incident was reported. A senior Delhi Police officer said information was received about a gathering at the DDA park, following which teams were immediately rushed to the spot and adequate force was deployed to maintain law and order. Strict action will be taken against anyone trying to disturb peace or violate law and order, a senior police officer said.

Delhi court acquits five men accused in 2018 bank dacoity-cum-murder case

A Delhi court has acquitted five men accused in a 2018 dacoity-cum-murder case at a Corporation Bank branch, saying the prosecution failed to establish their involvement beyond a reasonable doubt after key eyewitnesses and bank staff failed to identify them during the trial. Additional Sessions Judge Sumit Dass was hearing the case against Sachin (son of Satpal), Sachin (son of Inderjeet), Vicky alias Pushkar, Parvesh and Pawan Pandey, who were accused of looting the branch at

Kheda Dabar in south-west Delhi and killing its cashier in 2018.

In the order dated May 19, the court said, "The accused persons in the present case have been able to create doubt upon the story of the prosecution, for which benefit has to be given to them. Accordingly, the accused are entitled to the benefit of doubt."

According to the prosecution, the accused were involved in the incident at Corporation Bank's Kheda Dabar branch on October 12, 2018, where armed men allegedly stormed the bank,



snatched the security guard's weapon, looted around Rs 3 lakh and opened fire, killing cashier Santosh Kumar. Witnesses said the assailants fled on motorcycles after the robbery.

An FIR was registered at the Chhawla police station under charges including

dacoity, murder and offences under the Arms Act.

During the trial, several bank officials, customers and the security guard confirmed that a dacoity and killing had taken place. However, they told the court that they could not identify the perpetrators as the attackers had covered their faces with helmets and cloth masks. "To prove the prosecution's case, the testimony of the prosecution witnesses must be reliable. It is not the quantity but the quality of the testimony that helps a court in concluding any case," the court.

'Maha aarti' held at Bhojshala on first Friday after HC verdict Muslims offer namaz at homes

Hundreds of Hindu devotees gathered at the Bhojshala complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar for a "maha aarti" on Friday, exactly a week after the high court declared the site a temple, while members of the Muslim community offered namaz at their homes wearing black bands in protest.

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on May 15 ruled that the disputed Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque complex was a temple dedicated to Goddess Vagdevi and quashed an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) order that had allowed Muslims to offer namaz at the site on Fridays.

were allowed to worship at the medieval monument only on Tuesdays, while Muslims had been offering Friday prayers there for years. Both communities claim rights over the site.

This Friday marked the first Jumma or the day of special congregational prayers after the court verdict and Hindu groups described the event as the first large-scale Friday worship at the site in more than two decades.

The Bhoj Utsav Samiti and Bhojshala Mukti Yagya Samiti organised religious programmes, bhajan-kirtan and a "maha aarti" at the complex amid tight security arrangements. Bhojshala Mukti Yagya Samiti convenor Gopal



Sharma said devotees from Dhar and nearby areas participated peacefully in the rituals and prayers throughout the day.

The sanctum area and parts of the complex were decorated with rangoli and flowers as devotees queued up for darshan and prayers. Meanwhile, members of

the Muslim community offered Friday namaz in the courtyards of their homes and private premises wearing black bands as a mark of protest after the court setback in the Bhojshala case.

Local Muslim leader Abdul Samad said the community respected the high court's

verdict but was not satisfied with the decision. "We registered our protest peacefully by offering Jumma namaz at our homes and wearing black bands," he said. Samad said a petition challenging the high court order had been filed in the Supreme Court, and he expressed hope of getting justice. He also objected to the administration's decision cancelling permission for offering Friday namaz at the Kamal Maula Mosque portion of the complex. Earlier in the day, Samad said a delegation from the Muslim community recently met the administration and submitted a memorandum alleging that certain activities around Bhojshala were not in line with the high court's direc-

tion. He welcomed the administration's decision to cancel some programmes and permissions which, according to him, could have disturbed peace in the city.

"The Constitution gives equal religious freedom to all communities, and we will continue to act within its framework," he said. In view of the sensitive situation, the authorities deployed around 2,000 security personnel across Dhar district. Drone surveillance, CCTV monitoring, vehicle checks and mobile patrolling were also carried out. Dhar Superintendent of Police Sachin Sharma said the high court directions were implemented "in letter and spirit" and no untoward incident was reported from anywhere in the district.

SC to hear on Aug 18 ED's plea alleging obstruction by Mamata, others during I-PAC raid

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would hear on August 18 the Enforcement Directorate's plea alleging obstruction by the then West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and other state authorities during its January 8 search of the office of political consultancy firm I-PAC in Kolkata.

A bench of justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and N V Anjaria said it will hear the state machinery to obstruct its money laundering probe against I-PAC. The ED alleged that Banerjee, accompanied by a large police contingent, personally intervened to halt the search and seize evidence collected by federal agency officers. While hearing arguments on the matter on April 22, the top court observed that democracy is put in peril if a chief minister intervenes in a probe. The ED is seeking a direction to transfer the investigation into the



alleged obstruction and the "retaliatory" FIRs to the CBI, saying that an independent agency is required to investigate the conduct of Banerjee and the state's top police brass.

The West Bengal government and other respondents had questioned the maintainability of the ED's plea. On March 24, the apex court had questioned the West Bengal government over its objection to the maintainability of the ED's plea. The court had remarked that some ED officers had filed petitions in their individual capacity seeking to know whether they had ceased to be citizens of India merely because they were officers of the agency. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Banerjee in the matter, had earlier argued that a person who moves the court under Article 32 of the Constitution has to specifically set out which fundamental right of his has been violated. On January 15, the top court said the chief minister's alleged obstruction in the ED's probe was "very serious" and agreed to examine if a state's law-enforcing agencies can interfere with any central agency's investigation into any serious offence as it stayed FIRs against the ED officials who raided I-PAC.

REFORM, CHANGE

Fresh from a five-nation foreign jaunt, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is emerging as a more wised leader. In exhortations to his ministers, the PM has asked them to concentrate on reforms, work for improving people's lives and avoid pendency of work. His call to them is to also avoid interfering into people's lives. All these obviously are serious issues. The nation expected of him, as leader of the nation for three consecutive terms, to address these matters not now, but at the outset itself. Unfortunately, issues remain unresolved here for decades before governmental attention is focused on them. Remedial actions take more time. Chances are also that no action is taken and issues remain as issues, spill into the streets in the form of protests, violence etc. The noisy democracy has its unique characteristics. However, the occasion for the PM's advice to his ministers was the completion of two years of his present five-year term soon. At a meeting of his council of ministers, Modi looked forward to better times for the nation.

It's significant that the PM's emphasis on reforms and the need to provide more care for the people comes in the backdrop of his five-nation visit covering prominent parts of the developed world - the ultra-modern UAE and the European landscapes of Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy. What marks these entities, out of the comity of nations, is their impressive governance systems and the stress-free life. India, the noisy democracy, would despite the huge size present itself to them as a country-cousin. The long 80 years of native governance by elected leaders, for most part, let the nation and its people down. The Prime Minister could not be oblivious to the difference between the performance levels of the administrative systems there and here. India is a vast country, compared to these nations. Handling a 1.4 billion population posed its own unique challenges. But, so does China, which grew by leaps and bounds in this quarter of a century. Both these nations were on an equal footing at the turn of the century. Today, China's economy is five times stronger than India's. China's military strengths too grew matchingly.

Curiously, the Prime Minister's calls to his ministers to speed up the governance processes and care more for the people come close on the heels of the internet-led anti-establishment campaign by an army of social activists under the banner of the abruptly formed Cockroach Janata Party, which instantly drew a support and participation of over a crore of young minds in this country. The disenchantment/frustration of the youth has sent strong warning signals to the establishment. The spur was no more than a casual comment from the head of the judiciary. The Prime Minister is bound to have taken note of this with a shudder of angst and disbelief. Any governmental functionary would keep patting his own shoulders that he's doing his best for the nation and the people. Truth is different from perceptions. The world is progressing with such speed that one has to keep running faster even to remain where he's. Reforms, strengthening of the systems, bureaucratic overhaul to make it more effective, curing the ills of the justice-dispensation system and the promotion of a new political culture are important requisites to change the fate of this nation for the better.

Republican progress on immigration bill stalls out over Trump's ballroom, DOJ settlement

Senate Republicans appeared increasingly unlikely to meet their self-imposed deadline for passing a roughly USD 70 billion immigration enforcement bill this week as disputes over security funding for the White House and the Trump administration's USD 1.8 trillion settlement fund effectively derailed progress. Republicans were already expected to abandon USD 1 billion in security money for the White House complex and President Donald Trump's ballroom amid backlash from members of their own party. But then questions about the settlement fund added to some of the senator's concerns. They are questioning who would get the money.

Republican senators met with acting Attorney General Todd Blanche on Thursday as they worked to finalise the bill's text and whether to put parameters on the settlement, which was designed to compensate Trump's allies who believe they have been politically persecuted.

Thune told reporters that senators had questions and wanted to know "how we might make sure that it's fenced in appropriately."

But senators who emerged from the meeting were tight-lipped and indicated that lawmakers would not hold a vote on the package before leaving Washington for a Memorial Day break, risking failure to meet Trump's June 1 deadline.

Asked about a vote this week, Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, responded, "I don't even know." Sen. John Kennedy, R-La., was more blunt: "We're going home," he said. The last-minute scramble comes as Democrats have criticised Republicans for trying to fund Trump's ballroom when voters are concerned about basic affordability issues - and as some GOP lawmakers have grown increasingly frustrated with Trump.

Several GOP senators have spoken out against the settlement, which was announced this week, and many were upset by the president's endorsement Tuesday of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton in the party primary runoff next week against Sen. John Cornyn.

Asked Thursday at the White House if he was losing control of the Senate, Trump replied: "I don't know, I really don't know. I can tell you - I only do what's right."

The "anti-weaponisation" fund, part of a settlement that resolves Trump's lawsuit against the IRS over the leak of his tax returns, unexpectedly became one of the main complications in the bill. Democrats said they would force votes to block it or place restrictions on it.

Democrats have an opening because Republicans are trying to pass the immigration enforcement bill through a complicated budget process that requires a long series of amendment votes.



THE "ANTI-WEAPONISATION" FUND, PART OF A SETTLEMENT THAT RESOLVES TRUMP'S LAWSUIT AGAINST THE IRS OVER THE LEAK OF HIS TAX RETURNS, UNEXPECTEDLY BECAME ONE OF THE MAIN COMPLICATIONS IN THE BILL. DEMOCRATS SAID THEY WOULD FORCE VOTES TO BLOCK IT OR PLACE RESTRICTIONS ON IT. DEMOCRATS HAVE AN OPENING BECAUSE REPUBLICANS ARE TRYING TO PASS THE IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT BILL THROUGH A COMPLICATED BUDGET PROCESS THAT REQUIRES A LONG SERIES OF AMENDMENT VOTES

Democrats are considering multiple amendments, potentially to block that new fund outright or to ban any payments to Trump supporters who harmed law enforcement officers in the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Presenting a united front, Democrats from both the House and Senate rallied on the Capitol steps Thursday to show their opposition. Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said the amendment process "will give Republicans countless chances to do the right thing."

He added that if they declined to make changes, it would show voters that "Ballroom Republicans are not working for you, they are busy fighting for Trump."

Those amendments, along with others, could pass as a growing number of Republicans have voiced reservations about the fund.

So Republicans are now discussing their own last-minute additions to head that off, potentially placing some parameters on the settlement and who could receive compensation, according to two

people with knowledge of the private discussions who requested anonymity to discuss them.

It was unclear how any Senate changes would be received in the House. House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Wednesday that the House will pass the bill "whatever form it takes."

As Republicans challenged the settlement and parts of his agenda, Trump unloaded on the Senate in a social media post on Wednesday.

He urged Republicans to fire the Senate parliamentarian, Elizabeth MacDonough, who said over the weekend that parts of the USD 1 billion security proposal cannot remain in the ICE and Border Patrol bill.

Trump also renewed his long-standing calls for the Senate to pass the SAVE Act, a Republican bill that would require all voters to prove US citizenship, and to end the Senate filibuster.

Republicans need to "get smart and tough," Trump said, or "you'll all be looking for a job much sooner than you thought possible!"

While they have been loyal to Trump on most issues, Senate Republicans have resisted his repeated calls - even in his first term - to kill the filibuster, which triggers a 60-vote threshold in the Senate.

Hanging over the growing GOP rift is Trump's surprise endorsement of Paxton. That intervention has Republican senators privately fuming that it could cost them their majority in November as they view the incumbent, Cornyn, as the better candidate in the November general election.

Under the Secret Service's request, about USD 220 million would fund security improvements related to the ballroom. The rest would go for a new screening centre for visitors, training and other security measures.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., said the effort to add the security package to the bill was a "bad idea." The bill should not have included the other security improvements, he said, "because it's just giving everybody the billion-dollar ballroom."

FACING INTENSE INTERNAL PRESSURE

DNC releases post-election autopsy that criticises Kamala Harris

Kamala Harris "wrote off rural America" during the 2024 presidential campaign and failed to attack Donald Trump with sufficient "negative firepower," according to a long-awaited post-election autopsy released on Thursday by the Democratic National Committee.

The committee's chair, Ken Martin, shared the 192-page report only after facing intense internal pressure from frustrated Democratic operatives concerned with his leadership. Martin had originally promised to release the autopsy, only to keep it under wraps for months because he was concerned it would be a distraction ahead of the midterms as Democrats mobilise to take back control of Congress.

On Tuesday, Martin apologised for his handling of the situation and conceded that the report was withheld because it "was not ready for primetime." Although the autopsy criticises Democrats' focus on "identity politics," it sidesteps some of the most controversial elements of the 2024 campaign. The report does not address former President Joe Biden's decision to seek reelection, the rushed selection of Harris to replace him on the ticket or the party's acrimonious divide over the war in Gaza.

"I am not proud of this product; it does not meet my standards, and it won't meet your standards," Martin wrote in an essay on Substack on Thursday. "I don't endorse what's in this report, or what's left out of it. I could not in good faith put the DNC's stamp of approval on it. But transparency is paramount."

A spokesperson for Harris did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The initial reaction from Democratic operatives was a mix of bafflement and anger over Martin's handling of the situation.

"Why not say this in 2024, or bring in more people to finish it, instead of turning this into the dumbest media cycle for 7-8 months?" Democratic strategist Steve Schale wrote on social media. The postelection report, which was authored by Democratic consultant Paul Rivera, calls for "a renewed focus on the voters of Middle America and the South, who have come to believe they are not included in the Democratic vision of a stronger and more dynamic America for everyone."

"Millions of Americans are suffering from poor access to healthcare, manufacturing and job



"WHY NOT SAY THIS IN 2024, OR BRING IN MORE PEOPLE TO FINISH IT, INSTEAD OF TURNING THIS INTO THE DUMBEST MEDIA CYCLE FOR 7-8 MONTHS?" DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST STEVE SCHALE WROTE ON SOCIAL MEDIA. THE POSTELECTION REPORT, WHICH WAS AUTHORED BY DEMOCRATIC CONSULTANT PAUL RIVERA, CALLS FOR "A RENEWED FOCUS ON THE VOTERS OF MIDDLE AMERICA AND THE SOUTH, WHO HAVE COME TO BELIEVE THEY ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE DEMOCRATIC VISION OF A STRONGER AND MORE DYNAMIC AMERICA FOR EVERYONE"

losses, and a failing infrastructure, yet continue to be persuaded to vote against their best interests because they do not see themselves reflected in the America of the Democratic Party," the report says. The autopsy points to a reduction in support and training for Democratic state parties, voter registration shifts and "a persistent inability or unwillingness to listen to all voters."

Thursday's release comes as Martin confronts a crisis of confidence among party officials who are increasingly concerned about the health of their political machine barely a year into his term. Some Democratic operatives have had informal discussions about recruiting a new chair, even though most believe that Martin's job wasn't in serious jeopardy ahead of the midterm elections.

The report found that Harris and her allies failed

to focus enough on Trump's negatives, especially his felony convictions. This was part of a broader criticism that Democrats' messaging is too focused on reason and winning arguments, "even in cycles when the electorate is defined by rage."

"There was a decision in the 2024 Democratic leadership not to engage in negative advertising at the scale required," the report states. "The Trump campaign and supportive Super PACs went full throttle against Vice President Harris, but there was not sufficient or similar negative firepower directed at Trump by Democrats."

The report continues: "It was essential to prosecute a more effective case as to why Trump should have been disqualified from ever again taking office. The grounds were there, but the messaging did not make the case."

BREAKING NEWS, LITERALLY



DASU KESAVA RAO
VETERAN JOURNALIST

The other day I watched news, actually 'breaking'. Yes. The spokesmen of two rival political parties participating in a live TV debate found that hot words and even wild gestures were not getting them anywhere.

Natural justice implies that when words fail, action follows. Accordingly, one of them hit the other on the head while the latter tried to duck and give it back even as the horrified moderator watched helplessly. Any Good Samaritan act like intervention, he realised, might mean blows from both sides. He discreetly dropped the noble idea. When emotions get raw, one tries to 'break' the other's head. This is what they probably mean by 'breaking news'.

Politicians are not alone in displaying red hot emotions. Among our journalistic fraternity, we had some non-Gandhians who strongly believed 'himsa is mightier than pen'. The days are gone when the likes of Kotamraju Rama Rao, renowned editor of yore, boasted that he used his pen as the sword. Turning the other cheek, the good old Gandhian technique, is passe, they insist.

For the benefit of the current generation of journalists, I recall a few boxing bouts involving fellow journalists. I was either witness to most of them. This was at the Fateh Maidan Club during 1969-70. The boss and a junior reporter of The Indian Express were not on the best of terms; the former worked his way up through the mill while the latter emerged from the portals of OU Journalism department. It was nothing short of a drunken brawl where the youngster discovered that there was no push-over. The old man bravely stood his ground, literally. The bout ended in a draw.

A star hotel in Visakhapatnam became

the stage for the free for all in 1980-81. I was a safe distant witness, not a referee. One of our friends from Hyderabad, pretty high as the party peaked, made a nasty comment about the quality of food and service. The bearer was not amused. What began as a one-to-one exchange of words turned into a fight engulfing the entire hotel workers and the reporters. The night's honours went undoubtedly to the experienced hotel workers while our brave friends finished second with a black eye or a bleeding nose. Being a non-drinker, I chose to watch a late evening movie. When I returned, the fight was in its final round.

An agency reporter, worked up by alcohol and humiliation, vowed to get the hotel closed 'by morning'. He dragged me along to the nearest police station. He gave the lone constable, half asleep, a rude shock by screaming 'edi raa nee SI. Piliu?' My friend then woke up Home Minister K. Prabhakar Reddy, to lodge his complaint. A seasoned politician who knew the reporter well, the minister responded, 'Don't worry, I am going there anyway in the morning.' He never came, nor was he scheduled to. We were 'kicked out' of the hotel. Tempers cooled down. All was forgotten in the 'right spirit'.

The Secretariat press room hosted the knock-out event sometime during the mid-80s. The ornate high-ceiling press room was a cosy place where reporters gathered or gossiped before hunting for news. It happened in a flash. Nobody knew about the provocation. A senior office-bearer of the journalists union was knocked unconscious with a single left-hander by a newcomer working for Newstime. The victim was rushed to the Secretariat dispensary.

A press boycott of the Legislative Assembly was in 'force'. Reporters were persuaded or pressured not to enter the press gallery. An argument followed when a reporter from a vernacular daily was blocked from entering by a union leader. Annoyed by the blockade, the reporter, gifted with the build of a professional boxer, felled the pro-boycotter with an exhibition of 'fist of fury' and made his way in.

Double engine govt facilitating security measures at West Bengal borders

New Delhi: West Bengal Chief Minister, Suvendu Adhikari's meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi are significant – both politically and strategically. Politically, it can largely be linked to an imminent state Cabinet expansion – as the Adhikari government currently comprises only five ministers – apart from addressing other administrative issues. Strategically, the highlight of the "double engine" government lies in its focus on the porous Bangladesh border and the highly sensitive Siliguri Corridor in north Bengal. The ceremony for Adhikari's swearing-in at Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on May 9 as head of the state's first BJP government was attended by the three top decision-makers in the Union government, signalling strong central backing.

The BJP's decisive victory in West Bengal, winning 207 seats against the Trinamool Congress' 80 in the 294-strong Assembly, has reshaped the political landscape, aligning the state more closely with New Delhi's national security priorities. Politics West Bengal shares a 2,216 km border with Bangladesh, much of which is porous and witness to infiltration, smuggling, and illegal migration. Land transfer to the Border



Security Force (BSF) for border fencing was pending for years, allegedly due to political resistance under the previous government. Adhikari's Cabinet has now approved the transfer of 600 acres of land to the BSF, promising completion within 45 days. In fact, border fencing started the same week that the state government began the formal handing over of portions of land to the BSF, according to on-ground reports coming on Friday.

The porous border and a lack of political will had rendered districts like Malda, Murshidabad, and North 24 Parganas exposed to infiltration, which on occasions included insurgent movements, and large-scale smuggling. Thus, border fencing was critical to check cross-border crime and enhance national security. Of particularly strategic importance is the Siliguri Corridor to the north of the

state, which is approximately 20-22 km wide at its narrowest point, thus being given the term 'Chicken's Neck'. It is of vital importance, connecting mainland India to the northeastern states. Any disruption here could cut off the Northeast entirely. Beijing – which unreasonably claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of its territory – has long been aggressively eyeing this region. It failed in an attempt at gaining proximity through the apparent development of Jhapa industrial park in Nepal. The previous KPS Oli-led Communist government had signed a memorandum to allow Chinese personnel and machines gain strategic access to land lying close to the North Bengal border. The project was subsequently shelved by the Balendra Shah government, reportedly over administrative and financial issues. Now, Beijing is trying a route

via the Teesta water management initiative with Bangladesh, which analysts see as a way to gain leverage near the corridor. A World War-II airbase at Lalmonirhat in north Bangladesh, close to the Teesta project site, has reportedly since been witnessing increased activity. These moves reflect Beijing's strategy of encirclement, using economic projects to gain influence in India's vulnerable borderlands. By influencing Nepal and Bangladesh, China seeks to pressure India in the Siliguri Corridor, a choke point for military logistics. And all this time, land acquisition for BSF to set up a fence was allegedly stalled under the previous regime due to political sensitivities and concerns on farmer displacement. The BJP government has reversed this stance, prioritising border security over local politics, aligning with Prime Minister Modi's national security agenda. Several reports of illegal migration, cattle smuggling, and narcotics trafficking have been coming from these border districts, some of which are being probed by Central agencies. Adhikari's two-day high-level meetings in the national Capital thus underscore a unified approach – fencing, Intelligence sharing, and security preparedness, along with facilitating administration.

Minister Narayana launches 'Operation Clean Sweep' across the state municipalities



The "Operation Clean Sweep" initiative has commenced across all municipalities in the state. Minister Narayana officially launched the four-week programme in Vijayawada, aiming to achieve comprehensive cleanliness in local areas. During the event, the Minister joined sanitation workers in sweeping roads, painting road dividers, and planting saplings. He also shared breakfast with the public at an Anna Canteen. Minister Narayana emphasised that the success of "Operation Clean Sweep" relies on active participation from both the community and voluntary organisations. He outlined the schedule: the first week will focus on cleaning roads and public spaces, the second on drains and canals, and the third on promoting waste segregation at homes and businesses. The final week will be dedicated to cleaning public toilets. The Minister stressed that public involvement is crucial to maintaining effective sanitation standards.

TG banks record Rs 9.43 lakh crore deposits, Bhatti hails achievements

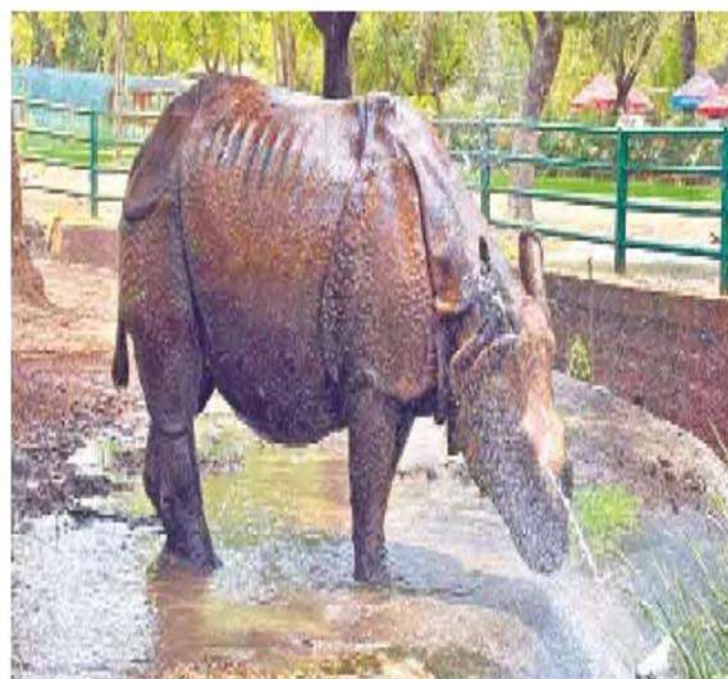
Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka has said it is a remarkable achievement that total bank deposits in the state have reached nearly Rs 9.43 lakh crore, while advances touched Rs 12.34 lakh crore. Telangana's Credit-Deposit ratio of 130.78 per cent is exceptional, he added. The Deputy CM expressed happiness that banks exceeded agricultural loan targets. Against a target of Rs 1,65,297 crore, banks disbursed Rs 1,68,401 crore in agricultural loans, achieving 101.88 per cent.

He said agriculture is the backbone of Telangana's economy and appreciated banks for supporting farmers, dairy farmers, fishermen and allied sectors through schemes, including Kisan Credit Cards. Participating in the 49th State Level Bankers' Committee meeting held on Friday, Bhatti appealed to banks to adopt a more positive approach towards educational loans, saying student loans are investments in the future of the youth. He stated that the people's government has proved that welfare and development can progress together like twin engines.

The Deputy CM also urged banks to actively support solar projects, rooftop solar panel installations, and other environmentally friendly initiatives through financial assistance. He stressed the need to bring more people under social security and insurance schemes. Bhatti Vikramarka said banks should function not merely as financial institutions that collect deposits and provide loans, but as strategic partners in the state's development. Since public money ultimately reaches banks, he said it is important to decide strategically which sectors should receive loans based on their contribution to the state's GSDP and employment generation. He further said that the government is moving ahead rapidly with key projects, including the rejuvenation of the Musi River, construction of Future City, and the Regional Ring Road. With Telangana witnessing rapid urbanisation, he said the services sector holds enormous opportunities for growth. To strengthen women's economic empowerment, Bhatti said that interest-free loans for Self Help Groups in the state are being increased from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. He said the government has decided to focus on large-scale loan distribution to women's groups in Hyderabad this year.

Summer safeguards: Zoo rolls out heat protection for wildlife

Sprinklers, foggers, coolers and hydration supplements help 2,100 animals beat soaring temperatures Hyderabad: Nehru Zoological Park has implemented various temperature-control measures to protect animals from dehydration and heat stress during the ongoing summer season. The facilities are benefiting around 2,100 animals belonging to 196 species. City & Local Guides To shield animals from extreme heat, zoo authorities have installed sprinklers, foggers and small rain guns in key enclosures, particularly in herbivore zones, the Reptile House, macaw enclosures, pheasantry and aviaries. Temporary shaded shelters, thunga roofing and kashkash thattis have also been arranged to reduce direct exposure to sunlight. Coolers have been installed in monkey and carnivore sections, while the Nocturnal Animal House has been equipped with air-conditioners and exhaust fans. To help animals stay hydrated, keepers are serving seasonal fruits such as watermelon, musk melon and citrus fruits. Continuous supply of cold drinking water with electrolyte and vitamin supplements, including Glucon-D, Electral, vitamin C, B-complex, Stresswell and Thermo Care liquids, is being provided to reduce



summer stress, said J Vasantha, Curator of Nehru Zoological Park. Park supervisors said teams are regularly wetting the thattis and thunga coverings three to four times a day and

closely monitoring the animals' condition throughout the heatwave. With a large number of people visiting the zoo during the summer holidays, staff have also arranged additional drinking

water points, shaded resting areas and misting facilities at selected locations across the park to help visitors cope with the heat while exploring the zoo.

Twisha Sharma case: Salon CCTV hours before death raises fresh questions



Fresh CCTV footage showing Twisha Sharma visiting a beauty salon in Bhopal hours before her death has surfaced, adding a new dimension to the probe into her alleged suicide. According to salon owner Kiran Parihar, Twisha visited the parlour on May 12 at around 3.12 p.m. and remained there for nearly three hours. During her visit, Twisha underwent a head massage and pedicure before leaving the salon around 6.15 p.m. The CCTV footage surfaced on social media shows Twisha appearing calm and relaxed during her stay at the parlour, with no visible signs of distress. Parihar said Twisha was a regular customer at the salon and had visited several times in the past. The salon owner also revealed that the next morning after Twisha's death, her mother-in-law, retired judge Giribala Singh, contacted the salon seeking details about the visit.

According to Parihar, Giribala Singh repeatedly asked about the exact time Twisha had arrived and left, whether she had made any payment, and whether there was any proof confirming her presence at the salon. Parihar said Twisha had not made any payment during the visit because she already had a pre-paid package purchased earlier, around the time of her brother's wedding. She further claimed that Giribala Singh later specifically requested the CCTV footage and informed her that Twisha had died by suicide. Soon afterwards, a group of five to six unidentified people dressed in black-and-white clothes resembling lawyers allegedly arrived at the salon claiming they had come on behalf of the police to collect the footage. Parihar said the CCTV footage was extracted after a technician was called to the salon. It is a fact that CCTV technician Rohit Vishwakarma had visited Giribala Singh's house late at night on May 12. Twisha Sharma was found hanging at her in-laws' residence in Bhopal on May 12. Her family has accused her husband, Samarth Singh and mother-in-law Giribala Singh of mental harassment and dowry-related abuse. Meanwhile, Samarth Singh, who had remained missing for 10 days after the incident, was arrested on Friday in Jabalpur and was brought to Bhopal early morning.

Govt clears pension for 2,356 more dialysis patients



Hyderabad: The Telangana government has sanctioned pensions for over 2,350 additional dialysis patients, in addition to the existing 4,710 beneficiaries. According to officials, since the formation of the Congress government, 'Cheyutha' pensions have been provided to 4,710 dialysis patients. Recently, pensions were newly sanctioned for another 2,356 dialysis sufferers. Panchayat Raj Minister Seethakka recently signed the relevant file, and the beneficiaries are set to begin receiving their pensions starting next month. Furthermore, officials disclosed that another 488 applications are currently under review, and pensions will be sanctioned to eligible applicants very soon. Dialysis patients face multiple challenges, including frequent hospital visits for treatment, expenses related to medication and travel, and loss of livelihood. In these circumstances, the 'Cheyutha' pension of ₹2,016 provided by the government offers significant financial relief.

Expand PNG infra fast, Nadendla to companies

Vijayawada: Food and civil supplies minister Nadendla Manohar directed officials and PNG companies to accelerate efforts to shift people from LPG usage to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) across the state. He assured that the government machinery would fully support PNG companies in expanding infrastructure and creating public awareness about the benefits of PNG usage. The minister conducted a special review meeting at the Secretariat here on Friday with representatives of PNG companies and senior officials from various departments. Transport minister B C Janardhan Reddy participated in the meeting through video conference. Speaking on the occasion, Manohar said the coalition government is committed to providing alternative gas solutions to the public quickly and efficiently. He stated that the government aims to ensure uninterrupted cooking gas supply to households and urged the five PNG companies operating in the state to be fully prepared for rapid expansion. He noted that people are increasingly turning



towards PNG gas in line with changing times and asked companies to strengthen infrastructure and intensify promotional campaigns.

The minister assured that the government is granting approvals for gas expansion works in cities and towns at a faster pace and promised immediate resolution of any issues faced by companies. He also said the government would facilitate land allotment on lease basis for setting up PNG filling stations. Highlighting the need for skilled manpower, the Minister said youth should be trained in PNG technical skills through ITIs, polytechnic colleges and other skill institutions. Under the

supervision of AP Skill Development and district collectors, batches of 100 youth from each district would be trained every 15 days with free accommodation, food and stipend support. He said linking trained youth with PNG companies would create employment opportunities while addressing manpower shortages in the sector.

Manohar also stressed the need for extensive awareness campaigns through women self-help groups, SERP and MEPMA networks to educate people about the convenience, cost savings and safety benefits of PNG usage. He instructed gas companies to coordinate with women's groups and offer incentives

for their participation in expansion activities. The minister announced that PNG connections would be made mandatory for major temples where Annadanam is conducted. He said the government would resolve pending issues in temples like Kanaka Durga temple and Sri Kalahasteswara temple to speed up PNG implementation, following directions from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. He also stated that simplified guidelines would soon be introduced for tenants using PNG connections and availing LPG subsidy benefits. He said the government is preparing regulations to ensure PNG users also receive the Rs 2,400 Deepam-2 scheme subsidy annually, as directed by the Chief Minister. Special focus would be given to expanding PNG connections in apartments, group housing complexes and villas in urban areas. He warned that another review on the performance of PNG companies would be conducted within 15 days and made it clear that visible progress in expansion activities must be achieved by then.

BJP says 'Cockroach Janata Party' bid to destabilise India, seeks NIA probe

Kerala BJP President, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, on Saturday alleged that the so-called Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) was part of a "cross-border influence operation" aimed at destabilising India, as the BJP demanded an investigation by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) into the satirical social media campaign. In a post on X, Chandrasekhar described the emergence of the CJP as a coordinated influence campaign targeting both India and the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The Cockroach Janata Party gambit is yet another classic cross-border 'influence operation' targeting India and PM Narendra Modi's govt -- designed by vested interests to destabilise India - helped along by elements in our Opposition," Chandrasekhar claimed. He further warned about the growing use of Artificial Intelligence, bots and social media platforms in shaping narratives and influencing public opinion.

"In the age of social media, bots, AI and its weaponisation, influence operations are dangerous, effective ways to DESTABILISE by building fake, seemingly organic narratives," he stated. The BJP leader said he had consistently maintained that India's economic growth and modernisation under PM Modi would invite resistance from several quarters internationally. "I have always maintained, India's rise and its modernisation under PM Narendra Modi will be resented by many countries, and there will be many hurdles created for our continued rise," he added. Referring to global crises in recent years, Chandrasekhar said India had managed to remain resilient despite multiple international challenges. "Starting with Covid, world economies, even the biggest ones including India, have had to face major challenges -- pandemic, Russia-Ukraine war, US-Iran war, energy shocks, Chinese aggression - but through all these crises, PM Modi has kept all Indians protected, safe and resilient and kept our econ-



omy growing," he said. Calling it a reflection of "true leadership", Chandrasekhar asserted that no campaign or vested interest could weaken the country's collective resolve. "No cockroach, no petty Indian Opposition politician, no Modi-hater, no foreign vested interest can derail our collective resolve to build a better future for all Indians," the Kerala BJP chief added. The CJP emerged earlier this month as a satirical political campaign reportedly founded by political communications strategist Dipke, who had earlier worked with the AAP. The campaign gained significant traction on social media following controversy over remarks allegedly made by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant against unemployed individuals during a court hearing. The remarks triggered criticism online, particularly among younger social media users, leading to the rapid spread of the satirical campaign.

However, the Chief Justice later clarified that his observations were specifically directed at those obtaining "fake and bogus degrees" and not at legitimate legal professionals. Currently, the CJP has crossed 21.9 million followers on Instagram. Political commentary blog Meanwhile, BJP Rajya Sabha MP, Manan Kumar Mishra, also backed

the demand for an NIA probe and defended the Chief Justice's remarks. "What the Bharatiya Janata Party has said, that it should be investigated through the NIA... I am the Chairman of the Bar Council of India, and of course, a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha. What I want to say is, as the leader of the Indian Bar, we are also going to issue a statement, and we will address the media as well," Mishra told IANS. He further said that the Chief Justice's remarks were being interpreted out of context and were directed specifically at individuals allegedly practising law using fake degrees. "The Chief Justice was referring to those who obtain fake degrees, wear black coats, bands, and robes, and appear in court. That statement was about them. The background of that situation was different," he said. Mishra also claimed that the Bar Council of India was aware of the issue of fake legal practitioners operating in court complexes. "The Bar Council of India is aware that around 35 to 40 per cent of those seen in court complexes wearing black coats and bands are fake. Their degrees are absolutely fake; they manufactured them somewhere or bought them from somewhere, and on that basis, they are practising in courts," he added.

A. R. Rahman poses with 'Peddi' Ram Charan as duo head to Bhopal

Mumbai: Oscar-winning composer A. R. Rahman and superstar Ram Charan looked dapper standing next to each other as the two prepped to leave for Bhopal for the song launch of their upcoming film "Peddi." Rahman shared a picture on Instagram featuring the two stars. In the image, the music composer is seen standing next to the star posing in front of their chartered flight. India news analysis "Peddi and I en route to Bhopal @alwaysramcharan #peddimovie #songrelease #hellohello," Rahman wrote as the caption. The trailer of Peddi was unveiled on May 18, which showcased the protagonist, Peddi, a multi-talented athlete who earns his livelihood through sheer physical might. Whether it's cricket, wrestling, or sprint-



ing, his life is defined by the grit and passion he pours into every discipline. Adored by the children and respected by the villagers, his rapid rise draws envy, especially from a domineering landlord whose pride refuses to share the spotlight.

Instead of relying on familiar sports-drama patterns, Peddi injects its sporting sequences with raw intensity and life-or-death stakes. Massive clashes on railway platforms, gravity-defying stunts, and adrenaline-fueled fights hint at a world

where sport and survival are inseparable. Director Buchi Babu Sana, who took to his X timeline to share the link to the trailer, wrote, "His arena. His rules. His game begins now. #PEDDITrailer OUT NOW. #PEDDI in cinemas worldwide on 4th June. #GetReadyForPeddi." The film also stars Janhvi Kapoor, Shiva Rajkumar, Jagapathi Babu, Divyenndu, and Boman Irani, each adding weight and intrigue to the drama. The film is slated hit screens on June 4 this year. Talking about Rahman, he has been feted with six National Film Awards, two Academy Awards, two Grammy Awards, a BAFTA Award, a Golden Globe Award, and six Tamil Nadu State Film Awards. In 2010, he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan.

Karan Johar's son Yash accuses father of making his education look bad

Mumbai: Filmmaker Karan Johar might be one of the biggest names in Bollywood, but at home, he is simply a father who gets told off by his kids. On Wednesday, KJo shared a video of his son Yash explaining to him how his father's bad singing is affecting his education. While the 'Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham' maker was humming a beautiful old melody, his son started laughing. As Karan asked the reason for the reaction, Yash said, "Your singing is bad. It makes my education bad. Do you want my education bad?" "Why does my bad singing affect your education? What do you mean by that? That's offensive", said a confused yet upset KJo. "That's true logic", Yash simply replied. This is not the first time that Karan has been outwitted by his son. Recently, KJo was offered a lucrative business proposal by his little one.



Yash suggested that once he and Roohi grow up, they will pay their father 200 Rs each every 3 months as rent. "So, when we grow up, we want to know how to do house rent. Okay. So, every three months, you come to our room, knock on the door. Then, you say monthly payment, can you please give us 200," he proposed. Making sure he understood, Karan inquired, "So, you will give me 200 rupees as rent for staying in my house, in your bedroom. You will pay me 200, and Ruhi will also pay me 200. So, you will give me 400 rupees every month as rent." After some negotiations, the father and son duo came to an agreement that Karan will get 200 rupees each from Yash and Ruhi every month. However, Yash asked Karan what they would be getting in return? KJo replied, "Payback? I'm giving you the room to stay. What more?" Then, Yash suggested that as they are paying him 400 Rs as rent, he should give them back 100 Rs. "One minute, what kind of a business deal is this?", asked Karan, unsure about the deal.

Uttam slams KTR over "politics on farmers deaths" amid grain procurement row

Hyderabad: Minister for Irrigation and Civil Supplies N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Friday countered allegations levelled by BRS working president KT Rama Rao regarding grain procurement, accusing the opposition party of indulging in "politics over farmers' deaths" for political gain.

In a sharply worded statement, Uttam Kumar Reddy alleged that BRS leaders were spreading misinformation to create confusion among farmers. He asserted that the Congress government was conducting grain procurement under the "Praja Palana" model with complete transparency and was releasing procurement and payment details in real



time. The minister accused the previous BRS government of corruption and irregularities at procurement centres, alleging collusion with rice millers to exploit farmers. He termed it "unfortunate" that the opposition was politicising farmers' deaths without verifying facts.

Responding to KTR's criticism over procurement delays, the minister cited comparative statistics from previous Rabi seasons. He said that during the 2021-22 Rabi season under the BRS regime, 26.78 lakh metric tonnes of grain worth Rs.5,239 crore were procured, but only Rs.2,624

crore had been paid by May 22. Similarly, in 2022-23, procurement stood at 36.63 lakh metric tonnes worth Rs.7,530 crore, while payments were only Rs.3,160 crore. In contrast, he said the Congress government had improved procurement and payment systems significantly. During the current Rabi season, 48.21 lakh metric tonnes worth Rs.11,499 crore have been procured so far, with Rs.8,203 crore already disbursed. Political commentary blog The minister also dismissed allegations of gunny bag shortages, stating that over 20.86 crore gunny bags were available statewide and that 1,300 vehicles were being used for grain transportation.

Families Of Indians Killed In Russia-Ukraine War Tell Supreme Court Bodies Returned In Mutilated Condition



The Supreme Court heard petitions from families of Indians recruited into the Russian military, alleging bodies were returned mutilated and compensation processes delayed. The Centre said 49 Indians have died so far. The Supreme Court on Friday heard a petition filed by families of Indian nationals who were allegedly duped into joining the Russian armed forces and later sent to fight in the Russia-Ukraine war. During the hearing, the petitioners told the court that the bodies of several deceased Indians were being returned to their families in a "mutilated" condition, while many families continued to struggle for compensation and official information. The matter was heard by a bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant. Counsel representing the families said many relatives had endured emotional trauma not only because of the deaths but also due to the condition in which mortal remains were returned from Russia. The lawyer informed the court that several families were still waiting for clarity regarding compensation, documentation, and the return of bodies.

Ebola outbreak reaches DR Congo's South Kivu as suspected cases soar

Kinshasa: The latest Ebola outbreak has spread to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)'s South Kivu Province, with fresh concern surfacing over wider transmission in the volatile eastern region. On Thursday, the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel group confirmed a new case in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu. The group, which has been capturing the city since February 2025, said that a 28-year-old man had travelled from Kisangani, the capital of Tshopo Province, and died before his diagnosis was confirmed, Xinhua news agency reported. Though Tshopo has not seen any cases to date, Kisangani -- one of the DRC's busiest transport hubs -- has emerged as a new area of concern, as authorities race to determine how far the virus may have already spread before detection. The outbreak, initially reported in Ituri Province, has now affected North Kivu and South Kivu, while two confirmed cases have also been reported in the neighbouring country of Uganda.

According to the figures released Thursday by DRC Health Minister Roger Kamba, 626 suspected cases and 159 probable deaths have been recorded since the country declared its 17th outbreak on May 15. In areas under its control, the M23 said that more than 200 samples from suspected cases had been sent to Goma, the capital of North Kivu, for laboratory analysis. In Goma, one confirmed case remains under strict medical supervision, while identified contacts have been isolated, it added. World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has warned that the number of cases is expected to keep rising, given the length of time the virus appeared to have circulated before the outbreak was detected. "So far, 51 cases have been confirmed in the DRC, in the northern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, including in the cities of Bunia and Goma, although we know the scale of the epidemic in DRC is much larger," he said on Wednesday. According to WHO officials, investigations are still underway to determine exactly when and where the outbreak began, but the scale of the epidemic suggests the virus may have been circulating for some time before being confirmed. "We are thinking that it has started probably a couple of months ago," Anais Legand, a WHO technical officer on viral hemorrhagic fevers, said Wednesday, stressing an immediate priority to cut transmission through contact tracing, isolation, and care for suspected and confirmed cases.

'We'll try to put best foot forward and carry winning momentum into Qualifier': DK ahead of SRH clash

Hyderabad: Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) batting coach and mentor Dinesh Karthik said the team remains hungry for improvement despite already qualifying for the IPL 2026 playoffs, stressing that momentum heading into the knockout stage remains crucial ahead of Friday's final league clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH).



While RCB have already booked a playoff berth, Karthik said the fixture still carries major importance because of the momentum factor heading into the Qualifier. "Look, I know we have qualified for the playoffs. We can take it easily. But I think it's as important as any other game for us. Because if we win this one, we'll go with the momentum in the first qualifiers. SRH is a solid team. And that's the reason why they are in the top

three. And they've played some wonderful cricket," Karthik said in a video released by RCB on X. "It's two good teams going up against each other. And we'll try to put our best foot forward. And we're trying to do everything we can to make sure that we compete and cross the line," he added. RCB have enjoyed a strong campaign with both bat and ball this season and are firmly in contention for a top-two finish. They are

placed at the number one spot with 18 points in 13 matches. However, Karthik insisted the squad is not prepared to become complacent. "I think it's been a terrific campaign with the ball and bat. I personally don't want to feel like everything is great; it's just a mindset of mine. I just feel you need to keep wanting some more even though there's very little part of the tournament left," Karthik said. "That hunger is important for you

to keep moving forward, and I couldn't have asked anything more in terms of character that they've shown, and that pretty much says everything you need to know about the current RCB team," he added. The former India wicketkeeper-batter highlighted the collective mentality within the squad and said every player has been striving to improve specific areas of their game throughout the season. "There's always room for improvement, whether it's bowling, batting, or fielding. I don't think this team is any different, and you can see with the mindset the players seem to have. Each have come with a plan to work on a certain specific thing and try to make sure that they're better. There are conversations, there's a collective effort in trying to play another good game of cricket," he added.

Cyprus President concludes 'productive' India visit

New Delhi: The State Visit of Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides to India concluded on Saturday with both nations announcing a major upgrade in bilateral relations by elevating ties to a Strategic Partnership. The visit is being seen as a significant step towards strengthening cooperation between New Delhi and Nicosia across diplomacy, trade, education and security sectors. Sharing details of the conclusion of the visit, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal posted on X, "A productive visit concludes. President Christodoulides departed from New Delhi after a successful State Visit. He was seen off by Minister of State for Road Transport & Highways, Shri Ajay Tamta. The visit gave a significant boost to India-Cyprus ties and marked a new chapter with



the elevation of bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership." On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had described India's partnership with Cyprus as "strong and futuristic" which remains rooted in shared democratic values. After holding delegation-level talks with President Christodoulides at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi, PM Modi stated that both countries had decided to elevate their relationship into a Strategic Partnership considering the growing closeness

between the two nations. "Ours is indeed a strong and futuristic partnership rooted in shared values. The growing investment linkages between our nations are a matter of immense joy, and we hope to increase trade and economic ties in the times to come," PM Modi posted on X after the meeting. According to the MEA, several key outcomes emerged from the bilateral discussions, including agreements on the establishment of a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter-Terrorism, cooperation

between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service and Cyprus' Diplomatic Academy, as well as collaboration in higher education and research. President Christodoulides also shared a warm moment with PM Modi during the visit as the two leaders posed for a selfie at Hyderabad House. Sharing the photograph on X, the Cyprus President wrote, "Prime Minister Modi, my good friend Narendra, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to you personally, and to the people of India, for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to me and my delegation." President Christodoulides also paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat before attending official engagements in the national capital on Friday.

Govt initiative to address employees' grievances lauded

Vijayawada: The AP JAC Amaravati has expressed gratitude to the State government for issuing orders to conduct special Joint Staff Council meetings at district, Head of Department (HoD) and State Secretariat levels to address employees' grievances. Welcoming GO RT No 1032, in a press release issued here on Friday, AP JAC Amaravati Chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu, Secretary General Paliseti Damodar Rao, Associate Chairman TV Phani Perraju and Treasurer Timmasarathi Nageswara Rao stated that the government had responded positively to a series of representations submitted by employees' associations seeking staff welfare measures and effective grievance redressal. The leaders appreci-

ated the government for not only issuing the orders but also specifying dates for conducting the meetings at various levels across the State. They said this initiative would help resolve departmental issues in a systematic manner and improve administrative coordination. The AP JAC Amaravati leadership appealed to all recognised employees' unions to make effective use of the opportunity by coordinating in advance with district officials, HoDs and Secretariat authorities and preparing proper data on pending issues for discussion during the meet-

ings. They noted that for the first time in the State's history, the government had directed that Joint Staff Council meetings be conducted regularly during June, October and February 2027 at district, departmental and Secretariat levels with fixed schedules. The employee leaders urged Collectors, Heads of Departments and departmental Secretaries to ensure that the meetings are conducted without fail and that employee issues are resolved at the respective levels so that staff members can work efficiently and continue delivering better public services.



SRH's batting dominance at home is their biggest strength: Sehwag



New Delhi: Former India opener Virender Sehwag hailed Sunrisers Hyderabad's explosive batting approach at home after their commanding 55-run win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in a high-scoring IPL 2026 clash in Hyderabad on Friday night. India news analysis SRH piled up a massive 255/4 at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, powered by blistering knocks from Ishan Kishan (79 off 46), Abhishek Sharma (56 off 22) and Heinrich Klaasen (51 off 24). In reply, RCB were restricted to 200/4 despite fighting contributions from Rajat Patidar, Krunal Pandya and Venkatesh Iyer. Analysing SRH's dominance at home, Sehwag said their ability to post daunting first-innings totals has become their biggest weapon and pointed out that SRH raised the bar even further against RCB by posting 255, leaving the visitors under scoreboard pressure from the outset.

"SRH's batting dominance at home is their biggest strength. When they win the toss and bat first, they are at their best. They have consistently put up 230 to 240 runs on the board. That kind of total puts immediate pressure on the chasing team. Against RCB, they went even higher, posting 255. That made the chase extremely tough from the very first over. RCB came out with the intent to go after the target, but everyone knew that if the powerplay didn't go their way, the match would be in SRH's control," Sehwag told JioStar RCB began aggressively through Venkatesh Iyer's quickfire 44 off 19 balls, but the wickets of Iyer, Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal after the powerplay tilted the contest firmly in Hyderabad's favour. "And that is exactly what happened. Once RCB lost wickets after the end of the powerplay, the required rate kept climbing, and the game slipped away. On flat tracks, setting a massive total and then letting the scoreboard pressure do the rest has become SRH's signature move at home," he added. City & Local Guides

Sehwag also weighed in on Venkatesh Iyer's impressive form and the selection dilemma it has created for RCB ahead of their upcoming matches, saying, "Venkatesh Iyer is at his best when batting in the top order. He played his best knocks for KKR in that position. For RCB, he hasn't had many chances at his preferred spot." The former opener referenced Iyer's recent performances, including a match-winning 73 against SRH "But when Rajat Patidar was injured, he came in at number four against Punjab and played a match-winning 73. Then against SRH, he opened the innings and played a quickfire 44, giving RCB the start they needed in a 256-run chase," he stated. With Phil Salt nearing full fitness, Sehwag believes RCB now face a positive selection headache but made it clear who he would leave out. "Now, with Phil Salt returning to full fitness, the big question is whether Venkatesh will keep his place in the XI. It's a good problem for RCB to have," former Delhi batter stated. Backing Iyer's aggressive intent at the top, Sehwag added, "Iyer's intent against Hyderabad was spot on. When chasing 256, you need that kind of positive start, and he delivered. I wouldn't drop Iyer from the opening slot. Instead, I would replace Jitesh Sharma with Phil Salt. Jitesh is not in great form, and RCB have taken bold decisions before. If Salt has to come back, Jitesh should make way."